

College Drinking in South Korea: Drinking Parties among college students

Tse Man Huen

The University of Hong Kong



Faculty of Arts
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Introduction

Drinking has become an **integral part** of life in South Korea, and it is known to be served different uses and varies from different life stages. However, most of the studies focus on the **hoesik culture** and social drinking of working labour, providing limited insight into the **college drinking** among peer college students.

Most researchers evaluate the problems brought by college drinking and defined the individuals with drinking problems as **problem drinkers** (Saunders 1993, 791), which labels college drinking as **negative** and **harmful** behaviour in the academic industry generally yet ignoring its **socio-cultural value**.

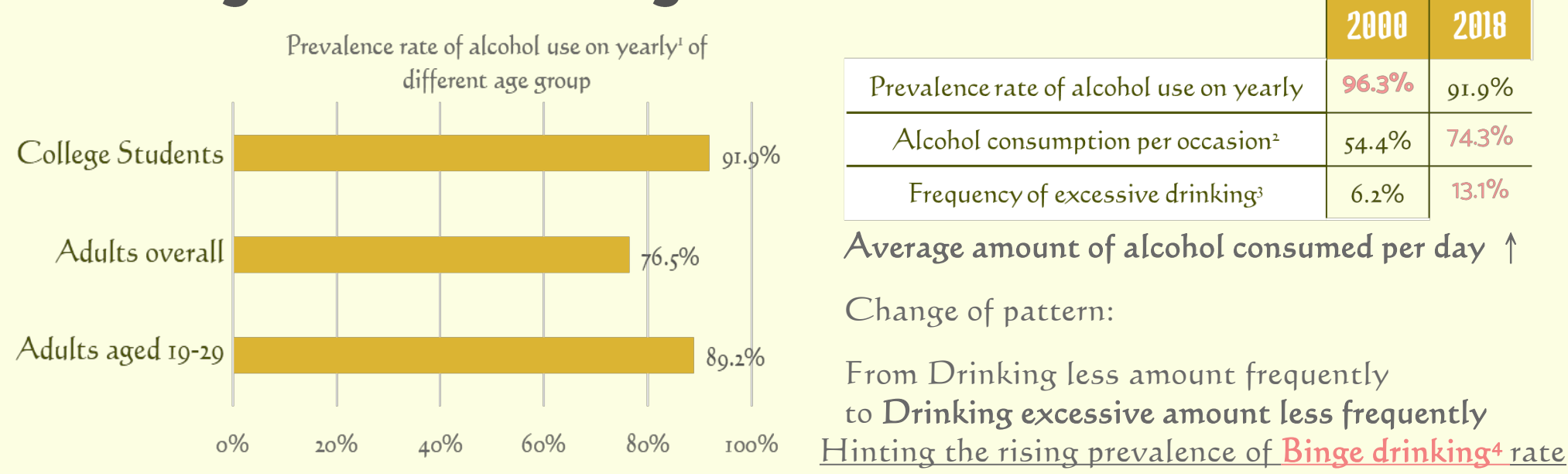
Drinking is a **social behaviour** determined by the society. The behaviours of drinking and the notion of alcohol recognized by groups in a society act as a form of **social norm**, which influences individual drinking behaviours (Borsari and Kate 2001, 412).

Korea is a **collectivist society** where individuals' behaviours are highly influenced by social norms (Bond and Peter 1996, 114) and have a unique drinking culture (Chun et al 2011, 36), the studies conducted among western college students **cannot reflect** the situation in Korean society precisely and can only be taken as a reference regarding the relationship between college drinking and social norms.

Thesis

The first part of the paper examines the **patterns** of college students' alcohol use in South Korea and evaluates the characteristics of Korean college **drinking behaviours**. The second part of the paper investigates the **drinking motives** of Korean college students by focusing on the two external motives concerning social norms in Korean society, be specific **social motives** and **conformity motives**. The paper then argues that drinking parties in college drinking are **essential** for students' well-being by considering the drinking parties' **roles** as an **organizational socialization tool** like *hoesik* does in the workplace but offering more freedom and emphasis on individual's desires.

Drinking Pattern of College Students



Drinking Behaviours of College students

People participate in drinking occasions in college drinking

College students usually drink the most frequently with **friends, seniors and juniors, schoolmates in the same department, friends of opposite gender and family and relatives** (UIF 2018, 91). This shows the high frequency of drinking with parties affiliated to **the college life circle**, thus implying college students attach high **importance** to their interrelationship in college.

Drinking Games

Drinking games are mainly played during **college drinking parties** with the aim of creating a **pleasant** atmosphere and engaging them to drink. College students usually make use of the opportunity to get close to seniors or juniors during the *ch'innongmoim*; while same year schoolmates also develop **intimacy** during the games (Yang and Song 2013, 95-96). However, the students are extremely easy to consume **excessive drinks** and get drunk, thus it is associated with **binge drinking**.

Statistic in 2001 shows that half of the respondents either do not or **seldomly** play drinking games. However, due to the change in drinking it is predictable that there may be a rise in frequency of participating in drinking games along with the increasing frequency of excessive drinking and binge drinking under the premise of drinking games are still common in binge drinking parties.

Occasion College Students Drink the Most

'**Social gathering with seniors, juniors or schoolmates in the same year**', '**the end of the exam**' and '**MT**' are the top 3 occasions college students drink the most (UIF 2018, 92).

The drinking behaviours on these occasions are highly associated with the **college culture** in Korea. **Freshmen welcoming party** is known as one of the occasions where seniors pressure incoming freshmen to drink, mostly **unwillingly**. This culture is not particular to Korean students, but also in some Asian countries. **MT** is also known as one of the occasions where college students **play games** and **binge drink** (KARF 2010, 111) and there is similar college culture in western countries as well.

Types of Alcohol Use of College Drinking

Same as Korean society, **soju** and **beer** dominant in the types of alcohol consumption among college students. Yet the statistics shed light on the **culture of mixing alcohol**, also known as *p'okt'anju* in Korea, refers to either mixing soju or whisky with beer (*somaek*). *P'okt'anju* is the most popular alcoholic drink among the **20s youngsters** in Korea (Bak 2017), proving making and drinking *p'okt'anju* as one of the common drinking behaviours in college drinking, since there is no empirical research studying the mixing of two or above kinds of alcoholic liquors into a beverage in other region's college drinking, *p'okt'anju* is regarded as one of the **unique** features of Korean college drinking culture.

Drinking Motives of College Students



Social motives of drinking refer to an individual **obtaining positive social rewards** by drinking alcohol. It is labelled as **positive** reinforcement social use drinking and is strongly endorsed, usually associate with moderate consumption of alcohol and drinking frequency. Individuals with such motives are more sensitive to one's drinking behaviours, thus less easy to excessive drink.

Social motives of college drinking include developing **senior-junior relationship** or meeting **friends of same school-year** or department.

Conformity motives refer to one **avoiding social rejection** by drinking alcohol. It is a **negative** reinforcement motives and more maladaptive and pathological type of drinking, thus less endorsed. Conformity motives are usually positively associate with drinking at **party occasions**. Infrequent drinkers with conformity motives directly predict drinking problems.

Typical occasion where college students drink by conformity motive are **freshmen welcoming party**, **MT** and **ch'innongmoim** with senior, students drink excessively to conforming perceived and social norms.

(Cooper 1994, 119,126-127)

Roles of Drinking Party in College Setting

Students join drinking parties to fulfil their social motives. Thus, the drinking party itself is a tool to facilitate information exchange and creating a pleasant atmosphere between so I evaluate the role of drinking party in a college setting by making use of the concept of **organizational socialization** to demonstrate the necessity of drinking parties in Korean college.

Organizational socialization is a process that an individual acquiring social skills and knowledge necessary to assume an organizational role (Van and Schein 1979, 211), and it occurs when one acquires the social skills and knowledge necessary to assume a particular job in an organization (Van 1978, 19). I consider drinking parties among college students also play a similar role in the college setting as *hoesik* does in a workplace setting.

Information Exchange

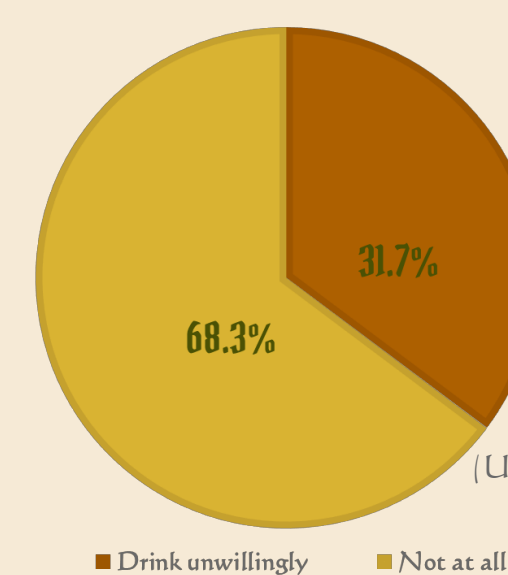
According to the **Social Cognitive theory** proposed by Bandura Albert in 1986, in the process interacting with others, people obtain information from one another, thus, the behavioural relationship is mutual (Saks and Ashforth 1997, 237). In college setting, active interaction between seniors, juniors, fellow schoolmates in the same department or year, and members of the same societies during the drinking parties such as senior *ch'innongmoim*, **MT**, and society activities can **facilitate mutual understanding** and learning among different parties.

Sense of belongingness

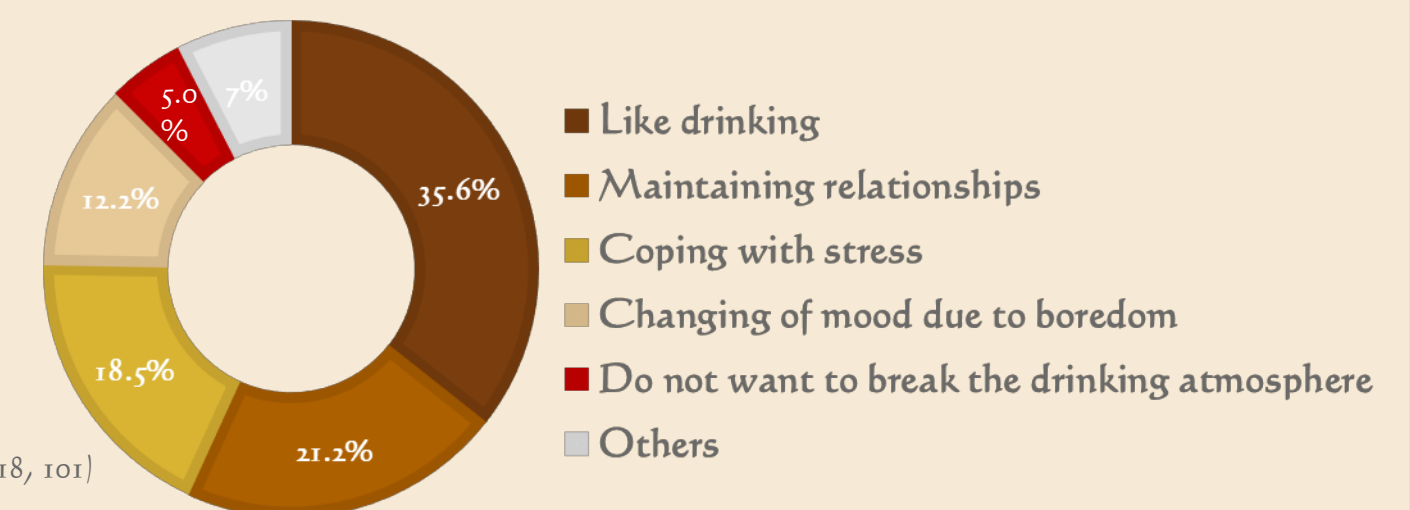
In terms of **Uncertainty Reduction theory** suggested by Oh, Chung, and Labianca, (2004, 860) newcomers usually have great anxiety when they enter a new organization, so they strive to reduce uncertainty through the organizational socialization process. In college context, the anxiety of freshmen caused by moving from a familiar environment to a new one lead to **rising necessity of knowing new friends** in college. Drinking party is a good occasion for the freshmen to know fellow and encourages a sense of belongingness to the college.

College Students' Attitude Towards Drinking Parties

Portion of Student Drinking Unwillingly in the Past 12 Months



Reason of College Students Drinking



Percentage of students drinking unwillingly is low and considering the top five reasons of drinking, three are associated with **positive reinforcement motives**, which are proved to be **negatively** associated with **drinking problems**. Furthermore, all top four reasons are based on students' own **desires** except the fifth one, hinting a prominent level of **active drinking**.

College students Vs Working Adults

Despite both groups have a positive attitude toward joining drinking parties than not joining, college students have a **higher self-efficacy** in joining drinking parties, which implies that colleges students have a higher desire on joining the occasions **actively**. The more positive evaluation about their decision not to join a drinking party also signifies a **higher freedom** on deciding whether to join the gathering (Lee et al. 2006, 493).

Conclusion

College drinking party is **essential** since drinking parties are deeply rooted in the college culture as an **organizational socialization tool** with a significant role in **exchanging information** and **building interpersonal relationship** as well as **the sense of belongingness** to achieve student's **well-being**.

By comparing the college drinking parties with *hoesik* to show the **freedom** and emphasis on **individuals' desires** of drinking parties in the college setting and suggest that even for students who frequently join drinking parties, it may not be problematic since the amount of alcohol consumption and drinking behaviours are highly associated with one's drinking **motives** and **desires**.

Acknowledgements

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1. Prevalence rate of alcohol use on yearly basis, referring to participants who had drunk alcohol during the previous year before the survey.
2. Alcohol consumption per occasion, referring to students reported drinking more than 5 standard drinks (one "standard" drink contains roughly 14 grams of pure alcohol, which is found in 12 ounces of regular beer, and 3 ounces of soju, which is typically about 20% alcohol (NIAAA, 2022)).
3. Frequency of excessive drinking, indicated as feeling drunk experiencing excessive drinking 6-11 times a year increased greatly (KARF 2010, 139).
4. Binge drinking is defined as consuming not less than 5 standard drinks for males and not less than 4 standard drinks for females within 2 hours based on the drinking level defined and is particularly prevalent among young people (NIAAA, 2022).
5. MT among college students is a Korean locution referring to 'membership training' between either members of clubs or seniors, juniors and schoolmates in the same department, the members usually travel on a short tour together for a few days and nights in order to build teamwork (KARF 2010, 111).
6. Ch'innongmoim is the Korean of social gathering, while here referring to the alcohol-involved general social gathering with seniors, juniors or fellow schoolmates in the same year.