Comparisons of Gambling and Alcohol Use Among College Students and Noncollege Young People in the United States
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There have been no large representative U.S. surveys of gambling, problem gambling and alcohol use among college students as compared with their same-aged counterparts in the general population. This study is the first to address this lack of comparative information on the prevalence of gambling and alcohol use among college and noncollege young adults ages of 18-21.

Findings
• College students and noncollege young people in the U.S. did not differ significantly in overall gambling, frequent gambling or problem gambling, after taking into account demographic factors.
• College students had higher levels of alcohol use and problem drinking as compared with their noncollege counterparts.
• Being male was the strongest predictor of both problem gambling and problem drinking.
• Blacks were less likely than whites to drink heavily; yet they were more likely than whites to gamble heavily.

Background
One thousand young adults participated in the study: 578 were college students enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges and universities; 422 were noncollege young adults, not enrolled in college of any kind. Each was paid $25 for participating.

Participants were asked about college status, age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES based for example, on parents education and occupational prestige) and whether they lived independently or with parents or guardians.

Effect of Precollege Drinking Intentions on Women’s College Drinking as Mediated via Peer Social Influences
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This study examined the impact of precollege intentions or expectations to drink on young women’s drinking during the 1st year of college. The research team considered how these intentions lead the student to make social choices which then contribute to heavy episodic drinking.

Heavy episodic drinking for women is defined as consuming four or more drinks on a single occasion, commonly associated with negative consequences. The longitudinal design of this study extended from the end of high school through the 1st and 2nd semesters of college.

Findings
• Frequent heavy episodic drinking in high school predicted more frequent heavy episodic drinking during the 1st semester of college.
• Students who at the end of high school said they expected to participate in heavy episodic drinking in college, were more likely to participate in actual heavy drinking in the 1st college semester. Heavy drinking in the 1st college semester in turn predicted higher heavy episodic drinking in the 2nd semester.
• Young women who expected to drink more in college reported having more female friends who drank, more friends who approved of drinking and more friends who put pressure on them to drink.

Background
High school seniors (416 females) living in Erie County, NY were recruited from city and suburban high school graduating classes in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007. Students and their mothers were offered the opportunity to participate.
Comparisons of Gambling and Alcohol Use (cont’d)

Gambling. *Gambling* was defined as gambling for money on each of 15 types of activities, such as office pools/raffles/charity; lottery; Internet; playing cards for money; playing sports or some game of skill for money; Bingo for money; and professional sports events. Participants were asked about the frequency of each form of gambling during the past 12 months.

Frequent gambling was defined as gambling 52 or more times in the past year. Participants who had gambled more than five times in their life were asked to complete the 12-question South Oaks Gambling Screen, Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA) measuring DSM-IV criteria for pathological gambling (APA, 1994). The items ask about going another day to win back money previously lost (“chasing”), having problems with family or friends about gambling, borrowing or stealing to cover gambling debts, etc. At-risk/problem gambling was defined as having two or more symptoms on the SOGS-RA in the past 12 months.

Alcohol. A drink of alcohol was defined as a beer, ale, malt liquor, wine, fortified wine, wine cooler, liquor, flavored malt beverage or other beverage containing alcohol. *Drinkers* were defined as those participants who had any alcoholic beverage during the past 12 months. *Heavy drinking* was based on whether or not participants had consumed five or more drinks in one day on 12 or more days in the past year. Participants who had had a drink of any alcoholic beverage more than five times in their life completed the Adolescent Diagnostic Interview (Winters & Henley, 1993). Of the 57 questions in this instrument, 19 were about alcohol abuse symptoms and 38 items were about alcohol dependence symptoms. *Problem drinking* was defined as having three or more alcohol symptoms in the past year.

Results

Gambling

- Rates of gambling were similar among college (75%) and noncollege young adults (70%) in the past year. However, noncollege young adults (25%) were more likely to gamble frequently, compared to college students (18%). Likewise, noncollege females had twice the rate of frequent gambling (12%) compared to college females (6%). College student status was not a significant predictor of any of the gambling variables once demographic factors were taken into consideration. Both college and noncollege males had high rates of frequent gambling, 31% and 38%, respectively.
- The top five types of frequent gambling were the same for college and noncollege young adults: lottery, card games, office pools/raffles/charitable small stakes gambling, sports betting and games of skill. Internet gambling was the least frequent form of gambling.
- There were striking gender differences. Males gambled more often than females, with sports betting and games of skill being three or more times more common among males than females. Gender was the most significant factor (regardless of college status) with males having approximately five times the odds of being a frequent or problem gambler as females.
- Regardless of college status, being black increased the odds of frequent gambling by 60%. Hispanic background was not related to gambling behavior.

Drinking

- Noncollege young adults had lower overall rates of drinking (61%) than their college counterparts (76%). Noncollege young adults were also less likely to be problem drinkers (19%) than college students (27%), whether male or female. However, the rates of heavy drinking were not significantly different between college and noncollege young adults.
- Male gender greatly increased the probability of drinking, heavy drinking and problem drinking, consistent with the male gender effect on gambling, regardless of college or noncollege status.
- Regardless of college status, being black decreased the odds of drinking and heavy drinking by 70%. Hispanic background was not related to drinking.
- Higher socioeconomic status predicted a somewhat increased probability of drinking and heavy drinking, but lowered the odds of problem gambling. Young people who lived independently from their parents or guardians had 1.7 times the odds of being a problem drinker compared to those who lived at home.

Discussion

Being a college student does not put a young person at added risk for gambling, frequent gambling or problem gambling. Findings from this study support the position that gambling and problem gambling are influenced by broad sociodemographic factors, especially gender and race. Therefore, prevention efforts must be targeted broadly across young adulthood regardless of college status.

In contrast, the rates of alcohol use and problem drinking were significantly higher for college than noncollege young adults. However, the rates of heavy drinking were not significantly different. Over one third of the males in both groups were classified as heavy drinkers.
Effect of Precollege Drinking Intentions (cont’d)

in a longitudinal study of the transition from high school to college. This Research In Brief reports on the student survey.

At the time of recruitment students were an average of 18 years old, white (91%), living with both parents (87%) and from households with a median income of $75,000. In the fall semester, students attended more than 100 different colleges; however, the majority of students attended colleges in western New York. Approximately 40% of the students reported living in their parents’ home and 60% lived away from home.

The students completed questionnaires at the time of high school graduation, the end of their 1st college semester and the end of their 2nd college semester. Questions were asked about alcohol consumption, intentions to drink in college, drinking norms of their female friends, their perceived approval of friends’ drinking behaviors and the frequency of experiencing pressure to drink.

Alcohol consumption reports from students identified the frequency of heavy episodic drinking over the past 90 days, at each of the three assessment times (high school graduation, end of the 1st college semester and end of the 2nd college semester). Questions were asked about how many drinks they would have each time they drank and how often they drank to intoxication.

Intentions to drink in college were determined by answers to questions about how often they expected to drink in college, how many drinks they would consume each time they drank, how often they drink four or more drinks, and how often they expected to become intoxicated.

Drinking norms were determined by asking students to estimate the percentage of their female friends who engaged in drinking on a scale from 0-10 (with 0 representing none of their friends, 5 representing half of their friends and 10 representing all of their friends).

Perceived approval for drinking was identified with questions about drinking behaviors, each beginning with “How would your close friends respond if they knew...” (you drank alcohol every weekend, drank to celebrate a special occasion, etc.). Responses ranged from “strong disapproval” (1) to “strong approval” (7).

Drinking pressure was assessed using questions about being offered a drink, being given a drink without asking for it, someone filling your glass unasked, someone buying a drink without asking first, drinking more than intended because someone encouraged or pressured you to drink, and feeling pressured to drink at a party or in a situation where others were drinking. Responses ranged from “never” (1) to “all the time” (7).

Results

The research team proposed three hypotheses for study: 1) that intentions about future college drinking would demonstrate a significant, positive association with actual college drinking; 2) that drinking intentions would predict social activities and social networks relative to drinking which would influence actual drinking; and 3) that these associations would be stronger for students living away from home compared to those living at home with their parents.

• Intentions regarding future college drinking positively predicted actual first semester drinking. More frequent heavy episodic drinking in high school also predicted more frequent heavy episodic drinking in the first semester of college, and the first semester drinking behavior strongly predicted second semester drinking behavior.

• Consistent with the 2nd hypothesis above, students who intended to drink more in college reported having more female friends who drank, more peer social approval of drinking and more social pressure to drink. All three factors influenced first semester drinking behavior.

• These associations were similar for students living with their parents and students living away from home.

Discussion

Consistent with the above hypotheses, the effect of college drinking intentions on actual heavy episodic drinking in college was influenced by social determinants: heavier drinking friends, greater perceived approval of drinking by friends, and more actual social pressure to drink.

Precollege drinking intentions, expectations or motivations to drink were found to lead new college students to affiliate with heavier drinking social networks or at least to perceive that their social networks involved more drinking and greater approval of drinking. These social influences were found to be associated with more frequent heavy episodic drinking the first semester and subsequently, in the second semester of college.

Interestingly, intentions to drink in college, reported at the time of high school graduation, were a better predictor of actual college heavy episodic drinking than actual high school drinking. Also, intentions to drink played a stronger role than high school drinking in generating the peer social influences that support and contribute to heavy episodic drinking in college. Therefore, college drinking is not merely a continuation of a pattern of behavior begun in high school but rather, reflects intentionality.

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Comparisons of Gambling and Alcohol Use (cont’d)

This study and related past research suggest that the college context contributes more to drinking than would be explained by age alone. As in other studies, heavy drinking is much more prevalent among white young people than among black young people, regardless of college status.

Alcohol misuse and gambling problems co-occur within a problem behavior syndrome. Additionally, young males have a higher co-occurrence of alcohol and gambling problems than do females.

Being male and being black were the important factors in increasing the risk for frequent gambling. Being male and having lower SES increased the risk for problem gambling. That males, blacks and lower SES persons are at higher risk than others for problem gambling parallels findings from this research team's national U.S. survey of adults (Welte, 2004).

Conclusion

College student status significantly increases the odds that a young person will drink alcohol and experience problems associated with alcohol use. However, college student status does not appear to put young people at added risk of gambling or gambling problems. The most important and consistent risk factor for both alcohol and gambling behaviors is being a young male, whether in college or noncollege settings. Age- and gender-targeted prevention and intervention strategies are warranted to reduce the serious consequences of alcohol use and gambling among young adult males in the U.S. population.

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References


Effect of Precollege Drinking Intentions (cont’d)

These findings suggest that drinking in the 1st semester of college is influenced by a student's affiliation with social groups that drink, independent of whether that student lives at home or lives with their parents.

Important strengths of this study include its design across an extended period of time and the high retention rate of participants. Although the research team believes that the study could be applied to male college students as well, findings were based on an all-female sample and should be tested with men before making these generalizations.

Conclusion

Interventions targeting incoming college students would do well to assess and address precollege drinking intentions since these have clear implications for college socialization and drinking behaviors. Understanding how intentions to drink in college are formed (e.g., from peers, older siblings or parents) might also help to guide prevention efforts.

Because college students are not passive recipients of social pressure to drink but rather make choices regarding social affiliations, emphasizing and encouraging social alternatives to drinking may be a promising prevention approach.

These findings also support the importance of intervention before the college experience begins (Turrisi et al., 2001; Testa, 2010) because peer selection effects occur quickly and drinking behaviors are established within a short time after the start of college.

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References
