

## Summary

### *Hazing in View: High School Students at Risk*

For more information about this research, please contact:

Dr. Mary Madden (207-581-2414) or Dr. Elizabeth Allan (207-581-3166)

University of Maine, Orono, ME

[mary.madden@umit.maine.edu](mailto:mary.madden@umit.maine.edu)

[elizabeth.allan@umit.maine.edu](mailto:elizabeth.allan@umit.maine.edu)

### **Background**

These findings are derived from the National Study on Student Hazing (Allan & Madden, 2008). The analysis is based on survey responses from 11,482 post-secondary students on 53 campuses across the United States and more than 300 interviews with staff and students from 18 of those campuses. Data gathering focused on the nature and prevalence of hazing among students in both secondary and postsecondary settings. Data on high school hazing are derived from college students reflecting back on their high school experiences.

It is not uncommon to find the term hazing used synonymously with bullying. While similarities exist between hazing and bullying, hazing is a term that carries a particular meaning pertaining to certain types of behaviors that occur in the context of groups. More specifically, the term “hazing” refers to any activity expected of someone joining a group (or to maintain full status in a group) that humiliates, degrades or risks emotional and/or physical harm, regardless of the person's willingness to participate.

### **Key Findings**

1. Forty-seven percent of students say they were hazed while in high school. This mirrors the results of a 2000 study conducted by Nadine Hoover and Norm Pollard that showed that 48% of high school students belonging to groups experienced hazing.
2. Hazing occurs in range of co-curricular high school activities including: athletics, ROTC, performing arts, band, and others school activities. Additionally, 16% experienced class hazing – meaning an initiation into the high school itself.
3. Hazing behaviors in high school range in nature and can include dangerous and illegal activities. The most frequently reported behaviors were:
  - 28% Associate with specific people and not others
  - 21% Sing or chant by self or selected group members/not related to a game or event
  - 19% Be yelled, screamed, or cursed at by other members of the group
  - 12% Participate in a drinking game
  - 12% Deprive self of sleep
  - 12% Get a tattoo or body piercing
  - 11% Drink large amounts of a non-alcoholic beverage
  - 11% Endure harsh weather conditions without proper clothing
  - 9% Be awakened by other members during the night
  - 8% Make prank telephone calls or harass others
  - 8% Drink alcoholic beverages until the point of getting sick or passing out
4. The mean number of hazing behaviors experienced by males ( $M = 2.4$ ) was significantly higher than females ( $M = 1.5$ ).

5. A gap exists between student experiences of hazing and their recognition of specific behaviors as hazing and/or their willingness to label it as such. Eight out of ten individuals who reported experiencing a specific hazing behavior while in high school do not consider her/himself to have been hazed.
6. Much hazing appears to occur “In View” of adults both in school and in the community. For example, class hazing of new students.

## **Recommendations**

### **Assess school policies to ensure that hazing is recognized as a behavior that is differentiated from bullying and has consequences.**

Most public schools have policies that address bullying and of course these policies are essential. High schools also need to ensure that they have clear policies that accurately define and effectively prohibit hazing. Policies should make clear that hazing can occur regardless of a student’s consent.

### **Reduce the extent to which upperclass students are privileged within the school environment including within student organizations and on athletic teams.**

The research shows that students are at risk for hazing as a new member of the school or of a team or organization. Those who perpetuate the hazing are upperclass students. Their actions, whether real or perceived, tend to be justified by their seniority status, which is often unintentionally reinforced by special privileges, either formal or informal, given to them within a school, team, or student organization. If upperclass students are afforded privileges, it should also be clear that the privileges come with responsibilities. In the case of hazing, it should be made clear that it is a responsibility of all upperclass students to do their part to ensure that hazing does not occur.

### **Educate all teachers, administrators, coaches, organizational advisors, and other school personnel, as well as parents, and community members about hazing.**

Hazing is not the well-kept secret many believe it to be. This study shows that hazing happens in view of adults in the school and in the community. Adults may be inclined to dismiss hazing as nothing more than silly pranks or harmless antics, yet data from this investigation indicate hazing can involve high-risk behaviors that are dangerous, abusive, and illegal. Aside from the fact that hazing itself is illegal in 44 states, hazing is also likely to violate the law through underage drinking and sexual activities where consent is questionable due to the coercive dynamics and peer pressure inherent in hazing. These same dynamics contribute to a group context where embarrassment, humiliation, and degradation can take an emotional toll and lead to what is called the hidden harm of hazing—the emotional scars that can result from the humiliating and degrading aspects of hazing<sup>2</sup>

### **Involve all students in hazing prevention efforts. Introduce these efforts in middle school or earlier and continue the education into and through high school.**

This study shows that students are at risk for hazing as a new member of the school. Therefore, it is important that all students be educated about hazing. Also, some respondents in this study report being hazed prior to high school in association with either a middle school or community activity.

### **Design prevention efforts to be more comprehensive than simply one-time presentations or distribution of anti-hazing policies. Focus on helping all students:**

- Develop an understanding of the power dynamics in order to identify hazing regardless of context;
- Understand the role coercion and groupthink can play in hazing,
- Recognize the potential for harm even in activities they consider to be “low level.”
- Generate strategies for building group unity and sense of accomplishment that do not involve hazing.

- Align group membership behavior with the purpose and values espoused by the school and its associated activities.
- Develop leadership skills students need to intervene on behalf of their peers if hazing behaviors are practiced in their group.
- Develop critical thinking skills needed to make ethical judgments in the face of moral dilemmas.

Findings from this investigation highlight some of the complexities related to hazing. It is clear that students continue to have a limited understanding of the definition of hazing and risks associated with it. This is highlighted by the fact that nearly half of high school students report experiencing a hazing behavior, but 8 out of 10 of these, do not consider themselves to have been hazed. In addition, students who have been hazed tend to dismiss institutional and legal definitions of hazing and minimize the potential harm that can result.

**Focus additional hazing prevention efforts on team coaches, group advisors, and students involved in student groups and athletic teams.**

Students involved in athletics and other co-curricular activities are at highest risk for hazing. Therefore, it is important that they receive additional education about what constitutes hazing. As well, students belonging to groups should receive additional guidance and education on how to implement non-hazing traditions and initiations to welcome new members to their groups. Coaches and group advisors need to be educated about signs that may indicate a group is engaging in hazing.

**Send a clear message that hazing will not be tolerated and those engaging in hazing behaviors will be held accountable.**

School administrators need to convey the message that hazing is considered a serious issue and will not be dismissed, minimized, or trivialized as silly pranks, antics, or as a normal part of the school climate. If a hazing event occurs, it is important the consequences are not perceived to be simply a “slap on the wrist” and that the resulting consequences for the group or organization be made public. This reinforces the message that hazing is not tolerated. When students have knowledge of a group caught hazing but fail to hear of consequences, they interpret the silence to mean hazing is not taken seriously.