



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

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Students Cite Having Fun, Peer Pressure and Campus Culture as Leading Reasons for Heavy Drinking

Ottawa, August 16, 2018 — In a new report released by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA), post-secondary students express their thoughts on binge drinking. *Heavy Episodic Drinking among Post-secondary Students: Influencing Factors and Implications* provides student views on heavy drinking and the major factors for participating in it, and addresses possible solutions and alternatives.

Binge or heavy drinking, referred to technically as heavy episodic drinking, poses serious health and safety risks. Young adults, particularly post-secondary students, are more susceptible to these risks. However, student participants in the focus groups upon which this report is based generally did not recognize their drinking behaviours as harmful.

This study demonstrates the extreme nature of binge drinking and its risks for students. It explores high-risk drinking consequences such as alcohol-induced blackouts and non-consensual sexual encounters, and drinking to cope with other issues such as stress and anxiety. Students also discussed how their experiences with alcohol changed over time as they learned to understand and manage their limits.

Key findings and recommendations

The frequently reported causes for participating in binge drinking include:

- The campus culture of drinking to socialize, have fun and be with friends;
- Peer pressure to keep up with others' drinking through various activities, including drinking games and buying rounds of drinks; and
- Boredom and having nothing else to do.

The students also proposed solutions to help curb participation in such behaviour. Their recommendations include:

- Educating students early and often about alcohol;
- Normalizing moderate drinking as a part of everyday life rather than condemning it;
- Finding fun alternatives for students in the evening rather than spending time at bars and clubs; and
- Eliminating risky behaviour through smart practices such as:
 - Bringing a set amount of money to a bar or club, or a set amount of alcohol for pre-drinking occasions;
 - Asking friends to monitor or stop their drinking after a specified amount; and
 - Consuming non-alcoholic drinks during drinking occasions.

The technical report, a report at a glance and a separate document of recommendations are available on the [CCSA website](http://www.ccsa.ca).



Quotes

“CCSA will continue to work with our partners on post-secondary campuses across Canada to reduce harms from alcohol. Student perspectives are invaluable in understanding and addressing this important issue.”

Bryce Barker, Knowledge Broker, CCSA

“The findings tell us that more needs to be done to help students better understand what the true risks of drinking are, particularly through more engaging methods of prevention and education. At a broader level, it may also be important to look at ways to modify the culture of student drinking.”

Shawna Meister, Research and Policy Analyst, CCSA

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CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

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