

# The dangers of underage drinking — on and off campus

By AdvocateDaily.com Staff



Post-secondary students and institutions must realize the dangers and potential legal ramifications of underage drinking, says Toronto personal injury lawyer **Jasmine Daya**.

While students must act both safely and responsibly, colleges and universities also have a duty to ensure the students attending their universities stay safe — which is also important to preserve the facility's reputation, says Daya, managing principal with **Jasmine Daya & Co.**

"Unfortunately, students are under so much pressure to conform by using drugs or alcohol, and it's made worse as a result of social media," she tells **AdvocateDaily.com**.

With most first-year students starting university under the legal drinking age, many of these young adults are away from their parents for the first time, Daya

adds.

"They may not have been exposed to many situations involving alcohol, and now they are free to do whatever they want," she says.

The social pressures combined with the naivety of these teens can lead to potentially dangerous situations where students are binge drinking and making poor decisions — sometimes leading to assaults, drinking and driving, or putting themselves at risk in other ways, Daya says.

It's why Daya says she is pleased by news that the North American Interfraternity Conference has approved a new policy that would ban alcohol from being served at fraternity and sorority houses as of September 2019, according to **USA Today**.

"That's huge," she says.

"According to **statistics** from Harvard University, four out of every five fraternity or sorority members are binge drinking, compared to two out of every five college students in general," she says. "While these are American statistics, I think it would be naive to believe this does not occur in Canada."

Homecoming celebrations in communities close to several Canadian universities have been known to get out of hand, with reports of underage drinking, property damage, assaults, and generally rowdy behaviour.

Queen's University shut down homecoming for five years following the 2008 parties that led to 140 arrests, 700 liquor charges and more than 20 severely intoxicated people being sent to the emergency room, reports the **Toronto Star**.

"The university set an example and said 'We will not permit this and do not agree if you want to behave this way,'" Daya says. "They took responsibility and worked with the City of Kingston, so homecoming became a safer opportunity for people to have fun and celebrate in a responsible manner."

Universities have an obligation to be aware of events that can lead to serious injury, as was the case for Daya's client at an Ontario university a number of years ago. The individual successfully sued the university for allowing students to become so intoxicated that an argument led to an assault causing a significant brain injury and permanent impairment to her client, she says.

"The university owes a duty to patrons on their property," Daya says. "They must know and oversee what is going on."

On a smaller scale, she says anyone hosting a party can be held responsible for underage drinking or injuries arising from college or university parties.

"If you're a university student and hosting friends to drink, you can be held responsible for whatever ensues after they leave the party — for example, if they are struck by a motor vehicle, drive while impaired, or get into an argument and punch someone," Daya says.

Another area of potential risk is within university residences, Daya says.

“Many first-year students live on campus, which can be a fun environment, but it can also lead to significant underage drinking. Universities often hire older students to act as residence advisors, and they can be held responsible if it’s discovered they have condoned any illegal activity,” she says.

Daya says this can also apply to activities off-campus. During a summer program she attended at Johns Hopkins University several years ago, she says residence advisors were fired for inviting underage students to a party where alcohol was served, and where they became quite intoxicated — even though the advisors were off-duty.

It’s important for parents to have honest and open conversations with their teenage children as they attend college and university, Daya says.

“Even if they are rolling their eyes, they’re still listening,” Daya says. “I tell my children, ‘Have fun, but remember why you’re there, and think about how you’ll feel when your family realizes what you’re doing.’”

It’s also important to make people aware of the possible criminal consequences. For example, an impaired driving infraction is a criminal charge and if convicted will be on your record, she says.

“And, university administrators must recognize they need to give young adults space, but their job as educators is not just in the classroom,” Daya says.