

IT'S NOT JUST A FIRST YEAR THING

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Excessive Drinking During Orientation Week for New and Returning University Students

INTRODUCTION

ORIENTATION WEEK (O'WEEK)

A highly social time at the start of the academic year that aims to acclimatize new students to university life.



It is also a time of excessive drinking among students; more alcohol is drunk during O'Week than any other time of the academic year.



Our previous research has also shown that the pattern of drinking established by new students during O'Week continues into the academic year. However, we do not know whether excessive O'Week drinking is just a 'first year thing'.

Returning students, who receive little benefit of being 're-orientated', may also take advantage of this period to drink excessively. This may have deleterious effects, e.g., normalising excessive drinking and setting up bad habits for their university careers.

- AIM 1.** To determine whether returning students also drink to excess during O'Week.
- AIM 2.** To determine whether returning students are better at treating O'Week drinking as a "one-off event".

METHOD



At the start of the two-week study, we asked students to retrospectively report their alcohol use using timeline followback.

We then tracked their self-reported alcohol use each day for 13 days using an Internet diary

RESULTS

There were no significant differences in O'Week drinking between students across different years ($F(2,551) = 0.024, p = 0.976$) for either men ($F(2,151) = 0.125, p = 0.831$) or women ($F(2, 395) = 1.028, p = 0.359$; Figure 1).

Furthermore, for all year groups, higher O'Week drinking contributed to higher rates of drinking during the academic term ($r(552) = 0.651, p < .001$).

For men only, the association between O'Week drinking and academic term drinking was moderated by year, as the association was greater for third year men (Figure 2).

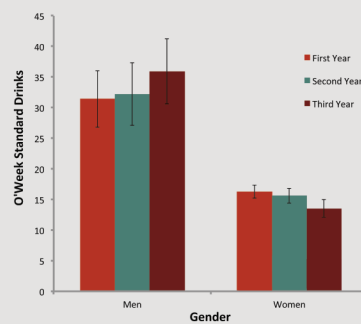


Figure 1. The number of standard drinks consumed during O'Week for men and women in their first, second, and third year.

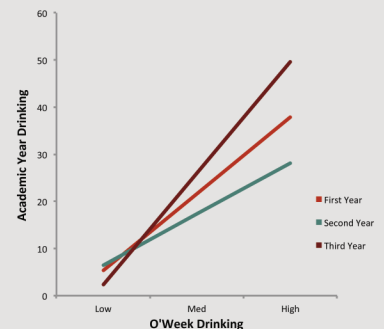


Figure 2. The relationship between O'Week drinking and academic year drinking for men at different years of enrolment in university.

DISCUSSION



Despite the first year focus, O'Week drinking is not just a first year thing. Students in all years drank excessively during this period of 'new student orientation'. Thus, it appears that O'Week is orientating students at all years – both new and incoming – to drink to excess behaviours.

Furthermore, O'Week drinking predicts higher rates of drinking during the academic semester for both new and returning students, and this relationship is actually stronger for third year men (vs. first or second year men).

SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY

University policy should focus on making O'Week truly about new students instead of a week-long drinkfest by limiting the number of returning students on campus during O'Week.



Prevention and intervention efforts should focus on returning second and third year students, as well as new first year students.