

MEDIA RELEASE

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US Institute funds Australian research into adolescent alcohol misuse

Deakin University and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute have received \$500,000 from a prestigious United States research institute to join an international effort to find solutions to the growing problem of teen alcohol misuse.

Professor John Toumbourou announced today that his teams at the Deakin University School of Psychology and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute Centre for Adolescent Health have been awarded half a million dollars from the United States National Institute for research into Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

This study will explore the development of adolescent alcohol use and its consequences, as part of the International Youth Development Study, a significant follow-up investigation comparing children in Australia and the United States.

The Australian funding forms part of a larger grant to foster an international research collaboration with a team led by Professor Richard Catalano from the University of Washington, Social Development Research Group.

"We have a serious societal problem with alcohol misuse," Professor Toumbourou said.

"This funding will strengthen an important collaboration between research teams in Australia and the United States.

"This research will contribute to prevention by identifying modifiable influences that affect adolescent alcohol use within individuals and in peer-groups, families, schools, communities and state policies. The consequences of adolescent alcohol use will also be studied in areas such as violence, school performance, social adjustment and alcohol and drug abuse.

"The study is large and representative in each country and includes data from schools, parents and children. By comparing findings we can gain a more universal insight into factors that encourage the positive development of children and young people," he said.

An expert on adolescent violence Associate Professor Todd Herrenkohl from the University of Washington, Social Development Research Group is currently visiting Australia to initiate the collaboration with local researchers.

Dr Herrenkohl announced today that a paper from the research collaboration will be the lead article in an upcoming issue of the international journal *Violence and Victims*.

"A number of previous studies have shown that adolescent alcohol use contributes to violence," Dr Herrenkohl said.

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“We were interested to examine how adolescent violence contributes to problems such as alcohol misuse. We looked not just at physical violence but also 'relational aggression' - the use of social exclusion and victimization within peer groups.

“Our paper shows that school students who are relationally aggressive are at greater risk of developing a range of problems including binge drinking. Specifically we controlled for prior measures of binge drinking in the first year of the study, and found that students who perpetrated relational aggression were more likely to be binge drinkers one and two years later. The study also looked at impacts on tobacco use, marijuana use, depression, and self harm.”

Ends

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