

Survey Data Recap: College Students with Disabilities

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Overview of College Students with Disabilities (SWD)



- It is a well-known fact that alcohol and other substance use and abuse are common problems among college students. It is also a well-known fact that substance use can have a multitude of negative outcomes. For example, a 2001 study revealed that more than 500,000 college students were injured due to alcohol consumption and more than 1,100 died from alcohol-related nontraffic injuries.
- Such statistics have warranted much research over the last decade into the substance use of college students. However, most of this research has been on college students as a whole. Few studies have specifically focused on college students with disabilities (SWD).
- College SWDs make up at least 6% (over 66,000) of the average college freshman class and vary in their performance. While some college SWDs excel, many struggle in various areas of college life. For example, college SWDs tend to drop out more than their non-disabled counterparts while those who do graduate take longer to do so.
- Studies that have explored the struggles of college SWDs generally focused on issues such as classroom accommodations and SWDs' relationships with—and support from—professors. The current study, which was funded by NIDRR, is the first to specifically explore the relationship between college SWDs and substance use. Thus, at this time it is unclear how alcohol and other substance use contribute to the struggles of college SWDs.

The Survey

- The present study was exploratory in nature with the goal of exploring issues that are known to negatively affect all college students (alcohol and substance use) in order to examine how these issues also affect college SWDs.
- The study consisted of a comprehensive survey that was sent out to 181 college and universities around the country. The survey had two main hypotheses and eight overall research questions (below).
- While the following results may be alarming to some readers, unfortunately few colleges and universities have prevention or intervention programs tailored to SWD needs.

Survey Results



There was a multitude of information gathered from this survey and all of it will be submitted to both a journal and our upcoming Project Empowerment monograph. For this topic sheet, only an abridged version of the results is provided.

Descriptive information of survey result data: A total of 1,285 college SWDs completed the survey. This sample was representative on gender ($\chi^2 = 2.21, p=0.136$), ethnicity gender ($\chi^2 = 3.071, p=0.381$), and those 23 years of age or younger ($\chi^2 = 1.969, p=0.161$). The median age for this sample was 21 years of age and 65.70% (n = 844) were female. The racial/ethnic composition was 70.70% (n = 909) Anglo/Caucasian, 7.5% (n = 96) Black/African American, 6.90% (n = 89) other, 6.50% (n = 83) Mixed Heritage, 2.60% (n = 33) Asian American, 0.70% (n = 9) Native American/Pacific Islander, and 5.10% (n = 66) declined to respond. When asked whether participants were of Hispanic descent, 10% (n = 128) responded affirmatively.

Hypothesis 1 determined whether alcohol and other substance use would vary by demographic characteristics of college SWDs.

- SWDs who are undecided about their major are more likely to drink alcohol 4+ times a week than any other major.
- SWDs who are in a sorority and fraternity are more likely to have 5+ drinks in a typical day in which they drink.
- Age and academic standing predict the frequency of getting drunk or high.

Hypothesis 2 determined whether alcohol and other substance use would vary among SWDs according to the type of disability.

- In general among SWDs, 8.7% with a learning disability, 9.1% with a physical disability, 16.7% with a psychiatric disability, 8.6% with a sensory disability, and 5% with a developmental disability drink every day.



- Research Question 1:** How frequently do SWDs consume alcohol?
● 0.5% drink every day or almost every day.
- Research Question 2:** How much do SWDs drink on average when they consume alcohol?
● 19.1% drink 5+ drinks on a typical day that they drink.
- Research Question 3:** How frequently do SWDs drink to the point of intoxication?
● 11.4% get drunk or high 1 to 4 times a month.
- Research Question 4:** How frequently do SWDs binge drink?
● 8.7% binge drink 2 or 3 times a week.
- Research Question 5:** How frequently do SWDs use marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, barbiturates, amphetamines, tranquilizers, steroids, and tobacco?
● During the past year: 26.4% used marijuana; 1.1% used crack or cocaine; 5.8% used other forms of cocaine; 1.3% used heroin; 1.8% used LSD; 3.4% used PCP, mushrooms, or other psychedelic drugs; 1.6% used barbiturates; 5.7% used methamphetamines or amphetamines; 2% used tranquilizers; 1.4% used steroids; 12.7% smoked cigarettes.
- Research Question 6:** What demographic characteristics of SWDs (e.g., age, academic major and standing, sex, ethnicity, etc.) are associated with alcohol and other drug use?
● In general, 7.3% of Anglo/Caucasian, 28.1% of African American/Black, 3% of Asian, 26.6% of Hispanic, and 16.9% of "Mixed Heritage" SWDs drink alcohol every day or almost every day.
● Native American and Asian American SWDs are not likely to frequently drink alcohol.
● African American SWDs are more likely to drink 4+ times a week than Anglo, Multiracial, or "Other."
● Hispanic SWDs are more likely to drink alcohol 4+ times a week than any other ethnic group.
● Males are more likely than females to drink 4+ times a week, and have 5+ drinks in a typical day that they drink.
- Research Question 7:** What kinds of negative consequences do SWDs incur as a result of substance use and with what frequency do such consequences occur?
● 10.2% reported injuring someone else due to drinking less than 1 per month, 1.1% injured someone monthly, 0.1% injured someone 2-3 times per week.
● 10.9% have had a relative, friend, doctor, or other health professional comment regarding concerns about their drinking.
● 5.5% sought or received treatment for alcohol or drug problems.
● The higher the number of days SWDs get drunk, the more likely they are to neglect responsibilities.
● For females, binge drinking was related to being sexually assaulted.
● Age of first drink and binge drinking is related to unprotected sex.
● The number of days drunk or high and the number of days binge drinking are related to engaging in illegal activities.
- Research Question 8:** Do the rates and correlates of substance use and abuse by college SWDs vary by the college size, location, affiliation (private/public), type (sectarian/nonsectarian), undergraduate student population (based on published FTE enrollment during the target semester), and whether the institution allows alcohol on campus?
● The overall rates and correlates of substance use and abuse by college SWDs does not vary by key college demographics.

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