

NEWS RELEASE

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Embargoed Until:

August 17, 2009

Release No. 09-45

Embargoed until August 17, 2009

National Survey Reveals Binge Drinking in Older Americans

ARLINGTON, Va. (August 17, 2009)—Binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks on the same occasion within the past 30 days, was reported by 14 percent of men and 3 percent of women age 65 or older, according to a study published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

These numbers raise significant safety concerns because the health risks of binge drinking increase as individuals age, and binge drinking is often missed by common screening methods, according to Dan G. Blazer, M.D., Ph.D., and Li-Tzy Wu, Sc.D., of Duke University, who analyzed data related to the drinking habits of middle-aged and elderly adults from the 2005 and 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

The authors found even higher rates of binge drinking in the 50-64 age group: 23 percent of men and 9 percent of women. Because binge drinking is not associated with psychological distress, it may be overlooked by health care providers.

“We feel that our findings are important to the public health of middle-aged and elderly persons as they point to a potentially unrecognized problem that often ‘flies beneath’ the typical screen for alcohol problems in psychiatry practices,” Dr. Blazer said. “Clinicians who work with this age group would be well advised to ask specifically about binge drinking.”

Among all respondents age 50 or older, binge drinkers were more likely to use tobacco or illicit drugs than were those reporting no alcohol use. Gender-specific features associated with binge drinking were higher income and not being married in men and nonmedical use of prescription drugs and being employed in women.

Survey results for nearly 11,000 adults age 50 or older will be reported online on August 17 at [*AJP in Advance*](#), the online advance edition of *The American Journal of Psychiatry (AJP)*, the official journal of the American Psychiatric Association. The study was supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Duke University Medical Center. Any other funding the authors may have received is disclosed in the article itself.

The American Journal of Psychiatry is the oldest continuously published medical specialty journal in the United States and was recently named one of the “Most Influential Journals in Biology & Medicine of the Last 100 Years.” Statements in this press release or the articles in the *Journal* are not official policy statements of the American Psychiatric Association.

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