"Drunkorexia' leads students to risky behaviour

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New research by Simon Fraser University grad student Daniella Sieukaran is the first to study the long-term relationship between dieting and heavy drinking among young adults.

Known as "drunkorexia," it is a growing phenomenon with post-secondary students in which young women, and sometimes men, restrict their diets in order to reserve calories for consuming large quantities of alcohol.

The research found this dangerous combination of alcohol abuse and dieting can lead to greater alcohol-associated risk behaviours, such as engaging in unprotected sex after drinking, and alcohol overdose.

Sieukaran, who is pursuing a combined MA/PhD in clinical psychology, presented her research at the Canadian Psychological Association's 73rd annual convention in Halifax this summer.

Her research surveyed 227 17-21-year-old York University students' dieting and drinking habits at the beginning and end of a four-month period.

"I wanted to know the effects of dieting and heavy drinking over time," she says.

Sieukaran found that of three types of disordered eating - dieting, emotional eating, and eating in response to external stimuli rather than
hunger - only dieting was associated with increased alcohol-associated risk behaviours.

"With the other types of disordered eating, there was actually a decrease in those types of behaviours," she says. "So there's a real connection between dieting and heavy drinking."

She adds, "It's a special group of drinkers that we should be focusing on in terms of prevention and treatment programs."

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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