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University Hospital, Office of Media Relations

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Boston University
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Dear Member of Media,

I want to alert you to a study on drinking behaviors and aquatic activity, conducted by researchers at Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH), that would make an interesting story for the Labor Day Weekend.

Thirty-six percent of men and 11 percent of women surveyed (or 23 percent of men and women surveyed) reported drinking the last time they were engaged in aquatic activities, a finding that may explain why men are more likely to drown than women. BUSPH researchers also found that 58 percent of those who reported drinking on or near the water also reported drinking and driving during the previous month.

Thirty percent of those who were boating reported drinking. According to Jonathan Howland, Ph.D., an assistant professor of public health at BUSPH and principal investigator of the study, these findings support the rationale behind a new federal law that establishes blood-alcohol levels that determine when boat operators may be charged with operating a boat while intoxicated.

Alcohol is presumed to play a role in many drownings, but there has been little data on the drinking behaviors of people engaged in water activities. Researchers conducted this study to develop preliminary epidemiological data on the frequency with which people engage in aquatic activities and what proportion reported drinking during those activities. As part of a larger study on traffic safety behaviors, 306 adults were questioned about their aquatic activity during the month prior to the interview.

In addition to finding that males were significantly more likely to report drinking during aquatic activities than females, researchers also found that 29 percent of those who reported drinking on or near the water drank four or more drinks, and those who drink and drive were more likely to use alcohol in aquatic environments.

Concerning general water activities, the researchers determined that: 75 percent of those questioned reported some aquatic activity during the month preceding the interview (August 1988); the mean number of days of aquatic activity during that month was 13; and the proportion of males (79 percent) to females (72 percent) reporting aquatic activity was not significantly different, although females reported more days than males (14 vs. 12 days).

The ocean was most common location for aquatic activities (53 percent), followed by lakes or ponds (26 percent), pools (18 percent) and rivers (2 percent). Swimming was the most frequently reported activity (76 percent), followed by sunbathing (73 percent) and boating (38 percent).

The study has been accepted for presentation before the upcoming meeting of the American Public Health Association. According to Howland, this study is preliminary to a larger national study now in planning.

If you are interested in more information or would like to interview Dr. Howland, give me a call at 638-8491.

Sincerely,

Betty Russell
Director, Media Relations