

Cause & Effect:

College drinking

Kara L. Theis

National American University

NAU Writing Center

One of the first things that might come to a person's mind regarding college is parties or drinking. For some, college is a time to experiment and drink socially. Some students have experimented with drinking prior to college, some have never had more than a sip, and others have entered college with a significant drinking problem. According to College Drinking Prevention, alcohol use on campus is not a new problem; it has been documented in the United States for at least 50 years ("College Drinking," 2014). There are many factors that could lead a college student to drink; there are also many outcomes that could stem from drinking in college, let's take a look at some of them.

One of the main reasons for college drinking in today's society is peer pressure. Peer pressure is increased during college simply because students do not have parents to keep them accountable anymore, they have their peers. Peer pressure in college can be indirect or direct from others; college students influence each other by introducing, providing, pressuring, or advertising alcohol use. Students are viewing excessive alcohol use as a socially acceptable and positive experience. Freshmen are more likely to be at risk for alcohol use because they are new to the college experience and wanting to begin new friendships. They want the transition into college to be as easy as possible; therefore, they give in to socially acceptable behavior without knowing the full consequences of the amount of alcohol that is being consumed.

School can be incredibly stressful, especially when a student is on their own with little guidance; some might turn to drinking to ease their anxiety. Overwhelming stress and anxiety can lead to unhealthy behaviors such as lack of sleep, excessive eating, and lack of eating, drug use, depression, and alcohol use. Students might turn to alcohol to relieve anxiety about studying, finals, or social problems. Students might also turn to alcohol when they have had a rough week and want to relax to relieve the stress of their everyday college life.

Some students feel the need to drink to be accepted in social situations. Alcohol gives some students that liquid courage they need to introduce themselves to their peers of the opposite sex, as well as the same sex. Students have admitted to using alcohol to break the ice, enhance social activity, have more fun, and facilitate connections with others.

While alcohol may be fine in moderation, drinking heavily can result in some serious consequences. Academic problems, alcohol abuse, drunk driving, health problems, legal problems, injury, assault, sexual abuse, unsafe sex, and even death are some of the negative consequences that may arise due to excessive college drinking. Students that drink in excess or rely on alcohol for focus or stress relief may greatly hurt their study habits and grades. If a student drinks the night before a test, they are more likely to receive a lower grade than if they had a good night's sober sleep the night prior. If a student drinks heavily, the risk of them still being intoxicated the morning after can increase. Students may miss out on opportunities to participate in school activities such as academic or athletic clubs, or even their scheduled classes. These consequences can lead to bad grades, school suspension, or even legal problems.

Legal problems can occur for many different reasons; all for which could be associated with college drinking. Students that are under the legal drinking age pose a risk for receiving minor intoxications. Students can receive tickets for public intoxication, or even disorderly conduct for being loud and obscene. Property damage is a common effect that could result from the misuse or abuse of alcohol; vomit, litter, and even intentional damage are examples. In a national study, 8 percent of all students admitted to property damage that was associated with drinking. Drinking in excess can also lead to physical and sexual assault; 600,000 students age 18-24 are physically assaulted annually by a student who had been drinking. Each year, 70,000 students age 18-24 are victims to alcohol-related sexual assault. According to CAS, 30 percent of

students who drank in the past year have admitted to driving after consuming alcohol. Half of all fatal crashes involving people ages 18-24 involve alcohol. This is a very dangerous situation that can lead to not only legal problems, but health problems and even death.

Aside from legal and academic problems, there are many health problems that can arise from excessive drinking as well. Liver problems, memory loss, unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancy, and alcohol addiction are just some of the many health problems associated with heavy drinking. 20 percent of binge drinkers are involved in unprotected sex, and a whopping 40 percent of binge drinkers are involved in unwanted sex. According to the CDC, 8 in 10 students report to be sexually experienced; however, 6 in 10 students report to have inconsistent condom use. Lack of safe sex can result in unwanted pregnancy or even sexually transmitted diseases. 400,000 students reported to have unprotected sex between the ages of 18-24; ¼ of them do not recall the experience due to heavy intoxication. Alcohol is the leading cause of death for people age 17-20 for vehicle crashes (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).

In conclusion, college drinking might sound fun and socially acceptable; however, in excess, there can be many consequences. There are many resources available for students who might feel pressured to drink excessively. There are also many resources available for students who might need a healthy outlet to relieve stress outside of drinking. Peer pressure, social norm, and stress are only some of the possible causes of excessive college drinking. Health, legal, and academic problems are only a small fraction of the serious consequences that can occur as a result of excessive college drinking.

References

Alcohol and Stress. (n.d.). Retrieved November 16, 2014, from <http://oade.nd.edu/support-for-students/alcohol-and-stress/>

High-Risk Drinking in College: What We Know and What We Need To Learn. (n.d.). Retrieved November 16, 2014, from http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/niaacollegematerials/panel01/highrisk_04.aspx

What's Inside. (n.d.). Retrieved November 16, 2014, from <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/projects/alcohol/whydrink.asp>

NAU Writing Center