

Binge Drinking Among College Students

Adriana Sarabia Savala^{1*}

B.A. Candidate, Department of Sociology, California State University Stanislaus, 1 University Circle, Turlock, CA 95382

Received 16 April, 2019; accepted May, 2019

Abstract

Binge drinking among college students has become a major health concern. Binge drinking has been defined as drinking five or more drinks in a single setting for men. For women, it is defined as four or more drinks in a single setting. Research shows gender differences and housing status affect patterns in alcohol consumption, specifically binge drinking. For the present study, it was hypothesized that participants who identify as a male will be more likely to report binge drinking behavior as compared to female participants. It was also hypothesized that students who live on campus will be more likely to binge drink than students who live off campus. A sample of 179 undergraduate students from CSU Stanislaus between the ages of 18 and 63 were asked to indicate their gender, what their current housing status was, on campus or off campus, and what their alcohol consumption habits were. To determine whether there were differences in binge drinking behavior between gender and housing status, data were analyzed using independent samples t-tests. The research hypothesis was supported. Significant results were found relative to both gender, $t(37.818) = 3.31$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.79$, and housing status, $t(14.382) = 2.3$, $p = .039$, $d = 0.67$. As expected, male participants were significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking behavior ($n = 31$, $M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.28$) as compared to female participants ($n = 148$, $M = 1.7$, $SD = 0.99$). As was also expected, participants who reported that they lived on campus were significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking behavior ($n = 14$, $M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.34$) as compared to those who did not live on campus ($n = 165$, $M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.03$). Although the numbers did not reflect high levels of binge drinking, these findings imply that both gender (male), and housing status (on campus) have an influence on college students' drinking behavior. Limitations of the study included a small sample size, the sample being limited to only an undergraduate college student population, and a disparity between reported gender and housing status.

Keywords: binge drinking; college students; gender; housing status

Introduction

Binge drinking among college students is becoming more common over the years. "Binge drinking has been defined as drinking five or more drinks in a single setting or as drinking five or more drinks in a single setting for men and four or more drinks in a single setting for women" (Clapp, Shillington, & Segars, 2000, p.140). College students suffer negative consequences when they have alcohol in their system because it impairs their motor skills, causes health problems, and does not allow students to think as clearly as they would if they were not intoxicated. Research shows gender differences affect patterns in alcohol consumption specifically binge drinking. Students' participation in school activities such as Greek membership and students' living status are factors that studies show affect their alcohol consumption.

Binge drinking among college students is so extensive that it is causing a major health concern to all people. "High-risk

alcohol use on college campuses has prompted a concerning response from federal agencies such as the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the US Department of Health and Human Services, as well as local efforts from community coalitions and college administrators" (Wagoner, Blocker, McCoy, Sutfin, Champion, & Wolfson, 2012, p.446). Although these programs are trying to prevent students from engaging in such dangerous alcohol-related activities, studies have shown binge drinking is still prevalent on college campuses (Wagoner, Blocker, McCoy, Sutfin, Champion, & Wolfson, 2012). Studies are trying to discover new techniques to help students' who are dealing with binge drinking and are at risk to experience negative social and psychological consequences due to high amounts of alcohol consumption (Gfroerer, Greenblatt, & Wright, 1997).

Literature Review:

Affiliation on Campus and Drinking Status

¹ Corresponding author. Email: asarabiasavalal@csustan.edu

Some research has shown students who are Greek members on campuses (such as being in fraternities or sororities or athletes) are more likely to participate in binge drinking (Smith, Finneran, & Droppa, 2014). This is because they are more likely to attend parties where alcohol is going to be served and play alcohol-related games. Alcohol is more accessible to Greek members because they are more likely to throw parties and are more likely to engage in alcohol-related games than students who are non-Greek members. The parties that the Greek members throw are for mostly for Greek members which is why they are also more likely to engage in alcohol-related games. All Greek members are invited and occasionally they will invite other peers who are non-affiliated students. Greek members pressure their peers to participate in alcohol-related games. Students feel pressured to drink because everyone else is drinking. "Students most often reported getting alcohol from a peer of legal drinking age, a sorority/fraternity party, or a bar" (Wagoner, Blocker,

McCoy, Sutfin, Champion, & Wolfson, 2012, p. 447). In other words, non-affiliated students are receiving alcohol from another student involved in a fraternity or sorority which makes alcohol available to everyone involved with those groups. Students are not only receiving alcohol from Greek organizations on campus they also receive it from their peers and bars. But being affiliated with Greek organizations puts them at a higher risk to participate in binge drinking according to research. Research suggests students are more likely to drink if involved in a Greek membership because alcohol is present during a party or social gathering.

Students reported the reasons they drink heavy amounts of alcohol is due to "social norms and wanting to have fun" (Clapp, Shillington, & Segars, 2000). It is a social norm in college many students are going to binge drink which is why many students reported feeling pressure to drink heavy amounts of alcohol at parties. Although there has been plenty of research done to support that there is a relationship among binge drinking and student's Greek status, little research has been done on students who are not affiliated with fraternities, sororities, and athletics.

Many studies conclude that Greek affiliation does not impact students' drinking status. One study has shown students who are not members of Greek organization still consume large amounts of alcohol (Smith, Finneran, & Droppa, 2014). Researchers found many factors made students vulnerable targets to excessive drinking (Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & D'Arcy 2005). For example, students who had been using drugs while consuming alcohol, drank higher amounts of alcohol as their night went on. Students who participated in binge drinking also attended parties and played alcohol-related games such as their peers did who are affiliated with fraternities, sororities, and sports on campus. Many college

students regardless of affiliation on campus binge drink, and suffer negative consequences which include dizziness, vomiting, and memory loss (Smith, Finneran, & Droppa, 2014). Researchers found alcohol was widely accessible regardless of affiliation which is why many students binge drink. A mass number of students participate in pre-gaming which is defined as consuming high amounts of "alcohol before they go out to a party and after they came back from the party" (Smith, Finneran, & Droppa, 2014). "Some of the worst consequences of a night out drinking were hangovers, confusion, embarrassment, vomiting, saying things one should not have, memory loss, medical personnel or police visits, being written up by a Residence Assistant, emotional consequences and getting out of control" (Smith, Finneran, & Droppa, 2014, p.36). Basically, regardless of students' affiliation on campus many students practice binge drinking and suffer negative consequences.

Gender Differences Impact on Alcohol Consumption

Some research suggests gender is not a reliable indicator to predict a student's drinking status. "Historically, male college students have been most involved in the drinking culture on their campuses; however, research based on large epidemiological studies suggests that with each new cohort of students that enters higher education, gender differences within this age group are diminishing" (Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & D'Arcy, 2005, p.142). There are many reasons to suggest why this is occurring. Women today in the United States believe in gender equality and do not let the fact that they are women get in their way of participating in things that are considered masculine. This is a reason why women today are catching up with men in terms of alcohol consumption (Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & D'Arcy, 2005). Today many women do not care if binge drinking is considered masculine, they will still participate in it. Female students are more likely to get alcohol for free which contributes to an increase in alcohol consumption (Wagoner, Blocker, McCoy, Sutfin, Champion, & Wolfson, M., 2012). The fact that women reported getting free drinks more often than men is one factor to take into consideration as to why women are consuming more alcohol now than they did a few years ago. Men did not report having as many free drinks as women but have been drinking more than women in the past decade (Wagoner, Blocker, McCoy, Sutfin, Champion, & Wolfson, M., 2012).

Other research suggests it is important to take into account a student's gender to predict the likelihood of one's drinking status. Research suggests men have been drinking more than females, because it is viewed by men as a competition, to see who can drink the most. Men view binge drinking as a sport and like to compete against one another. The male students like to

see who can drink the most alcohol in short periods of time. (Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & D'Arcy, 2005). This research concludes gender is an important factor to take into account when predicting college students drinking status, but the gender gap may be closing soon according to another research.

Housing Status

Another important factor to look at when predicting binge drinking is a student's housing status. Research suggests students who live away from their parents tend to binge drink more frequently (Gfroerer, Greenblatt, & Wright, 1997). This is due to the fact they are away from their parents' and are at a new stage in their lives where they have more freedom. College students who move out of their parents' home are experiencing the world for themselves, and do not have their parents constantly consulting them with the decisions they make. Students who live on college campuses are adjusting to having alcohol accessible to them for maybe the first time (Gfroerer, Greenblatt, & Wright, 1997).

Students are at a critical and exciting new chapter in their lives, and with their parents out of the picture, they are going to be experimenting with new things, such as binge drinking. Moreover, students have parties without their parents knowing, which contributes to why binge drinking is more prevalent among students who live away from their parents. When students attend parties, they do not have to pay for alcohol. If alcohol is free and students' parents are not around, they are more likely to drink. Many students experiment binge drinking because it is much easier for them to try when they do not have their parents around. Alcohol is easily accessible and is free when students go to a party, so students feel inclined to experience it.

Conclusions

Overall, research suggests many factors contribute to college students participation in binge drinking. It is important to take into account students' affiliation on campus, gender, and living status when looking for groups to aid in alcohol-related problems. Many universities are setting up counseling programs to help students deal with the negative consequences after they have binge drank (Gfroerer, Greenblatt, & Wright, 1997). Not only have students affected themselves, but others around them when they binge drink. "Alcohol use among college students is becoming a health concern to the public" (Clapp, Shillington, & Segars, 2000). College students drinking is a community problem, because after consuming high amounts of alcohol students usually drive and are more likely to injure or kill themselves and others around them. They

are also more likely to perform deviant behaviors in the community. When students are intoxicated, they are more likely to commit non-consensual acts against other students or people in the community (Wagoner, Blocker, McCoy, Sutfin, Champion, & Wolfson, 2012). Which is why it is such an important topic to research in order to tackle the vulnerable targets who need to seek help.

My research will be to see if our campus, California State University, Stanislaus, has large amounts of students who binge drink. Most research done has been in United States Universities, however many of these research findings were not done in California, so it will be interesting to see if our campus is like other campuses in the United States. Most research was done on non-affiliated students on college campuses and had only a few numbers of subjects, and the majority were Caucasian male students (Smith, Finneran, J., & Droppa, 2014). Researching our campus will be different because we have a diverse student population. The campus at California State University, Stanislaus is primarily a commuter campus, composed largely of first-generation students. This type of research will allow us to see if our campus needs to establish programs to help students deal with the negative consequences of drinking high amounts of alcohol.

Methods

Overview. A sample of 179 undergraduate students were recruited through the CSU Stanislaus Department of Psychology online participant pool (SONA). Participants ranged from 18 to 63 years of age. Anyone who was under 18 was excluded from the study. All participants were given 1 SONA credit for participating in the study, which counted as experimental credit for a psychology class. Students were made aware of the study from instructors, and flyers.

The research design is a 2 X 2, within-subjects design to examine factors pertaining to the effects that gender and housing status have on drinking behaviors. The independent variables are gender and housing status. Participants were asked to identify whether they are male or female and whether they live on campus or off campus. The dependent variable is reported binge drinking behaviors measured using a drinking behavior survey. The measures used in the study are a demographics questionnaire and a drinking behavior survey. The demographics questionnaire consists of 11 questions designed to assess the participants' personal characteristics, including questions regarding whether or not they consume alcohol. The drinking behavior survey consists of two questions, both using a 5-point Likert scale of measurement with one designed to assess their binge drinking status, with the second question designed to assess a personal view on how the participant views drinking, and finally, one close-ended

question designed to assess the participant's likelihood of having difficulties with the legal system due to drinking behavior.

Participants were recruited through SONA. Those who were interested were able to access further information about the study, the Consent Form, questionnaires, and the drinking behavior survey through Qualtrics. Once a participant agreed to participate, he or she was instructed on how to advance through all portions of each section, beginning with the Consent Form. Upon completion of the Consent Form, the participants were instructed to complete a demographics questionnaire, at which time they were asked if they consumed alcoholic beverages. Those who indicate that they do not consume alcohol were directed to the end of the survey. Participants were then instructed to complete the drinking behavior survey. At the conclusion of the experiment, the participants were then directed to the debriefing sheet, at which time they were thanked for their participation, and the purpose of the study was explained to them. It was clarified to them that the study's purpose is to understand factors pertaining to gender and housing status and its effects on binge drinking.

Results

To determine whether there were differences in binge drinking behavior between gender and housing status, data were analyzed using independent samples t-tests. Both research hypotheses were supported. Significant results were found relative to both gender, $t(37.818) = 3.31, p = .002, d = 0.79$, and housing status, $t(14.382) = 2.3, p = .039, d = 0.67$. As expected, male participants were significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking behavior ($n = 31, M = 2.6, SD = 1.28$) as compared to female participants ($n = 148, M = 1.7, SD = 0.99$) (see Figure 1). As was also expected, participants who reported that they lived on campus were significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking behavior ($n = 14, M = 2.6, SD = 1.34$) as compared to those who did not live on campus ($n = 165, M = 1.8, SD = 1.03$) (see Figure 2).

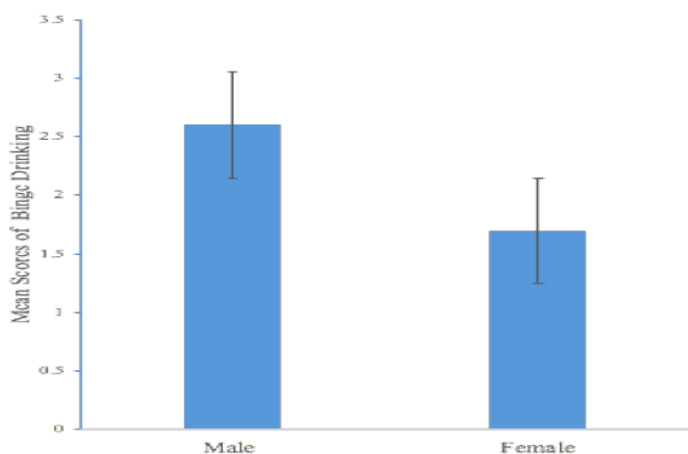


Figure 1. Mean score of binge drinking relative to gender.

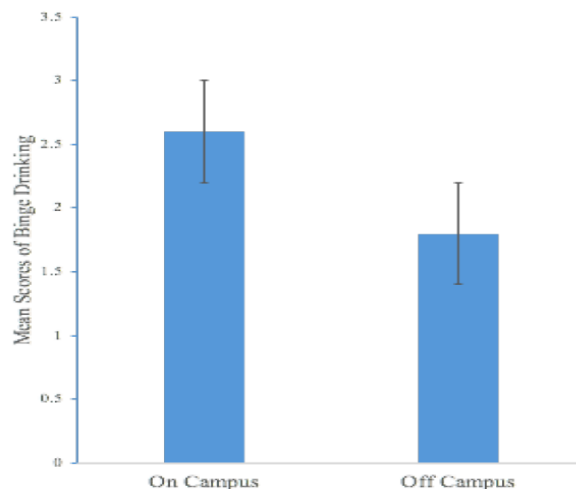


Figure 2. Mean score of binge drinking relative to housing status.

Implications

Although the numbers did not reflect high levels of binge drinking behavior, these findings imply that both gender (male), and housing status (on campus) have an influence on college students' drinking behavior. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that gender and housing status influence students' drinking behaviors (Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & D'Arcy, 2005). Limitations of the study included a small sample size, the sample being limited to only the undergraduate college student population, and disproportionate ratios pertaining to genders and housing status. These findings will aid in the implementation of outreach programs against the danger of binge drinking on the California State University, Stanislaus campus.

Future work

There are many potential works that could develop out of this study. There needs to be more research done on campuses with diverse student populations. More data will need to be collected in the future to better understand the nature of our campus. Larger sample sizes and inclusion of the graduate student population will improve our understanding of our campus.

Acknowledgments

I thank the California State University, Stanislaus Honors Program and the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program for support throughout this research. Dr. Andrew Dorsey provided critical insights and guidance at various stages of the study. I would like to send special thanks to Professor Deborah Forester. Without her mentorship and inspiration, this research would not have been possible.

References

- Clapp, J. D., Shillington, A. M., & Segars, L. B. (2000). Deconstructing contexts of binge drinking among college students. *American Journal Of Drug & Alcohol Abuse*, 26(1), 139.
- Gfroerer, J. C., Greenblatt, J. C., & Wright, D. A. (1997). Substance use in the US college-age population: Differences according to educational status and living arrangement. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87(1), 62-65.
- Smith, M., Finneran, J., & Droppa, M. (2014). High risk drinking among non-affiliated college students. *Journal Of Alcohol & Drug Education*, 58(1), 28-43.
- Wagoner, K. G., Blocker, J., McCoy, T. P., Sutfin, E. L., Champion, H., & Wolfson, M. (2012). Free alcohol use and consequences: Gender differences among undergraduates. *American Journal Of Health Behavior*, 36(4), 446-458. doi:10.5993/AJHB.36.4.2
- Young, A. M., Morales, M., McCabe, S. E., Boyd, C. J., & D'Arcy, H. (2005). Drinking like a guy: Frequent binge drinking among undergraduate women. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 40(2), 241-267. doi:10.1081/JA-200048464 .