

News Story 2: “Research shows women harder hit by hangovers.” *Sacramento Bee* (from Scripps Howard News Service) 15 September 2003, p. A7.

Study finds women suffer worse hangovers than men

By Lee Bowman, Scripps Howard News Service

In the life-is-not-fair category, new research finds that women not only get drunk on fewer drinks than men but women also suffer from worse hangovers.

A team at the University of Missouri-Columbia developed a new scientific scale for measuring hangover symptoms and severity. Even accounting for differences in the amount of alcohol consumed by men and women, hangovers hit women harder. “This finding makes biological sense, because women tend to weigh less and have lower percentages of total body water than men do, so they should achieve higher degrees of intoxication and, presumably, more hangover per unit of alcohol,” said Wendy Slutske, an associate professor of psychology who led the team. The study, supported by the National Institutes of Health, is being published Monday in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

The researchers asked 1,230 drinking college students, only 5 percent of them of legal drinking age, to describe how often they experienced any of 13 symptoms after drinking. The symptoms in the study ranged from headaches and vomiting to feeling weak and unable to concentrate.

Besides women, the study found that the symptoms were more common in students who reported having alcohol-related problems or who had one or both biological parents with a history of alcohol-related problems.

“We were surprised to discover how little research had been conducted on hangover, because the research that does exist suggests that hangover could be an important factor in problem drinking,” said Thomas Piasecki, an assistant professor of clinical psychology who took part in the study.

Other research has pinpointed hangover impairment as an important factor in drinkers suffering injury or death, and in economic losses arising from people taking time off to recover from a drinking bout.

The most common symptom reported was dehydration or feeling thirsty. The least common symptom was trembling or shaking. Based on having at least one of the symptoms, most students had been hung over between three and 11 times in the previous year. On average, students had experienced five of the 13 symptoms at least once during that period.

“While hangover is a serious phenomenon among college drinkers, for most of them it occurs rarely enough that it is unlikely to have a major deleterious impact on academic performance,” Slutske said.

However, 26 percent of the students reported having experienced hangovers at least once a month in the past year, and the researchers speculate they could be at a higher risk of failure, and wondered if they might represent some identifiable segment of the student population, such as fraternity or sorority members.