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Alcohol, Drugs and Crime

Alcohol Abuse in College and the Effect of Alcohol in Society

 As a college student, I often find myself at a crossroads in regards to partying and drinking. See, although I’m underage, I do drink, now, do I drink as often as “regular” college students do? Definitely not. I find myself conflicted because I want to fit in. I do not want to be shunned but I also do not enjoy drinking in excess. The practice of drinking and overdrinking in college and university settings is one of the biggest reasons why parents fear sending their home trained eighteen-year-olds away for school. As a college student, I can understand their concern but some of us, who also made the decision to be above the influence, decided to go away to college too and from my point of view, we are the forgotten few.

 Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in the United States leading many to forget that it is, indeed, still a drug. Because it is socially acceptable and legal, many abuse the drug openly and teenagers and young adults, regardless of the drinking age, look to possess it. Many teenagers drink because they think it will make them “cool” or maybe, they have been told that when they drink, they are much more likeable (I have encountered this). It is because of this that these teens do not assess the dangers of drinking alcohol in excess. As a student, I often find that “excess” is also a loose term, defined differently throughout the years as to what it means. The California Student Survey[[1]](#footnote-1) different challenges that pertain to the heavy use of alcohol and why the term “excess” is so difficult to give a definition. The first challenge they spoke of was that cultures and subcultures vary wifely in the degree of tolerance for substance use and abuse. Most people think of themselves as “social drinkers[[2]](#footnote-2)” while others take the term “social drinker” to an entirely new level. Should you “socialize” every night – you go from “social drinker” to “alcoholic.” Not only so, some people consider any recreational drinking by youth to be “abuse” solely by virtue of its illegality. This ties in with the fact that many cultures do not find what we consider underage drinking an issue because of their beliefs. How are we to tell a 15-year-old from a foreign country that they cannot drink wine with their family during a holiday?

 The abuse of alcohol and alcoholism is difficult to define for any population because, most of the time, the criterion is measured adult-wise, leaving the youth who drink illegally out of the number. Not only so, drinking behavior occurs sporadically throughout youth years and varies according to friendships and the company kept. Many young adults drink excessively as a result of the friends they keep and most alcohol use disorders take years to develop and maybe even longer for someone to catch. It usually does not become apparent to the user that they have a problem until the problem has them by the throat. A problematic drinker[[3]](#footnote-3) will eventually have medical, social and even financial issues by the time they realize they need help. It is these issues that point out that there is concern. Some indicators of abuse and dependency are not relevant to students developmentally, such as driving under intoxication under the age of 16.

 As for how frequently alcohol is used and abused, the number increases through high school and up to college. Newly free and independent college students find themselves, for the first time, no longer under parental discretion and use alcohol to assert their freedom. A potential indicator of heavy involvement is using at school (for college students, in classes) or during the school day. Off the record, I have found that many students participate in this sort of activity, especially when stress level rise, usually during midterms or finals. Students also tend to participate in this type of activity when stress levels finally subside or when stress levels are about to rise, like, for example, Townhouse Day. An inability to forego use during school, despite the inherent risk of being caught, suggests a level of involvement or confidence that reflects a psychological and/or physiological dependency. Many would say that this behavior also reflects a disengagement from school but I beg to differ. Especially here at Pace University, I have found that there is not a direct correlation between drinking and how well you do in school. Those who get distracted usually do not care about school to begin with but those who care about school, still drink, and keep their grades up because they know that that is the only way to stay here. Not only so, drinking excessively in college, I have found, does not deter students from the fact that they must graduate. So now I wonder, is alcoholism during adult ages (where, most of the time, you are no longer working to get somewhere) worse than underage and college drinking? Research shows that nationwide, college binge drinkers face lower GPAs, higher levels of antisocial behaviors, drinking to get drunk and/or cope and will probably abuse alcohol in the future. I don’t believe that these assessment are incorrect, I have just found a different aspect in Pace University everyday life.

 An interesting aspect of drinking, as popular as it is, is that alcohol is a depressant and regardless of the reasons the person is drinking, the drug depresses the central nervous system. I found that the highest levels of drinking are by college students (explained above) and there are groups that tend to drink more than others. Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and single men drink more than their counterparts. It is also clear, living on a college campus, and those who are stressed, depressed, withdrawn also drink excessively. As a depressant, how is it that the people who need to be “picked up” drink excessively? Those who use drinking as problem intervention[[4]](#footnote-4) have usually become detrimental to themselves, others and society and therefore need to be stopped or reduce their use (which, most of the time, is not an option). In determining levels of abuse and dependency, most assessment tools rely on evidence of adverse consequences[[5]](#footnote-5). It is not enough to determine that one needs help just by their frequency of use or level of dependency but rather one must prove that their use adversely affects their day-to-day lives. There must be a pattern and for young adults, this pattern is very hard to find.

 Finally, I must explain what the use of alcohol does to both adults and young adults. Beginning the use of alcohol at a young age speeds up these issues and also opens the door for bigger issues, such as financial and biological (pregnancy, etc.) as an adult. Alcohol affects your cognitive functioning and the more you drink, the more you are impaired. Drinking excessively, or even in moderation, increases the chance of alcohol induced brain damage, motor skills are affected, senses are affected, your problem solving ability decreases, mystery bruises arise and drinking sedates the medulla part of the brain. Young adults who drink, such as teenagers in high school, tend to make greater mistakes that follow them into adulthood: teen pregnancy rises, the spread of STDs/STIs becomes widespread and the drift from family also leads to dependency issues (not on the alcohol but on other people) making teens feel alone and leading them to continue with their bad decisions. The risks are the same into college but the concept of date rape is added, making parties and outings dangerous for young ladies and their friends.

 In conclusion, I find that alcohol is popular, not only among young adults but also well into adult hood. The reasons people abuse alcohol varies as do many of the consequences that will plague them should they begin using at different ages. For youths, school failure ensues and dropping out because a big factor. For adults, their home lives are ruined, as are their work lives. Currently prevention for alcohol is not impacting heavy users. Those who are already immersed in the life are not being reached out to and those who are not yet affected by alcohol use have role models who are. It is a vicious cycle that will continue to thrive with the legalization of alcohol in America. What is our solution? I’m not sure. But with the issues clearly laid out, there is no reason that a solution should not be in the works.

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3. Austin, Gregory, Ph.D, Rodney Skager, Ph.D, Jerry Bailey, Ph.D, and Scott Bates, Ph.D.*Heavy Alcohol and Drug Use*. Rep. Sacramento, CA: Daphne Hom, 2007. Print.

1. California School Survey conducted in late fall and early winter of 2003-2004 under conditions of strict confidentiality and anonymity. It examined both high-level and high frequency use patterns, focusing on two categories of students, those classified as *high risk drug users* and those who self-report as *binge drinking of alcohol.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Social drinkers are defined as those who **claim** to drink lightly only at parties or other social events. They usually **claim** that they do not drink on a daily basis or when at home. Only those who drink light at social events are actually social drinkers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A problematic drinker is defined as someone who drinks alcohol daily and frequently. A problem drinker or alcoholic will drink alone at home and have an alcoholic beverage with meals. All events in their lives revolve around alcohol and where they can find it. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Problem intervention is drinking to avoid your issues and to forget what is plaguing you. Drinking does not solve your problems and though you temporarily forget your issues, they return, prompting you to drink again. This leads to dependency. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Adverse consequences are issues that arise in everyday life because of ones drinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)