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A Study of Pattern and Variation of Alcohol and  
Drug Abuse in A Predominantly Black College

By

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years college enrollment has been considered as a high risk activity as measured by the increase in the illegal drug and alcohol abuse on campuses around the country. While there is general knowledge about high rate of alcohol and drug abuse across campuses, there is not much known about variation in terms of geographic location, ethnic composition, and regional/cultural background. This study is about pattern and variation of alcohol abuse in a predominantly black university. Since the student body includes a relatively large size of students from other ethnic groups, the setting provides for exploring ethnic/racial differences in alcohol and drug abuse among students.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **A. Alcohol:**

There is a wide range of literature about alcohol use and abuse on campus and its related problems. The topics studied include change in drinking age (Connell, 1985) drinking and driving (Valois, 1986), disciplinary and personal problems associated with drinking (Engs, 1977), policies and local enforcement strategies (Gadeleto and Adnerson, 1986) and the correlates of heavy drinking patterns (Wechsler and Rhoman, 1981). One study cites the loss of life and property that occurs when students drink and drive (Valois, 1986). It is noted that 45 to 60 percent of deaths in young people are related to

alcohol. In fact alcohol is the number one substance abuse problem on campus (Hirschorn, 1987).

Surveys depicting the severity of alcohol problems are plentiful. An early study revealed that 79 percent of the college men and 65 percent of college women were drinkers (Straus and Bacon, 1953). More recently, some studies have reported that currently 90 to 95 percent of the college students are drinkers (Edy, 1983). Most of the research investigating the trends over time suggest that drinking habits are relatively stable, but the awareness of the university officials has risen significantly in the recent decade (Hanson and Engs, 1984).

In general studies have shown that among college students who consume alcohol, a large proportion drink heavily (Engs and Hanson, 1985; Hill and Bugen, 1979; wechsler, McFadden, and Rohman, 1980). Female college students are now drinking more than before and Black men drink less than other college students (Cooper, 1981; Humphrey, Stephens, and Allen, 1983). Some studies have indicated college environment and family drinking patterns are important determinants of college students drinking behavior (Deakin and Cohen, 1986). Parents' alcohol consumption, age and high school drinking pattern are also shown as important predictor of drinking behavior among college students (Friedman and Humphrey, 1985).

Some studies have shown little difference between male and female college students in terms of drinking behavior (Engs and Hanson, 1985; National Institute of on Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism, 1987). There are indication that college students tend to increase the quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption between their freshman and senior years (Banks and Smith, 1980; Kaplan, 1979). In examining the relationship between GPA and drinking behavior, most researchers report that drinkers (especially heavy drinkers) earn lower GPAs than do nondrinkers (Engs, 1977; Hill and Bugen, 1979). The causal relationship is ambiguous in this case. It is not clear whether the low GPA and as such low self-esteem results in drinking or it is the drinking behavior which results in lower GPA. Among most important findings of the alcohol consumption among college students, are the findings related to consequence of alcohol consumption. College students frequently have experienced adverse effects from alcohol use (Hughes and Dodder, 1983).

#### B. Drug

Several studies have reported the percentage of college students who have used various hard drugs (Snodgras and Wright, 1983). There are reports that about 65 percent of all college student have used marijuana with a higher percentage of male using than females. The use of LSD is generally lower with less than ten percent having used this drug. The use of Cocaine is reported as a drug that is used by about 30 percent of the college population. Gender differences are in favor of male students and female students are less users of Cocaine (Traub, 1983).

Most of the research on drug abuse focuses on personality

and family correlates of drug use. It is suggested that drug use is associated with lower life satisfaction, boredom, lack of school spirit, and personal problems (Wright and Moore, 1982). Among family factors correlated with drug abuse are poor communication between parents and children (Jerk, et. al., 1985). Permissive parental attitudes toward drugs also lead to drug use (Tudor, Peterson, and Elfson, 1980).

#### **METHODS**

The research population for this study consisted of students enrolled in a southeastern state university in spring 1990. There were approximately 3,400 students enrolled at the university in the spring 1990. In the last week of April 1990, after the students were returned from the spring break and before they were getting ready for their final tests, 500 questionnaires were distributed in dorms, and several courses at different level which were shared across different programs. These courses included health education course required for freshmen, university letter course required for during sophomore years, introduction to sociology, and a large criminal justice class. Out of 500 questionnaires 487 were returned. While the procedure used was not enough for a desirable representative sample, the comparison of sample characteristics with population characteristics shown in Table 1, suggests that the sample is relatively representative. The sample is slightly biased toward the younger students. Male students have participated a little

less than female students.

(Table 1 about here)

Data for this study were collected by a self-administered questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was related to socio-demographic background of the students. The questionnaire included a series of close-ended questions regarding alcohol and drug behavior.

## **FINDINGS**

### **1. Alcohol Use Among Students**

Table 2 reports about drinking behavior during two weeks prior to the survey. The students were asked, "Think back over the last two weeks. How many times have you had five or more drinks at a sitting?" About 10 percent of the students said that during the last two weeks they have had five or more drinks at one sitting. Another 18 percent said that this has happened two times or more during the last two weeks. This data supports the previous findings of existing heavy drinking on the campus.

(Table 2 about here)

When asked about average number of drinks per week, 40 percent of the students said they have at least one drink per week (Table 3). About 8 percent said they have an average of two

drinks per week. More than two drinks per week is common among 17 percent of the students. However, the most alarming data is about students who report an average of 6 or more drinks per week. About 8.4 percent of the students are among this group of heavy drinkers.

(Table 3 about here)

Alcohol drinking habits seems to be starting before entrance to college. Table 4 reports about the age at which the students started to drink. There are students who have started their drinking behavior before they were in their teen years. This group consists of 3.1 percent of the students surveyed (Table 4). Drinking behavior accelerate during teenage years. The data from students shows that students who drink at university start their drinking behavior before they enter college. Only less than a fraction of percent reported that they started drinking at age 18 and more. This finding implies that although drinking on campus is a significant problem, but drinking does not start there. It starts at high school. The college environment is only a more favorable situation and works as a facilitator.

(Table 4 about here)

Data reported in Table 5 show how common is drinking on the campus. Among the sample of students 21 percent reported that they have used alcoholic drinks on the campus and 23 percent



mentioned that they have drunk in the residence hall. The most alarming information is about those students have been drinking and driving. About 15 percent of the students said they have drunk in car.

The view of students about alcoholic drinks on the campus was asked by the following question:

"Some students have indicated that alcohol use at parties they attend in and around the campus reduces their enjoyment, often leads to negative situations, and, therefore, they would rather not have alcohol used. Other students have indicated that alcohol use at parties increases their enjoyment, often leads to positive situations, and, therefore, they would rather have alcohol available and used. Which of these is closest to your own view?

In response to this question, 35 percent of the students want alcohol be available on the campus. This is a significant portion of the student expressing their interest in availability of alcoholic drinks in parties.

Actual and attitudinal data show the existence of alcohol use a noticeable problem on the campus studied. As a result of this, the students should experience negative consequences of this behavior. These negative consequences would determine their situation at school directly and indirectly. For example, 42 percent of the students report about having hangover as the consequence of drinking. This problem indirectly would influence

the performance of the student at school. As such about 36 percent of the students reported that they have done poorly on a test because of drinking and about 13 percent reported they have missed classes as a result of drinking.

In addition to direct and indirect academic consequences, students report about misbehavior, crime and drink and drive as part of their drinking behavior. About 17 percent of the students reported that they have got into fights and argument while they have been drunk. A much more adverse consequence related to sexual abuse is reported by 8 percent of the students in the sample. The negative consequence of "drink and drive" is reported by 8 percent of the students.

(Table 6 about here)

## 2. Drug Use Among Students

The self-report about drug abuse is lower than expected among the students studied. Although they were asked about use of a long list of drugs during the year prior to the study, those who did report about using drug referred mainly to marijuana. Only 3 percent of the students reported use of any other drug than marijuana. So the analysis here is about use of marijuana.

The students were asked "Within the last year about how often you have used the following drugs." Table 7 summarize the answers of the students to this question. About 7 percent said they have used drug once during the last year. While once a week

does not seem much alarming, there are students who have used Marijuana on regular basis. About 2 percent of the students have used drug on monthly basis. But the most troubled group is another two percent who have not had a week without one or two times using drug.

Again an important question is when and what age the students start to use drug. Is it in college that they start to use drug or they come to college with a good taste of drug. When asked about the age that students used drug for the first time, about 7 percent of them mention college age, 18 years or more. On the other hand most of the student drug users on the campus have started their drug using behavior from high school days and even earlier. Almost one percent of the students said they have used drug before age 13. But most of the students who have reported use of drug, have started in high school (Table 8). This is again inconsistent with the commonly taken view that the college student is at drug risk. The college environment facilitates drug use for a large number of students who have already had the habit of using drug before they entered college.

### 3. Correlates of Alcohol Use Among Students

The available socio-demographic data allow some exploration about the correlates of alcohol use among students in this predominantly Black University. For this purpose, the drinking behavior is measure by creating a variable coded (1) if the student reported he had at least one sitting with five drinks

during the two weeks before the survey, and coded (0) if the person reported no such experience. Mean of this variable for each category of the socio-demographic variables were calculated by using MEANS Procedure in SPSSPC program. The results are reported in Table 8.

First of all there is difference between Black and White students. Black students seem to be less of drinkers compared to the White students on this campus. The most significant findings for Black students is gender difference; male students drink much more than female students. The married Black students drink less than single Black students. Freshman drinks more than seniors and those who are full-time workers who earn money seem to be less around alcoholic drinks. The correlation between grade point average and drinking behavior is strong. Students with higher grade point average report less drinking behavior. Those Black students who have a positive view about availability of alcohol in campus parties, report a significantly higher frequency of use.

(Table 9 about here)

The correlates of alcohol use among White students is slightly different from Black Students. Male white students report more drinking behavior than female white students. The difference between single and married students is much more in case of White students; 58 percent of the single white students

report drinking behavior compared to 24 percent of the married White students. The difference between freshman and junior students is much more evident in the case of White students. Again the low grade point average is associated with drinking behavior. Yet the direction of casualty is not clear. Is it frustration, low self-esteem that results in drinking behavior for the low GPA students? Or it is the drinking problem and its adverse consequences which results in lower GPA?

#### 4. Correlates of Drug Use Among Students

To examine the correlates of drug use, a variable was created and coded as following: If the student reported use of drug at least once during last year, the variable was coded (1). If the student did not report any use of drug during last year, the variable was coded (0). Note that the use of drug is use of Marijuana as only a small percent of the students reported use of other drugs. The mean of this variable was calculated for each category of the socio-demographic variables (Table 10). There are significant gender difference for drug use both for Black and White students. Female students are less prone to use drugs. The differences between single and married students is significant among Black students. Black freshman students report more drug use compared to seniors. The class pattern among White students is not consistent. Among black students those who do not work to earn money have the least reporting of drug use. This is opposite to the situation for White students. The relationship between

drug use and GPA is a negative one. Students with higher GPA have a lower rate of reporting about drug use. This is true for both Blacks and Whites.

#### CONCLUSION

In recent years college enrollment has been considered as a high risk activity as measured by the increase in illegal and alcohol abuse on campuses around the country. The study reported here examined the situation in a predominantly Black university in southeastern United States. The data revealed serious to moderate problem with respect to alcohol and drug use among the students. Serious drinking and drug use problems are reported by students. It is easy to find regular drinkers and drug users among students.

The negative consequences of alcohol use is reported by students. These negative consequences influence the academic performance of the students directly and indirectly. In this way the problem perpetuates itself. The students who miss classes or tests, get involve in argument or get into trouble with police as a result of alcohol use, will come out with frustration and anger and anxiety, which by themselves result in further use of alcohol.

The students drinking and drug use problem starts in high school and not at college. Most student who drink or use drug start in high school. The college is a less restricted environment and hence it is easier for the user to report about

him or herself. The Black-White difference are significant for alcohol and drug use. Black students report less in both cases. The most important correlates of drug and alcohol use is gender. Grade point average is also correlated but we need more studies to specify the direction of the causality. Given the fact that freshmen students report a higher level of drug and alcohol use and most users starts using a high school, it seems that a policy intervention should target male freshman students as soon as they enroll. There is need for preventive program for arriving students who see the college environment as a less restricted situation for some of the habits they have developed at high school.



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**Table 1. Comparison of Sample and Population Characteristics**

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<u>Characterisitcs</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Sample</u>
Mean Age	26.0	22.5
Percent Black Students	68.1	68.0
Percent Male Student	34.0	31.7
Pecent In-State Students	93.0	92.0

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**Table 2. Drinking Behavior During Two Weeks Prior to the Survey.**

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<b>Number of Drinks at One Sitting</b>	<b>Percent Reporting</b>
None	71.5
Once	9.9
Twice	9.7
3 to 5 times	6.0
6 to 9 times	1.4
10 and more times	1.6
Total	100

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Table 3. Average Number of Drinks Per Week as Reported by the St

<u>Average Number of Drinks Per Week</u>	<u>Percent Reporting</u>
None	59.2
1	14.8
2	8.1
3	4.5
4	3.6
5	1.4
Six and more	8.4
Total	100

**Table 4. Age at Which the Student Started to Drink Alcoholic Beverages**

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<u>AGE</u>	<u>Percent Reporting</u>
Under 10	3.3
11-12	1.2
13-14	6.1
14-15	16.1
16-17	25.6
18-25	23.5
Do not Drink	24.0
Total	100

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**Table 5. Places the Students Have had Alcoholic Drinks**

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<u>Place</u>	<u>Percent Reporting*</u>
On Campus	21.1
in Residence Hall	22.6
Off Campus	33.1
At Residence Place	28.1
In Car	14.6

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\*Because of multiple responses, the percentage does not add up to 100.

**Table 6. Adverse Effects of Alcohol Use Among Students**

<u>Effects of Alcohol</u>	<u>Percent Reporting*</u>
Had a hangover	42.2
Performed poorly on a test	35.6
Missed class	12.8
Been in trouble with police	4.1
Damage property, pulled fire alarm, etc.	1.1
Got into argument and fight	16.6
Drive a car under the influence	16.3
Behave been taken advantage of sexually or or have taken advantage of another sexually	8.0
Have been heart or injured	5.5
Tought about committing suicide	1.7

\*Because of multiple responses, the percentage does not add up to 100.

**Table 7. How Often Students Have Used Drug During Last Year**

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<u>Number of Times</u>	<u>Percent Reporting*</u>
None	86.6
Once during last year	7.2
Six times during last year	1.9
Once a month during last year	1.0
Twice a month during last year	1.4
Once a week during last year	1.0
Three times a week during last year	1.0
Total	100

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\*Drug use refers to use of Marijuana. There was about 3 percent reference to other drugs.



**Table 8. Age at Which the Student Started to Use Drug**

---

<u>AGE</u>	<u>Percent Reporting</u>
Under 10	.2
11-12	.5
13-14	3.5
14-15	5.2
16-17	15.3
18-25	6.8
Do not use drug	68.5
Total	100

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\*See footnote Table 7.

**Table 9. Relationship between Socio-demographic Characteristics and Using Alcohol**

Independent Variables	Percent Reporting Alcohol Use*	
	Blacks	Whites
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	45	52
Female	19	22
<b>Marital Status:</b>		
Single	27	58
Married	22	24
<b>Class:</b>		
Freshman	30	44
Sophomore	26	47
Junior	31	33
Senior	25	30
<b>Working Status:</b>		
Full-time Work	16	35
Part-time Work	29	48
No Work	27	30
<b>Grade Point Average:</b>		
Very low	50	**
Low	36	60
Average	17	48
Good	4	21
<b>Desire for Alcohol Availability on Campus Parties:</b>		
Yes	46	63
No	13	23
Grand Mean	28	38
N	331	156

\*Students using 5 or more than one drinks at one sitting during two weeks prior to the survey.

\*\* Less than 10 cases in the cell.

**Table 10. Relationship between Socio-demographic Characteristics and Using Drug**

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>Percent Reporting Drug Use*</u>	
	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Whites</u>
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	30	22
Female	13	17
<b>Marital Status:</b>		
Single	19	17
Married	10	14
<b>Class:</b>		
Freshman	20	11
Sophomore	23	40
Junior	10	12
Senior	18	20
<b>Working Status:</b>		
Full-time Work	12	9
Part-time Work	26	20
No Work	14	25
<b>Grade Point Average:</b>		
Very low	20	**
Low	20	15
Average	16	15
Above Average	8	11
<b>Desire for Drug Availability on on Campus Parties:</b>		
Yes	18	23
No	17	15
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>18.3</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>156</b>

\*Percent of students using drug such as Marijuana during the last year.

\*\*less than 10 cases