

Drunkorexia: New Trend Sweeping College Campuses

Pauline Anderson | June 28, 2016

A new and troubling trend in which youth deliberately do not eat and then go on to drink alcohol in excess appears to be sweeping US college campuses, new research suggests.

Known as "drunkorexia," the practice refers to a combination of diet-related behaviors, such as food restriction, excessive exercise, or binge eating and purging, with alcohol use, lead investigator Dipali V. Rinker, PhD, research assistant professor, University of Houston, in Texas, told *Medscape Medical News*.

Dr Rinker's research showed that 8 of 10 college students, many of whom were men, recently engaged in at least one behavior related to drunkorexia.

The aim of the practice, said Dr Rinker, seems to be to get drunker or get drunk faster. This may involve induced vomiting, the consumption of laxatives or diuretics, or not eating at all before drinking.

Dr Rinker presented the findings at the 39th Annual Research Society on Alcoholism Scientific Meeting in New Orleans.

The study included 1184 college students from the University of Houston and from a crowdsourcing Internet marketplace. All participants completed a Web-based survey. They had to have engaged in at least one episode of heavy drinking in the past 30 days. An episode of heavy drinking was defined as having four or more drinks in one sitting for women and five or more drinks in one sitting for men.

The mean age of participants was 22.3 years. Almost 60% were women, and almost two thirds (63.3%) were white.

Results showed that 81% of the sample reported engaging in at least one drunkorexia behavior once in the past 3 months.

The analysis also showed that young people living in fraternity or sorority houses were the most likely to engage in negative behaviors surrounding alcohol use. The next most likely group were those living in residence halls, followed by those living off campus, and, finally, those living at home.

Living away from family for the first time and feeling intense stress at school may be contributing factors, said Dr Rinker. But there are other driving forces.

"Our data suggest that college students are more likely to engage in these specific compensatory behaviors if they are athletes, are already heavy drinkers, are coping with negative emotions, are engaging in disordered eating practices already, and, most importantly, because they perceive it to be a highly normative behavior among college students."

She said she was surprised that it is not just young women who engage in drunkorexia.

"Our study suggested that males are just as likely, if not more likely, to engage in these behaviors. We suspect that this is because men, in general, just tend to engage in riskier drinking behaviors than women."

Drunkorexia can have significant fallout in terms mental and physical health. "Engaging in these behaviors is associated with heavier and more problematic drinking and alcohol-related consequences, such as blacking out, getting into fights, passing out, or driving under the influence," said Dr Rinker.

Because the phenomenon has only been studied among college students, researchers do not know whether nonstudents are also engaging in these behaviors.

Clinicians can play a role in reducing or controlling the drunkorexia phenomenon, said Dr Rinker.

"They can provide information to college students that indicates that these behaviors are far less normative than they think they are and can encourage students to eat and exercise in a healthy manner."

The research was supported by a grant from the University of Houston and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

39th Annual Research Society on Alcoholism Scientific Meeting: Presented June 27, 2016.

Medscape Medical News © 2016 WebMD, LLC

Send comments and news tips to news@medscape.net.

Cite this article: Drunkorexia: New Trend Sweeping College Campuses. *Medscape*. Jun 28, 2016.

This website uses cookies to deliver its services as described in our [Cookie Policy](#). By using this website, you agree to the use of cookies.

[close](#)