

Cause & Effect: College drinking

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More than half of all high school students choose to attend college after graduation. Athletic and academic clubs, fraternities and sororities, parties and social gatherings; these are just some of the things students can look forward to in college. Nationally, a very large majority, about 80 percent, of college students use alcohol (Villanova University Counseling Center, n.d.). 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 the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2005), alcohol use on campus is not a new problem; it has been documented in the United States for at least 50 years. College drinking is not always fun and games; there are many factors that lead to alcohol use, as well as consequences it might result in.

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 their parents nearby to keep them accountable anymore. Peer pressure can be both indirect and direct. 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.

Stress is another factor that could lead a student to turn to alcohol. School can be incredibly stressful, especially when a student is on their own with little guidance. Some students 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. Baer (2002) writes that 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. There are strong data suggesting that members of Greek social organizations, fraternities and sororities drink more heavily and more frequently than other students (Baer, 2002). A lot of organizations, clubs, and social gatherings are centered on alcohol use. Drinking has been a social norm in college for quite some time.

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. According to Hingson (2002), 600,000 students age 18-24 are physically assaulted annually by a student who had been drinking and 70,000 are victims to an alcohol-related sexual assault. 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 (Wechsler & Austin, 1998). 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 (Wechsler, Meichun, Lee, Dowdall, 2000). 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; $\frac{1}{4}$ 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). Alcohol is the culprit to many incidences and crimes in which people have claimed memory loss. Something this potent should not even be legal or readily available to society. It has and will continue to cause many diseases, disorders, and

deaths. According to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 28 percent of adults in America drink enough to be considered alcohol dependent. Alcohol is extremely addicting and can cause many mental and physical problems when in withdrawal. Some of these problems might include tremors, increased perspiration, nausea, rapid heartbeat, fever, hallucinations, and even seizures. Someone going through alcohol withdrawal may develop delirium tremens which could potentially become life threatening.

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.

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