

# Young adults in Britain more likely to drink heavily if they smoke or have a higher education background

May 10 2016

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Young adults in Britain are more likely to drink heavily if they smoke or have attended higher education (college and university), new research has found.

The study, which was led by a team of researchers from the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, aimed to

examine in greater detail how adolescent smoking and [higher education](#) relate to the link between [socio-economic background](#) and alcohol consumption.

The research, which is published today in *Addiction*, was based on cohort studies from across Scotland, England and Wales. It showed that those from a more deprived background were more likely to smoke and less likely to enter higher education.

Adolescent smokers were more likely to drink weekly as an adolescent and more heavily in early adulthood. However, adolescents who took part in higher education were also more likely to drink heavily in early adulthood. These patterns were consistent across all three large cohort studies examined.

Dr Michael Green said: "What this study shows are the different pathways – smoking and higher education – into heavy drinking, depending on young people's socioeconomic backgrounds. These opposing pathways might help explain why previous research on inequalities in young people's drinking has had inconsistent results.

"It appears that heavy drinking in [early adulthood](#) is more likely for both adolescent smokers and those who go to university or college. That would suggest that the pathways to heavy drinking are more varied and opposing than had been previously thought."

The study measured higher education as being in full-time education after the age of 18 years old, while heavy drinking was measured as more than 14 units a week for women or 21 units for men.

The authors believe that the study may have implications for how drinking concerns are targeted and tackled in young people.

Dr Green said: "Currently interventions focused only on heavy drinking in universities/colleges are targeting a more advantaged population and may neglect more disadvantaged drinkers.

"There may be common causes affecting disadvantaged [young people](#) that lead to both smoking and [heavy drinking](#). If we can identify and understand these it may be easier to intervene to prevent both."

**More information:** The study, 'Adolescent Smoking and Tertiary Education: Opposing Pathways linking Socioeconomic Background to Alcohol Consumption' is published in the journal *Addiction*.

Provided by University of Glasgow

Citation: Young adults in Britain more likely to drink heavily if they smoke or have a higher education background (2016, May 10) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-05-young-adults-britain-heavily-higher.html>

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