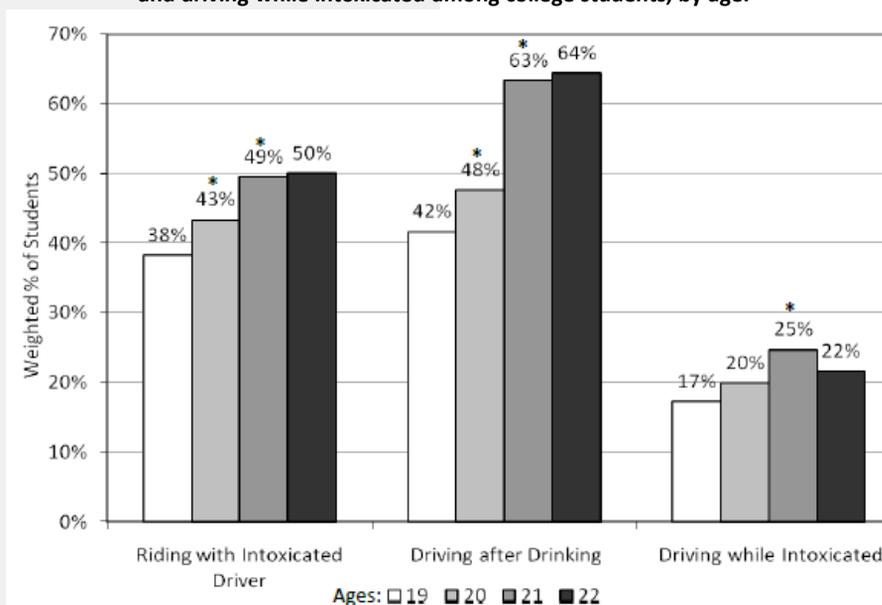


Trends in alcohol-related traffic risk behaviors among college students

MAJOR FINDINGS:

The researchers used data collected from a large group of college students to study the prevalence of risky driving behaviors in college students over time. Driving while intoxicated (DWI), driving after drinking any alcohol (DAD), and riding in a car with an intoxicated driver (RWID) were measured. The prevalence of each behavior varied by both sex and age.

Annual prevalence of riding with an intoxicated driver, driving after drinking, and driving while intoxicated among college students, by age.



* Denotes statistically significant change from the preceding year (<.05).

Note: Data on driving after drinking and driving while intoxicated were restricted to individuals who had access to drive a car in the past year.

For males, at age 19, DAD was most prevalent (48%) followed by RWID (40%) and DWI (21%). At 19 years old for females, however, RWID and DAD were at 36% and 35%, respectively and DWI was at 14%. Overtime, all three behaviors increased significantly for both males and females particularly when students turned 21. The behavior that increased most drastically was DAD for both men and women; 74% of men and 54% of women reported the behavior at age 22.

By looking at the frequency of the risky behavior, they determined that in most cases students who engaged in these risky behaviors did so in multiple years, not just once.

Of major interest to:

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



Practice and Policy Suggestions: The findings are concerning. The researchers believe that the actual crash risk for 19-20 year olds could be higher than their perceived risk because young drivers often underestimate how intoxicated they are and are more likely to have a crash simply because they are less experienced drivers. The researchers were not surprised to find that there was a drastic increase in the number of students reporting these behaviors after the age of legal purchase was attained. These findings represent a serious public health concern as these drivers are not just risking their own lives, but those of everyone else on the road.

“These findings call into question the assertions of some advocates who claim that lowering the drinking age to 18 would be a useful strategy for reducing harm associated with alcohol consumption,” write the authors. If the drinking age were to be lowered, the researchers speculate that drinking and driving would begin to increase at even younger ages as alcohol becomes more readily available to high school students. It is also important to note that these findings were discovered in a state that has very strict drinking and driving laws for underage drinkers. However, there is a low perceived enforcement of the laws, though, so students are not necessarily concerned about the legal repercussions of drinking and driving. Given this, it might be helpful to step up law enforcement in targeted areas where college students are known to drink and drive to increase the perceived risk among this population. Sobriety check points may prove to be particularly effective. More aggressive law enforcement in and around college campuses paired with early identification and intervention with individuals at high risk for serious alcohol problems may lead to lower levels of such risky behaviors among college students.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Beck, K.H., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Vincent, K.B., O’Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2010). Trends in alcohol-related traffic risk behaviors among college students. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*. 34(8), 1472-1478.



About the College Life Study (CLS)

The CLS is a longitudinal study of 1,253 college students at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university. This study is one of the first large-scale scientific investigations that aims to discover the impact of health-related behaviors during the college experience. Any first time, first-year student between 17 and 19 years old at the university in the fall of 2004 was eligible to participate in a screening survey. The researchers then selected students to participate in the longitudinal study, which consisted of two-hour personal interviews administered annually, beginning with their first year of college. A full description of the methods used is available.¹ Inherent to all self-reporting research methods is the possibility for response bias. Because the sample is from one large university, the ability to generalize the findings elsewhere is uncertain. However, response rates have been excellent and attrition bias has been minimal.

For more information about the study, please visit www.cls.umd.edu or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland, College Park, at aarria@umd.edu.

¹ Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O’Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fitzelle, D.B., Johnson, E.P., Wish, E.D. (2008). Drug exposure opportunities and use patterns among college students: Results of a longitudinal prospective cohort study. *Substance Abuse*. 29(4), 19-38.

This research brief was prepared by Ilana Yergin, University of Maryland School of Journalism and disseminated by the Treatment Research Institute (TRI), a non-profit research and development group specializing in science-driven transformation of treatment and policy in substance use/abuse. Click [here](#) to learn more about TRI.

