**Background**

Parenting a child with developmental or mental health problems negatively affects parents’ physical health across the lifespan.
- More physical symptoms, greater functional limitations, and poorer self-rated health among parents of children with intellectual disabilities
- Lower levels of health-related quality of life among parents of children with developmental disabilities

Engaging in maladaptive coping behavior such as problematic drinking may exacerbate the negative consequences of parenting a child with a disability.

**Research Questions**
1. How does having a child with developmental or mental health problems [non-normative parenting] affect parents’ alcohol-related health behaviors in mid-life (in the 50s)?
2. How does non-normative parenting affect parental physical health in later life (in the 60s)?
3. How do alcohol-related health behaviors moderate the relationship between non-normative parenting and parental physical health?

**Data**

Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS) - prospective study of a random sample of 10,317 men and women who graduated from Wisconsin high schools in 1957 and their randomly selected siblings (Hauser et al., 1992).

Initial data collected in 1957, and the same respondents were interviewed in 1964, 1975, 1992, and 2004. In 1975 and in 1994, a random sub-sample of siblings of the graduates was added to the study, and was administered the same interview and questionnaire as the graduates. We used data from two time points: 1992/94, when the respondents were in their mid-fifties (midlife), and 2004/06, when the respondents were in their mid-sixties (early retirement).

**Analytical Sample**
- Parents aged 60 and above with a child with a disability and a control group of parents who do not have a child with a disability
- Targeted disability conditions: Developmental disability: Mental retardation, Down syndrome. Fragile-X, Fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, brain trauma prior to age 22. Mental illness: schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, alcoholism and drugs, anxiety disorder and other emotional problems
- Questions on alcohol consumption and problem drinking were administered to 80% of the WLS sample. The final analytic sample included only those who were part of the alcohol module
- Number of respondents with a child with a disability \( N = 458 \) (203 had a child with developmental disabilities and 255 had a child with mental illness).
- Number of respondents in the comparison sample \( N = 2941 \)

**Measures**

Health measures:
- **Health Utility Index (HUI)** is a reliable and valid measure of health status and health-related quality of life (Horman, Furlong, Fenny, et al. 2003)
- **Functional limitations** assessed by asking respondents if they experienced any difficulty in each of the seven domains: pushing and pulling large objects, standing, etc.
- **Drinking behaviors**
  - **Binge Drinking episode** was defined as having consumed five or more drinks on the same occasion (National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2004)
  - **Problem drinking behavior** assessed with: (a) whether the respondent ever felt bad or guilty about drinking, (b) whether people ever answered the respondent by criticizing his/her drinking, (c) whether drinking ever caused problems at work or (d) problems between the respondent and their spouse, children, parents, or other immediate relatives; (e) whether the respondent had ever gone to anyone for help about drinking

**Results**

**Effect of having a child with disability on alcohol-related behaviors at mid-life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of drinks consumed in the last one month</th>
<th>Problem drinking behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of the respondent</td>
<td>12.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown up with an alcoholic</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- Parents of children with a disability showed greater symptoms of problematic drinking behaviors than the comparison group when they were in their 50s.
- Having a child with a disability was associated with parents’ poorer HRQOL and greater functional limitations in later life.
- Symptoms of problem drinking behaviors in mid-life significantly moderated the relationship between parenting a child with a disability and physical health in later life.