

Adolescent Alcohol Use

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To this day, Alcohol poses a danger that literature defines as “the world's third largest contributor to disease” (Marshall, 2014). According to the World Health Organization, nearly 2.5 million deaths are caused by alcohol, with rising prevalence among adolescents (WHO, 2014). Alcohol consumption and misuse in adolescents continues to be a national health issue in the United States (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2013). In-depth reports for one month indicated underaged drinking to stand at almost 30% (SAMHSA, 2013). A recent study about ongoing drug use among high school students found an alcohol consumption level of almost 50% by the time they reach 12th grade, and warned that the majority of high school students have had an experience of alcohol intoxication by the time they graduate from high school (Mitchell, Gryczynski, O’Grady, Schwartz, 2013).

Most research gives evidence and a call to action about the need for interventions to reduce drinking in adolescents, yet little research has regarded long-term effects and possible causes for development of underaged drinking (McCambridge et. al., 2011; Mitchell et. al., 2013). A few systematic reviews give information about the lack of correlation between a person’s childhood socio-economic status and the consumption of alcohol (Wiles et al., 2007). In addition, social influences such as peer pressure, drinking family members, easy access to alcohol or broken family dynamics can be risk factors for adolescent alcohol consumption (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005; Rubin et al., 2006; Guyer et al., 2012; Marshall, 2014). Furthermore, literature has illuminated that genetic factors play a role in teenage drinking behaviors (Rose et al., 2001; Marshall, 2014). In addition, research shows that psychological instability during childhood can be a factor for developing alcohol use disorders (Tarter et al., 2003; Thatcher and Clark, 2008). Surprisingly, literature has shown that most adolescents nowadays have a higher tolerance for alcohol than adults and are more prone to develop binge drinking behaviors as they get to experience higher levels of positive effects from alcohol

(Marshall, 2014). With that in mind, more research needs to focus on the positively perceived effects so education and treatment for adolescent clientele can be optimized.

Conclusively, the literature on adolescent alcohol use/misuse must continue to grow as to fully understand how to best support those affected by it. Although patterns in drinking behavior and alcohol use disorder could be traced through environmental and genetic factors, the make-up of alcoholic beverages and the use thereof often changes throughout the generations. Therefore, quantitative as well as qualitative research is needed to identify factors which contribute to drinking behaviors in adolescents and preventative interventions to protect the younger generation.

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