

Social Learning Theory and the Effects of Living Arrangement on Heavy Alcohol Use: Results from a National Study of College Students

Objective: This study examined the relationship between living arrangement and heavy episodic drinking among college students in the United States. Using social learning theory as a framework, it was hypothesized that vicarious learning of peer and family alcohol-use norms would mediate the effects of living arrangement on heavy episodic drinking. *Method:* Analyses were conducted using data from the 2001 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study, a national survey of full-time undergraduate students attending 4-year colleges or universities in the United States ($N = 10,008$). Logistic regression models examined the relationship between heavy episodic drinking and various measures of living arrangement and vicarious learning/social norms. Mediation of the effects of living arrangement was tested using both indirect and direct methods. *Results:* Both student living arrangement and vicarious-learning/social-norm variables remained significant predictors of heavy episodic drinking in multivariate models when controlling for a variety of individual characteristics. Slight mediation of the effects of living arrangement on heavy episodic drinking by vicarious learning/social norms was confirmed for some measures. *Conclusions:* Although vicarious learning of social norms does appear to play a role in the association between living arrangement and alcohol use, other processes may underlie the relationship. These findings suggest that using theory alongside empirical evidence to inform the manipulation of living environments could present a promising policy strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm in collegiate contexts.