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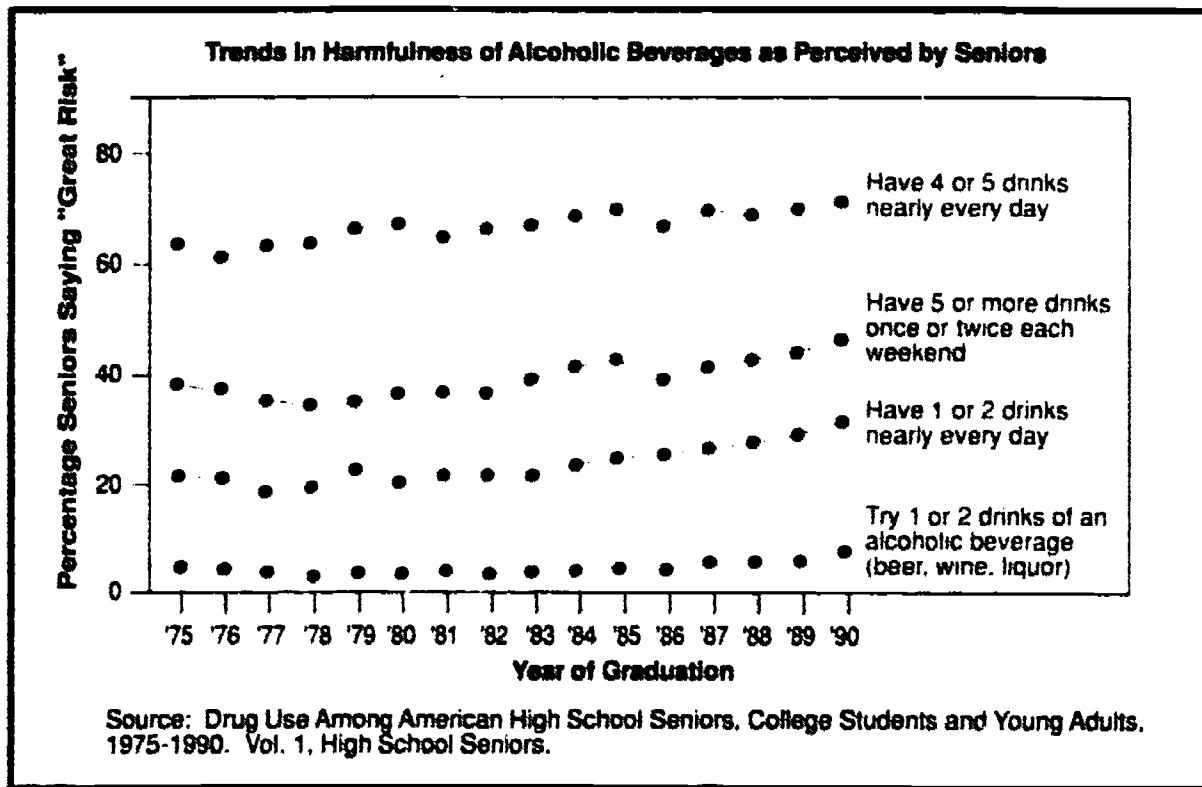
ABSTRACT

This booklet presents an overview of teenage drinking and teenagers' knowledge about drinking. Results from a variety of studies are summarized under these topics phrased as questions: (1) What are the consequences of teenage drinking? (2) How many teenagers and college students binge drink? (3) How big is the problem of teenage drinking? (4) What are the racial, ethnic, and gender differences in drinking? (5) What kind of alcoholic beverages do young people drink? (6) How do young people obtain alcoholic beverages? (7) Do young people have trouble buying alcoholic beverages? (8) What misconceptions do young people have about alcoholic beverages? (9) Why do young people drink alcoholic beverages? and (10) Are young users of alcohol more likely to use other drugs? Sixteen organizations and 19 references are listed. (ABL)

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# TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE DRINK AND KNOW TOO LITTLE ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES



*"We must teach our children that  
alcohol is a drug."  
—President George Bush, 1989*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Public Health Service  
Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

President Bush's citations are from the December 13, 1989, issue  
of *Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Week*

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## What are the consequences of teen drinking?

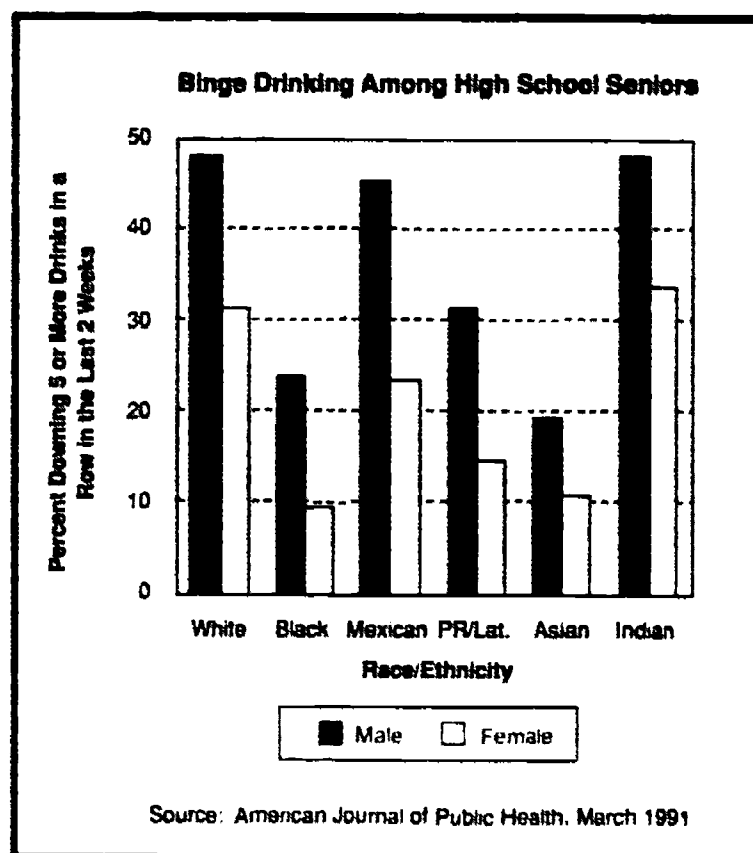
- The number one killer of teens and young adults is alcohol-related highway death (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1988).
- Alcohol is the major cause of all fatal and nonfatal crashes involving teen-aged drivers (Centers for Disease Control, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 1990). Nearly eight young people died each day—one every 3 hours—in 1989 in an alcohol-related vehicular crash (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).
- Alcohol use also is associated with homicides, suicides, and drownings—the other three leading causes of death among youth (National Commission on Drug-Free Schools, 1990).
- In 1989, 9% (about 120,000) of State-funded alcohol treatment admissions were clients under the age of 21 (National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, 1990).
- Among sexually active teens, those who averaged five or more drinks daily were nearly three times less likely to use condoms, thus placing them at greater risk for HIV infection. Among all teens who drink, 16% use condoms less often after drinking (*American Journal of Public Health*, 1990).
- A significant proportion of violent crimes among students—such as date or acquaintance rape, robbery, and assault—has been shown to involve alcohol. A survey of college administrators indicates that more than one-half of campus incidents, which ranged from violent behavior to damage to residence halls and other property, were related directly to alcohol use (National Commission for Drug-Free Schools, 1990).

*"Drunk driving is one of the most deadly scourges ever to strike modern times and it is as crippling as crack, as random as gang violence, and it's killing more kids than both combined...."*

*—President George Bush, 1989*

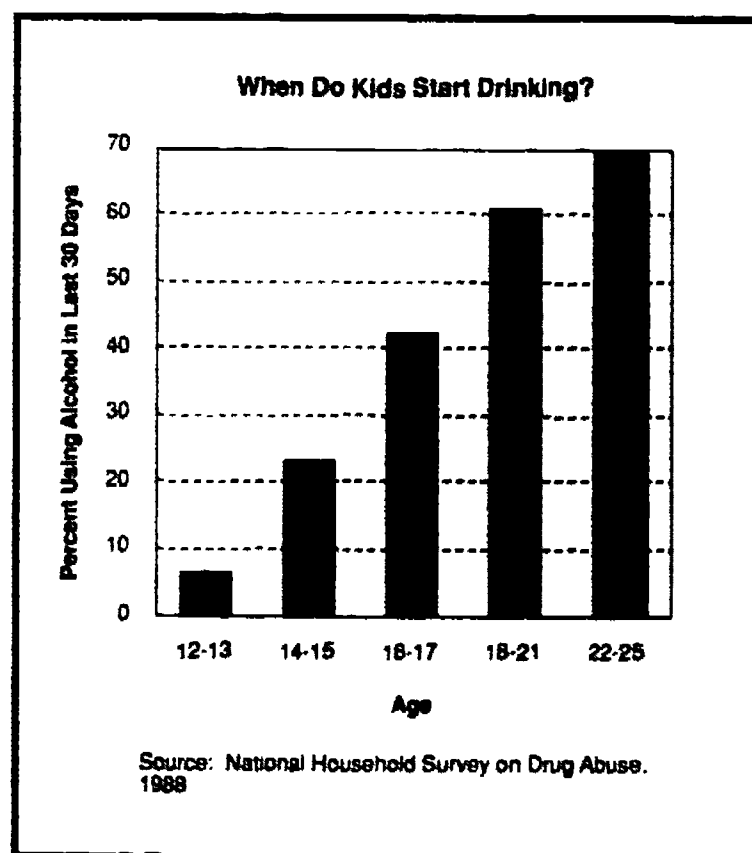
## How Many People Binge Drink?

- Among 12- to 17-year-olds who drink, 27% "down drinks fast to get an effect," and 28% experience blackouts (National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Main Findings, 1990).
- About one-third of twelfth-grade students engage in binge drinking at least once every 2 weeks and 4% drink daily (National High School Senior Survey, 1990).
- About 40% of college students engage in binge drinking regularly; 4% of college students, or about 0.5 million, drink every day (National High School Senior Survey, 1990).



## How big is the problem of teen drinking?

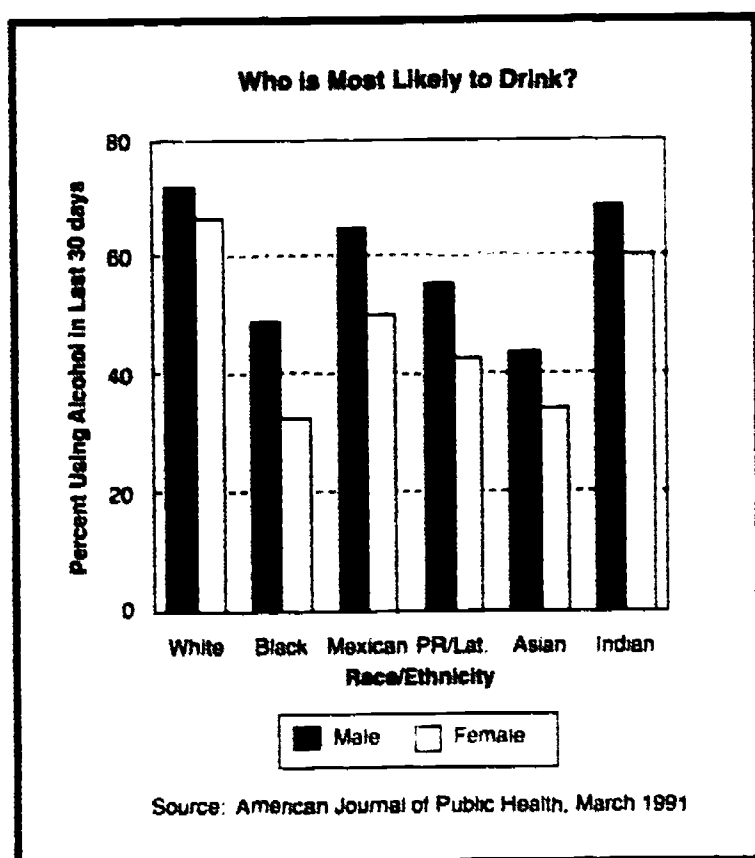
- According to a poll conducted by the National Association of Student Councils, alcohol is the leading school problem today: 46% say that alcohol is their school's most serious problem (*USA Today*, June 25, 1991).
- A 1990 survey of the American public, sponsored by the Century Council, found that 95% said "teenage drinking is a problem," and 75% agreed that the problem has become worse in the past 5 years. In this same survey, 73% said they "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that alcohol advertising is a "major contributor to underage drinking" (*Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 1991).
- Alcohol use increases dramatically through the teen years until age 21, when 61% of 18- to 21-year-olds are regular drinkers (National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 1988).
- About nine out of every ten high school seniors have tried alcohol, and nearly six



out of every ten are regular (at least monthly) users of alcohol (National High School Senior Survey, 1990).

- Over 75% of eighth-grade students have tried alcohol, and 55% of them have tried it by sixth grade. By tenth grade, nearly 90% of students report having tried alcohol; of these, 69% report first use by eighth grade (National Adolescent Student Health Survey, 1987).

## What are the race/ethnicity and gender differences?



- The highest drinking rates (defined as use in the last 30 days) are among White and American-Indian male and female high school seniors and Mexican-American males. These same groups are among the heaviest drinkers (*American Journal of Public Health*, 1991).

- Although drinking is less overall among female high school seniors, the use pattern follows that of males by race/ethnicity. In other words, current and heavy alcohol use is higher among White, American-Indian, and Mexican-American females and lower among African-American, Puerto Rican, Latin American, and Asian-American males and females (*American Journal of Public Health*, 1991).

- Nondrinking rates are highest among African-American and Asian-American youth (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, *Seventh Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health*, 1990).

## What kind of alcoholic beverages do young people drink?

- Junior, middle and senior high school students drink 35% of all wine coolers sold in the United States (31 million gallons) and 1.1 billion cans of beer (102 million gallons) or 2 percent of the 62 billion bottles/cans of beer sold each year (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).
- Teenagers prefer wine coolers (their drink of choice) because they like the fruity, non-alcoholic taste and because they think wine coolers don't contain much



alcohol. They drink more beer, however, because it is cheap and easy to get (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).

## How do young people obtain alcoholic beverages?

- Almost 7 million young people who drink (about two-thirds) buy their own alcoholic beverages. Students as young as ages 12 or 13 report buying alcoholic beverages in a store (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).
- Young people get around purchase laws by having older friends buy alcoholic beverages for them, by using fake identifications, and by buying from stores that don't obey minimum purchase laws or that have young clerks (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).
- Teenagers frequently find alcoholic beverages at parties without parental supervision and at friends' homes. Older teenagers who drink usually obtain alcohol from their friends, whereas younger ones get it from their parents (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).

## Do young people have trouble buying alcoholic beverages?

- According to a recent study, 19- and 20-year-olds who tried to buy beer in Washington, D.C., were successful in 97 out of 100 attempts. Earlier research in Westchester, New York, had similar results. Nineteen- and 20-year-olds bought beer successfully 80% of the times they tried. These youths rarely were asked for identification to verify that they were age 21 (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 1991).

## What misconceptions do young people have about alcoholic beverages?

- Minimum purchase age: 5.6 million teenagers don't know that the minimum legal age for purchasing alcohol is age 21 in every State; even worse, 2 million don't even know that such a law exists (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).
- Alcohol's intoxication effects: 2.6 million teenagers don't know that a person can die from an overdose of alcohol. One-third believe that drinking coffee, taking a cold shower,

*When looking at beverage bottles, two out of three junior and high school students can't tell the difference between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, particularly when it comes to wine coolers and mineral waters with fruit juices.*

— Office of the  
Inspector General  
Survey, 1991.

or getting fresh air can "sober you up" (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).

- Relative strengths equivalencies: 80% of teenagers don't know that a can of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a shot of whiskey or a glass of wine, and 55% don't know that a 5-ounce glass of wine and a 12-ounce can of beer have the same amount of alcohol. Almost one-half mistakenly believe that a can of beer contains more alcohol than a shot of whiskey or a glass of wine (Office of the Inspector General Survey, 1991).

## Why do young people drink alcoholic beverages?

According to the Office of the Inspector General's 1991 survey many teenagers drink to handle stress or to change the way they feel:

- 31% drink alone (among bingers, 39%).
- 41% drink when they are upset (among bingers, 58%).
- 25% drink because they are bored (among bingers, 30%).
- 25% drink to feel high (among bingers, 37%).

## Are young users of alcohol more likely to use other drugs?

- Young people who start using alcohol within the critical 13- to 16-year-old age period have a higher tendency to be current users of alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana than do those who start drinking when they are older (Yu and Williford, 1990).
- The majority of young people who use illegal drugs first used alcohol. And, they continue using alcohol along with regular use of other drugs. As a result, these young people have higher-than-average rates of alcohol-related injury and death (National Commission on Drug-Free Schools, p. 64).
- Delaying the age of first use of alcohol beyond childhood and adolescence reduces the risk of alcohol and other drug problems later (Robins and Przybeck, 1985).

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# RESOURCES

ARROW Native American Development  
Corporation  
1000 Connecticut Ave. Suite 1206  
Washington DC 20036  
(202) 296-0685

Hispanic Information and  
Telecommunications Network  
449 Broadway Third Floor  
New York NY 10013  
(212) 966-5660

Indian Health Service  
Colorado River Service  
Route 1, Box 12  
Parker AZ 85344  
(602) 669-2137

Institute on Black Chemical Abuse  
2616 Nicollet Ave. S  
Minneapolis MN 55407  
(612) 871-7878

Marin Institute for the Prevention  
of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems  
24 Belvedere St.  
San Rafael CA 94013  
(415) 456-5692

Multi-Media Center  
Morehouse School of Medicine  
720 Westview Dr. SW  
Atlanta GA 30310-1495  
(404) 752-1530

National Asian Pacific American  
Families Against Substance Abuse  
420 E. Third St. Suite 909  
Los Angeles CA 90013  
(213) 617-8277

National Prevention Network  
c/o Louisiana Division of Alcohol  
and Drug Abuse  
PO Box 3868  
Baton Rouge LA 70821-3868  
(504) 342-9351

National Association for  
Children of Alcoholics  
31528 Coast Hwy Suite B  
South Laguna CA 92677  
(714) 499-3889

National Association for Native  
American Children of Alcoholics  
P O Box 18736  
Seattle WA 98118  
(206) 322-5601

National Clearinghouse for  
Alcohol and Drug Information  
PO Box 2345  
Rockville MD 20852  
(800) 729-6686

National Coalition of Hispanic Health  
and Human Service Organizations  
1030 15th St. NW Suite 1053  
Washington DC 20005  
(202) 371-2100

National Council on Alcoholism  
and Drug Dependence  
12 West 21st St.  
New York NY 10010  
(212) 206-6770

National Families in Action  
2296 Henderson Mill Rd. Suite 204  
Atlanta GA 30345  
(404) 934-6364

National Federation of Parents  
9551 Big Bend  
St. Louis MO 63122  
(314) 968-1322

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Abuse Prevention and Disabilities  
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Washington DC 20004  
(202) 783-2900

OSAP is gathering information on what groups across the country are doing about the problem of underage drinking. We will publish this information in the near future. Please send your ideas to:

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Drug Information  
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