



# FOCUS ON: THE STUDY OF COLLEGE HEALTH BEHAVIORS

Volume 1: Issue 1

December 12, 2003

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## Announcing: The Study of College Health Behaviors

The Study of College Health Behaviors (CHB) brings together a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health and the Harvard Medical School, who are united in a public health approach to health and health behavior.

These Harvard researchers collaborate with a network of experts from other universities, government agencies, and other organizations to investigate the determinants of health among college students, evaluate programs, communicate scientific findings, and inform public policy agendas.

### About the Study

The Study of College Health Behaviors (CHB) will survey a nationally representative sample of college students from across the United States. This survey expands on the success of the College Alcohol Study (CAS) to examine a

broad range of health-related behaviors. The CHB will investigate health threats to young people in the vulnerable transition from adolescence to adulthood, whether these threats to health lie in personal history, personal conduct, or

in the larger social, physical or policy environment. CHB will look at both risk behaviors and protective practices for a wide range of public health and medical concerns, including:

HEALTH AREA	GENERAL SCOPE
Alcohol Use	Use patterns, problems, reaction to school policies
Tobacco Use	Use patterns, quitting intentions
Illicit drug use	Type of drugs used, extent of use, ease of access
Stress	Stress assessment scale
Mental Health	Depression assessment scale
Sleep	Weekday and weekend sleep patterns and problems
Sexual health	Sexual activity, condom use, sexual assault, abuse
Physical activity and weight control	Type and frequency of exercise, body image, eating patterns and disorders
Sun protection behaviors	Protective behaviors, tanning light use
Motor vehicle safety	Drinking and driving, fatigue, seatbelt use
Health services use	Health center use, reasons for use

**ANNOUNCING: CHB***(continued from page 1)*

Our aim is to use the sampling frame of the CAS to gather high quality, nationally representative data that is relevant for school, local, state, and national levels, and to provide scientific analysis that will promote global understanding of the epidemiology of college health behaviors.

One in three young adults in the United States - or about 11 million students - attend college. During their years at college, young people typically

acquire and solidify many of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

We have developed the CHB because college plays such a powerful role in shaping lives and influencing health. By understanding what promotes or discourages health and healthy behaviors during this formative period, we have an opportunity to greatly improve the health of this population.

The CHB is an extramurally funded research group affiliated with the Department

of Society, Human Development and Health at the Harvard School of Public Health. Core staff members engage in epidemiologic, economic, sociologic, policy, treatment, and evaluation research. CHB researchers also collaborate with investigators at other institutions.

Please visit our web site [www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas) to view the recording of the web seminar "A New Opportunity to Learn More About your Students' Health Behaviors" and learn more about joining the survey.

## Diverse College Campuses Yield Lower Binge Drinking Rates

### *Fewer Higher-Risk Drinkers at More Diverse Schools Binge Drink*

Drinking rates among higher-risk drinkers on American college campuses—those who are white, male and underage—are significantly lower on college campuses with larger proportions of minority, female and older students. Researchers with the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) reported these findings in a study appearing in the November 2003 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*. The study is the first to examine the role of college student demographics and diversity in moderating binge drinking among high-risk students.

Most significantly, however, the findings show that greater diversity on campuses may serve as a risk-protective factor, even for those who were binge drinkers in high school. The study found that incoming white freshmen who did not binge drink in high

school were less likely to start binge drinking as college students, if their universities had higher proportions of African American, Latino, Asian or older students. And, incoming white freshmen who were binge drinking in high school were less likely to continue drinking in this way when attending schools with higher percentages of minority or older students.

"This study has shown that having a diverse student body on college campuses is an important factor in lowering binge-drinking rates," said Henry Wechsler, Ph.D., principal investigator of the study and director of College Alcohol Studies at the Harvard School of Public Health. "In making decisions about admissions, colleges should recognize the many benefits of greater diversity on campus, including a possible decrease in problem drinking."

The study, "Watering Down the Drinks: The Moderating Effect of College Demographics on Alcohol Use of High-Risk Groups," was funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), based in Princeton, New Jersey. Meichun Kuo, Sc.D., also of the Harvard School of Public Health, is a co-author.

The study analyzed data from 52,312 college students at 114 predominantly white colleges from the 1993, 1997, 1999 and 2001 College Alcohol Study surveys. College student binge drinking, as defined by Wechsler and other public health researchers, is the consumption of five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks for men, and four or more drinks in a row for women. Research has shown that this style of binge drinking is associated with lower grades, vandalism, and physical and sexual violence.

**DIVERSE CAMPUSES**

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Students who do not binge drink experience many “secondhand effects” from the binge- drinking behavior of other students, including physical assault or unwanted sexual advances, vandalized property and interruptions of sleep or study.

Researchers examined whether an increased presence of students from groups in which alcohol is less heavily consumed had a moderating effect on those students who binge drink. Previous studies conducted by the College Alcohol Study have shown that binge-drinking rates vary greatly among certain student subgroups. For example, African American and Asian, female and older students have lower rates of binge drinking than do white, male and younger students. Moderating effects of minority and older students on the drinking habits of high-risk students were observed at schools with small, medium and large enrollments. The moderating effect of having more female students was significant for

the small and medium schools, but not for the large schools.

“The results may shed light on why fraternities, sororities and freshman dorms have particularly high binge-drinking rates and account for a disproportionate share of alcohol problems on campuses,” Dr. Wechsler said. “These social and living arrangements tend to group higher-risk drinkers together, with little chance of their intermingling with those who drink less heavily.”

“Although various interventions have been attempted to lower the level of binge drinking, to our knowledge, colleges have not yet examined housing and admissions policies, and student demographics to that end,” according to the study.

The findings suggest practical solutions for predominantly white colleges, including: creating a campus environment that would attract a diverse student body; increasing the numbers of minorities on campus;

encouraging more women and older students to live on campus, and in fraternity and sorority houses; and decreasing the heavy concentration on campus of likely high-risk drinkers who are overwhelmingly young, male and white.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care. It concentrates its grantmaking in four goal areas: to assure that all Americans have access to quality health care at reasonable cost; to improve the quality of care and support for people with chronic health conditions; to promote healthy communities and lifestyles; and to reduce the personal, social and economic harm caused by substance abuse - tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs. To this end, the Foundation supports scientifically valid, peer-reviewed research on the prevention and treatment of illegal and underage substance use, and the effects of substance abuse on the public's health and well-being.

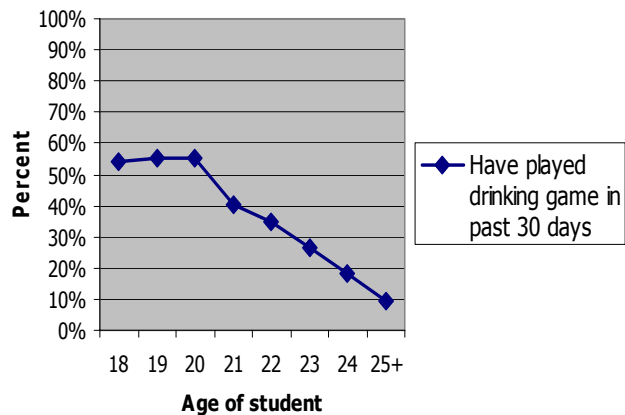
**Dangerous Games**

Our data indicate that the most dangerous college drinkers are those who have played drinking games in the past 30 days.

**Who?** Current binge drinkers (59.6%), Greek members (58.7%), athletes (54.2%), and males (47.2%) are most likely to report playing drinking games in the past 30 days.

**What?** Drinking games vary from “Quarters” to

**Drinking game participation by age of students who have drunk in the past 30 days...**



**DANGEROUS GAMES**

*(continued from page 3)*  
 “Beer Pong” and anything in between

**When?** Underage students play significantly more drinking games than those students 21 years and older (54.4% vs. 32.4%)

**Where?** Students who live in Greek housing (63.5%) and in university housing (43.2-52.2% depending on the type) play more drinking games than do students living off-campus with or without parents (27.5% and 39.7% respectively).

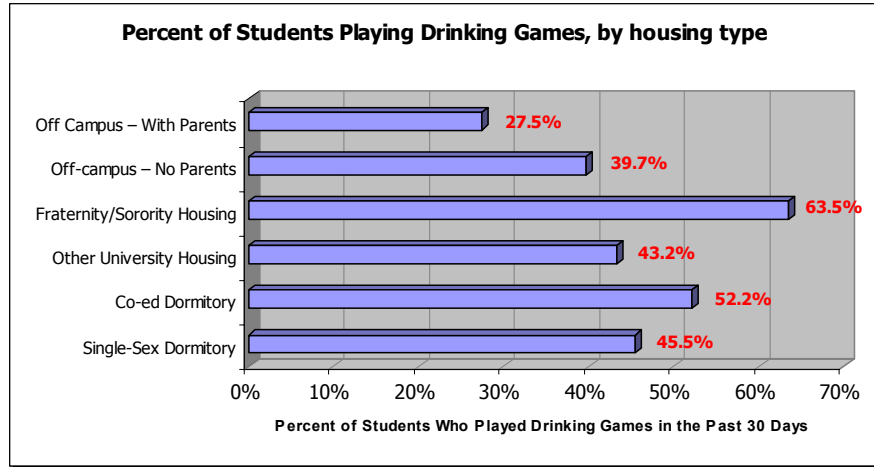
**Why?** Students who play drinking games are more likely than those who have not played drinking games to list their reasons for drinking to be: “to celebrate” (75.3% vs.

51.7%), “to have a good time” (73.9% vs. 46.5%), “because I like the taste” (46.0% vs. 36.8%), “to relax or relieve tension” (43.0% vs. 29.4%), and “to get drunk” (40.1% vs. 13.9%).

**How much?**

Drinking game players indicated that they had consumed alcohol on a mean 9.7 occasions in the past 30 days, almost doubling the 5.2

times a month that non-drinking game players drink. They were also four times more likely to indicate that they had been drunk three or more times in the past month, being drunk a mean of 4.7 times a month (95% CI 4.54-4.88) versus 1.3 times (95% CI 1.27-1.40) for those students who do not play drinking games.



**Meet the CHB Research Staff**



**Elissa R. Weitzman** is a social and psychiatric epidemiologist at the Harvard School of Public Health. She is the Co-Principal Investigator of the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study and Study of College Health Behaviors and Director and Co-PI of the “A Matter of

Degree” program evaluation, a national longitudinal study of the efficacy of an environmental prevention effort to reduce perilous drinking and drinking related harms among college youth. Her research focuses on the interplay of individual and environmental risk and protective factors as they shape health risk behaviors and mental health status among adolescents and young adults. Dr. Weitzman earned a master’s degree in health policy and a doctorate in psychiatric and social epidemiology from the Harvard School of Public Health and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in

bioethics at the Harvard Medical School. She has authored papers on the role of alcohol outlet density and the larger alcohol environment as they affect patterns of alcohol consumption, harms and progression in drinking behaviors, protective effects of community levels of civic engagement on high risk drinking, patterns of alcohol use and abuse among young adults in college generally and among young adults who report having parents who abused alcohol. She is the sole author of a forthcoming study of national patterns of depression and alcohol use/abuse comorbidity among college youth and the lead

**ELISSA WEITZMAN***(continued from page 4)*

author of an upcoming report on the efficacy of a national environmental prevention program on reducing consumption and harms

among college youth. Dr. Weitzman has traveled widely for her own work, conducting field work in the Arctic Circle, Bolivia, Haiti, and in communities throughout the United States, and to

mountain tops around the world to support her husband's work in astronomy. She and her husband have two young children.

## Spotlight on Collaborators

The CHB works with an extensive network of collaborators outside of Harvard. In this issue we are focusing on a group of researchers from Canada who study college drinking.



CHB researchers recently collaborated with a group of Canadian researchers to conduct the first international comparison of college drinking behavior in Canada and the US. The study used nationally representative data from each country, College Alcohol Study data in the US and data collected at 16 universities in Canada. The article appeared in the December 2002 issue of *Addiction*.

Kuo M, Adlaf EM, Lee H, Gliksman L, Demers A, Wechsler H. [More Canadian Students Drink But American Students Drink More: Comparing College Alcohol Use in Two Countries](#). *Addiction*. 2002; 97(12): 1583-1592.

The results provide new insight to the potential cross-national differences on important issues, such as the gender gap in drinking and the protective role parents may play. These findings could be used to advance research on heavy drinking in campuses across North America.

Their most current campus research will involve a survey of almost 10,000 university undergraduates drawn from a census of 68 Canadian universities. This survey, which is funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, will employ a mixed mode method of both mail and internet surveys. The timeframe and questionnaire have been coordinated with Harvard's to ensure appropriate cross-national comparisons.

**Dr. Edward Adlaf** is a Research Scientist and Head of the Population and Life Course Studies Unit at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. He is currently the Director of the *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey*, the longest monitoring study of drug use among adolescents in Canada, and the *CAMH Monitor*, an annual monitoring survey of Ontario adults. Dr. Adlaf holds an appointment as Associate Professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, where he teaches survey methods.

Further details of Dr. Adlaf's work can be found at the CAMH's Population & Life Course Studies webpage [http://www.camh.net/research/population\\_life\\_course.html](http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html)

**Dr. Andrée Demers** is a Professor in the Department of Sociology, Director of the Health and Prevention Social Research Group (GRASP) at the Université de Montréal, and Président of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol. She also serves as a scientific advisor for the Fonds de la recherche en santé du Québec. Her research focuses on social determinants of addiction and health, especially on social environment and drinking context.

Further details about Dr. Demers work can be found on the Université de Montreal's website: <http://www.grasp.umontreal.ca/1507.htm>

**Dr. Louis Gliksman** is the Director of the Social, Prevention & Health Policy Research Department of the Centre and the coordinator for the World Health Organization at the CAMH, and Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Western Ontario. He has been the Principle Investigator of numerous research projects, many of them action research, in the prevention field. He has been long interested in the

**SPOTLIGHT ON COLLABORATORS**

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college population, and has developed and evaluated a program intended to reduce heavy alcohol consumption and related problems among college students. He has conducted a number of surveys of this population in Ontario and was the principal investigator on a research project that investigated the alcohol and drug use patterns and problems, as well of their determinants, of college students across Canada. Through a grant from the Health Transition Fund in the Canadian Ministry of Health he investigated the potential of training primary care physicians in issues of mental health with a package developed by WHO. Together with some collaborators from the United States, he has received a five-year grant from NIAAA to study server training programs in the US. He is a co-investigator on an NIAAA grant that is investigating the efficacy of a program designed for bar owners/managers that should reduce the incidents of violence in these establishments. Most recently, he is investigating the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the Toronto Drug Treatment Court and the factors that lead to success and failure in this program.

**Recent Publications**

Adlaf, E., Kuo, M., Gliksman, L., Demers, A., & Wechsler, H. (2003). American-Canadian differences in illicit drug use among college students: Some preliminary findings, *Epidemiological Trends in Drug Abuse: Community Epidemiological Work Group, December 2002: Volume II: Proceedings* Bethesda: National Institutes of Health.

Adlaf, E. M., Gliksman, L., Demers, A., & Newton-Taylor, B. (2001). The prevalence of elevated psychological distress among Canadian undergraduates: Findings from the 1998 Canadian Campus Survey. *Journal of American College Health, 50*(2), 67-72.

Adlaf, E. M., Gliksman, L., Demers, A., & Newton-Taylor, B. (2003). Cigarette use among Canadian undergraduates. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 94*, 22-24.

Adlaf, E. M., Gliksman, L., Demers, A., & Newton-Taylor, B. (2003). Illicit drug use among Canadian university undergraduates. *CJNR, 35*(1), 24-43.

Demers, A., Kairouz, S., Adlaf, E. M., Gliksman, L., Newton-Taylor, B., & Marchand, A. (2002). A multilevel analysis of situational drinking among Canadian undergraduates. *Social Science and Medicine, 55*(415-424).

Gliksman, L., Adlaf, E. M., Demers, A., & Newton-Taylor, B. (2003). Heavy drinking on Canadian campuses. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 94*, 17-21.

Gliksman, L., Demers, A., Adlaf, E. M., Newton-Taylor, B., & Schmidt, K. (2000). *Canadian Campus Survey 1998*. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Kairouz, S., Gliksman, L., Demers, A., & Adlaf, E. M. (2002). For all these reasons, I do...drink: A multilevel analysis of contextual reasons for drinking among Canadian undergraduates. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 63*(5), 600-608.

## CHB in the News

From **The New York Times**

# Drinking at Colleges Is Focus of Study

September 15, 2003, by Stuart Elliott

The marketing of lower-priced beer and liquor near college campuses is linked with higher rates of heavy drinking among students, according to a study by the Harvard School of Public Health. The study, released on Friday, was the third major report in a week to focus on alcohol marketing and drinking among young people.

Among the tactics criticized by the study were: sale prices at taverns and stores, as low as 25 cents for a beer at a bar; selling beer in 24-packs, with lower prices per can; and signs on bars and liquor stores advertising special weekend prices. All those and other tactics contribute to increasing the number of drinks students consume, the study said.

Previous studies from the Harvard School said that students under 21 drink 48 percent of all alcoholic beverages consumed on college campuses. This study said that efforts to regulate marketing practices could be more effective in reducing binge drinking among students than educational campaigns.

John Doyle, executive director at the American Beverage Institute in Washington, a restaurant trade association, said that alcohol abuse on campus is not caused by marketing and is a much smaller problem than the study indicates. "Alcohol abusers on campuses or elsewhere are people who need treatment," Mr. Doyle

said, not restrictions on marketing aimed at them.

Two reports sent last week to Congress focused on underage drinking. One, from the Federal Trade Commission, concluded that the alcoholic-beverage industry does not intentionally market its products to young people. The second report, from the National Academy of Sciences, concluded that such marketing routinely reaches young consumers and is presented in a style attractive to them, and proposed measures like tax increases and a national ad campaign as remedies.