

In Teen Girls, Alcohol Habits Tend to Differ By Race



A new study reveals racial differences in the alcohol habits of high school females, with alcohol use more common among white girls than black girls.

And among those who do drink, black girls tend to consume more liquor, whereas white girls generally drink both beer and liquor.

"This study is timely because only by understanding racial differences in the type of alcohol consumed can researchers and community decision-makers better tailor policies and preventive interventions to reduce the negative consequences of excessive alcohol use," said Mildred Maldonado Molina, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of health outcomes and policy at the University of Florida.

The research included both cross-sectional national surveys as well as a two-year longitudinal study of high school students.

"One study goal was to find out whether neighborhood conditions uniquely predicted alcohol use – which it did, for both black and white girls – when accounting for the relatively strong effects of parent and peer influences on drinking," said study author Tammy Chung, Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

For the study, researchers analyzed data from the Pittsburgh Girls Study (PGS), a large community sample of urban girls between the ages of 11 and 18. This included information regarding 2,171 girls (1,236 black girls, 935 white girls), who were questioned about their alcohol use.

"We found that prevalence of alcohol use was higher among white, relative to black, girls during adolescence," said Chung. "Among drinkers, black girls tended to consume liquor, whereas white girls generally reported consuming beer and liquor."

Researchers also found greater variety among the drinking patterns of white girls, compared to black girls. For example, black girls reported either low likelihood of alcohol use in their teen years, or increasing likelihood of alcohol use over time. In contrast, white girls who drank included those

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who mainly had sips of wine, or started drinking alcohol in their early teens versus mid-adolescence.

Chung noted that black and white girls also reported different risk profiles. For example, white girls had greater ease in gaining access to alcohol. However, black girls were more likely to report negative neighborhood conditions.

"However, similar predictors for black and white girls were also identified: ease in accessing alcohol, report of friends' alcohol use, and poor neighborhood conditions were associated with heavier drinking profiles in both groups," Chung said

Chung also noted that a key message from this study is the importance of routine alcohol screening for early identification of youth alcohol use and intervention.

"Among black girls who report drinking, intervention might focus on use of liquor and liquor-related harm, whereas among white girls, limiting access to alcohol is an important intervention target," she said.

Source: Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research; PsychCentral.com, Traci Pedersen, Associate News Editor