



Sex and intoxication among women more common on spring break according to AMA poll

Survey shows female college students drink more and often on spring break trips

For immediate release

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CHICAGO — Alcohol and sex play a prominent and potentially dangerous role in spring break trips of college co-eds according to an American Medical Association (AMA) poll released today. Eighty-three percent of the respondents agreed spring break trips involve more or heavier drinking than occurs on college campuses and 74 percent said spring break trips result in increased sexual activity.

The poll of college women and graduates, aged 17-35, was funded as part of the AMA's partnership with The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation on A Matter of Degree, an initiative to reduce high-risk drinking on college and university campuses.

"Scientific evidence shows women process alcohol differently putting them at greater risks for heart problems, reproductive disorders and liver disease," said J. Edward Hill MD, president of the AMA. "These survey results are extremely disturbing because it brings up an entirely new set of issues including increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, blackouts and violence."

Key findings of the poll include:

1. A majority (74 percent) of respondents said women use drinking as an excuse for outrageous behavior.*
2. More than half of women (57 percent) agree being promiscuous is a way to fit in.
3. An overwhelming majority (83 percent) of women had friends who drank the majority of the nights while on spring break.
4. More than half (59 percent) know friends who were sexually active with more than one partner.
5. Nearly three out of five women know friends who had unprotected sex during spring break.
6. One in five respondents regretted the sexual activity they engaged in during spring break, and 12 percent felt forced or pressured into sex.
7. An overwhelming majority (84 percent) of respondents thought images of college girls partying during spring break may contribute to an increase in females' reckless behavior.*
8. An even higher percentage (86 percent) agreed these images may contribute to dangerous behaviors by males toward women.
9. Almost all (92 percent) said it was easy to get alcohol while on spring break.

10. Two out of five women agreed access to free or cheap alcohol or a drinking age under age 21 were important factors in their decision to go on a spring break trip.

Each year in Cancun, Mexico, a major spring break destination for American college students, the city and hospitals report an increase in deaths, rapes, injuries, assaults and arrests related to drinking. In Daytona, Fla., another popular spring break destination, last year county officials reported twice as many rape cases during the month of spring break.

"Spring break is broken," said Dr. Hill. "What was a traditional time to relax and take a break from college studies has turned into a dangerous binge-fest."

One spring break promoter's Web site for a trip to Cancun says, "your yearly intake of alcoholic consumption could happen in one small week." It then advises college students to tell parents "its an educational trip" and "don't worry about the water because you will be drinking beer."

"Months before spring break, students are bombarded by promotions on campus that are loaded with ads for cheap or free alcohol," said Dr. Hill. "The American Medical Association is encouraged to hear college women and graduates agree something must be done to fix this problem."

A majority (59 percent) of survey respondents support restricting the content of spring break flyers and ads on campus, and 61 percent support prohibiting drinking or alcohol specials as part of any tour package. Approximately 71 percent support increased regulation of the tour agencies, and 81 percent support the idea of requiring colleges to offer alternative spring breaks that do not include alcohol.

"Women are fed up with the marketing tactics and images from the alcohol industry and spring break tour operators," said Dr. Hill. "Public health advocates should also be fed up since aggressive spring break marketing endangers the health and safety of college students."

Alternative spring break trips, that often emphasize community service, have been increasingly successful across the country. The University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa. and the University of Wisconsin-Madison are just a few schools that offer service trips to desirable destinations without alcohol as the focal point.

The AMA said the poll results highlight the need for policy change, including offering alternative spring breaks and restrictions on alcohol advertising on campus. Physicians are encouraged to counsel parents about talking with their children about the health risks of alcohol use and spring break.

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Editor's Note: The American Medical Association commissioned the survey. Fako & Associates, Inc., of Lemont, Illinois, a national public opinion research firm, conducted the survey online February 27 – March 1, 2006. A nationwide sample of 644 women age 17 – 35 who are part of an online survey panel who currently attend college, graduated from college or attended, but did not graduate from college, who reside within the United States were surveyed. The source of the panel is Survey Sampling International's (SSI) Survey Spot Panel. A strict multi-step screening process was used to ensure that only qualified individuals participated in the survey. The survey makeup was: 62 percent women age 17 – 23 and 38% women age 24 – 35. The survey was conducted in proportion to regional shares of the population based on current census data.

* These questions were left to the interpretation of the respondent. Based on the wording of other questions in the poll, the AMA assumes reckless behavior is associated with sex and binge drinking. The AMA assumes outrageous behavior is associated with public nudity, dancing on tables/bars and participating in drinking contests.

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