

Researchers Find Lingering Memory Problems Related to Binge Drinking

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Research Summary

U.K. researchers say that teens who binge drinking can suffer from memory impairment even days after they stop drinking alcohol, the BBC reported April 3.

Researcher Thomas Heffernan and colleagues from Northumbria University and Kent University gave memory tests to a group of 26 binge drinkers ages 17-19 to a group of 34 non-binge drinkers. The male binge drinkers consumed at least eight units of alcohol at one sitting, while the women had at least six units at one time.

Drinkers tested three or four days after their last drinking session exhibited more forgetfulness and absentmindedness. "We found no differences between binge drinkers and non-binge drinkers in the self-reporting questionnaires, but when it came to the video the binge drinkers recalled significantly less than the non-binge drinkers," said Heffernan. "Although from their own reports they appeared to have good memories, they didn't perform as well in the video test. The binge drinkers recalled up to a third less of the items, a significant difference."

Heffernan said research has shown that excessive alcohol use can damage parts of the brain involved in everyday memory. "Not only may these teenagers be harming their memory, if their brains are still developing they could be storing up problems for the future," he said.

The findings were reported at a recent meeting of the British Psychological Society.