

Activities the key to avoiding teenage binge drinking

9 April 2014, by Pepita Smyth

Young teenagers with early pubertal timing are less likely to follow risky binge drinking trajectories across high school when they participated in structured activities revealed a new study from Murdoch University.

The study, which followed more than 1300 [students](#) from year 8 to year 11 in 39 Western Australian schools, aimed to tease out protective factors for teenage [binge drinking](#) behaviour.

Professor Bonnie Barber and Dr Kathryn Modecki surveyed the students over a four year period, asking about their participation in sports and non-sport activities early in [high school](#), their consumption of alcohol across high school, and their pubertal timing.

"We found that students fell into four distinct groups when examining binge drinking pathways," said Dr Modecki.

"The bulk of students abstained from binge drinking altogether during the study and a further 11 per cent of students only participated in low levels of binge drinking across high school.

"However there were two groups of students who demonstrated dangerous patterns of behaviour.

"Around 17 per cent of students were heavy binge drinkers in year 8 compared to their peers and their levels of drinking increased over the three year period. A further 6 per cent of students were not heavy drinkers in year 8, but rapidly increased throughout their high school years until they reported the highest rate of drinking by year 11."

By looking at time spent in structured activities early in high school, the researchers hoped to identify protective factors and behaviours that could be modified to protect youth at risk for binge drinking due to early pubertal timing.

"We found that there was a strong relationship between reaching puberty early and binge drinking, however students did not fall into this group if they were engaged in structured activities," Dr Modecki said.

The next step in the research is to tease out how structured activities help to reinforce positive behaviour in teenagers, particularly for youth who are at-risk of problem behaviour.

Provided by Murdoch University

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