

Another downside to college boozing: poorer job prospects

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Frequent college binge drinking markedly lowers the chances of landing

a full-time job upon graduation, a new study suggests.

Examining alcohol consumption's effect on first-time employment, researchers found [drinking](#) heavily six times a month cut the chances a new graduate would find a job by 10 percent. And each episode of [binge-drinking](#) in a given month lowered those odds by 1.4 percent.

"The study is important because it definitively shows how drinking impacts employment," said study author Peter Bamberger. He's research director of Cornell University's Smithers Institute in Ithaca, N.Y.

"It's kind of a wake-up call to college students that their behavioral health has long-term implications," Bamberger added. "You can have fun in college, but within limits."

Bamberger is also a professor of organizational behavior at Tel Aviv University in Israel.

Binge drinking is defined slightly differently by gender. For women, it's consuming four or more alcoholic drinks within two hours; for men, it's five or more within two hours.

Prior research has established how often college students typically drink and some of the habit's effects. According to the U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), nearly six in 10 college students aged 18 to 22 drank alcohol in the past month, and nearly two-thirds of them engaged in binge drinking in that time frame.

About one-quarter of college students have reported academic consequences tied to drinking, including lower grades and missed classes, the NIAAA says.

The new research was funded by the NIAAA and led by a Cornell

consortium. It analyzed data from 827 people who graduated between 2014 and 2016 from four geographically diverse U.S. universities. The students were contacted via email toward the beginning of their final academic semester or quarter, and were screened for graduation status and plans to begin working upon graduation.

The participants (61 percent women) took surveys both before graduation and one month after, answering questions about academics, alcohol use and post-graduation full-time employment status, among other factors.

The findings also suggest that a [student](#) who binge drinks four times a month is 6 percent less likely to find a job upon graduation than a student with different drinking habits. Drinking in moderation didn't negatively affect graduates' job search results, according to the report.

"I think a simple awareness of the implications of binge drinking for the student can have a pretty significant effect," Bamberger said.

The study does not prove a cause-and-effect relationship between college binge drinking and a lower chance of landing a job. Bamberger said the data also couldn't establish exactly why the correlation seems to exist.

But one "plausible explanation," he said, is that binge drinking adversely affects a graduating student's ability to execute the tasks required to find full-time employment. This may include sending out resumes in a timely manner, performing well on interviews and networking with others.

Delynne Wilcox and Beth DeRicco are co-chairs of the American College Health Association's Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Coalition. They said they weren't surprised by the study's findings, which they feel could bolster efforts to tackle binge drinking among [college](#)

[students](#).

"It's still hard to make people understand, even though we have all this data, that the alcohol use that occurs deeply affects the relationships young people have, their grade-point averages and their academic success," DeRicco said.

"So a study like this really helps us," she added. "Having [young people](#) really understand that their odds of success change is an important leverage tool we have."

Wilcox said parents have an important role to play in warning their young-adult children about the potential consequences of alcohol use and abuse.

"Colleges are bound legally by federal regulations to make efforts to prevent binge drinking, and some do it better than others," Wilcox said. "The missing piece that I think is equally important is the parents' component. While parents tend to think they're finished with that once their children graduate from high school, the [college](#) needs the parents to still be engaged."

The study was published online recently in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

More information: Peter Bamberger, Ph.D., professor, organizational behavior, Tel Aviv University, and research director, Smithers Institute, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.; Delynn Wilcox, Ph.D., M.P.H., and Beth DeRicco, Ph.D., co-chairs, American College Health Association's Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Coalition, Hanover, Md.; Aug. 24, 2017, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, online.

The U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism offers additional facts on [college drinking](#).

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