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Recommended Citation

Dowling, Christian; Cass, Sarah; Hensley, Morgan; and Park, Hyejoon, "The Correlation Between Stress and Alcohol Consumption in College Students" (2019). *Posters*. 28.

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The Correlation Between Stress and Alcohol Consumption in College Students

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Abstract

Stress levels in the life of a college student can be extreme and sometimes, the only way that the student knows how to cope with the high levels of stress is to consume alcohol. This coping strategy is not healthy and unfortunately, the use of alcohol as a coping strategy can lead to more harm than good. Recent studies have shown that 80 percent of all college students in America consume alcohol and almost half of those students have binge drank in the past two weeks. This study evaluates the relationship between stress and the level of alcohol consumption in college students. This study is a quantitative study that was conducted with the use of surveys which means that the study was conducted using random sampling. These surveys were conducted on the website SurveyMonkey.com. The surveys were conducted on anonymous college students. We surveyed multiple college students about their demographics (i.e) age, race, gender, etc.) history with alcohol, their levels of stress, and current consumption of alcohol.

Background Information and Objectives

The National Survey of Drug Use and Health in year conducted research showing that college students between the age of 18-22 consumed alcohol more frequently, in larger amounts, and binge drank more often than those not enrolled in a college of the same age range. In 2015, research showed that 58% of college students drank within the past month, ten percent more than those not enrolled in a college of the same age range. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health in 2015 discovered that 26.9 percent of people aged 18 and older reported that they had participated in binge drinking in the past month. Seven percent reported that they had participated in heavy drinking in the past month.

According to that same survey, 15.1 million people of the age 18 and older suffer from alcohol use disorder. This survey used 9.8 million men and 5.3 million women. In the 2015 survey, it was also found that 623,000 adolescents (ages ranging from 12-17) suffered from alcohol abuse disorder and 20 percent of college students met the criteria for alcohol abuse disorder. In this study, it was also found that one in four percent of college student has faced academic consequences because of drinking.

Because of these statistics, we wanted to find out the correlation between college students and an increase in alcohol consumption. Many college students are facing a great deal of stress. Could this be the reason for the higher levels of consumption? We asked many college students to fill out a survey so we could better understand the reason of consumption and what type of stress and how much stress they were going through.

Methodology

We conducted our research by using a survey designed on SurveyMonkey.com. This survey was disseminated to 108 anonymous Pittsburg State University students . In our survey, we had particular demographics questions. Those questions where asking about age, level of college education, and employment status. These are the demographic questions:

1. What is your age: Under 21 years old or over 21 old?
2. What level of education are you in: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, 5+ years of college?
3. What is your current employment status: Employed Full-Time, Employed Part-Time, Not Employed/Looking For Work, Not Employed/Not Looking For Work, Retired, or Disabled/Not Able to Work

Here are the results:

1. 32.17% of our participants were under 21 while the remaining 67.83% were over 21 years old
2. 19.44 % of our participants where freshman, 10.19% sophomore, 27.78% junior, 20.37% seniors, and 22.22% were in their fifth year or above.
3. 14.81% employed/working full-time, 54.63% employed/part-time, 12.04% not employed/looking for work, 16.67% not employed/not looking for work, 0.93% retired, and 0.93% disabled/not able to work

Following these demographic questions, we moved onto questions that evaluated the participant’s level of stress, levels of alcohol consumption, the relationship between stress and alcohol consumption followed up by questions about the participant’s experiences with binge drinking.

Results

Survey Results:

Our survey was conducted on 108 anonymous Pittsburg State University students over a span of 24 hours. In our survey we also found that since the beginning of their scholastic career many college students have experienced an increased amount of stress in their live. The following graph shows how many of our participants state that their level of stress has increased since beginning college:

Since becoming a college student, has your stress levels increased? (108 responses)			
Answer Choices	Responses		
Yes	87.04%	94	
No	12.96%	14	

In the course of our survey, we found compelling results when asking about the level of alcohol consumption in college students. As the graph shows, the level of alcohol consumption since beginning college has increased:

Since joining college has your, alcohol consumption increased? (108 responses)			
Answer Choices	Responses		
Yes	62.96%	68	
No	37.04%	40	

The main goal of the survey and research was to look at the relationship between increased levels of stress and the alcohol consumption in college students. The findings were compelling; they can be seen in the following table:

When you are enduring stress, does your alcohol consumption increase? (109 responses)			
Answer Choices	Responses		
Yes	30.56%	33	
No	70.37%	76	

The final thing that the survey evaluated was the reasons as to why college students drink in excess. The point of excessive drinking is when an individual drinks more then five drinks in one sitting:

The times you have drunk in excess (5 or more drinks in one sitting), what was the reason for consumption? (105 responses)			
Answer Choices	Responses		
Social Event	57.14%	60	
Stress/Emotional Hardship	11.43%	12	
Did not have intention of binge drinking but could not control it	3.81%	4	
No reason	27.62%	29	

Conclusion

Our study gathered information from 108 anonymous students attending Pittsburg State University of all age ranges and year in college. When asked if when stress increased did alcohol consumption also increase, 70% of students answered no. But when asked if stress level increased, 87% said yes, their stress level had increased. 62% said their alcohol consumption also increased. The correlation between the two is still unknown but we do know there is an increase in both. Participants deny any correlation between stress and alcohol consumption. This, therefore, disproves our hypothesis of there being a correlation between the high levels of stress in college students and an increase of alcohol consumption. This leads us to believe there is need to treat high levels of stress and alcohol consumption independently instead of treating them concurrently. There were, however limitations to our research. The most apparent limitation to our research was the fact there was a limited amount of time allotted for our research. Another limitation is the fact that the survey was only sent to one campus and can not accurately evaluate the topic at hand for the rest of the universities throughout the nation. One last limitation is the fact that this study is dependent on whether or not the dependent is being completely honest when taking the survey.

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