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Alcohol Abuse and Dependence Among College Students

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Abstract: Alcohol abuse and dependence among college students has become a serious social issue. Explained are the reasons to why college students abuse alcohol, and also some reasons for them to seek treatment. The boundary is college students ages 18-24. The eight factors that lead to abuse and dependence are: peer pressure, social cohesion, fear to fit in, low self-esteem, personal goals, access to alcohol, guidance problems, and the "party gene". Six problems associated with abuse and dependence are: extreme sexual behavior, life goals, realization, struggling grades, work problems, and health problems. In conclusion, there are steps toward reducing alcohol abuse and dependence among college students, but some students believe it to be "American Culture" rather than other social forces.

Introduction: Alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is not only the problems of the individuals that play this role, but also public/social issues which call for social reform. This basic problem takes place solely in college, and the only individuals in college are college students. "A nation wide survey showed that college binge drinking is among parents' top concerns" (Binge Drinking is 2001). The main reason for parents to have thoughts associated with this, is because of the numerous problems associated with college binge drinking. It starts with binge drinking, and leads to something far beyond bingeing and alcohol abuse. It leads to alcohol dependence and the many problems that follow this disease.

The following research will explain in more detail many of the factors, problems, and reasons for alcohol abuse and dependence among college students. It will explain some of the motives and goals of the students. It will identify a students desire to drink to cope. It will purse alcohol relating to death and injury. It will identify the many peer pressures and intangibles that lead a student into drinking patterns of behavior. Finally, it will introduce the possibilities of what steps can be done to subdue, or even eliminate, these problems. Through this research, it will become clear that this is not just the problem of one student, or of many students. Alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is a problem that is taking place this instant. It is a problem that our society faces as a whole. Alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is a social issue.

The social system this paper focuses on is college students. College students have many reasons why they are animatly involved in binge drinking which leads to abuse and ultimately dependence. The social elements are parents, teachers/counselors, peers, bar

owners, fraternity/sorority members, and group/club members. The basic ideas and reasons for each element are as follows: Parents set the stage and set the standard for how they would like their son/daughter/students to behave. Teachers/counselors give aide and advice mainly to students who ask. Peers expect college friends to act similar if not equal. Bar owners aim a lot of their business toward college students.

Fraternity/sorority members are large social groups that base a lot of their activities on alcohol. Groups/clubs (outside of fraternities and sororities) are not widely offered or highly attended in college. The system boundary is college students ages 18-24. Most articles do research via surveys that only include information about students ranging from 18-24. The four internal relationships in my social system are: 1. Easy access to alcohol. 2. A gene causing alcohol abuse and dependence. 3. Fraternity and sorority parties. 4. Bad/no guidance. 5. Bad/no involvement in groups or clubs offered by the University. Both the internal and external relationships of my social system are main reasons for why college students binge drink and become alcohol abusive and dependent (see figure 1).

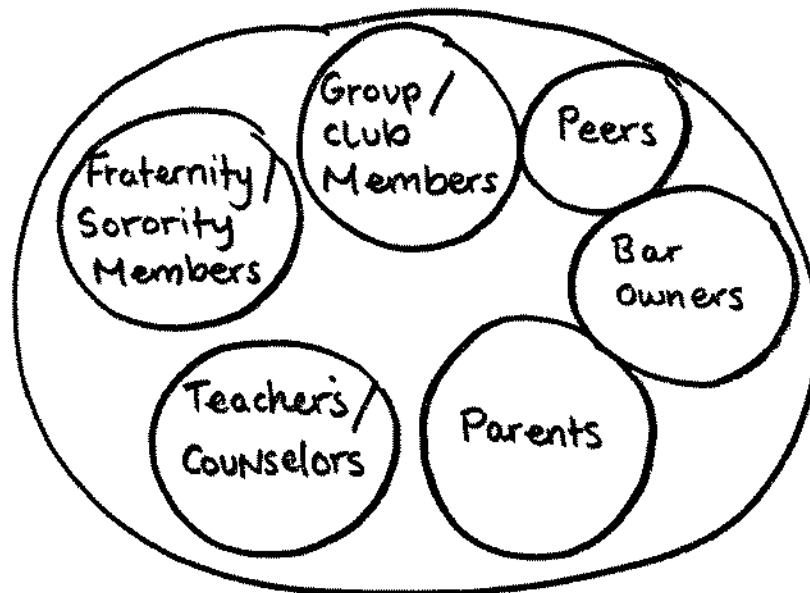
Method: The research presented in this paper is secondary research that was collected from at least fifteen different references. The research was gathered from the San Diego State Love Library in the periodical portion of the library. Also, information and research were found on the Internet by using online search engines. The periodical information was more prestigious in terms of credibility than was the online articles. However, both had very extensive information from which to choose from. Also, the research had a variety of models and graphs from which to choose from. Finally, after

Figure 1: Social Systems Model for Alcohol Abuse and Dependence Among College Students

Social System: College students

Elements: College students, parents, teachers/counselors, peers, bars, groups/clubs, fraternities/sororities

System Boundary: College students ages 18-24



Relationships:

Internal: Easy to access alcohol, a gene that causes abuse and dependence, drinking to cope with distress, life goals.

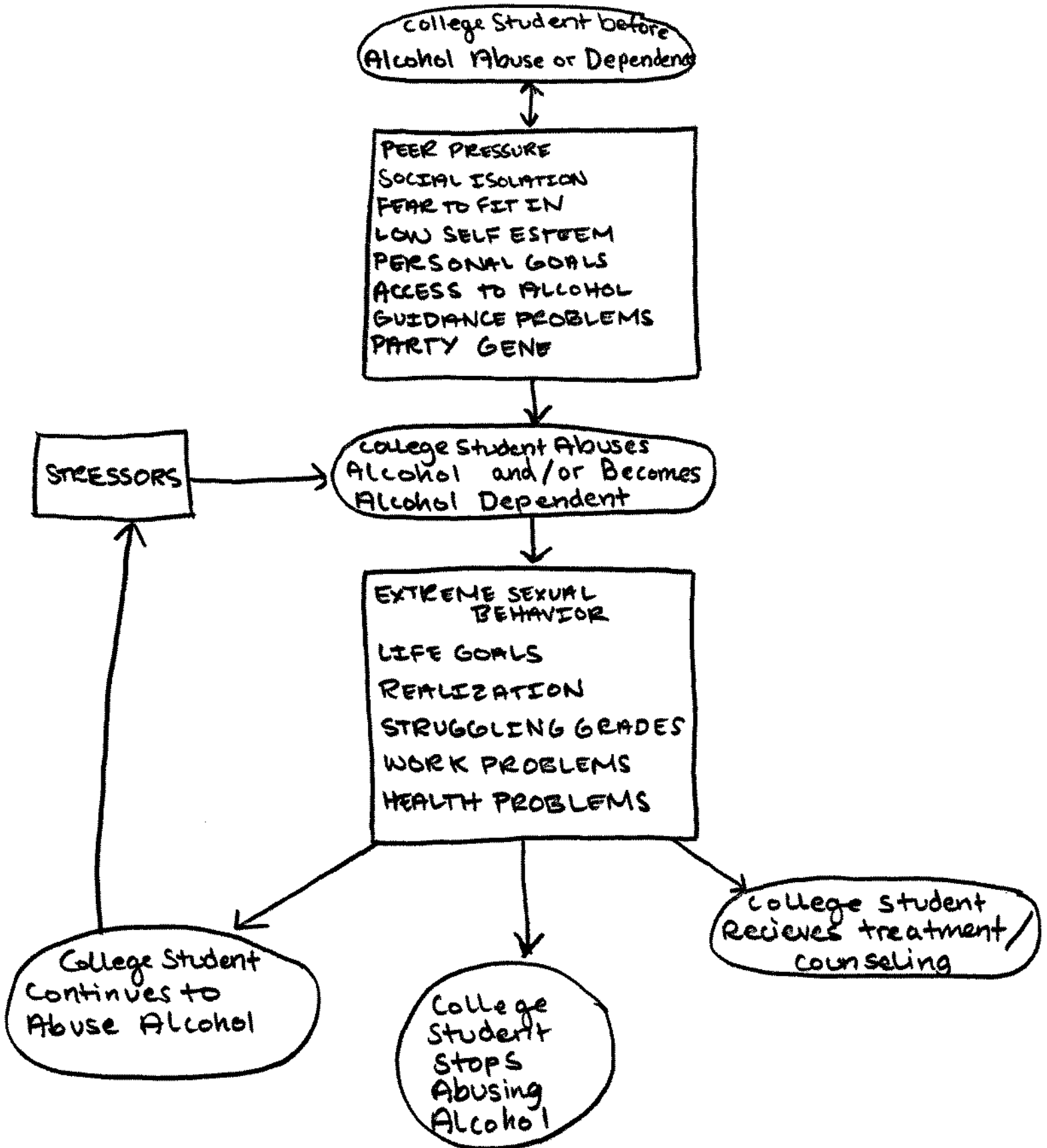
External: Peer pressure and conformity, dollar beer nights at local bars (towards students), fraternity/sorority parties, bad/no guidance, bad/no involvement in groups.

reviewing all of the references, a conclusion as to what would be used was presented and completed.

Results: The research shows that there are several reasons as to why college students are led into alcohol abuse and dependence. Each reason is based on the conclusion that either one or all of the reasons had something to do with alcohol abuse and dependence among college students.

The state/process dynamic model of this paper shows the reasons to why college students abuse alcohol, and also some reasons and problems for them to seek treatment/counseling (see figure 2). The first problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is peer pressure. "Drinking rates tend to be highest among incoming freshmen, members of fraternities/sororities, and athletes" (Preboth 2002:2595). Students are being put into numerous positions where they are expected to drink. Being a freshman, in a fraternity/sorority, or being an athlete, are added pressures where students are put into peer-pressure positions. When they are put into these positions, their peers either offer alcohol, which is accepted or denied, or question the students' intentions as to why they are not consuming alcohol. When one is put into a situation like this, it is very difficult to go against one's peers, and they often fall victim to peer pressure. "Nearly 75% of students living in sorority or fraternity houses are binge drinkers" (Binge Drinking Remains 2002). Because fraternity/sorority houses expect their members to act and function like one (all doing the same thing), when they have an event that includes alcohol, they are expected to go along with the group. As seen in one recent study, 49% of college students at fraternity parties binge drink (Harford 2002:730)

Figure 2: State Process Dynamic Model of Alcohol Abuse Among College Students



(see figure 3). This large percentage of binge drinkers at fraternity parties has to do with the involvement of peer pressure. Peer pressure causes the individual to make a decision based on what his or her peer's think is socially acceptable. If one's peers want them to drink, they often succumb to their peer's wishes.

The second problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is social cohesion. In this paper, social cohesion refers to a college student having a large group of friends and being very socially active. In an article about abuse and dependence, it states that students who said that parties were important to them, belonged to a fraternity or sorority, lived with a roommate, had five or more friends, socialized four or more hours per day, and studied for fewer than five hours per day were more likely to be diagnosed with alcohol abuse or dependence (Knight et al. 2002:267). Basically, the more social you are, the more likely you are to be alcohol abusive or dependent.

The third problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is fear to fit in. As students, especially freshman, meet new people and create new friends, there is a large amount of pressure for them to fit in. "A recent study conducted by the University of California found that the percentage of college freshman who report drinking beer frequently is down to 48.3%, a record low. The data compiled by the American Freshman 2000 survey contrasts with data from 1982, when 73.7% of college freshman reported drinking beer frequently or occasionally" (Alcohol Abuse 2002). This article helps to show that the fear for almost every student is the fear of not being accepted and not fitting in with the norm of society. Because freshman are so

Figure 3: Binge Drinking by College Students in Selected Settings

TABLE 6. Heavy drinking (5+ drinks) at select settings among drinkers by gender, college residence, year in school and legal drinking age, in percent

	Dorm party		Frat party		Off-campus party		Off-campus bar	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Total	39.8	3,112	49.0	3,868	45.5	8,919	37.4	7,653
Gender								
Female	39.3	1,696	39.2	2,253	34.3	5,168	29.4	4,622
Male	52.4	1,416	62.6	1,615	61.1	3,751	49.7	3,031
Residence								
Same-sex dorm	38.2	626	45.3	726	40.5	1,277	32.4	953
Coed dorm	41.9	1,842	52.4	1,643	49.7	2,978	39.9	2,149
Off-campus without parents	37.0	482	48.3	1,290	46.8	3,714	40.1	3,604
Off-campus with parents	30.6	162	39.4	209	36.5	950	26.3	947
Year in school								
Freshman	41.9	1,207	53.4	1,455	51.6	2,396	43.3	1,357
Sophomore	39.8	905	47.7	1,031	48.2	2,250	40.0	1,457
Junior	36.1	619	45.4	826	42.7	2,363	37.2	2,324
Senior	39.2	381	45.4	556	38.3	1,910	33.0	2,515
Legal age, years								
Less than 21	40.5	2,348	50.6	2,834	49.3	5,499	40.9	3,287
21 and older	37.5	764	44.6	1,034	39.6	3,420	34.8	4,364

Source:

Harford, Thomas C., Mark Seibring, and Henry Wechsler. 2002. "Attendance and Alcohol Use at Parties and Bars in College: A National Survey of Current Drinkers." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 63:726-733.

vulnerable to want to mesh with other students, they tend to experience binge drinking or alcohol abuse as a means of satisfying their desire.

The fourth problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is low self-esteem. Low self-esteem can be produced from a variety of reasons, but it can also cause a student to have numerous problems, including alcohol abuse or dependence. Low self-esteem can cause a student to feel worthless and meaningless, flushing the student into a whirlpool of binge drinking where they feel like they may drown. A student may drink to cope with their low self-esteem by drinking more and more to meet their wishful level of intoxication. "When asked whether they used alcohol to cope 42.3% said yes. When the use of alcohol to cope with a specific situation was examined, 37.6% reported using alcohol to cope at least slightly with a recent stressor" (Levenson and Park 2002:490). Students are drinking to enable themselves to cope with problems that are creating stress in their lives. They see it as a means of escaping reality.

The fifth problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is personal goals. Depending on whether or not the student was goal oriented, or pushed to accomplish goals, resulted in whether or not the students abused alcohol. The students that had many motives toward life accomplishments or were very goal oriented, were much more likely not to be alcohol dependent. They were also much more likely not to have any alcohol problems, according to Croteau, Lecci, and Maclean (2002:622). If students base their motives on weekend party habits, the likelihood that they will have drinking problems is very high. However, if students start spending their time mapping a personal future with goals as a primary function, there will be a major decline in alcohol abuse and dependence.

The sixth problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is access to alcohol. Many students find it particularly easy to receive alcohol. It is sold on virtually every street corner, and there seems to always be some type of discount or sale on alcohol near the Universities to persuade the students into buying their product. Not to mention, when students go to parties, there is alcohol everywhere. Because alcohol is so easy to access for students, it only complicates the problems of alcohol abuse and dependence more. If it were to become less receivable, alcohol abuse and dependence would be at lower levels.

The seventh problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is guidance problems. The students who have received more guidance and support from parents, teachers, and counselors were less likely to binge drink. “Based on data gathered from 17,592 student surveys from 140 colleges across the country, the researchers found that students at schools with above-average levels of social capital were 26% less likely to binge drink than were students at schools with below average levels. Social capital being measured as community commitment to volunteerism” (Broad 2001:1). Students that are not guided in the right direction follow some or all of the last seven problems that were just discussed. However, students that are guided in the right direction and have received good guidance will be less influential involving alcohol when it comes to peer pressure, fear to fit in, and low self-esteem.

The eighth problem that leads to alcohol abuse and dependence among college students is the “party gene”. An inherited gene that causes some students to drink more than others. “The gene in question comes in two versions, or alleles: long and short. People with two short alleles are more prone to anxiety and are more susceptible to

depression triggered by adverse experiences. Now it appears they are more likely to get drunk. Those with two short alleles were more likely to binge drink and set out to get drunk” (Holden 2003:3). If more and more students inherit the party gene, there will be and increase in the amount of alcohol abusive and dependent college students. Finally, if students follow one or all of the last eight problems that lead a student to becoming alcohol abusive and dependent, the next issue for them is to actually become alcohol abusive and dependent.

There are six problems that the student has once they become alcohol abusive and dependent. Problem one is extreme sexual behavior. Students that abuse alcohol find that they have unwanted sex more often due to their decreased motor skills and inhibitions. In a survey since the beginning of the school year alcohol has caused nearly 109,448 students to have sexual intercourse when they were so intoxicated that they could not consent (Heeren et al. 2002:141). Also, many college students report being too intoxicated to know whether or not they had given consent to having sex (Branch 2002:D-14). College students do not understand the dangers of sexual behavior, and alcohol just makes these concepts impossible to understand. Problem two is life goals. Students suffering from alcohol abuse and dependence have no concept of life goals what so ever. Their goal is achieving a drunken status, even if it is during a midterm, or final. Not too much matters except getting drunk for these students. In 1998, a total of 245,589 people (not just college students) received treatment from alcohol abuse facilities (see figure 4). In 1997, there were 9.4 million college students between 18-24 years of age (Curry 1998). These students are not receiving treatment because they do not realize they have a problem. Problem three is realization. The student has no concept of realization

Figure 4: Clients and Facilities for Substance Abuse

Table 277. Substance Abuse Treatment Facilities and Clients: 1995 to 1998

[As of 12/31/98. Based on the Uniform Facility Data Set (UFDS) survey, a census of all known facilities that provide substance abuse treatment in the United States and associated jurisdictions. Selected missing data for responding facilities were imputed]

Item	Number	Type of care and type of problem	Number of clients, '98	Client characteristic	Number of clients, '98
FACILITIES		Total	1,038,378	Total	1,038,378
1995	10,746	Outpatient rehab	915,798	Under 18 yrs	100,322
1996	10,641	24-hour rehab	108,627	18 to 24 yrs	182,966
1997	10,860	24-hour detoxification	13,953	25 to 34 yrs	282,467
1998	13,155			35 to 44 yrs	293,561
				45 to 64 yrs	162,795
				65 yrs and over	16,247
CLIENTS		Drug only	279,224	Male	715,478
1995	1,009,127	Alcohol only	245,589	Female	322,899
1996	940,141	Both alcohol & drug	513,565	White, non-Hispanic	605,793
1997	929,086			Black, non-Hispanic	247,840
1998	1,038,378	Total with a drug problem ¹	792,789	Hispanic	140,499
		Total with an alcohol problem ²	759,154	Asian, Pacific Islander	9,300
				American Indian ³	26,724
				Other	8,222

¹ The sum of clients with a drug problem and clients with both diagnoses. ² The sum of clients with an alcohol problem and clients with both diagnoses. ³ Includes Alaskan native.

Source: U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Uniform Facility Data Set (UFDS): Annual surveys for 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998.*

Source:

Index to the Statistical Abstract of the United States. 2000. Retrieved November 11, 2003 (<http://www.census.gov>).

because it doesn't matter anymore. Whether or not they lose their job or get kicked out of school just doesn't seem real at this point. They don't even believe that they are alcohol dependent and drink heavily. "Heavy drinkers on campus usually describe themselves as moderate drinkers. If someone does not think they have a problem, they are unlikely to listen to messages directed at people who have that problem" (Marcus 2000:53). The main problem is college students do not want to believe or even realize that it is possible for them to become addicted to alcohol. This results in these students continuing to abuse alcohol in heavy amounts. Problem four is struggling grades. How can a student who is alcohol dependent, not to mention alcohol abusive, keep up in school and achieve high grades? Basically the student will suffer great losses in achievement due to their problem. Problem five is work problems. Whether or not they develop problems at work or problems with working with people, it is very hard for them to maintain a good work ethic and/or stay worker friendly in retrospect with working with people. Problem six is health problems. "We estimate that in 1998 there were approximately 1,400 unintentional, alcohol-related fatal injuries among college students ages 18-24: approximately 1,100 traffic and 300 non-traffic unintentional, alcohol-related fatal injuries" (Heeren et al. 2002:139) (see figure 5). A student's health should be their primary concern, but this is not always the case. Once a student becomes alcohol abusive and dependent their health is not their number one priority. Their number one priority is to abuse alcohol.

Conclusion: In this paper, secondary research gave seven reasons to the causes of alcohol abuse and dependence among college students. The paper then gave six resulting

Figure 5: Annual estimated college student alcohol related injury deaths

TABLE 1. 1998 estimated U.S. 18-24 year old college student alcohol-related injury deaths

Alcohol-related motor vehicle crash deaths	
18-24 year-old alcohol-related motor vehicle crash deaths ^a	3,674
Percentage of 18-24 year olds who are college students ^b	31%
Number of 18-24 year old college student alcohol-related motor vehicle crash deaths	1,138
Alcohol-related unintentional, nontraffic deaths	
Number of 18-24 year old unintentional injury deaths ^c	10,052
Number of 18-24 year old motor vehicle crash deaths ^d	7,444
Percentage of unintentional nontraffic injury deaths that are alcohol related ^d	38%
Percentage of 18-24 year olds who are college students ^b	31%
Number of 18-24 year old college student alcohol-related unintentional injuries	307
Total	1,445

^a NHTSA (1999), Fatal Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data. ^bNational Center for Education Statistics (1999). ^cCDC Unintentional Injury Fatalities (2000). ^dBased on meta-analysis of 331 medical examiner studies.

Source:

Heeren, T., R.W. Hingson, A. Kopstein, H. Wechsler, and R.C. Zakocs. 2002. "Magnitude of Alcohol-Related Mortality and Morbidity Among U.S. College Students Ages 18-24." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 63:136-144.

problems due to alcohol abuse and dependence. The main reasons for alcohol abuse and dependence among college students being a social issue are with six resulting problems (problems 1-6). These problems must be faced, and answers must be available.

“Researchers speculate that participating in volunteer activities helps protect students from the urge to binge drink” (Helping Others 2001). Volunteering is just one step in the right direction toward fixing this issue. “Its efforts include eliminating alcohol-industry sponsorships of athletics, mandating parental notification if underage students are caught with alcohol, increasing alcohol-free social events on campus and encouraging local tavern owners to eliminate drink specials geared toward students” (Binge Drinking is 2001). The less access the students have to alcohol, the less likely they will become alcohol abusive and dependent. By eliminating alcohol sponsorships, creating alcohol-free social events, and ridding tavern and bar specials, it makes alcohol less available to the students. Also, students that receive counseling find it easier to understand they have a problem and to face their problem rather than hide it, or deny it. Basically, if college students do more volunteer work, have less access to alcohol, have better guidance, and/or receive counseling to assist them with their problems, it will create a chain reaction. This chain reaction will help the students to be more likely to develop personal goals, and to be more responsible with binge drinking and alcohol abuse and dependence. However, “About 40% of college students binge drink” (Preboth 2002:2595). Not to mention, they believe it to be the norm for college students to drink. “It’s part of the American College Culture. I don’t know of any college where a large part of the student body isn’t drinking on weekends,” (Harvard Study Finds 2002). If college students really believe that drinking is a part of the American college culture, than these efforts to reduce

and eliminate alcohol abuse and dependence among college students will never happen,
and this social issue will continue until change occurs.

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Appendix: The author is a junior at San Diego State University studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. He is very interested in baseball and in learning about the different religions of the world. He spends a lot of time reading to increase his knowledge, and highly appraises sleeping. He chose to do research on alcohol abuse and dependence among college students because he wanted to understand why so many students turn to drinking, and even more seemed to plan their lives around drinking. The only way for him to come to a conclusion about the topic was to read a lot of sociological journals and listen to what the “experts” had to say in regard to the topic.