False ID use among college students increases the risk for alcohol use disorder: Results of a longitudinal study

MAJOR FINDINGS:

This four-year study examined the prevalence of false identification (ID) use and its association with alcohol use disorder (AUD) among 1,015 college students who drank alcohol at least once in their lives by the first year of college. Alcohol use is highly prevalent among underage youth in the United States—despite minimum legal drinking age laws—and poses health and safety risks. Alcohol is easy for most youth to obtain, and research has shown that false IDs are one of the factors contributing to alcohol's easy accessibility. Technological advances in manufacturing false IDs and the proliferation of web-based sales of false IDs have probably contributed to recent increases in false ID use among underage drinkers.

Out of the 1,015 college student drinkers we interviewed, two-thirds used a false ID at least once (66%) between the time they started college and their 21st birthday. On average they used false IDs 24% of the times they drank before they turned 21. False ID use contributed to increases in both the number of drinks students consumed and how often they would drink. The researchers accounted for demographics, individual characteristics, high school behaviors, family factors, perception of peer drinking norms, and other factors related to false ID use. Using sophisticated statistical models, the study found that false ID use was not directly related to AUD risk, but it contributed to increases in drinking frequency, and therefore indirectly predicted increases in AUD risk over time. The findings supported the main hypothesis that the more frequently students used a false ID, the more they increased their drinking frequency over time, and thereby increased their risk for AUD.

The study also looked at the predictors of using a false ID frequently. The study found that early initiation of alcohol use, having more alcohol and drug involvement during high school, Greek life involvement, and living off-campus were related to frequent false ID use. Sensation-seeking, an individual characteristic related to impulsive risk-taking, also predicted frequency of false ID use.

These results were similar to prior studies of the correlates of false ID use; however, this is the first study to examine the relationship between false ID use and the consequent risk for developing an AUD. It is important to note that the correlates of false ID use—both in this study and in prior studies—also tend to characterize heavier drinkers in general. However, unlike prior research, the present study went further by demonstrating that false ID use contributed to increased risk for developing an AUD, even after accounting for those shared risk factors.

Of major interest to:

☑ **College Administrators**

☑ **Parents**

☐ **Educators**

☐ **Health Professionals**

☑ **Students**

☑ **Law and Policy Makers**

RESEARCH BRIEF

Practice and Policy Suggestions:
Students who use false IDs make up an important target population for alcohol prevention and early intervention. The study highlights the use of false IDs as a priority for policy makers in order to help reduce excessive drinking among college students. Heightened enforcement of sanctions against manufacturers or suppliers, confiscation of false IDs, and enforcing sanctions for false ID use might be warranted. Most importantly, high-risk drinkers should be directed toward effective interventions that can help them change their behavior. Ultimately, this will promote student health, safety, and long-term success.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., Vincent, K.B., Bugbee, B.A., O'Grady, K.E. (2014). False identification use among college students increases the risk for alcohol use disorder: Results of a longitudinal study. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research.* **38(3), 834-843. doi:10.1111/acer.12261**

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.[1,2] 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 School of Public Health 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.

[2] Vincent, K.B., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Pinchevsky, G.M., O'Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2012). Maintaining superior follow-up rates in a longitudinal study: Experiences from the College Life Study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches.* 6(1), 56-72.

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