

Drug And Alcohol Use In College Athletes

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Abstract

Drug and alcohol use is a major public health concern in the United States, as college-aged adults seem to be at the forefront of national statistics due to the commonality on campuses. Research is coming out that determines further understanding of what causes college students to drink and use drugs, but there is a lack of knowledge and literature on the point of view of college athletes. The current study used an online system, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), to address different aspects and consistency of the usage of drugs and consumption of alcohol. The study observed tendencies of college athletes, N=243, M(age)= 19.8, that participated over many sports including baseball, football, men's basketball, men's cross country, men's track, softball, volleyball, women's basketball, and women's track. Results of the survey showed that these students had their first sip of alcohol and tried marijuana for the first time at an early age. The survey also showed over half of the participants admitted to binge drinking in the past month, as well as collectively using alcohol and marijuana in the past 30 days as well, among other statistics. Findings and discussion determine that college student athletes are more likely to binge drink, and less likely to engage in drug usage, due to being strictly monitored and regimented with their athletic commitments and having the feeling of missing out on college experiences. These results suggest that more alcohol and marijuana educational programs should further target student-athletes.

Keywords: alcohol; drug use; marijuana; binge drinking; college athletes; college

Abbreviations

NSDUH: National Survey on Drug Use and Alcohol.

YRBS: Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Introduction

Literature Review

Drug and alcohol use is a public health concern in the United States. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Alcohol (NSDUH), 62.3% of Americans (174.3 million people) consumed alcohol in 2021. Illicit drug use increased to 21.9 percent (61.2 million people) in 2021 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023). Alcohol and drug usage are a public health concern because they can cause negative health effects. For instance, alcohol consumption has been linked to an increased risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease. There is also an association with liver disease and pancreatitis (Shield et al., 2013). These negative health problems can create long-term health issues, especially for those who drink and use drugs during college where many of these habits are formed.

Alcohol Consumption During College

During the college years, the prevalence of alcohol use is high. The 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), reports that 52.5 percent of full-time college students drank alcohol in the past month and 33.0 percent of these students reported binge drinking (5 or more drinks in a row) in the past month (NSDUH, 2022). College men are more likely to binge drink than women, 54% of first-year men drank more than 7 drinks in a day while only 16% of first-year women consumed more than 7 drinks in a day (Corney & du Plessis, 2022). These same results are also found in graduate students, on average, men consumed 8.7 drinks per occasion and women on average consumed 5.1 drinks (Corney & du Plessis, 2022).

An over-consumption of alcohol can cause physical and mental harm to college students. A study of first-year students found that 55% reported memory loss and 27% reported being injured due to drinking. Fifteen percent reported having unprotected sex due to an overconsumption of alcohol (Corney & du Plessis, 2022). A study on dating violence, found that 20.8% of women reported drinking alcohol before being sexually abused, 14.7% reported psychological abuse, and 17% were physically abused (Shorey et al., 2016).

Why do college students drink? There are many factors that influence students' drinking habits. Environmental factors, like living at home, are linked to drinking less, those who live on campus are 70% more likely to drink (Lorant et al., 2013). Also, having peers around you drinking alcohol increases the chance of drinking. Seventy-six percent used alcohol when their close friend was also drinking (Dorji et al., 2020). In terms of stressors, students were more likely to drink (8% increase) when they had a high-stress day (Russell et al., 2017). Furthermore, the stressors of college can lead to alcohol and substance use/abuse to cope.

Substance Usage During College

The prevalence of drug use is also increasing. The 2018 Monitoring the Future College Students and Young Adults Survey results showed that marijuana use is at a historic high with a 7% increase to a whopping 42.6%. Furthermore, the survey showed a decrease in prescription opioid misuse from 5.4% to 2.7% (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019).

What type of drugs are commonly being used? The most common drug reported during and after college is marijuana. A longitudinal study found that 45% of incoming students used marijuana once a year and was highest by the 3rd year (47%), that number dropped to 29% by the age of 25. Nonmedical prescription stimulants were used by 21% (Arria et al., 2017). A survey of college-athletes reported that prescription opioids like Percocet and Vicodin (11.9%) and prescription stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin (11.3%), were more common than hallucinogens and cocaine (Knettel et al., 2021).

College Athletes' Usage

Compared to non-athlete students, college athletes tend to drink less. A survey comparing the two found that only 46% of college athletes drank alcohol, while 75% of the general student population drank occasionally or frequently (Druckman et al., 2015). While college athletes tend to drink less frequently than non-athletes, one study found that the athletes did drink more in one-sitting. College athletes drank 0.7 more drinks than non-athletes when day-drinking and were more likely to binge drink (53.3%) than non-athletes (41.2%) (Parisis et al., 2019). Similar to non-athlete students, male athletes had a "3.22 higher odds of binge drinking versus females" (Knettel et al., 2021).

College athletes reported less drug usage. Compared to non-athlete students, marijuana use was less common with only 28.7% using in the past year versus 33.3% (Parisis et al., 2019). A study of 188 student-athletes found that 31.8% of participants have used cannabis at some point in their life and 23.4% have used a substance other than alcohol or cannabis (Knettel et al., 2021). College athletes reported binge drinking and substance use because of stress related to academics, athletics, and team management stress (Knettel et al., 2021). Both athletes and non-athlete college students use alcohol to cope with the stress of college. The purpose of this study was to examine the drug and alcohol usage of college athletes in the Southeast region of the United States.

Materials and Methods

Methods

This study was conducted by administering the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to student athletes. The sample consisted of student athletes from 4 different universities located in the Southeast region of the United States. The total subjects, N=243, had a mean age of 19.8 years old and participated in many sports, including baseball, football, men's basketball, men's cross country, men's track, softball, volleyball, women's basketball, and women's track. Some example survey questions used to determine the prominence of alcohol and drug use among these athletes are as follow:

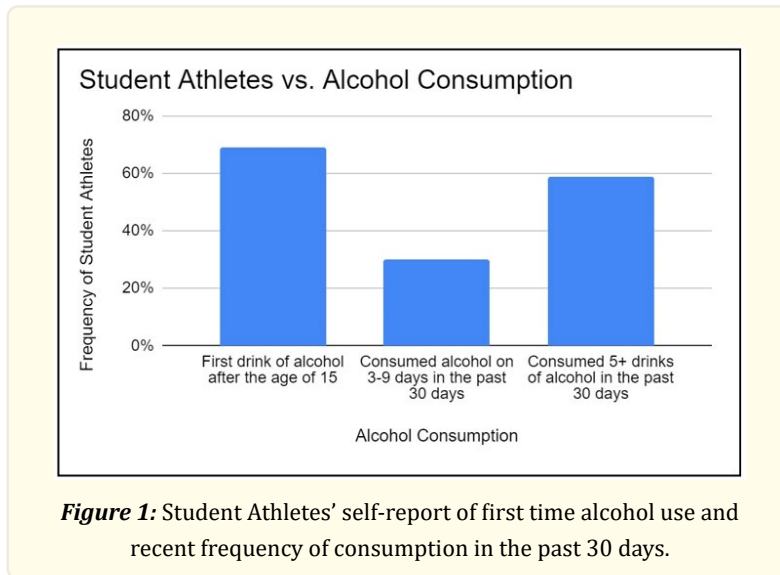
- "How old were you when you had your first drink of alcohol other than a few sips?"
- "During the past 30 days, how many days did you have at least one drink of alcohol?"
- "During the past 30 days, how many days did you have 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is within a couple hours?"
- "How old were you when you tried marijuana for the first time?"
- "During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana?"

Unfortunately, this survey lacked full details as many of the student athletes who answered these questions did not specify their sport. This could possibly be due to the fear of reprisal from their Athletic Department or the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

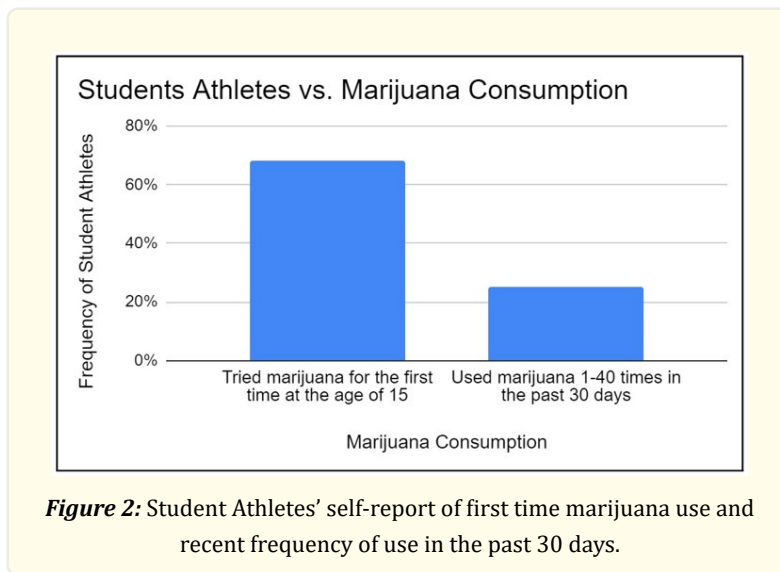
Results and Discussion

Results

After the surveys were completed, descriptive statistics were calculated and the results showed many interesting findings. Out of 243 student athletes, 69% had their first drink of alcohol after the age of 15, and 30% drank alcohol on 3-9 days in the past 30 days. In terms of binge drinking, 59% had 5 or more drinks of alcohol on 1-30 days in the past 30 days (see Figure 1).



This data indicated that almost 60% of college athletes participated in binge drinking from 1-30 days in the past month, which as relayed earlier can cause an increase in physical and mental harm. Furthermore, 68% of students had tried marijuana for the first time at 15 years of age or older, and 25% used marijuana 1-40 times in the past 30 days (see Figure 2).



Accordingly, this information confirms that collectively 25-30% of student athletes used alcohol and marijuana in the past 30 days, respectively.

Conclusion

The lifestyle that is thrust upon these student athletes' that is ingrained in them is that they are part of a team. It is possible that since their lives are strictly monitored and regimented with their athletic commitments, they don't get the same opportunities to have a "nor-

mal college experience". Therefore, when the opportunity presents itself to participate in the "college lifestyle" with behaviors such as binge drinking or marijuana use, they tend to overindulge. This is in addition to their stresses associated with collegiate competition. With that said, these results suggest that more alcohol and marijuana educational programs should further target student-athletes.

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