Age of Drinking Onset, Alcohol Dependence, Driving after Drug Use and Involvement in Motor Vehicle Crashes after Drug Use

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OBJECTIVE: To assess whether age of drinking onset and alcohol dependence predict illicit drug use, driving after drug use, and traffic crash involvement after drug use.

METHODS: A national sample of 42,867 persons 18 and older was surveyed in 1991-1992 (response rate = 90%). Logistic regression examined these potential associations among 27,616 respondents who ever drank alcohol. Controlling for age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, marital status, cigarette use history, childhood depression, and family history of alcoholism.

RESULTS: Of drinkers, 22% ever used drugs. Forty-five percent of them had driven after drug use and six percent were in crashes after drug use. The younger age at which respondents began to drink, and having ever experienced alcohol dependence, were independently associated with greater odds using drugs, driving after drug use and reported crash involvement because of drug use. Among persons who began drinking prior to age 14 relative to 21 or older, the increased odds of drug use, driving after drug use and being in a motor vehicle crash because of drug use were 3.2 (2.6, 4.0), 3.2 (2.4, 4.1), and 3.9 (1.5, 4.8). The increased relative odds for people ever alcohol dependent were 2.5 (2.3, 2.7), 3.2 (2.9, 3.8), and 5.6 (3.6, 8.7).

CONCLUSIONS: Efforts to prevent drug related crashes should include measures to delay early onset of drinking which is associated with alcohol dependence, drug use, drug use at an early age, and driving after drug use.

Keywords: Drinking, Drugs, Driving