

The American Issue

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Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in the United States

<http://www.udetc.org/UnderageDrinkingCosts.asp>

Tragic health, social and economic problems result from the use of alcohol by youth. Underage drinking is a causal factor in a host of serious problems, including homicide, suicide, traumatic injury, drowning, burns, violent and property crime, high risk sex, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and need for treatment for alcohol abuse and dependence.

Underage drinking cost the citizens of The United States \$68.0 billion in 2007. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth.¹ This translates to a cost of \$2,280 per year for each youth in the State. Excluding pain and suffering from these costs, the direct costs of underage drinking incurred through medical care and loss of work cost the United States \$22.3 billion each year.



Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in the United States represent the largest costs for the State. However, a host of other problems contribute substantially to the overall cost. Among teen mothers, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) alone costs the United States \$1,227 million.

Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence and are two and a half times more likely to become abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.² In 2007, 62,461 youth 12- 20 years old were admitted for alcohol treatment in the United States, accounting for 9% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the country.³

Alcohol Consumption by Youth in the United States

Underage drinking is widespread in the United States. Approximately 13,334,000 underage youth in The United States drink each year. In 2007, according to self-reports by United States students in grades 9-12:⁴

- 75% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
 - 24% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
 - 45% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
 - 26% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (i.e. binge drinking) in the past 30 days.
- 4% had at least one drink of alcohol on school property on one or more of the past 30 days.

In 2007, underage drinkers consumed 14.5% of all alcohol sold in the United States, totaling \$24.2 billion in sales. These sales provided profits of \$11.9 billion to the alcohol industry.¹

(Continued on page 4)

New Report Highlights Alcohol Abstainers, Quitters as Well as Current Drinkers

March 23, 2010 News Feature By Bob Curley

A new federal report may not show how many Americans are in recovery from alcoholism, but it does provide interesting insights into the number of adults who have quit drinking or abstain for health and other reasons.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics estimated in its Health Behaviors of Adults: United States, 2005-2007 report ([PDF](#)) that 61.2 percent of American adults currently drink alcohol, but that 24.6 percent are lifetime abstainers and 14.3 percent of Americans call themselves former drinkers.

Of the latter, 8.1 percent said they are former infrequent drinkers, while 6.2 percent classified themselves as former regular drinkers. Pat Taylor, executive director of Faces and Voices of Recovery, said more research is needed on why people decided to stop drinking, particularly those who formerly were regular drinkers.

"Until we understand that, we won't be able to help the over 22 million Americans still struggling with alcohol and other drug problems," said Taylor.

Men (67.6 percent) were more likely than women (55.3 percent) to be current drinkers. More white adults were current drinkers (64.2 percent) than members of any other ethnic group; Asians were the least likely to drink (43.1 percent).

Most of the current alcohol users surveyed were considered to be light drinkers (29.3 percent), while 14.4 percent were classified as moderate drinkers, 12.3 percent were considered infrequent drinkers, and 5 percent were labeled heavy drinkers (having more than 7 drinks per week for women, or more than 14 drinks per week for men, on average, during the past year).

The study found a distinct correlation between income and education level and alcohol use, but not one that fits with the stereotype of the poor, ignorant drunk. In fact, current drinking levels increased steadily alongside education, with holders of masters, doctorate, or medical degrees far more likely to drink (73.9 percent) than individuals who did not graduate from high school (44.3 percent). The richest Americans also were much more likely to drink than those living below poverty level.

Interesting, the inverse was true among those adults who had chosen to quit drinking: holders of the most advanced degrees were half as likely to have ended their former infrequent or regular drinking as high-school dropouts, and poor Americans likewise were more likely to have stopped drinking than richer ones.

One in Five Americans Still Smoke

Smoking remains stubbornly persistent in certain U.S. populations despite decades of health warnings: according to the NCHS report, 20.4 percent of American adults are current smokers.

The good news: 21.1 percent of U.S. adults said they had quit smoking, and 58.5 percent said they never smoked. Sixteen percent of adults lit up daily, while 4 percent said they smoked less than once a day. Daily smokers consumed an average of 17 cigarettes per day, compared to 5 per day for non-daily smokers (on the days that they smoked).

About 4 in 10 smokers said they had tried to quit during the year prior to the survey. The report found that 31.8 percent of current smokers started smoking before age 16, while just 17.1 percent began at age 21 or older. Men were more likely than women to smoke, but were more apt to quit smoking, too.

The report, based on *2005-2007 National Health Interview Surveys*, also looked at sleep, obesity and exercise rates among American adults. "Despite evidence of the potential harm of some health behaviors and substantial efforts to disseminate this information to the public, many Americans continue to engage in health behaviors that put them at risk of chronic disease and disability," the report stated.

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CESAR *FAX* →

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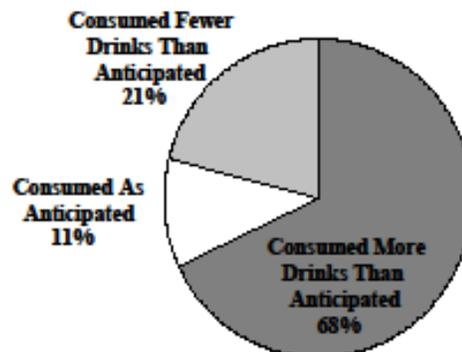
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

More Than Two-Thirds of College Students Who Celebrated Their 21st Birthday with Alcohol Drank More Than They Anticipated; Average of 12 Drinks Actually Consumed, Compared to 7 Anticipated

The majority of college students who planned to drink to celebrate their 21st birthday ended up drinking more than they anticipated, according to a study of 150 college students attending one Southwestern university. More than two-thirds (68%) of celebrants consumed more drinks than they had anticipated (see figure below). Those who underestimated their celebratory consumption anticipated drinking an average of 7 drinks but actually consumed 12 drinks. The study found that students who consumed more drinks than anticipated were more likely to drink faster and drink more shots than students who were accurate or drank less than anticipated. More than half (55%) of celebrants in this study reported drinking free shots in bars. In addition, students who drank more than anticipated were more likely to engage in 21st birthday drinking traditions (e.g., drinking 21 shots, drinking at midnight) and to have more influential peers present that encouraged drinking. Overall, 61% of all those who drank to celebrate had one or more influential peers present and 60% engaged in one or more 21st birthday drinking traditions. According to the authors, “the amount and style of drinking observed during 21st birthday celebrations are excessive and should be viewed as a serious public health threat” (p. 183). They suggest interventions that “encourage responsible peer behavior and teach celebrants skills to stay within their anticipated drinking limits” as well as “community-based interventions to stop or reduce the amount of free shots given to young adults by drinking establishments” (p. 183).

**Alcohol Consumption During 21st Birthday Celebration,
Among College Students Who Had Planned to Drink Alcohol As Part of Their Celebration**
(N=150 college students attending a large public Southwestern university)



SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from Brister, H.A., Wetherill, R.R., and Fromme, K., “Anticipated Versus Actual Alcohol Consumption During 21st Birthday Celebrations,” *Journal of Studies of Alcohol and Drugs* 71(2):180-183, 2010. For more information, contact Heather Brister at hbrister@mail.utexas.edu.

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(Underage Drinking Costs Continued from page 1)

Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in the United States

Underage drinking in the United States leads to substantial harm due to traffic crashes, violent crime, property crime, unintentional injury, and risky sex.

- During 2007, an estimated 1,988 traffic fatalities and 48,800 nonfatal traffic injuries involved an underage drinking driver.
- In 2006, an estimated 2,099 homicides; 989,100 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery and assault; and 1,919,900 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft involved an underage drinking perpetrator.
- In 2006, an estimated 371 alcohol involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides involved underage drinking.

In 2006, an estimated 158,600 teen pregnancies and 730,500 risky sexual acts by teens involved alcohol.

Total underage drinking costs \$68.0 billion

Produced by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), November 2009.

1 Levy, D.T., Miller, T.R., & Cox, K.C. (2003). Underage drinking: societal costs and seller profits. Working Paper. Calverton, MD: PIRE.

2 Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

3 Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). (2007). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity*. Available [On-line]: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss>.

4 Center for Disease Control (CDC). (2007). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Available [On-line]: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbss/2001/youth01online/htm>.

YOUTH EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL ADVERTISING ON TELEVISION, 2001 TO 2007 www.camy.org

Youth (ages 12 – 20) exposure to alcohol advertising on television has risen by 38% since the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth began monitoring this exposure in 2001. From 2001 to 2007, the number of alcohol advertisements seen in a year by the average television-watching 12-to-20-year-old increased from 216 to 301. In 2007, approximately one out of every five alcohol advertisements was placed on programming that youth ages 12 to 20 were more likely per capita to see than adults of the legal drinking age. Almost all of these placements were on cable television, where distilled spirits companies in particular have dramatically increased their alcohol advertising in the past seven years. Researchers from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University (CAMY) and Virtual Media Resources of Natick, Massachusetts (VMR) analyzed the placements of 2,033,931 alcohol product advertisements that aired on television between 2001 and 2007, placed at a cost of \$6.6 billion. Key findings include:

- In 2007, more than 40% of youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television came from ads placed on youth-oriented programming, that is, programs with disproportionately large audiences of 12-to-20-year-olds.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of these overexposing ad placements in 2007 were on cable television, which generated 95% of youth overexposure to alcohol advertising on television. • Of the youth overexposure on cable in 2007, 53% came from beer advertising, and 41% came from distilled spirits advertising.
- In a comparison of individual brands on the basis of their abilities to comply with industry voluntary codes on advertising placement and to avoid youth overexposure in 2007, 10 brands stood out, accounting for 41% of youth overexposure and 52% of advertisements placed above the industry's voluntary standard of a 30% maximum for youth in its audiences.
- Between 2001 and 2007, alcohol companies aired 73,565 “responsibility” advertisements on television. Youth ages 12 to 20 were 22 times more likely to see an alcohol product advertisement than an alcohol industry- funded “responsibility” advertisement.

PREVENTION EFFORTS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES BEGINNING TO SEE SUCCESS

After decades of troubling statistics and trends about high-risk drinking among college students, things are starting to change. In a recent article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Brandon Busteed wrote about what he has learned over the past 10 years working on college campuses to reduce high-risk alcohol use. Busteed is the founder and chief executive of Outside the Classroom, a company that deals with campus drinking problems and collects data on campuses through an online course, AlcoholEdu.

Last year, more than one third of all college freshmen in the United States took the AlcoholEdu course. Overall, the data collected from the course shows that gradually, drinking behaviors on college campuses are changing in a positive way. At some universities, decreased rates of high-risk drinking were actually quite dramatic:

- Frostburg State University – 27% decrease in the past 10 years
- University of Pittsburgh – 12% decrease in the past two years
- University of Tampa – 23% decrease in 2009 alone

Tactics, strategies and common elements

The decreased rates of high-risk drinking at these colleges and several others across the country can be attributed to a wide range of tactics and strategies – with some underlying common elements. Frostburg State has been working with local police and landlords to reduce off-campus parties. The University of Pittsburgh has focused on providing alternative social options by opening a new student activity center. Other colleges have developed mandatory orientations about alcohol for all incoming students. Regardless of the types of strategies used, colleges with decreased rates of high-risk drinking share some common elements:

- Making alcohol abuse prevention a priority across the entire institution
- Communicating and reinforcing the priority through the president's office
- Combining and coordinating the efforts of all campus groups, task forces and coalitions
- Establishing measurable goals, shaping strategic plans and tracking their progress

Changing attitudes at the top

Busteed's article also mentions that one of the most significant changes has been in the mind-set of college presidents. "They have begun to understand the powerful relationship between reducing students' drinking and improving academic performance, student engagement and retention rates," Busteed wrote. "The data on those points could not be more convincing: The more students drink, the lower their GPA, the less likely they are to interact with their professors, and the more likely they are to drop out."

Even the universities that have made significant progress will readily admit that problems still exist and that much more work must be done. However, the data collected by Busteed and others shows that prevention efforts work – as shown by an emerging college culture that is less dependent on alcohol.

Source:

Busteed, Brandon, "Is high-risk drinking at college on the way out," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 14, 2010.

American Council on Alcohol Problems
2376 Lakeside Drive
Birmingham, AL 35244

TO:

PURPOSE: American Council on Alcohol Problems is the channel of cooperation through which state temperance organizations, national religious bodies and similar concerned groups and individuals in America can unite to deal with the problems caused by alcohol and other drugs.

ACAP provides the forum and the mechanism through which concerned persons can find common ground on alcohol and other drug problems and address these issues with a united voice. It is the successor organization to the American Temperance League and the Anti-Saloon League established in 1895. Membership of ACAP presently is made up of 30 local temperance organizations, 22 national Christian denominations, and other fraternal organizations that support ACAP's philosophy of abstinence.

(ACAP is classified by the IRS as a 501 (c)(3) tax-deductible charity.)

Checks should be made payable to:

American Council on Alcohol Problems

Mail to: 2376 Lakeside Drive, Birmingham, AL 35244

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ALCOHOL ABUSE SOARS IN U.S. ARMY ©2010 by Face™ <http://freshstory.org>

The U.S. Army is not only fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – it's also in a fight to control soaring alcohol abuse among soldiers. *USA Today* recently reported that the Army was stepping up efforts to increase the availability of substance abuse counselors in order to better deal with the growing number of soldiers seeking alcohol treatment. According to the article, the Army's No. 2 Officer, General Peter Chiarelli, has announced that 300 more counselors are needed immediately to reduce wait times and allow for more evening appointments.

In 2009, 9,199 soldiers entered treatment programs for alcohol problems – an increase of 56% over the 5,873 soldiers who enrolled in treatment in 2003 when the Iraq War began. More than 11,800 soldiers in 2009 were assigned to "alcohol education" – a 16- to 20- hour course for soldiers who have been disciplined for an alcohol-related incident.

Alcohol abuse linked to record suicide rate

Alcohol and substance abuse have also been identified as contributing factors to the Army's rising suicide rate that has now reached record levels. According to statistics reported in *USA Today*, the suicide rate in the Army has nearly doubled since 2005 to 23 per 100,000 people. In comparison, the suicide rate among the general population in the U.S. is about 20 per 100,000.

The government has worked to expand alcohol awareness programs designed specifically for military personnel, such as the website www.ThatGuy.com, which was launched in 2009 by the Department of Defense. On a positive note, the increased call for treatment counselors may be some indication that awareness programs are allowing soldiers to recognize their alcohol problems and get the help they need.

Sources:

"Army's suicide crisis leads to action," *USA Today*, January 28, 2010.

"Alcohol abuse weighs on Army," *USA Today*, February 9, 2010.

"Army alcoholics: more soldiers hitting the bottle," *ABCNews.com*, February 22, 2010.