College Drinking

By Mary Ellen Lynch

Media images of drinking among college students emphasize hilarious parties and mischievous antics performed by college students while under the influence of alcohol. A recent study funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), however, suggests that there is a dark side to college drinking that needs to be taken more seriously.

According to a study by Dr. Ralph Hingson and others, drinking among college students aged 18-24 was related to a number of negative outcomes. Based on an analysis of information provided by such groups as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Survey, the authors estimate that alcohol use was related to over 1,400 deaths in this population. This includes deaths due to motor vehicle accidents as well as those due to other unintentional accidents that were the result of alcohol use. In addition, they estimate that among college students in the 18-24 year age group, over 500,000 were injured annually as a result of their own alcohol use, over 600,000 were assaulted as a result of other students’ alcohol use, and over 70,000 alcohol-related sexual assaults or date rapes occurred.

Although the data on consequences of excessive drinking are striking, NIAAA reports that only a minority of college students engage in frequent high-risk drinking. They estimate that approximately 40% of college students engage in binge-drinking (5 or more drinks at a time for men and 4 or more for women). Results of one study showed that about 20% reported frequent binge-drinking-- more than three times in a two-week
period. In addition, they report that, between 1993 and 1999, the proportion of college students reporting that they abstained from alcohol increased from 15% to 19%.

The NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking is developing strategies to prevent excessive drinking among college students. According to Dr. Mark Goldman, Task Force Co-Chair, “Prevention strategies must simultaneously target three constituencies: the student population as a whole; the college and it’s surrounding environment; and the individual at-risk or alcohol-dependent drinker.” Materials concerning task force findings and prevention strategies are available for university staff involved in student health and campus life, counselors, parents, students, and others at www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov.

For further information regarding this article please contact the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory West Campus, 1256 Briarcliff Road N.E., Suite 323-West, Atlanta GA, 30306. You can email us at msacd@listserv.cc.emory.edu, visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD, or phone us at 404-712-9800.

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References
