

Enjoy College Life Without Alcohol

Key Points

- ※ Drinking among college students represents a significant but often neglected public health issue.
- ※ Various factors can initiate alcohol use and contribute to binge drinking among college students. Apart from individual factors (such as belief, expectancies about or prior experiences of alcohol use) or personality traits (such as impulsiveness, sensation or novelty seeking), some aspects of the college experience and campus environment also play critical roles in shaping students' drinking behaviours.
- ※ Similar to many developed countries, alcohol use is common among college students in Hong Kong. The Survey of Drug Use among Students in 2014/15 reported that the proportions of lifetime, 1-year and 30-day alcohol use among post-secondary students were 78.7%, 67.1% and 37.6% respectively. Among university students, studies also observed significant changes in the uptake and patterns of alcohol use through their university lives.
- ※ Colleges and universities could be safe places where students can thrive academically, grow personally, and mature socially without pressure from the institution and peers to use alcohol. Alcohol is neither a part of college life nor a necessary component for parties and other social activities. Be smart and do not let alcohol ruin the precious college life.

Enjoy College Life Without Alcohol

Entry to college is an important turning point in life. Without parents nearby to enforce the rules, young people begin the experience of making their own decisions which facilitate personal growth. Young people also have the opportunity of personal experimentation in many areas of behaviour which include the use of alcohol.

Drinking among college students represents a significant but often neglected public health issue.¹ There is evidence from some countries of increasing consumption and binge drinking (i.e. the practice of drinking excessive amounts of alcohol in one bout or within a short period of time) among college students, and so are the harms associated with alcohol use.^{2,3} Negative consequences of alcohol use range in severity from having a hangover, blackout, missing classes or getting into an argument, to impaired academic performance, being involved in physical fights or risky sexual acts, and even premature death from acute intoxication or injuries. For binge drinking, it is of particular concern for its close association with alcohol-related problems involving not only the drinkers but also people around them.^{1,4}

Extent of Alcohol Use and Associated Problem among College Students

An earlier international study examined patterns of alcohol use in over 17 000 full-time university students aged 17 to 30 years from 21 developed and developing countries between 1999 and 2001 reported that the age-adjusted prevalence of drinking (defined as any more than drinking alcohol on special occasions) in men and women ranged from 29% and 6% (in South Africa) to 95% and 93% (in Ireland) respectively. Regarding binge drinking (defined as consuming 5 or more drinks in a row for men and 4 or more drinks for women) over the past 2 weeks, some countries reported high prevalence rates of above 40% in men (such as in the United States (U.S.), the Netherlands,

Belgium, Ireland, Columbia, Poland and Slovakia) and above 30% in women (such as in England, Iceland, and the Netherlands).⁵

Each year, large numbers of college students are affected by their own and other students' drinking. In the U.S., a study aimed to estimate the magnitude of alcohol-related mortality and morbidity among college students aged 18 to 24 between 1998 and 2005 estimated that deaths from alcohol-related unintentional injuries increased from about 1 400 in 1998 to over 1 800 in 2005. In 2001, an estimated 696 000 college students being assaulted by other students under the influence of alcohol and 97 000 experienced a sexual assault or date rape perpetrated by another drinking college students.^{6,7} In Australia, a study of over 7 000 full-time undergraduate students aged 17-25 years also showed a substantial proportion of students experienced 'second-hand effects' from other people's drinking, such as having to 'baby-sit' inebriated students (27.2%), having studying or sleep interrupted (20.9%), being insulted or humiliated (12.9%), having a serious argument (12.5%), or experiencing an unwanted sexual advance (10.9%) in the previous 4 weeks.⁸

Contributory Factors Associated with Drinking in College Students

Various factors can initiate alcohol use and contribute to binge drinking among college students. Apart from individual factors (such as belief, expectancies about or prior experiences of alcohol use) or personality traits (such as impulsiveness, sensation or novelty seeking), some aspects of the college experience and campus environment also play critical roles in shaping students' drinking behaviours.⁹⁻¹¹

In fact, the transition from secondary school to college entails considerable individual changes and social adjustments. With more autonomy, the shift from parental attachment to peer acceptance may initiate or increase alcohol use.¹²

The development of new peer networks may bring about more exposure to social activities, including alcohol-service parties, celebration drinking and hazardous drinking games.¹³⁻¹⁵ Studies have shown that students increase their alcohol use during the first year of college and the pattern of heavy drinking often continues throughout college and young adulthood.⁹ Students living in on-campus residences with a high density of young people or off-campus without parental supervision tend to drink more frequently and in higher quantities, engage in binge drinking more often, and report more alcohol-related problems than those living with their parents.^{16, 17} Binge drinking behaviours are also more common in college environments having a strong drinking culture, few alcohol control policies on campus or inadequate enforcement of existing policies, alcohol made easily accessible through low prices, heavy marketing and special promotions.^{10, 11}

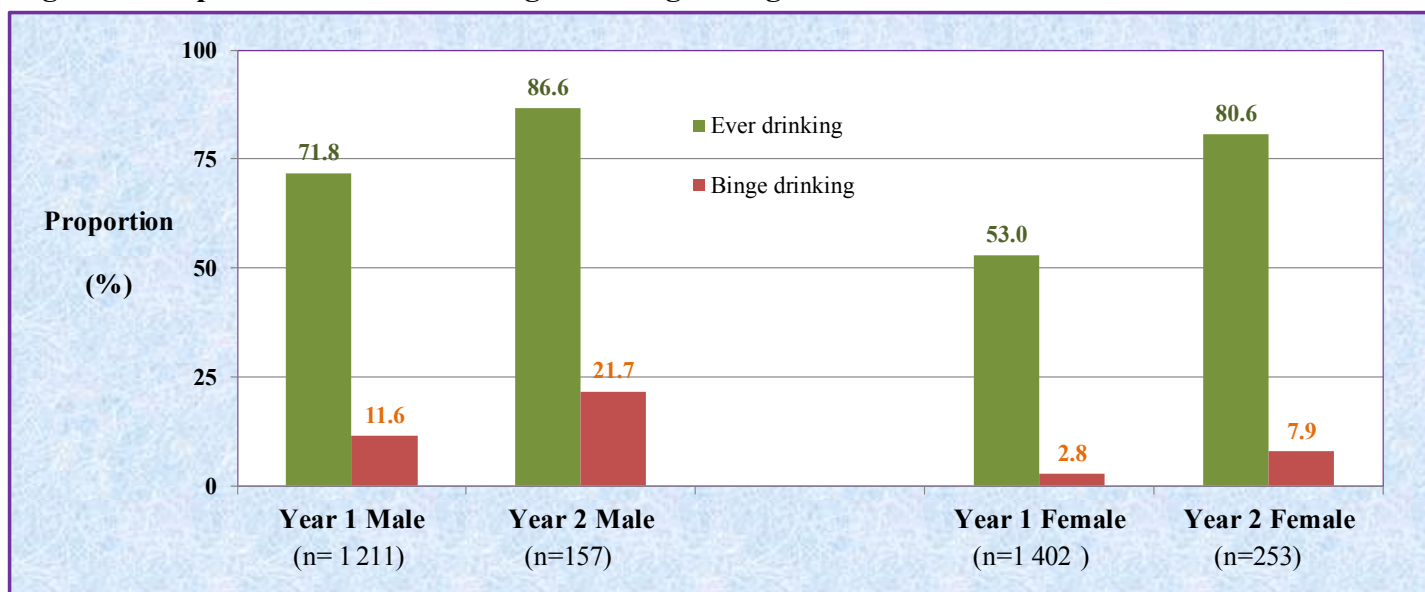
Patterns of Alcohol Use among College Students in Hong Kong

Similar to many developed countries, alcohol use is common among college students in Hong Kong. The Survey of Drug Use among Students in 2014/15 which included over 38 000 students from

36 institutions with post-secondary programmes reported that the proportions of lifetime, 1-year and 30-day alcohol use among post-secondary students was 78.7%, 67.1% and 37.6% respectively.¹⁸

In contrast with students in the west, the majority of first year university students in Hong Kong are not binge or regular drinkers. However, studies observed significant changes in the uptake and patterns of alcohol use midway through their university lives.^{19, 20} A survey included a random sample of 411 second year undergraduate students in 2006 and 2 630 first year students from the previous year observed that the proportions of ever drinking and binge drinking (i.e. consuming 5 or more servings of alcohol in one occasion in the past month) among Year 1 male students were 71.8% and 11.6% respectively. For Year 1 female students, the corresponding proportions were 53.0% and 2.8%. Compared with Year 1 students, proportions of ever and binge drinking among Year 2 students were significantly higher (Figure 1). There was a demonstrable shift towards consumption of stronger alcoholic beverages including table wine, spirits and Chinese rice wine, although beer remained the primary choice of alcoholic beverage for both Year 1 and Year 2 students (Table 1).²⁰

Figure 1: Proportions of ever and binge drinking among Year 1 and Year 2 students



Source: Kim et al, 2009.

Table 1: Types of alcoholic beverages usually consumed and reasons for drinking among ever drinkers

| | Year 1 Male | Year 2 Male | Year 1 Female | Year 2 Female |
|--|-------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Types of alcoholic beverages usually consumed^a | | | | |
| Beer | 90.6% | 87.5% | 73.2% | 75.0% |
| Table wine | 35.0% | 44.9% | 49.4% | 58.8% |
| Spirit | 5.6% | 13.2% | 3.0% | 10.3% |
| Chinese rice wine | 2.5% | 11.0% | 3.6% | 4.9% |
| Cocktails or Shooters ^b | NA | 11.0% | NA | 29.4% |
| Reasons for alcohol use^a | | | | |
| Celebration (or Party) | 50.6% | 90.9% | 58.9% | 93.9% |
| Good taste | 9.1% | 18.8% | 12.9% | 18.2% |
| Good for health | 6.1% | 14.4% | 5.9% | 9.5% |
| Relaxation | 6.2% | 21.3% | 2.7% | 7.3% |
| Stress management | 4.3% | 22.1% | 1.0% | 9.8% |
| Curiosity ^b | NA | 29.9% | NA | 45.1% |

Notes: ^a More than one choice is allowed in response; ^b NA: Not available because not asked in Year 1.
Source: Kim et al, 2009.

“To celebrate” was the most commonly cited reason for drinking and over 90% of Year 2 students reported so (compared with 50% to 60% of Year 1 students). It is also noteworthy that 4.3% and 1.0% of Year 1 male and female students cited “stress management” as a reason for drinking respectively. After 1 year, the corresponding proportions rose substantially to 22.1% and 9.8% (Table 1).²⁰

Changing the Culture of College Drinking

Colleges and universities could be safe places where students can thrive academically, grow personally, and mature socially without pressure from the institution and peers to use alcohol. To prevent and reduce college drinking, below are some measures for colleges and universities to consider²¹:

- ◇ Establish, review and enforce rules against underage alcohol use;
- ◇ Restrict the sale of alcoholic beverages on campus or at campus facilities;
- ◇ Ban alcohol sponsorship of athletic events and other campus social activities;
- ◇ Eliminate alcohol advertising on campus and in college publications;
- ◇ Provide alcohol-free locations where students can gather with their friends to socialise or study;
- ◇ Offer alcohol-free residence halls, prohibiting alcohol use in dormitories;
- ◇ Display alcohol policy prominently on the campus and distribute it to all students and their parents;
- ◇ Provide easy access to staff and students information about alcohol’s effects and the risk of alcohol use;
- ◇ Identify at-risk drinking among college students (e.g. by the use of the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT)) and give personalised feedback on their drinking behaviours;
- ◇ Provide referral and facilitate access to counselling and treatment for alcohol and related problems as appropriate.

College is a great time in a student's life and college partying is always fun! However, college students should know that alcohol is neither a part of college life, nor a necessary component of parties and other social activities. Getting drunk and hangovers, waking up in bed with a stranger, or having an unwanted pregnancy is not part of that fun. Be smart and stay away from drinking games or alcohol-service situations (see Box 1 for some ways to say "NO" to alcohol). In fact, many students and peers enjoy a great time with de-alcoholised or non-alcoholic beverages (such as alcohol-free punches) as alternatives. Do not let alcohol ruin the precious college life, and stand up for the right to a safe alcohol-free academic environment. To know more about alcohol and health, please visit the Change for Health website <http://www.change4health.gov.hk/>.

Box 1: Ways to say "NO" to alcohol

- **Give a reason or excuse**, such as "I have something to do tomorrow. I'm not coming for the drink."
- **Suggest something else which is healthier**, such as "Let's go for a movie or coffee instead."
- **Find an ally to back you up**, such as "We are the No-to-Alcohol Buddies!"
- **Refuse directly**, such as "No, thanks. I don't drink."
- **Walk away from the situation**, such as say "Sorry, some urgent business has flashed through my mind" and walk away.

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WHO Western Pacific Regional Forum on Protecting Young People from the Harmful Use of Alcohol



The Regional Forum on Protecting Young People from the Harmful Use of Alcohol (Regional Forum) will be organised by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific and co-convened by the Department of Health from 29 to 30 April 2016 in Hong Kong.

According to WHO, the harmful use of alcohol is a global problem that compromises both individual and social development. In 2012, about 3.3 million deaths, or 5.9% of all global deaths, and 5.1% of the global burden of disease and injury, measured in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), were attributable to alcohol consumption. Young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol-related harm because of specific biological, neurological, social and psychological factors.

In response to this public health issue, WHO has advocated for policies and actions to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, especially among young people. These include measures related to taxation to increase the price of alcohol products, strict regulation of marketing and physical availability of alcoholic beverages, legal minimum drinking age restrictions, regulated access to settings and events that young people may frequent, and screening for problematic use and early interventions.

The Regional Forum will provide guidance on priority and cost-effective interventions to reduce alcohol related harm, share tools, and strengthen youth engagement and action for more effective advocacy.

For more information on youth drinking harm and this Regional Forum, please visit the Centre for Health Protection's webpage on '**Youth drinking harms health**':

http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/34286.html.

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