Alcohol-related incidents in Residence; what are the demographics?

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Hello, my name is Rebekah Murray-Smith and I am from the University of Wollongong.

I am going to talk about the thematic analysis I performed on alcohol-related incidents in the university residences at the University of Wollongong that occurred throughout the contracted periods in 2014 and 2015 (the start of February to the end of November). I considered demographics such as age, gender, nationality, and at which point in the academic session the incidents occurred, and looked for patterns.
The findings of the data analysis are in line with current research, and identifies groups considered most likely 'at-risk'. By identifying these groups, residence managers may be able to provide tailored, targeted and efficient intervention and harm minimisation strategies.

The consumption of alcohol is widely associated with risk behaviours and harmful health outcomes for young people, especially university and college students. According to the Australian Department of Health, young people aged 18 to 24 have the riskiest drinking patterns with almost 66% drinking at a high level that causes harm in the short term. It is well documented that alcohol abuse of this sort leads to a higher rate of issues relating to alcohol, such as blackouts, and unwanted and negative sexual experiences.
The UOW Residences

The University of Wollongong, over the period of 2014 and 2015, had nine student residences that housed almost 1900 students. Six of these residences were specifically undergraduate residences (catered and self-catered), and the remaining three were dedicated postgraduate student accommodation.
Incidents in residence

A total of 2203 incidents were recorded in 2014 and 1701 incidents in 2015. Of these incidents that were recorded in the StarRez incident module, I took into account only the incidents that had been reported, categorised, or referred to as any of the following terms: ‘alcohol’, ‘drinking’, ‘drunk’, ‘party’, and other similar terms. Incidents reported as anything further to this were removed for analytic purposes, including manager, witness, and victim entries (only retaining participant entries).
Globally, university and college students have a higher prevalence of alcohol consumption, when compared with their non-university peers. Studies have found, in European countries like Germany and Sweden, high numbers of both males and females engage in harmful episodic drinking, and that frequent binge drinkers had higher instances of smoking and other drug use.

One study I read found the levels of alcohol consumption in Sweden for both male and female university students are well above the limits for at-risk alcohol consumption. Residents were found to drink considerably more than their non-resident counterparts; however, despite finding that the levels of drinking in the residential cohort are high, the communities function very well.

Out of first year university students in Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and the UK, the UK was flagged to have the highest numbers of students drinking harmful quantities on a regular basis. Germany placed somewhere in the middle, whilst Poland showed the smallest numbers.

Research has also suggested that there are extremely low rates of binge drinking in Asia.

A recent study examined drinking behaviours in university students in China where the results suggest that there is a division between students: those who have adopted Western values as a result of living in heavily populated urban areas are more likely to consume a higher volume of alcohol than their more traditionally oriented counterparts. Compared with Western students, the alcohol consumption and frequency levels are much lower; however, appear to be on the rise.
The findings of these studies provide insight into the international student cohort and the influence of culturally specific behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol in the youth and university context.
Current literature regarding harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption in Australia and New Zealand reflects a trend whereby domestic university students score higher than their international counterparts. Domestic students aged between 17 and 20 were more likely to drink at harmful levels than students aged 21 to 25, and are considered low risk. Students living in private accommodation or at home are also much less likely to report harmful or high-risk consumption of alcohol.

International students of all ages are even less likely to report hazardous drinking, with domestic students overall being much more likely to report frequent hazardous alcohol consumption.

Previous studies have alluded to a strong possibility that peer influences may be significantly more powerful for males than females, and may be a contributing factor to high-risk alcohol consumption in this demographic. One theory I found proposed that, while drinking is inherent in Australian culture, it is now considered socially unacceptable to pressure someone to drink, however the behaviours associated with parties provides evidence of indirect or latent peer pressure to drink.

Students aged 18 to 24 years old and who consume high-risk levels of alcohol were also found to be significantly more likely to score highly on factors including criminal and aggressive behaviour (most likely males), health and emotional harms, and sexual harms (most likely females).
Current research on students in residence in Australia and NZ show undergraduate students living in residence are significantly more likely to engage in harmful alcohol consumption. Young males, in particular those from rural areas, appear to be the most at-risk group for harmful alcohol consumption. Studies have also found males who consumed more alcohol during OWeek also showed significantly higher rates of drinking during the academic year.

Heavy drinking is pervasive amongst undergraduate students in Australian and New Zealand halls of residence. Undergraduate students aged 18 to 22 years living in the halls of residence are persistent in their alcohol consumption and, for some students, heavy drinking is intentional. Again, it appears peer influence is a compelling factor in alcohol consumption in the university residences. The social constructs of peer influence can also be linked to events in the university calendar such as OWeek, social events, and sporting events. Further to this, drinking culture is encouraged by local establishments in close proximity to the university residences; these establishments would market directly to students (e.g., ‘Half price nights’).
This graph depicts the total number of alcohol incidents in the residences for both 2014 and 2015. A consideration was made to compare these numbers against the number of residents living in the residences over these two periods; however, the incidents are not indicative of all residents, as the raw data suggests there is a great likelihood that there are repeat offenders within the participant group recorded in the incident module.
Both of these graphs support previous research that discuss and analyse male and female alcohol consumptive habits. Female residents appeared less likely than their male counterparts to experience alcohol-related incidents. A comparison of male and female incidents recorded reveals in 2014 58% of alcohol-related incidents recorded were experienced by males. In 2015, this number significantly increased to 63%, however overall the number of incidents of this type had decreased significantly.
Findings for this section of data indicate clear results in ages for both 2014 and 2015. In 2014 there was a significant number of incidents experienced by residents aged 19 and 20. In 2015 the ages included 19, 20, and 21 year old residents.
The age demographic is compared with gender, and shows female residents aged 19 in 2014 were more likely to participate in alcohol-related incidents than female students of other ages, but appear less likely to participate in these incidents than their male counterparts aged 20.

In 2015, ages appear to be slightly more varied for both genders. Noticeably, there is a larger gap in the number of incidents between female and male residents. Female residents aged between 19 and 20 appear more likely to experience alcohol-related incidents, and males aged 18 to 20 also fall into this category. From 2014 to 2015, there is a marked change in the range of ages reporting alcohol-related incidents. Data from 2014 reveals ages from 18 to 31 as having participated in these incidents, whereas in 2015 the gap is somewhat narrower, ranging from 17 to 26.
Looking at the international and domestic resident data, both years show the same percentage split of reported alcohol-related incidents experienced by international and domestic residents. The numbers show a drop from 2014 to 2015, and an explanation of this may be that the number of international residents each year fluctuates. Of course, fluctuations of international student numbers occur yearly, depending on things such as target marketing, strength or weakness of the Australian dollar etc.
The data analysed for alcohol-related incidents over the contracted period shows a pattern against the academic calendar. In 2014, a spike in incidents around March indicates OWeek festivities, residents becoming acquainted with each other etc., May represents mid-session break, the end of Autumn session shows a drop in numbers, and over the July/August months OWeek celebrations once again commence. As with the end of Autumn session, there is a noted drop in numbers towards the end of Spring session and the contracted period, which is reflective of final assessments and exam periods.

The data gathered for 2015 reveals a similar trend for Autumn session, with a considerably higher number of alcohol-related incidents, again due to OWeek and initial orientation programs; however a marked drop is seen in May, which leads to a decline for the remaining portion of the academic year and contracted period. A slight rise in the numbers of incidents can be seen towards the end of the contract, which coincides with final assessments being due and exam periods. The comparison of the two years and the apparent decrease in numbers in 2015 may be a direct result of the introduction of ‘dry campus’ periods, in which there is a zero tolerance for alcohol in the residences during key periods.
Both of these graphs depict the total number of alcohol-related incidents for 2014 and 2015 respectively, and plot gender against the contracted period in residence. While in 2014 the data shows similar trend lines in alcohol-related incidents for both male and female residents, 2015 depicts a much flatter trend line for female residents, with the exception of the OWeek period.
This research provides sound evidence to suggest that there is a strong element of predictability as to the specific demographics within the university residences that are most likely to experience an alcohol-related incident throughout key times of the academic year. The findings indicate that male residents who are domestic and aged 19 to 20 are most likely to participate in an alcohol-related incident. This research is highly significant as it may lead to the development of a much more tailored intervention approach by creating education strategies to be implemented to specifically target the most at-risk groups living in the residential communities throughout Australia and New Zealand. I am now going to introduce Dr Tim Corney who will speak to you on his research on this topic.