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Adolescents Spending Time with Their Parents: Does It Matter?

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Abstract: The current study aims to explore the relevance of 'time spent with parents' for different risk behaviors (i.e., alcohol use, smoking, gambling and problematic social media use), peer factors (i.e., time spent with peers, peer pressure and peer support) and parenting behaviors (i.e., control, relatedness and family support). A cross-sectional design was employed, including 2165 adolescents aged from 12 to 18 years (*Mage* = 14.7, *SD* = 1.33; 52% girls; 30% in pre-vocational education). Independent sample *t*-tests were performed to compare different contrasting groups (≤1 h vs. >1 h; ≤2 h vs. >2 h; ≤3 h and >3 h) for relevant outcomes. Results. Adolescents spending on average >1 h per day with their parents in joint activities reported lower levels of risk behavior, less peer pressure, more peer support and more parental control, relatedness and family support. At the same time, this does not seem to come at the expense of spending time with peers, as adolescents spending 1 h or more with their parents did not spend less time with their peers. All the findings point at the relevance of parents spending time and undertaking joint activities with their adolescent children.

Keywords: adolescence; time spent; risk behavior; peers; parents

1. Introduction

Parents are important socialization agents in children's lives. By various ways of parenting and interacting with children, parents influence the development of youth greatly, for better and for worse. A vast number of studies have investigated the role of parents by distinguishing between supportive and controlling behaviors (cf. parenting styles [1]; mostly involving practices such as monitoring, support, behavioral control and communication [2]). Yet, in addition to these parenting behaviors, it appears that the quality of the parent–child relationship is a key factor for youth optimal development [3,4]. Yet, we argue that a prerequisite of building a qualitative and trustful relationship with your child is by providing the opportunity for this relationship to be build, i.e., spending time with your child. In this study, we will explore the relevance of time spent with parents alongside risk behaviors (i.e., substances use, problematic social media use and problematic gaming), peer factors and parenting factors.

Based on the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner [5], there is always an interaction between the individual and the context, indicating that next to individual factors, social factors play a role in the development of risk behaviors. Up to now, research on the prevalence of risk behaviors has investigated individual factors often in interaction with contextual factors, including parenting practices and the quality of the parent–child relationship. For example, stricter parental rules about alcohol use increased adolescents' self-control and lowered subsequent drinking only among adolescents who reported a higher quality of communication (proxy for parent–child relationship [6]). Also, a positive parenting context, where parents are responsive and grant autonomy to their child, is protective against adolescents' development of problematic social media use [7]. In fact, there is large support from studies demonstrating the importance of parents building qualitative and trustful relationships with their children for a variety of developmental outcomes [8]. By being

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responsive, more supportive of the child's autonomy and using more behavioral and less harsh control strategies, parents can develop a qualitative relationship with their child (i.e., secure attachment) [9]. However, fairly little is known about the opportunity that should be created to enable a qualitative parent–child relationship to be built. Based on previous related research, it is likely that parents spending time with their children is a prerequisite to develop such qualitative and trustful relationships.

The influence of parents on adolescents' behavior changes over time, mostly due to the increasing influence of peers. These changes are in favor of dynamic developmental theories, such as the age-graded theory of informal social control [10]. This theory recognizes that individual behavior is not only determined by dispositional factors but also strongly depends on environmental factors such as parenting that provide input for opportunity and motivation (i.e., the notion of situated action). Moreover, risk behavior can be explained by general processes of social control, structured activities and human agency. That is, adolescents with stronger social bonding and constraints (e.g., carrying out activities with parents) perceive and experience more consequences when involved in risk behaviors and are therefore less motivated to do so. They also end up in fewer situations that enable the opportunity to engage in risk behaviors. In line with the dynamic developmental perspective, a recent review demonstrated that parents do remain influential across adolescence [11]; however, this influence is subject to change as a function of adolescents' age [12]. That is, parental monitoring and involvement consistently predict substance use across adolescence, yet their influences change from more explicit parenting behaviors (e.g., rule setting) to more automatic parenting over the course of adolescence. Parenting may even buffer the effectiveness of negative influences of peers [13]. This may point out that even though adolescents may be more oriented towards their peers, the time adolescents spend with their parents may remain relevant as well.

Engagement of adolescents and their parents in shared activities, such as playing games and sports together, can be investigated by the time they spend on these shared activities. The significance of engaging in shared activities has been demonstrated by Manczak [14], showing that adolescents who engaged in more shared activities with their parents had lower health risk in early midlife, 22 years later. Relatively few studies have examined a proxy of the time spent with parents in relation to adolescents' risk behavior. Yet, those available are all in support of the importance of parents (or family) spending time with their children for lowering the risk of adolescents' risk behaviors [15], such as internet addiction [16–19], sexual activity [20] and substance use [21–23]. For example, Gunuc and Docan [17] found in a cross-sectional study that spending more time with the mother (e.g., eating meals, chatting and shopping) lowered the risk of developing internet addiction. Also, King et al. [23] demonstrated that the more time that a parent spent with their adolescent child each day, the less likely the child was to have ever used drugs. A recent study that looked at the influence of time spent with parents on problematic social media use showed that adolescents who used social media problematically spent less time with their parents compared to normative social media users [24]. More studies have shown that adolescents' spending time in unsupervised contexts are more likely to engage in risk behavior, such as substance use [25]. Yet, research is also consistent about the protective role parents have herein. That is, parental monitoring and solicitation are important protective factors against antisocial behavior when adolescents spend more time unsupervised [26]. In line with this and the age-graded theory, higher levels of parental monitoring and solicitation relate to fewer opportunities to engage in risk behavior (i.e., unsupervised contexts) and to better parental bonding. In turn, parental bonding is an important factor contributing to adolescents' level of self-control throughout adolescence and their subsequent level of involvement with delinquent peers and their level of risk behavior [27]. Thus, it is expected that adolescents who spend more time with their parents are less likely to engage in risk behaviors.

Overall, adolescence is characterized by spending more time with peers at the expense of time spent with parents [28]. Adolescents become more independent, gain more auton-

omy and often start experimenting with risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol use; [29,30]). In line with the developmental theory of crime by Moffitt [31], the majority of youths engage in risk behavior only in adolescence, particularly due to peer factors. That is, risk behavior mostly takes place in the presence of their peers [21,28,32]. Complying to peer norms and peer pressure are some of the underlying mechanisms contributing to risk-taking behaviors in adolescents [33]. Peers play an important role in adolescents' lives; adolescents who are satisfied about their peer relations and perceive peer support report to be happier [34], yet this may have positive [35] and mostly negative outcomes [36] on risk behavior. Taking into account this increasing role of peers, the importance of parent–child relationships remains crucial for adolescent development [37]. This makes it an interesting avenue to look into the weight that spending time with parents still has in this developmental phase and how this interplays with peer contacts. Leijse et al. [24] demonstrated significant relationships between more time spent with parents on the one hand with less perceived peer pressure and more peer support on the other. This makes us expect that spending more time with parents is also beneficial for developing supportive peer relationships.

The current study aims to explore the relevance of 'time spent with parents' for different risk behaviors (i.e., alcohol use, smoking, gambling and problematic social media use), peer factors (i.e., peer pressure and peer support) and parenting behaviors (i.e., control, relatedness and family support). A cross-sectional design with one wave of data was employed, including adolescents aged from 12 to 18 years. This study will contribute to better insight into the relevance of parents spending time with their adolescents, which may result in imperative implications for the prevention of and intervention in risk behavior among adolescents. In line with developmental theories [10,28] and previous empirical studies on the role of parents–adolescents spending time, we expect/hypothesize that spending more time with parents will result in: (1) lower levels of involvement in risk behaviors; (2) less peer pressure and more peer support; and (3) more parental monitoring (parental control), higher levels of relatedness and more family support.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Procedure and Participants

Data were collected as part of a larger Dutch intervention study, LEF, including an experimental and a control condition [38]. LEF is a community-based intervention aimed at the prevention of alcohol use among youths. In each condition, one public secondary school located in the Netherlands participated in the study. In the experimental condition, an additional school participated; however, as the method of administration was different, only a small number of adolescents filled out the questionnaire (n = 63; see below). All adolescents in the schools participated in the study, except for the exam classes, as they could not miss any classes. Data were collected by trained research assistants in classrooms using online questionnaires available on a secured website. Parents received a letter of consent, which informed them about the participation of the school in the program, and they were given the opportunity to refuse participation of their child by email/telephone during the entire study period (1.13% refusal). Data were gathered in May/June 2018 before any intervention was implemented (baseline). This study was approved by the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Utrecht University (FETC18-060).

A total of 2893 students were asked to participate in the study. Of these, 524 students did not participate due to their parents' refusal or their absence from school on the day of data collection (individual or whole class due to scheduling problems). In addition, students of one school in the experimental municipality were only allowed to fill out the questionnaire outside school hours in their own time to lower the burden on parents and students; 63 students out of 286 participated. An additional 11 students reported missing on multiple items and were therefore excluded. This resulted in a total sample of n = 2165 (*Mage* = 14.7, *SD* = 1.33, 52% girls), with 30% following lower secondary education (pre-vocational education).

2.2. Measures

Weekly alcohol use was measured by using the quantity–frequency measure [39,40]. Frequency was measured by asking the number of days a week the adolescents usually drank on weekly basis. Quantity was measured by asking how many glasses of alcohol the adolescents usually drank on a typical day they drank alcohol (9-point Likert scale; 0 = I don't drink alcohol, 8 = 11 glasses or more). The quantity–frequency was computed by calculating the products of the number of days and the number of glasses. The sum of these scores were used, where higher scores indicated more weekly alcohol use.

Smoking was measured by asking the adolescent how many cigarettes he/she had smoked on average in the previous four weeks [41]. Response options ranged from 0 = I don't smoke to 7 = more than 20 cigarettes a day.

Gambling was measured by asking how often in the previous twelve months the adolescent had spent money on gambling. Adolescents could respond on a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 = I didn't spend money on gambling, 2 = one time a month or less, 3 = 2–4 times a month and 4 = 2–3 times a week.

Problematic social media use was measured using the social media disorder (SMD) scale, including nine items [42] corresponding to the nine diagnostic criteria for internet gaming disorder according to the appendix of the DSM-5. These criteria entail preoccupation, persistence, tolerance, withdrawal and displacement. Adolescents were asked, "During the past year, have you (. . .)", followed by, for example, "regularly had no interest in hobbies or other activities because you would rather use social media?", which refers to the criterion 'displacement'. Respondents replied on a dichotomous scale (1 = no and 2 = yes). The nine items were summed, with a higher score indicating more social media disorder symptoms. Given the items' dichotomous nature, internal consistency was calculated using the ordinal alpha based on the tetrachoric correlation matrix [43]. Ordinal alpha values were 0.90.

Perceived peer support was measured by the subscale Peer Support of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support [44]. The measure contained four items such as "My friends are really trying to help me". The respondents answered the items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*). A mean score was calculated, in which a higher score represented more peer support. The internal consistently was found to be satisfactory for this sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.912$).

Perceived peer pressure was measured by the Peer Pressure Scale [45]. Respondents were asked to answer six items, which included different claims on the question "Some young people do certain things that they would not do because otherwise they. . .". An example of one item was: "...will be ridiculed by friends". The respondents had the possibility to answer the statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely does not apply to me* and 5 = *applies to me very often*). The mean score was calculated, which resulted in a score between 1 and 5. A higher score indicated more perceived peer pressure. The internal consistently of this sample was reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).

Time spent with peers was measured by asking "How much time do you spend per day with your friend outside regular school hours?". This was asked for school days and weekend days separately, with the response options being 1 = *less than 5 min*, 2 = *between 5 and 30 min*, 3 = *between 30 min and 1 h*, 4 = *between 1 and 2 h*, 5 = *between 2 and 3 h*, 6 = *between 3 and 4 h* and 7 = *more than 4 h*. A sum score of both items was calculated, in which a higher score indicated that more time was spent with the peers. The internal consistently was low ($r = 0.47$, $p \leq 0.01$), as the time that adolescents spend time with their peers may differ between school and weekend days.

Time spent with parents was assessed by asking "How much time do you spend together with your parent(s) on joint activities (e.g., play board games, go for a walk, talk about things) each day"? for school days and weekend days separately. The respondents could answer on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *less than 5 min* and 7 = *more than 4 h*). First, each category was recoded into an average amount of minutes by taking the average amount of minutes in that category for school days and weekend days. For example, response 3 = *30 min–1 h* was recoded into 45 min. An average amount of time per day a week was calculated by

the total time on weekdays (time school days × 5) + total time on weekend days (time weekend days × 2)/7 days. The internal consistently was found to be reliable ($r = 0.70$, $p \leq 0.01$). Insight into a specific number of hours is helpful for prevention professionals to inform parents, and it could be easier used as a tool for parents to implement. Therefore, three separate dichotomous groups were created, with adolescents spending (1) up to 1 h vs. >1 h; (2) up to 2 h vs. >2 h; and (3) up to 3 h vs. >3 h.

Parental control refers to certain rules being set and was measured by five items indicating the level of active monitoring [46]. An example item is "Do you need to have your parents' permission to stay out late on a weekday evening?". Adolescents could respond on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* and 5 = *always*). All items were averaged, and a higher score indicated more parental control. Cronbach's alpha was 0.83.

Relatedness was measured by six items reflecting the level that the adolescents' related to their parents [47]. An example item is "I am a person with a strong connection with my parents". Adolescents could respond on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree. Items were recoded and summed, such that a higher score indicated a higher level of relatedness. Cronbach's alpha was 0.42.

Family support was measured by the subscale Family Support of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support [44]. The scale included four items with different statements about family support, for example, "The people in my family really try to help me". The respondents answered the four items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*). The mean score was calculated, in which a higher score represented more family support. The internal consistently of this sample was found to be reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).

2.3. Analysis

First, correlations between all the study variables were obtained for the total sample. Second, we performed independent sample t-tests to compare different groups of time spent together (≤1 h vs. >1 h; ≤2 h vs. >2 h; ≤3 h and >3 h) for all risk behaviors, peer and parenting factors. In each t-test, the mean scores of all risk behaviors and peer and parenting factors were compared between the two groups to establish the number of hours that was most discriminative based on the (number of) effect sizes. The effect sizes (Cohen's d) of differences between groups (*t*-tests) were reported with an interpretation of ≥0.20 being small, ≥0.50 being medium and ≥0.80 being large [48]. Third, descriptive statistics were calculated for the total sample and for adolescents spending < or ≥than 1, 2 or 3 h separately (depending on the outcome of step 2). Because of the multiple significance testing being undertaken, the Bonferroni correction was applied ($\alpha = 0.05/10$). Accordingly, with respect to the results of the *t*-tests, a *p*-value of <0.005 was considered significant. All analyses were conducted in SPSS version 28.0.

3. Results

Table 1 depicts the correlations between all the variables of interest. Time spent with parents was significantly and negatively related to all the risk behaviors, yet the correlations were small (range $r = -0.13$–$r = -0.09$). The highest correlation was found between time spent with parents and the level of relatedness ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$).

To estimate the difference between the number of hours adolescents spent with their parents for the outcomes on risk behavior, peer factors and parent factors, three groups were created, namely, ≤1 h vs. >1 h (>1 = 73.2%), ≤2 h vs. >2 h (>2 = 50.3%) and ≤3 h vs. >3 h (>3 = 30.1%). Our focus here was mostly on the risk behaviors The effect sizes of the differences between the groups on risk behaviors (weekly alcohol use, smoking, gambling and problematic social media use; see Table 2) demonstrates that the group distinguishing between ≤1 h vs. >1 h seemed the most distinctive. In this group, the significant differences were somewhat larger for most, yet not all, risk behaviors compared to the ≤2 vs. >2 and the ≤3 and >3 groups, though they were still small (range $d = 0.14$–0.20).

Table 1. Correlations between all variables of interest.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age													
2. Gender	0.04												
3. Education level	0.20	0.01											
4. Time spent with parents	−0.00	0.17 **	0.09 **										
5. Weekly alcohol use	0.32 **	0.01	−0.01	−0.09 **									
6. Frequency of smoking	0.14 **	−0.02	−0.06 **	−0.12 **	0.52 **								
7. Gambling	0.06 **	−0.20 **	−0.02	−0.13 **	0.33 **	0.24 **							
8. Problematic social media use	−0.06	0.06 **	−0.15 **	−0.10 **	0.17 **	0.11 **	0.11 **						
9. Peer support	0.01	0.27 **	0.03	0.15 **	0.05	−0.01	−0.06 **	−0.07					
10. Peer pressure	−0.09 **	−0.19 **	−0.10 **	−0.10 **	0.07 **	0.08 **	0.13 **	0.31 **	−0.26 **				
11. Time spent with peers	−0.05	0.08 **	−0.22 **	0.01	0.16 **	0.11 **	0.08 **	0.04 *	0.32 **	−0.05			
12. Parental control	−.15 **	0.11 **	0.10 **	0.13 **	−0.14 **	−0.06 **	−0.11 **	0.04	0.05	−0.02	−0.18 **		
13. Relatedness	−0.04	0.07 **	0.11 **	0.28 **	−0.16 **	−0.14 **	−0.10 **	−0.29 **	0.19 **	−0.23 **	−0.01	0.08 **	
14. Family support	−0.09	−0.05	0.05	0.22 **	−0.09 **	−0.05	−0.05 **	−0.21 **	0.28 **	−0.16 **	0.07	0.05	0.54 **

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) of the differences between ≤1/>1, ≤2/>2 and ≤3/>3 h spent with parents.

Variable	≤1 h vs. >1 h (>1 h = 73.2%)	≤2 h vs. >2 h (>2 h = 50.3%)	≤3 h vs. >3 h (>3 h = 30.1%)
Risk behaviors			
Weekly alcohol use	0.13 *	0.12 *	0.06
Frequency of smoking	0.20 **	0.15 **	0.12 *
Gambling	0.19 **	0.18 **	0.16 **
Problematic social media use	0.14 *	0.16 **	0.18 **
Peer factors			
Peer support	−0.30 **	−0.23 **	−0.22 **
Peer pressure	0.15 *	0.11 *	0.20 **
Time with peers	−0.06	−0.06	−0.06
Parent factors			
Parental control	−0.18 **	−0.21 **	−0.21 **
Relatedness	−0.50 **	−0.44 **	−0.45 **
Family support	−0.35 **	−0.34 **	−0.33 **

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

In Table 3, the mean scores of all the variables for those spending on average ≤1 h per day with their parents and those spending >1 h are reported. Adolescents who reported to spend more than 1 h a day per week with their parents on joint activities reported significant differences on all but one (time spent with peers) of the variables compared to adolescents who spent 1 h a day or less with their parents. That is, the former reported lower levels of risk behavior (though weekly drinking was not significant after Bonferroni's testing), more favorable peer factors (i.e., peer support) and more favorable parenting factors (i.e., relatedness). There was no significant difference between adolescents who spent more than 1 h and those who spent 1 h or less with their parents for the time they spent with their peers. Adolescents spending more than 1 h with their parents reported higher levels of parental control, responsiveness and family support compared to those spending 1 h or less a day with their parents.

Table 3. Mean (M) and percentages (%) of the total sample and the categories of the time spent with parents.

Variable	Total *N* = 2165	≤1 h Spent with Parents *N* = 581	>1 h Spent with Parents *N* = 1584	*t*-Value (*p*-Value)
Age (M, SD)	14.7 (1.33)	14.6 (1.30)	14.7 (1.35)	
Gender (%)				
Female	52.1	40.9	56.2	
Male	47.9	59.1	43.8	
Education (%)				
Low	30.4	35.2	28.5	
High	69.6	64.8	71.5	
Weekly alcohol use (M, SD)	2.91 (7.09)	3.57 (9.13)	2.66 (6.15) *	2.53 (0.01)
Frequency of smoking (M, SD)	1.12 (0.67)	1.22 (0.93)	1.09 (0.54) **	4.09 (<0.00)
Gambling (M, SD)	1.16 (0.54)	1.24 (0.73)	1.14 (0.45) **	3.85 (<0.00)
Problematic social media use (M, SD)	1.36 (1.84)	1.54 (2.03)	1.29 (1.76) *	2.78 (0.00)
Peer support (M, SD)	5.66 (1.28)	5.38 (1.35)	5.77 (1.24) **	−6.20 (<0.00)
Peer pressure (M, SD)	1.68 (0.69)	1.75 (0.72)	1.65 (0.69) *	3.02 (0.00)
Time with peers (M, SD)	3.97 (1.47)	3.91 (1.51)	3.99 (1.45)	−1.21 (0.11)
Parental control (M, SD)	3.36 (1.06)	3.22 (1.07)	3.41 (1.05) **	−3.72 (<0.00)
Relatedness (M, SD)	5.11 (1.05)	4.74 (1.07)	5.24 (1.01) **	−10.15 (<0.00)
Family support (M, SD)	6.09 (1.19)	5.79 (1.36)	6.20 (1.11) **	−7.28 (<0.00)

Note. * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion

This explorative study is one of the first to provide more insight into the relevance of adolescents spending time with their parents, i.e., the quantity of parent–child interactions. We demonstrated that adolescents spending on average more than 1 h per day with their parents in joint activities reported lower levels of risk behavior, less peer pressure, more peer support and more parental control, relatedness and family support. At the same time, this does not seem to come at the expense of spending time with peers, as adolescents spending 1 h or more per day with their parents did not spend less time with their peers. All the findings point at the relevance of parents spending time and undertaking joint activities with their adolescent children.

In line with the age-graded theory of informal social control [10] and previous research on positive and supportive parenting [30], the current study showed that spending at least 1 h per day on joint parent–child activities is beneficial for several health-related outcomes in adolescents. That is, adolescents spending more than 1 h with their parents reported lower levels of risk behavior, i.e., alcohol use, smoking, gambling and problematic social media use. Though the difference for weekly drinking did not hold after Bonferroni's correction, the fact that adolescents spending on average more than 1 h a day with their parents drank on average more than one glass of alcohol less per week is practically relevant when considering the age of the adolescents (M= 14.7 years) and that there is no safe level of alcohol use for them. This result corroborates previous research on family time. For example, Gunuc and Dogan [17] demonstrated that adolescents who spent more time with their parent were less likely to develop internet addiction. Also, although we did not test any directional relations, it is likely that parents who spend more time with their adolescent child create the opportunity to build on their relationship with their child, as exemplified by the higher levels of control, relatedness and family support. Yet, it is likely that this is a bidirectional relationship, where adolescents who perceive their parents as more involved are also more open to spending time with them. Adolescents with stronger social bonding with their parents are expected to engage in less risk behavior either due to the greater risks at stake and the fewer opportunities they may come across (cf. the age-graded theory; [10]). This study showed that it is relevant that parents spent time with their adolescent child, even though their role as parents may change as children become older [15].

One of the potential explanations provided in previous research for the protective effect of family time is that spending more time together lowers the time that adolescents spent in unsupervised contexts [25,28]. This explanation doesn't seem to hold for the understanding of spending time with parents, as adolescents who spend more time with their parents do not spend less time with their peers. This is an important result, as social

connections with peers are particularly important in this developmental phase [28]. It is more likely that adolescents are better equipped to have more skills to interact with peers in a more positive manner, as adolescents spending >1 h a day with their parents perceive lower levels of peer pressure and more peer support. Laird et al. [26] already demonstrated that higher levels of parental monitoring protected adolescents against the impact of unsupervised time on antisocial behavior. Yet, it is also possible that these positive parenting behaviors act as mechanisms in the relationship between time spent with parents and more peer connectedness. This may imply that, in line with supportive parent–child relationships [49], parents spending time with their adolescent children seem to empower their children to establish more supportive peer relations. Another plausible explanation for the lack of an effect on spending time with peers is that this contact with peers also takes place online. Adolescents are also spending, next to face-to-face contact, time with their peers in the online world [50]. However, the measure assessing how much time adolescents spent with their peers did not differentiate between face-to-face and online contact. Although we know that there is an overlap of the peers that adolescents are in touch with in real life and online [50], it would be interesting to gain more insight into how the time that adolescents spend with important others (e.g., parents and peers) are divided among one another.

In line with Laird et al. [26], our previously stated assumption that spending time with parents is expected to be a prerequisite to develop qualitative parent–child relationships seems to hold. This is exemplified by adolescents spending more time with their parents reporting significantly more parental control and higher levels of parent–child relatedness and family support. Moreover, our results also indicate that even in adolescence, when youths tend to spent more time with peers, this does not seem to come at the expense of time spent with their parents, in contrast to the study of Lam et al. [28]. In fact, spending more time with parents even contributes to better peer relationships (cf. [24]). This is imperative knowledge, since peers play a pivotal role in adolescent social and identity development; this study indicates that spending more time with parents does not harm and may even improve peer relationships.

4.1. Strengths and Limitations

Though this is one of the first studies exploring the relevance of adolescents spending time with their parents across domains of risk behaviors, peers and parents, this study has some limitations that should be considered. First, as this study is primarily explorative and therefore descriptive, any causal relations between time spent with parents, risk behaviors, peer factors and parenting factors could not be established. That is, once adolescents are more involved in risk behaviors, their parents may react by engaging in more negative parenting behaviors [51,52]. Future studies should apply more enhanced statistical analyses to longitudinal data to further investigate the preventive role of time spent with parents in adolescents' risk behaviors and its potential mechanisms. Second, though significant differences were found between adolescents spending on average less and more than 1 h a day, we should take into account that the effect sizes were rather small. Third, the data in the current study were collected in one community in the Netherlands and can therefore not be generalized to other communities nor countries. Fourth, though relatedness seemed to be an important characteristic for the time adolescents spent with their parents, it should be noted that the reliability of this measure was low. Fifth, we have not considered the time that parents spent with their children in childhood and the transition to adolescence. Insight into this transition phase could provide more insight into whether parents who spend more time with their adolescents were already spending more time with their child in childhood as well.

4.2. Implications

The findings in the current study have some important implications that should be considered. For science, the findings indicate the relevance and contribution of the

time adolescents spent with their parents for adolescent development. Where previous research has mostly focused on the qualitative aspect of parent–child interactions and relationships [3,4], this is one of the few studies that has considered the quantitative aspect. We demonstrated that actually both dimensions should be taken into account in the investigation of the role of parents in adolescent development. For practice, our study demonstrates that even for adolescents who may seem to be more focused towards their peers, it is highly relevant for parents to spend time with them. Parents should therefore not underestimate their protective role in risk behavior in this important developmental phase of adolescence, and they should be aware of this. These new insights are imperative for parent programs at the local and national level targeting risk behavior in adolescence. For example, the NIX18 campaign in the Netherlands has been around for 10 years and is mainly focused on parents and encouraging them to make agreements and communicate with their children about not drinking alcohol under the age of 18. The current findings can help to redefine the strategy of NIX18 by focusing the campaign on the importance of spending time with adolescents. Overall, parents should be informed about the importance of undertaking activities with their adolescents and spending on average at least one hour a day per week.

5. Conclusions

The current study is the first to imply that it is pivotal for parents to spend time with adolescent children. Spending on average 1 h or more per day with your child may contribute to lower levels of risk behavior, better peer relationships and more qualitative parent–child relationships. Moreover, spending more time with parents does not come at the expense of spending time with peers.

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