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Isralowitz, Richard; Shpiegel, Svetlana; Reznik, Alex; and Laytin, Adam, "Ethiopian Youth in Israel: Gender-Related Alcohol Use and Related Problem Behaviour" (2009). *Department of Social Work and Child Advocacy Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works*. 41.

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Ethiopian youth in Israel: Gender-related alcohol use and related problem behaviour

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Abstract

Jewish people from Ethiopia have been immigrating to Israel since 1973. Difficulties with language, unemployment; low socioeconomic status and prejudice have been common place and linked to problem behaviour including school drop out, delinquency and drug abuse among Ethiopian youth. This research examines the patterns of alcohol use and related problem behaviour among male and female Ethiopian youth participating in after-school programs and youth centres. For all alcohol substances (i.e., beer, wine and liquor such as vodka and whiskey), boys were significantly more inclined to drink than girls. The patterns of alcohol use among Ethiopian youth tend to be more similar to those of high-risk youth placed in alternative schools because of learning difficulties and/or behavioural problems than those of other high-school-age youth in the country. Their alcohol use and related problem behaviour, especially driving a car or motorcycle after drinking or being a passenger in a car or on a motorcycle when the driver had been drinking, should be targeted for further study and prevention purposes. Also, gender differences in prevalence of alcohol use among Ethiopian youth should be monitored to verify what may be a growing problem among females in the country.

Introduction

Jewish people from Ethiopia have been immigrating to Israel since 1973; presently, there are about 100,000 residents in the country. Difficulties with Hebrew language, high rates of unemployment, low socioeconomic status and prejudice have been common place and linked to integration difficulties

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(Buckard, 2001; Lifshits, Noam, & Habib, 1998; Ringel, Ronell, & Getahun, 2005). "The Ethiopian population has the highest rate of poverty of any social group in Israel" (ORT, 2007). Research on Ethiopian youth in Israel is sparse; however, problems with school drop out, delinquency and substance use have been reported (Edelstein & Bar-Hamburger, 2003; Kogan, Luo, Brody, & Murry, 2005; Ringel et al., 2005).

In the United States and Europe, substance use has been particularly characteristic of males (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2002; Springer, Sambrano, Sale, & Kasim, 2002; Thom, 2003). Recent findings, however, reveal changes in use patterns based on gender status. A US survey, for example, shows the same percentage (9%) of females and males aged 12 to 17 dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug (Office of Applied Studies, 2004). Female, more than male, arrestees and detainees report drug dependence and polydrug use (Kim & Fendrich, 2002). In Britain, females tend to drink more on a weekly basis and binge drink (Join Together Online, 2004). Among high-risk Israeli youth placed in alternative schools because of learning difficulties and or behaviour problems, males and females have similar patterns of being in a car or on a motorcycle with a driver who had been drinking (Isralowitz & Reznik, 2006). In a major comparative study of Russian-speaking immigrant and native-born Israeli adults, comparisons by gender reflect higher drug severity scores for females (Isralowitz, Reznik, Spear, Brecht, & Rawson, 2007).

The purpose of this article is to report the patterns of alcohol use and related problem behaviour among male and female Ethiopian youth and to discuss the need for additional research that may contribute to policy and service provision targeting this high-risk population.

Methods

This exploratory study consisted of a purposive sample of 110 Ethiopian youth—54% (59) male and 46% (51) female, 12–18 years old, with a median age of 15. The data were collected at after-school programs and youth centres in Beer-Sheva, the largest city in the southern region of the country. Data were collected during a 3-month period in 2005.

The study youth were asked to complete a simply worded questionnaire. Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Resources Center, Ben Gurion University, staff responsible for distributing the questionnaire were available to help youth understand the questions if necessary. Data were collected in a voluntary and anonymous manner complying with human subject guidelines. The data-collection instrument consisted of 31 questions about background characteristics, life time and last 30 day alcohol use patterns and problem behaviour including binge drinking (i.e., five or more drinks per drinking occasion), driving a car or motorcycle after drinking, and being a passenger in a car or on a motorcycle when the driver had been drinking. Many of the questions were similar to those

used for the Monitoring the Future—Adolescent Drug Use Survey (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2004) and the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004). The questionnaire was prepared in English, translated to Hebrew and then back translated. The data-collection instrument was examined for construct validity and reliability purposes by the Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, University of California, Los Angeles, and found to be acceptable for this study (Reiber, 2002). Also, program staff working with the Ethiopian youth reviewed the instrument before data collection. Chi-square and *t* test analyses were used to examine the study data.

Results

Lifetime alcohol use was used to compare the youth. For all alcohol substances (i.e., beer, wine and liquor such as vodka and whiskey) boys were significantly more inclined to drink than girls. Results showed the following use patterns: beer (63% boys, 29% girls, $\chi^2 = 11.739$, $p < 0.001$); wine (55% boys, 22% girls, $\chi^2 = 12.29$, $p < 0.001$); and liquor (54% boys, 18% girls, $\chi^2 = 15.15$, $p < 0.001$). No significant differences were found among the boys and girls for age of first use. The mean ages (in years) were: beer (13.6 boys, 14.2 girls); wine (13.7 boys, 13.4 girls); and, liquor (13.8 boys, 15.0 girls). When last 30 day use was compared, significant gender differences were found for beer (47% boys, 28% girls, $\chi^2 = 4.23$, $p < 0.05$) and liquor (44% boys, 16% girls, $\chi^2 = 9.44$, $p < 0.01$) but not wine (37.7% boys, 22% girls; $\chi^2 = 3.028$, *ns*) (see Table I).

Table I. Alcohol use.

Variables	Values	Boys (<i>N</i> = 59)	Girls (<i>N</i> = 51)	Total (<i>N</i> = 110)	df	<i>t</i> or χ^2
Beer: life time	Yes	62.5%	29.4%	46.7%	1	11.739***
	No	37.5%	70.6%	53.3%		
Beer: age of first use <i>Mean (SD)</i>		13.61 (1.699)	14.18 (1.662)		32	0.927
Wine: life time	Yes	55.4%	22.0%	39.6%	1	12.286***
	No	44.6%	78.0%	60.4%		
Wine: age of first use <i>Mean (SD)</i>		13.71 (2.144)	13.43 (1.988)		22	0.297
Hard liquor: life time	Yes	54.2%	18.0%	37.6%	1	15.145***
	No	45.8%	82.0%	62.4%		
Hard liquor: age of first use <i>Mean (SD)</i>		13.80 (1.196)	15.00 (1.871)		23	1.793
Beer: last 30 days	Yes	47.4%	28.0%	38.3%	1	4.228*
Wine: last 30 days	No	52.6%	72.0%	61.7%	1	3.028
	Yes	37.7%	22.0%	30.1%		
Hard liquor: last 30 days	No	62.3%	78.0%	69.9%	1	9.441**
	Yes	43.6%	16.0%	30.5%		
	No	56.4%	84.0%	69.5%		

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table II. Binge drinking and other alcohol-related problem behaviour.

Variables	Values	Boys (<i>N</i> = 59)	Girls (<i>N</i> = 51)	Total (<i>N</i> = 110)	df	χ^2
Binge drinking	Yes	49.1%	19.6%	35.2%	1	10.282***
	No	50.9%	80.4%	64.8%		
Passenger in a car when the driver had been drinking	Yes	12.3%	7.8%	10.2%	1	0.579
	No	87.7%	92.2%	89.8%		
Driving a car after drinking	Yes	14.3%	2.0%	8.4%	1	5.263
	No	85.7%	98.0%	91.6%		

Note: * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Alcohol-related problem behaviour results show that boys (49%) more than girls (20%) were inclined to binge drink during the last 30 days ($\chi^2 = 10.28$, $p < 0.001$). Those who reported driving a car or motorcycle after drinking were 15 years of age and older (16%) and mostly male. No significant differences were found among the boys and girls for being a passenger in a car or motorcycle when the driver had been drinking (12% boys, 8% girls) (see Table II).

Discussion

The present study is descriptive and a number of limitations may affect the ability to generalize the findings. First, adolescents can be suspicious about information gathering and as such may provide arbitrary or inconsistent responses (Hawke, Hennen, & Gallione, 2005). Another limitation of this study is that data were collected from after-school and community-based programs in one population centre of the country. It is believed, however, that the population studied is comparable to other Ethiopian adolescents living with low socio-economic conditions elsewhere in the country.

Findings show that Ethiopian boys drink more than girls and engage more in alcohol-related problem behaviour. These results are consistent with other studies of alcohol use based on gender (Isralowitz & Reznik, 2006; Opland, Winters, & Stinchfield, 1995; Treiman & Beck, 1996). Also, present results show that the pattern of Ethiopian youth alcohol use is similar to that of high-risk youth placed in alternative schools because of learning difficulties and/or behavioural problems (Isralowitz & Rawson, 2006; Isralowitz & Reznik, 2006). The present study last 30 day alcohol use results compared to national high-school survey data (Bar Hamburger, Rahav, Teichman, Gil, & Rosenblum, 2002) show Ethiopian youth have significantly higher levels of beer and liquor use than other Israeli youth—beer (38% vs. 21%); hard liquor (31% vs. 16%).

Underage drinking and driving is a serious behaviour problem. In the United States, 25% of the drivers, particularly male between ages 15–20, who died in motor-vehicle accidents had been drinking alcohol (US Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2004).

This rate is more than twice that for alcohol-involved drivers 21 and older (Yi, Williams, & Dufour, 2001). In Israel, the minimum legal driving age of a motorcycle and car are 16 and 17. The minimum legal drinking age is 18. The study results show that there is underage driving and drinking among Ethiopian youth and the rate is comparable to other high-risk youth in the country. This is a serious problem in need of research that should include periodic monitoring and be applied to prevention efforts. Also, Ethiopian youth gender differences in prevalence of alcohol use should be monitored to verify what may be a growing problem among females in the country.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the cooperation of Iris Gelbort, Noah Sitton, and community-based program staff involved with this research initiative. Also, gratitude is expressed to the US–Israel Educational Foundation for its support of Adam Layton under the Fulbright Program.

Declaration of interest: The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

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