

Hello, and welcome to As It Is -- VOA's daily show for people learning American English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we tell about the high economic cost of heavy drinking.

"...a number of people die of alcohol-attributable conditions. And many of those folks die in the prime of their life."

But first, we have a report on aggression seen in children who drink a lot of soda.

Some Children Who Drink a Lot of Soda Get Aggressive

A new study found evidence of aggressive behavior in children who have four or more servings of soft drinks every day.

Bob Doughty reports.

Information for the study came from the mothers of 3,000 five-year-olds. Researchers asked the women to keep a record of how many servings of soft drinks their children drank over a two-month period. The women were also asked to complete a checklist of their children's behavior.

The researchers found that 43 percent of the boys and girls drank at least one daily serving of soda. Four percent of the youngsters had four or more sodas to drink every day.

Shakira Suglia is with Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health in New York City. She worked on the study with researchers from the University of Vermont and Harvard University School of Public Health. She says they found that children who drank the most soda were more than two times as likely as those who drank no soda to show signs of aggression.

“For the children who consumed four or more soft drinks per day, we see an association between aggressive behaviors, attention problems and withdrawn behaviors.”

The aggressive behaviors included destroying possessions belonging to others, taking part in fights and physically attacking people.

Shakira Suglia says the researchers identified the link after they considered socio-demographic factors like the child’s age and sex. They also considered other possible influences, such as whether the boys and girls were eating sweets or given fruit drinks on a normal day. In addition, the researchers examined parenting styles and other social conditions that might be taking place in the home.

Doctor Suglia says it is not clear why young children who drink a lot of soda have behavior problems.

“We can’t prove that this is a direct cause and effect relationship; having said that, there are a lot of ingredients in soda, a lot of ingredients that have not been examined in relation to behavior.”

A substance often found in soft drinks is caffeine, which helps to make people feel energized. Dr. Suglia suggests that caffeine could be causing the five year olds to be more aggressive.

The research is part of a larger study called the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. It follows 5,000 poor mothers and their children in 20 American cities.

Earlier studies of young adults have found the highest sugar levels in those who carry weapons and show signs of negative social behavior.

I’m Bob Doughty.

The High Cost to the American Economy of Heavy Drinking

A new study has found that excessive alcohol drinking costs Americans more than \$220 billion a year. That amount is equal to almost two dollars a drink. But study organizers believe the biggest costs come from a loss of worker productivity.

Robert Brewer works for America’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a public health agency. He helped to produce a report on the study.

The researchers used findings from 2006 to examine different costs linked to heavy drinking. They looked at results from around the United States and found a lot of variation in different parts of the country.

Alcohol-related costs include health care, the cost of trying cases for drinking-related crimes, and property damage from road accidents. Robert Brewer says the biggest cost is loss productivity. Many people with a drinking problem have lower-paying jobs. He says they may also be less productive when they are at work.

“In addition to that, a number of people die of alcohol-attributable conditions. And many of those folks die in the prime of their life. So there’s the personal tragedy there. But there’s also a huge economic cost to somebody dying, for example, in an alcohol-related motor vehicle crash at age 35.”

The researchers were mainly concerned about the cost of heavy alcohol use. The study did not look at the effect on individuals who drink a glass of beer or wine with dinner. Mr. Brewer says the largest costs come from binge drinking, when people drink a lot of alcohol in a short period of time.

The study was based on the economic costs of heavy drinking in the United States. But Mr. Brewer says many nations have problems with what the World Health Organization calls “harmful use of alcohol.”

“But I think that it is very reasonable to assume that harmful alcohol use is going to result in some of the same consequences in other countries, even if the costs associated with those consequences are different.”

The study on the economic costs of excessive alcohol use was published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

And that’s As It Is for today.

Our program was written from reports by Jessica Berman and Art Chimes, with additional reporting by Kim Varzi.

Every day on As It Is we report on issues of interest to you. Tell us what you want to hear on a future show.

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