

Early Alcohol Use, Rural Residence, and Adulthood Employment

Early onset of alcohol consumption may increase the risk of physical disease and psychological disorders. The relationship between alcohol consumption during youth/early adulthood and subsequent employment is not fully known. With fewer opportunities for corrective intervention, the consequences of abusive drinking during youth or young adulthood may be greater for rural residents. The purpose of this study was to determine whether alcohol use in youth and early adulthood was more likely to result in adverse employment outcomes among youth living in rural areas than urban youth. The study draws information regarding youth alcohol use patterns and adult employment from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth – 1979, which has been following a panel of young persons recruited in 1979 for more than 20 years. Rural was defined as living outside any Metropolitan Statistical Area. In the analysis, residence was defined as the area where the person resided in 1982-1984, when the drinking behaviors occurred.

Key Findings:

Drinking behaviors in youth/early adulthood

- Nearly half (47.6%) of respondents reported drinking before age 18, and 55.3% reported binge drinking.
- One in five respondents (19.7%) in 1984 reported alcohol dependency related aggression (DRA) symptoms, and 23.5% alcohol dependency related loss of control (DRLC) symptoms. One in ten respondents (9.7%) indicated that drinking affected their school or work performance.
- Rural youth surveyed in 1979-1983 were as likely as their urban counterparts to start drinking before the age of 18, binge drink before 18, and report that work or school was impacted by drinking. Rural youth were more likely to report 3 of 11 dependency-related symptoms: arguing heatedly while drinking, difficulty stopping drinking once begun, and loss of memory while drinking, but did not differ on other measures.

Employment outcomes

- In unadjusted analysis, respondents who lived in rural areas in 1982-1984 were as likely as those who lived in urban areas in youth to report being employed in 1998. Rural respondents were more likely to earn less than 125% of the federal poverty level, work more hours per week, earn irregular compensation (contracts, tips, and commission), and not receive health benefits.
- The relationships among residence, drinking behaviors, and employment quality showed no fixed pattern. For example, irregular compensation was associated with rural early-onset drinkers, rural residents with DRA or DRLC symptoms, and rural binge drinkers respectively; however, it was also associated with urban binge drinkers and rural youth whose drinking does *not* impact work or school. These findings suggest that residence does not affect the relationship between early drinking behaviors and the quality of employment in adulthood. Rural residence does not provide added risk or protection to the effects of drinking during youth on adulthood employment.

A full copy of the report can be obtained from the SC Rural Health Research Center at <http://rhr.sph.sc.edu>