

Underage Drinking

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a statewide coalition of 21 public and private colleges in Missouri with the mission of building safe and healthy campuses. PIP gathers data from the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey in order to assess high-risk behaviors occurring among college students. Data from the MACHB can be utilized to gain an understanding of programs that are currently established to inform individuals about the prevalence of underage drinking.

Discussion

According to a comprehensive article detailing underage student drinking habits, about half of the alcohol consumed at four year colleges is consumed by students under the legal drinking age of 21.¹ It is important to understand why underage students are drinking to create effective prevention efforts, and to lower the overall binge-drinking and alcohol consumption rate. Efforts on campus can also lessen the incidences of students harming themselves and others from the use of alcohol.

Prevalence

According to data from the 2016 MACHB, about 49% of underage students had consumed alcohol least one time in the past 30 days, with 8% of underage drinkers choosing to drink 10-20 of those 30 days. Binge-drinking (consuming 5+ drinks over a two hour period anytime within the previous two weeks) among underage drinkers is also an issue on college campuses. Approximately 24% of underage students in Missouri reported binge-drinking.

The survey identified that underage students consume alcohol most frequently at a social gathering/friend's house (77%) and where they live (39%). The results are similar when focusing on pre-partying; with 47% indicating pre-partying at a social gathering/friend's house and 26% indicating drinking at their own residence. Further, students stated they were able to access alcohol most frequently from an over 21 year old friend (46%), using a fake ID (9%), going to a place where they know IDs are not checked (9%), or from fraternity or sorority houses (7%). Of the 9% of underage drinkers whom

reported utilizing a fake ID, 59% indicated they have never been denied while purchasing alcohol.

Why Underage Students Are Drinking

I want to have fun with friends	84%
I want to relax	49%
I like how it makes me feel	36%
To get drunk	33%
It doesn't negatively affect my academics	24%
To escape/so I can forget my problems	16%
I have nothing better to do	11%
Alcohol is always readily available	8%
There won't be any negative consequences	5%

When prompted to indicate reasons for drinking, nearly 84% of underage drinkers chose 'I want to have fun with friends'. Other popular answers were; 'I want to relax (49%)' and 'I like how it makes me feel (36%)'. As seen in the PIP Social Norm brief (pip.missouri.edu/docs/briefs/PIP_5_5.pdf), there is a large misconception with the frequency of alcohol consumption and the amount of drinks typical students have while they drink. It can be inferred that college students may perceive drinking to be the 'norm' and the typical way to meet new people and spend quality time with friends. This may suggest the need for educating college students on safe drinking behaviors and the influence of social norms.

1 Wechsler, H., Lee, J. E., Nelson, T. F., & Kuo, M. (2002). Underage college students' drinking behavior, access to alcohol, and the influence of deterrence policies: Findings from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study. *Journal of American College Health*, 50(5), 223-236.

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