

Hazing widespread among students belonging to campus groups

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PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — More than half of college students belonging to teams, clubs and organizations report being hazed even though the practice is banned on virtually all campuses and in 44 states that have laws against hazing, according to a new study.

Hazing also goes far beyond locker rooms and fraternity houses to include a variety of organizations like drama clubs and honor societies, students told professors Elizabeth Allan and Mary Madden from the University of Maine's College of Education and Human Development.

"It's far more widespread than many people would've assumed," Allan said.

The professors' National Study of Student Hazing was based on responses from 11,482 students at 53 institutions. It was released Tuesday at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators meeting in Boston.

The professors, based in Orono, said previous research on hazing was narrowly focused on Greek organizations and athletic teams. Their research was based on an online survey of students who were chosen at random by college administrators. The team also interviewed more than 300 students.

No one else has undertaken such an ambitious study of hazing in higher education, said Norm Pollard, the dean of students at Alfred University and the leader of a national study of hazing among student athletes in 1999. Pollard was an adviser for the study.

Among students who belonged to campus organizations, 31 percent of men and 23 percent of women reported participating in drinking games, and 17 percent of men and 9 percent of women reported drinking to the point of getting sick or passing out, the survey said.

The study found the highest rates of hazing (74 percent) among members of varsity athletic teams and fraternities and sororities (73 percent). But rates also were high for participants in club sports (64 percent) and performing arts organizations (56 percent).

Twenty-eight percent of participants in academic clubs and 20 percent of honor society members reported being hazed, the study said.

Furthermore, a quarter of students who were hazed believed their organization's coach or adviser knew about it, and a quarter also reported being hazed in a public space on campus. And 47 percent of respondents arrived at college having already experienced at least one hazing incident in high school.

Half of those who reported experiences that constitute being hazed said they were aware of anti-hazing policies, but nine out of 10 students who reported being subjected to behavior that constitutes hazing didn't believe they had been hazed, the professors said.

Activities the survey counted as hazing were skits or roasts where members are humiliated, singing or chanting in public, wearing embarrassing clothing, being yelled or cursed at, enduring harsh weather without proper clothing, drinking large amounts of alcohol, and watching or engaging in sex acts.

As campuses have cracked down on alcohol, pledges or new members also sometimes have been forced to drink large quantities of water or milk, sometimes with deadly results, Allan said.

Gary Powell, a hazing expert in Cincinnati, said defining hazing is a potential problem with any study. Drinking to excess and physical abuse clearly are hazing, but the line is blurry for activities that don't put people at risk of injury, he said.

Many people define hazing the way Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously defined pornography: "I know it when I see it," said Powell, who dealt with liability issues while working for a law firm that represents fraternities and sororities.

Pollard said any hazing, even a silly stunt performed in a public place, is worrisome because hazing tends to escalate.

"We call those silly things that kids did in public sort of the canary in the coal mine. If you see these things in public, then there are worse things going on in private," he said.

As rituals continue, successive steps can lead to destructive consequences. "Something that starts fun and enjoyable, left unchecked, can escalate over a couple of years into something that's quite deadly," Pollard said.

Allan and Madden didn't try to recommend solutions, but Madden said it's clear there's plenty of work to be done when 91 percent of students who are hazed don't realize it.

"They'll call it something else, team-building, or say 'I gave my permission to be treated this way.' It's a challenge for college administrators," Pollard said.

On the Net:

<http://www.umaine.edu/hazingstudy/>

<http://www.stophazing.org/>