

University drinking: why students drink, and the consequences

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Divine Word University, Madang, PNG
Photo Credit: Lorelle Tekopiri Yakam

In the [first blog of this series](#), I discussed students' views on alcohol consumption and students' drinking behaviour. In this blog, I discuss the factors that contribute to students' drinking, and the effects of this drinking.

This series stems from [qualitative research](#) I conducted at Divine Word University (DWU), involving 22 senior students (years 3 and 4), who were randomly selected.

The study identified several reasons why students drink, including relieving stress, relaxation and socialising, relieving anxiety and depression, and a way to "blow off" steam or escape from problems in their personal life:

... it's like an escape, some students turn to alcohol as an escape from their problems and worries. For a short period of time they get to forget all about their problems ...

... other social issues like family problems at home, and I don't want to listen to those things and when I want to forget I go and consume alcohol. Not all the time but you know at certain times only ...

Peer pressure and family influence are two main factors that encourage student drinking. Students who have peers, friends or course mates who drink are more [susceptible to drink](#). Participants mention the need to fit in and be a part of the group. This means that although they do not drink at home they do so at university. As stated by one participant:

... most of the people I hang out with, they all consume alcohol so like, we are all in the same category ... my friends think alcohol is a bad thing to drink, but then, we feel the urge to drink ... My family forbid us from drinking ...

Consuming alcohol not only creates a [sense of belonging](#) for students in their peer groups, but is also associated with being an adult:

... My friends say it's part of growing up. So, I take alcohol to be a 'girl blo group'[1] ...

Some students whose families condone drinking, consume alcohol at university. Additionally, allowances provided by parents or family, and the amount of allowance, play a vital role in whether students consume alcohol or not, how often and how much:

... I drink when the situation arises, like when I do have money or somebody wants to sponsor or buy ...

... I saw that some students we come from different background families. Some of them they are in their payroll, their parents are wealthy so they keep on sending them money, so when they see that there are lot of money, they buy whatever necessary things they need to buy, and the left over money, they influence some other boys and they went out and consume alcohol ...

... Every student on campus come from different backgrounds. Some are fortunate, some are unfortunate. Fortunate in terms of income. Some who can afford drink every weekend, but for some who are unfortunate, they drink at times or occasionally, whenever they have money ...

A concerning theme identified by the participants was the need to satisfy the urge to drink, which may indicate a drinking problem. Some participants said that alcohol is consumed because of the intoxicated feeling that it offers. The trend of “binge drinking” and “drinking to get drunk” is popular among some students.

Students reported a range of consequences of alcohol consumption. It affects their personal mental state, academic work, relationships, and social interactions. Major concerns expressed are alcohol poisoning and alcohol addiction.

Some alcohol-related socially disturbing behaviours identified by participants are: noise (screaming, loud singing, loud music); swearing at other students; starting arguments with other students; disrespecting DWU staff; and disturbing students who are trying to sleep, complete an assessment, or study.

After consuming alcohol students experience feelings of regret and nausea, loss of appetite, fatigue, headaches, and restless nights resulting in a lack of proper rest. It was clear that although students know the effects of alcohol consumption on their academic performance, they continue to drink:

... when we consume alcohol, it reduces our thinking capability, that we cannot memorise our information and, maybe some lecturers' notes or we cannot

remember it well, when we consume a lot of alcohol. It basically reduces our thinking capability ...

... Losing memory. Before when I meet a person for the first time after introductions I remember their name and next time I meet them somewhere, I would call them by names and all that. The same principles apply to my studies. But lately I'd say I find it a little difficult to understand things so I have to read over and over again about three or four times and then I would understand the concept of a topic ...

Managing finances becomes challenging for students who have developed the habit of consuming alcohol whenever they have money. Students who spend all their money on alcohol, borrow from others, leading to a habitual cycle of borrowing and squandering money.

Students identified some alcohol-related, high-risk behaviours including: gender-based violence (GBV) or abuse between couples in a romantic relationship; assaulting and harassing other students; damaging university property; and risky activities like climbing over the university's fence, and walking out to settlements and other communities outside the campus to look for alcohol.

... I've seen a lot of, male students especially when they get drunk they beat up their girlfriends, bully them around the campus. Other students see it but they don't do anything. The authorities don't even know. Alcohol influence their mind to do things that is out of control ...

... First of all, rowdy behaviour. A few nights ago, there was a really big fight here on campus. Students were drinking and they started fighting. It was like a free throw. Everyone was just fighting each other ...

... Some of them they let out their frustrations on the dormitories. This year I had to get my lock fixed because the person who occupied my room last year was said to have been a person who liked to drink every weekend. And he broke all the stuff in the room so I had to fix all of them ...

... Last year I saw, one boy was consuming alcohol along the Banana Block^[2] and the people there they smashed him up and he was bleeding on his face. So, when they're consuming alcohol they are not into the campus because they know that the policy is there so, to avoid the security, they're consuming alcohol in those settlement areas. And that's where they end up looking for trouble like fighting with the outside people, and even the police, when they catch them they even belt them up ...

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A very concerning trend is alcohol-related GBV/abuse among couples in romantic relationships. Moreover, female students generally become **targets of harassment** to some intoxicated male students. This makes the campus unsafe for them to move around freely.

To conclude, a combination of factors causes students to drink, and binge drink. It is clear that students may know the negative consequences of their drinking, but continue to drink for various reasons.

In the next blog, I will discuss how students get away with drinking, and what they think about DWU's zero tolerance on alcohol consumption on campus rule.

Notes

[1] Tok Pisin slang to imply acceptance of an individual as part of the group.

[2] Banana Block is a settlement in Madang province.

*This is the second blog in a series on **#Student drinking in PNG**. You can read the first blog [here](#).*

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Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/university-drinking-why-students-drink-and-the-consequences-20210802/>