

Binge drinking is strongly associated with eating problems among Russian girls

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Adolescent binge drinking has been linked to a host of problems, including worse school performance, risky sexual behaviors, illicit drugs, and a greater risk of suicide. Binge drinking may also be linked to problematic eating behavior, yet little research exists. A study of the relationship between binge drinking and eating problems among Russian adolescents has found that problematic eating behaviors and attitudes are commonplace, and that binge drinking is associated with more eating problems in girls than boys.

Results will be published in the March 2015 online-only issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* and are currently available at Early View.

"Although [binge drinking](#) has been studied in relation to a variety of different health risk behaviors, there has been comparatively little research undertaken on the association between binge drinking and problematic eating behavior," said Andrew Stickley, a researcher at Södertörn University in Sweden and corresponding author for the study. "Most of this research has been undertaken in North America. Several studies among adolescents have linked binge drinking to various forms of disordered eating such as fasting, using diet pills, and purging behaviors."

Stickley and his colleagues used information from the Social and Health Assessment (SAHA), a cross-sectional school-based survey carried out in Arkhangelsk, Russia, to analyze data on 2,488 (1485 girls, 1003 boys) 6th to 10th grade students (aged 13 to 17 years old). Information was collected on various eating problems - worries about weight, feeling fat, excessive eating, fasting and excessive exercise, and purging behaviors - as well as binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a row.

"There were two main findings," said Stickley. "First, problematic eating behaviors and attitudes were commonplace among Russian adolescents,

especially among girls. Second, binge drinking was associated with eating problems among both sexes, although it was linked with more eating problems in girls."

Stickley explained these gender differences in greater detail. "Nearly 50 percent of Russian girls worried about how to stop gaining weight, while almost one-third of them had fasted or engaged in excessive exercise to prevent weight gain," he said. "Among boys, problems were less prevalent, although 35 percent of them reported excessive eating. The prevalence of purging behaviors - such as vomiting or using laxatives - was however, much lower among both sexes. After adjusting for potential confounders, for girls, binge drinking was associated with five of the six eating problems we examined, while among boys, binge drinking was linked to two problems - feeling fat, and vomiting or using laxatives to prevent weight gain."

What this means, added Stickley, is that the cross-sectional association between binge drinking and eating problems observed previously among North American adolescents can also be found among Russian adolescents. "This suggests that the association between binge drinking and eating problems in adolescence might occur across different country settings regardless of the socioeconomic environment or particular drinking culture," he said.

Stickley suggested that more research on this association be conducted among adolescents and adults in other countries in the world. "It is also essential that this research be longitudinal," he said, "to help determine how binge drinking and problematic eating behaviors are linked across time and whether - and how - other factors such as depression affect this association."

Lastly, Stickley had advice for clinicians and prevention specialists "Given the close link between these risky health behaviors," he said, "when one is

detected it would also be advisable for clinicians to screen for the other, while looking for factors that might underpin both such as stress, personality characteristics etc."

Provided by Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research

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