

Student Perceptions of the Drinking Culture in Three Queensland Residential Colleges: Causes, Consequences and Recommendations

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Introduction: In recent years, residential colleges in Australia have been the subject of investigations into systemic cultural problems, including excessive alcohol consumption. In this mixed methods study, we conducted focus groups and a quantitative survey with student leaders at three residential colleges in Queensland, to explore current culture of colleges.

Aims: We aimed to investigate the current culture in residential colleges in Queensland, particularly around excessive drinking. We also sought student advice on effective alcohol interventions.

Design and Methods: 72 student leaders from three colleges participated in focus groups, in November 2020. Each focus group ran for 1.5-2 hours and included three sections: 1) a quantitative survey, 2) guided focus questions, 3) feedback on potential college alcohol interventions.

Results: Thematic analysis revealed students felt supported by the college environment, however themes supported the existence of a strong drinking culture, where alcohol plays a central role in students' social lives at college. Social processes appear to play a key role in maintaining a culture of excessive drinking. Quantitative data supported that binge drinking is still prominent in residential colleges: 93% of the students were hazardous drinkers, according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification test (WHO AUDIT).

Discussion and Conclusions: Analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data collected in these focus groups suggested that drinking remains a core component of the social lives of most residential students and that social influence is a major factor in the drinking behaviour of students. However, students reported positive cultural aspects, and were receptive to alcohol interventions.

Implications for Translational Research. This study was important for gaining insights into the current culture around alcohol use in residential colleges in Queensland. The insights students provided on drinking culture and potential interventions are crucial for developing effective interventions.

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