

# Risk of alcohol-related cancer lowers the intention for binge drinking in college students

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Binge drinking for college students has proven to be a huge problem at many universities. The risk of DUI or even death makes it a public health concern that students and administrators need to face. A recent study by researchers at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, found that college students exposed to the risk messages of alcohol-related cancer had lower intent to engage in binge drinking.

Cindy Yixin Chen and Z. Janet Yang of the University at Buffalo, State University of New York will present their study at the 64th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association in Seattle, WA. Chen and Yang conducted an online survey in which an experiment was embedded among a sample of college students. The survey examined if [risk perception](#) of alcohol-attributable [cancer](#) could decrease intention for binge drinking among college students.

Participants were exposed to a brief risk message presenting alcohol-attributable cancer incidence in textual, tabular, or graphic format. The experiment explored if risk messages regarding alcohol-attributable cancer in different formats (text, table, graph) have different influences on risk perception. The experiment also tested if such influences are contingent on different levels of numerical skills of college students.

Chen and Yang found that when risk of alcohol-related cancer was presented in visual tables and graphs, this increased participants' risk



perception and in turn, their reluctance to engage in binge-drinking behavior. Previous studies have examined college students' perceptions of risk from experiencing alcohol-related problems such as having a hangover, feeling nauseated or vomiting, experiencing blackouts, drunk driving, and unplanned sex. Chen and Yang's study is the first to examine what formats of messages regarding alcohol-attributable cancer are best to curtail this behavior.

"Binge-drinking among college students has been recognized as one of the most serious public health concerns for over a decade. The current alcohol-prevention campaigns generally focus on consequences of [binge-drinking](#), such as DUI, unintended injuries, death, or a series of health and psychological problems. These negative consequences are well-known, and students hear these repeatedly, which may incur message fatigue," said Chen. "The risk messages we designed focused on the cancer incidence rates attributable to drinking. This is an innovative approach in message design, as not many [college students](#) know the association between drinking and cancer."

**More information:** "Message Format, Numeracy, Risk Perception of Alcohol-Attributable Cancer, and Intention for Binge Drinking among College Students," by Cindy Yixin Chen and Z. Janet Yang; To be presented at the 64th Annual International Communication Association Conference, Seattle, WA, 22-26 May, 2014.

Provided by International Communication Association

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