

Study pinpoints behavior type linked to binge drinking in young adults

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While there are a number of studies on alcohol misuse, most of the research has been focused on the adult population. Alcohol is the most widely used drug among young adults between the ages of 18 to 25. Binge drinking—almost a rite of passage—peaks during the college years. So this begs the question, "Are there specific characteristics associated with high-level binge drinking habits in college students?"

A new psychology study conducted at Florida Atlantic University is the first to delve into the specific subcomponents of inhibition behavior as it relates to [binge drinking](#) to help predict who may be at high risk, and to better develop targeted education, intervention, and support programs.

"There are many aspects of inhibition behavior, which is essentially the ability to stop yourself from a particular behavior," said Andres L. Paz, lead author of the study and a psychology student in FAU's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science who will be receiving his Ph.D. in August. "Looking specifically at risk factors, I wanted to see if there was one particular aspect of inhibition that could better predict propensity in [young adults](#) to binge drink."

Previous studies on binge drinking have used a blanket approach on inhibition to gauge behavior. Over the course of one month, Paz investigated three specific subcomponents of inhibition behavior: the ability to stop or prevent a response to stimuli; the ability to cancel an already initiated response to stimuli; and the ability to override distracting stimuli in order to carry out a desired response.

To test these subcomponent behaviors of inhibition, study participants were assigned three tasks involving motor responses to different stimuli; each representing one of the three subcomponents. Prior to completing these tasks, participants, who ranged in age from 18 to 25,

filled out a detailed questionnaire on their demographic information, alcohol use, and binge drinking history. Every two weeks, they completed an online alcohol consumption log, and at the end of the study, they returned to the lab to perform the three motor response tasks again.

Using regression model analysis, an analytical method used to predict behaviors, Paz was able to obtain and decipher the results from his research. The regression model tabulated all of the data from the tasks as well as the surveys and alcohol consumption logs, to measure the number of intoxication days, the days in which they became drunk, and the number of days when they were hung over.

"Results from this study show that the 'withholding of the response' task or the ability to stop or prevent a response to stimuli, was the most significant factor in predicting binge drinking behavior," said Paz. "Greater errors on this particular task was associated with higher numbers of drunk days."

The "withholding of the response" task was an exercise that measured an individual's ability to prevent himself or herself from responding to stimuli or stopping the response from happening altogether. Paz likens this to "self-control."

"Perhaps our biggest takeaway from this study is that we suspect that the inability to withhold a [response](#) from stimuli plays a key role in putting a person at greater risk of binge drinking behaviors," said Paz.

However, Paz cautions that there are still many unanswered questions and more research that is needed.

"We still don't know if binge drinking puts you at risk of becoming an alcoholic or whether it is simply a phase you outgrow when you graduate. And what about weekend warrior binge drinkers?," said Paz.

"There are so many elements involved with any kind of addiction including alcoholism. That is why it's so important to continue research in this area to help us develop more personalized approaches to treat addiction. One size doesn't fit all."

Results of this study titled "Inhibitory Performance Predicting Drinking Behaviours Among Young Adults," was published in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

Provided by Florida Atlantic University

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