

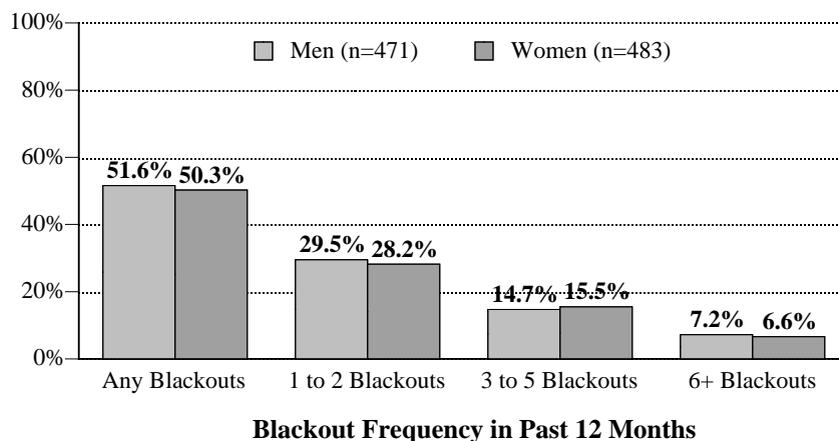
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Study Suggests Alcohol-Induced Blackouts Among College Students Are a Strong Predictor of Future Emergency Department Visits

Alcohol-induced blackouts among college students are associated with future emergency department (ED) visits, according to data from a study of full-time students at five universities. Approximately one-half of high-risk college drinkers reported an alcohol-induced blackout* in the past year. While students were most likely to report experiencing one or two blackouts, approximately 15% reported three to five blackouts and 7% reported six or more blackouts (see figure below). Students reporting three to five or six or more blackouts were more likely than those reporting no blackouts to be treated in the emergency department (ED) for any reason in the 24 months after the study (1.39 and 1.75 times more likely, respectively; data not shown). Blackouts were associated with future emergency department use even after controlling for alcohol intake, sensation-seeking, and demographic factors. The authors conclude that “blackouts are a strong predictor of emergency department visits for college drinkers and that prevention efforts aimed at students with a history of blackouts might reduce injuries and emergency department costs” (p. 1).

Percentage of High-Risk College Drinkers Reporting Blackouts in the Past 12 Months, 2004-2009



*Students were asked “How many times has this happened to you while you were drinking or because of your drinking during the last year?” for the survey item “Suddenly found yourself in a place that you could not remember getting to.”

NOTES: Data were collected between October 2004 and February 2009 as part of the College Health Intervention Projects (CHIPS) study from full-time college students age 18 or older attending one of 5 universities located in Wisconsin, Washington, and British Columbia. High-risk drinking was defined as drinking either more than 12 drinks for women and more than 15 drinks for men in the past seven days; or more than 40 drinks for women or more than 50 drinks for men in the past 28 days; or more than five drinks on 8 or more occasions during the past 28 days for either men or women.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Mundt, Marlon P. and Zakletskaia, Larissa I., “Prevention for College Students Who Suffer Alcohol-Induced Blackouts Could Deter High-Cost Emergency Department Visits,” *Health Affairs* 31(4), 2012. For more information, contact Dr. Marlon Mundt at marlon.mundt@fammed.wisc.edu.