



The Association Between Frequency of Alcohol Use and Depression in Adolescents vs. Young Adults



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Introduction

- Exploring the association between alcohol usage and depression in young people
- Alcohol use disorder (AUD) and heavy/problematic drinking (not casual use) are most strongly linked to depression and suicide attempts. (Boenisch, S., Bramesfeld, A., Mergl, R., Havers, I., Althaus, D., Lehfeld, H., Niklewski, G., & Hegerl, U. (2010))
- Alcohol use and depression both tend to feed into each other: alcohol use disorder (AUD) makes depression symptoms worse, and depression symptoms increase the risk of developing AUD (Bulloch, A., Lavorato, D., Williams, J., & Patten, S.)

Research Question

- How does the association between frequency of alcohol use and depressive episodes within the past year vary amongst adolescents (12-17) as compared to young adults (18-25)?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n= 70,241) were drawn from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), a nationally representative U.S. sample of the civilian, non-institutionalized population ages 12 and older.

Measures

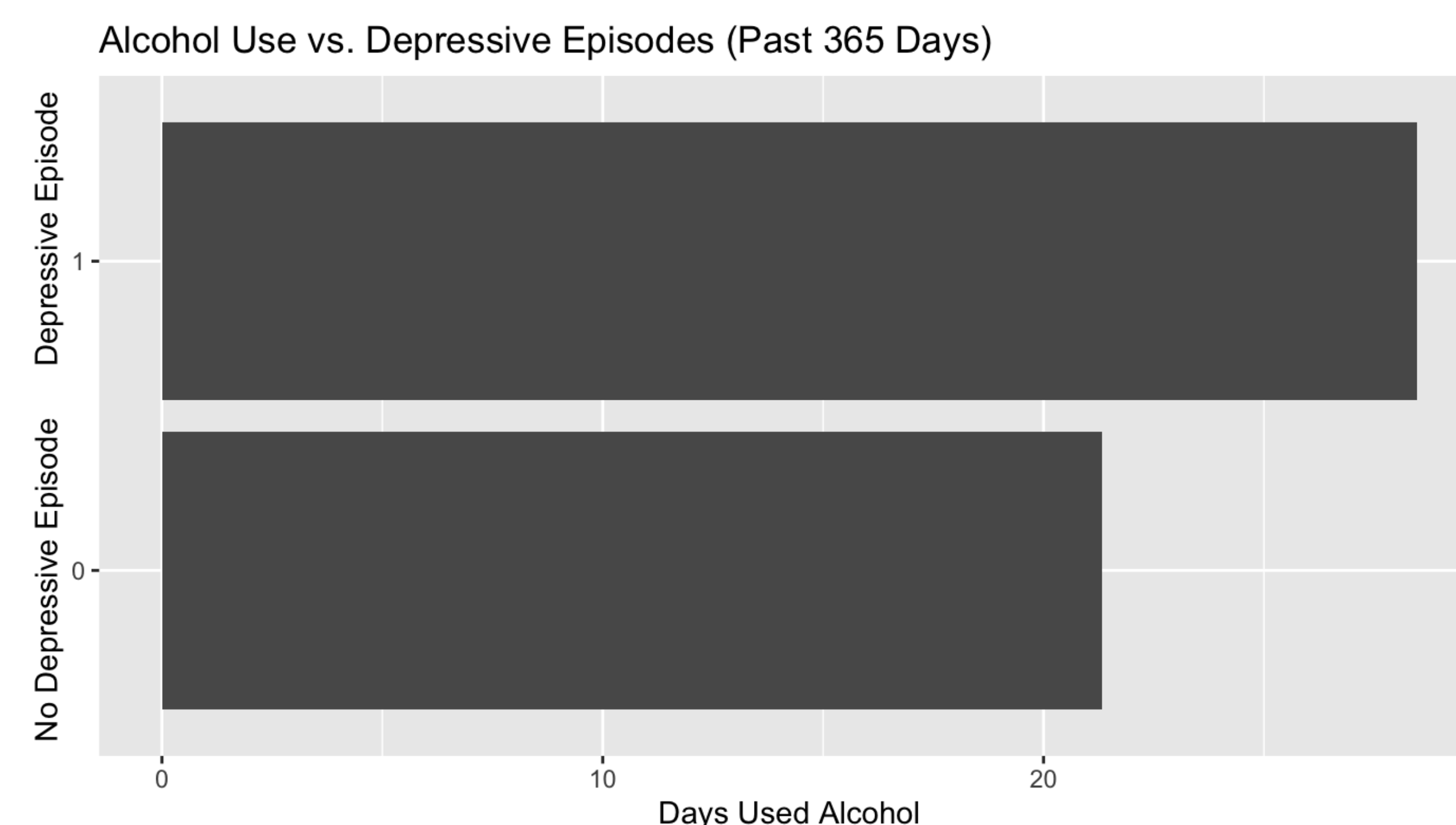
- Depression: data were collected using structured mental health questions based on DSM criteria for a past-year major depressive episode
- Alcohol use: data were collected through self-reported questions about lifetime use, past-year use, past-month use, binge drinking, and heavy drinking.

Results

Bivariate

- There was a significant positive association, for both age groups, between past-year drinking frequency and the odds of a past-year depressive episode (see figure 1)

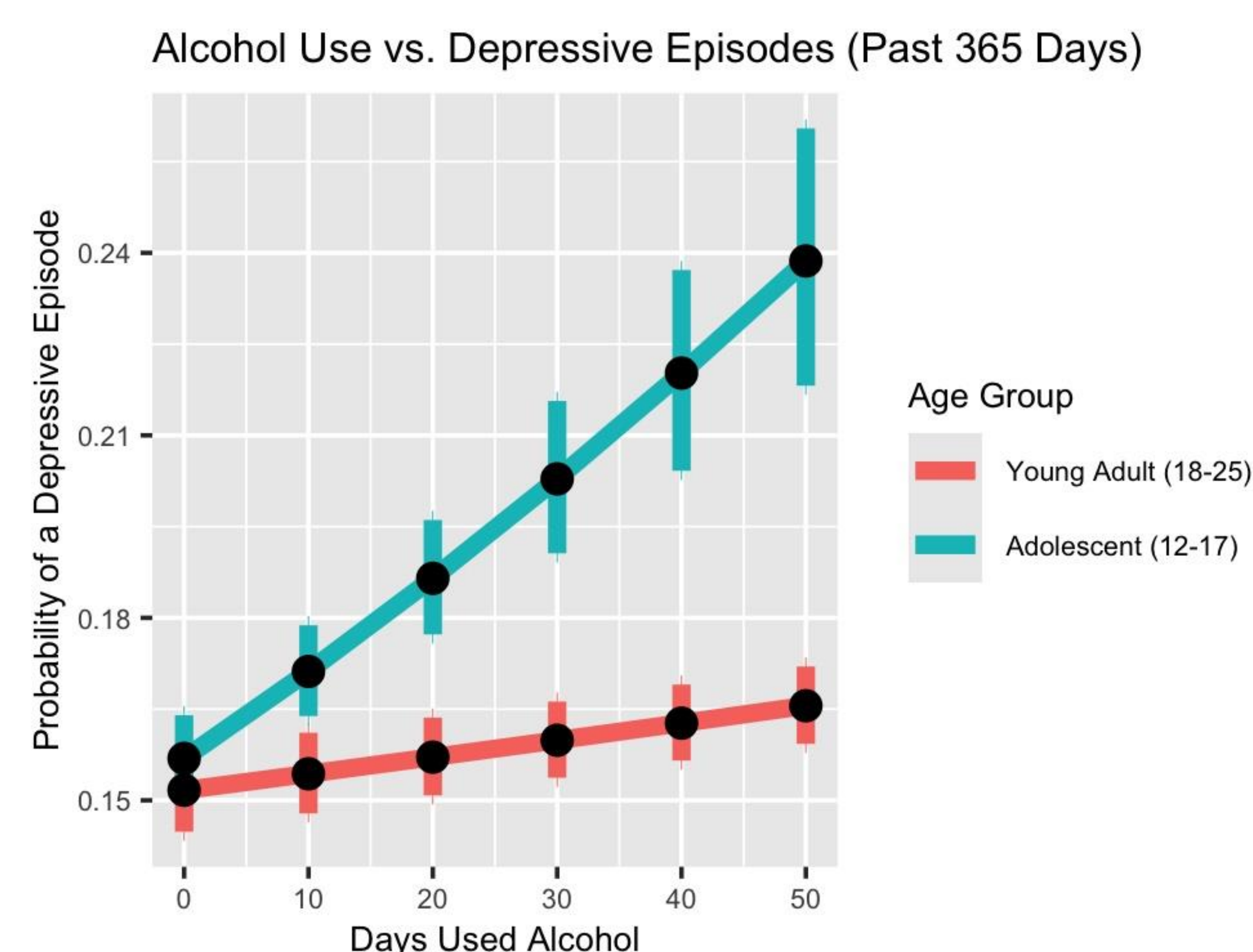
Figure 1: Alcohol Use vs. Depressive Episodes Overall



Multivariate

- A logistic regression analyses showed that the effect of alcohol use on depressive episodes is stronger for adolescents than for young adults (OR=1.006-1.011, $p < 0$).
- For adolescents, each additional drinking day increases odds by an extra 0.6%–1.1% on top of the young adult effect

Figure 2: Alcohol Use vs. Depressive Episodes (Moderated by age group)



Discussion

- Though frequency of alcohol use is associated with likelihood of a depressive episode for both age groups, the association is significantly stronger for adolescents
- These findings may contribute to proactive efforts to mitigate depression in adolescents via drug abuse prevention, especially within spaces such as schools

References

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