

1983

How alcohol influences a representative group of rural ninth grade students in Iowa

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How alcohol influences a representative group of rural ninth grade students in Iowa

Abstract

Abuse of alcohol is one of the biggest health and social problems in the United States today. It is estimated that there are more than fifteen million persons whose drinking is associated with serious personal and social problems, including about ten million who are alcoholics. Alcohol use is often associated with crime, poverty, and other social problems. Alcohol also contributes to physical illness, mental illness, and family conflicts. More than fifty percent of the fatal accidents and a high proportion of the injuries occurring on the nation's highways involve drivers or pedestrians who have had too much to drink. (Nusbrunner, 1981).

HOW ALCOHOL INFLUENCES A REPRESENTATIVE GROUP OF
RURAL NINTH GRADE STUDENTS IN IOWA

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Department of School Administration
and Personnel Services
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by
Stephen Taylor Brem
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures	iv
CHAPTER	
1. The Problem	1
Introduction	1
Statement of Problem	4
Importance of the Study	5
Assumptions	5
Limitations of the Study	6
Definition of Terms	6
2. Review of Literature	8
Introduction	8
Historical Data	9
Information Sources	11
Usage of Alcohol by Students	13
Summary	14
3. Design of the Study	15
Procedures to be Used	15
Sources of Data	15
Instrument	16
Methods of Gathering Data	16

	Page
4. Analysis of the Data	19
The Problem	19
Methods of Gathering Information	19
Alcohol Values and Attitudes	19
5. Discussion of the Findings	30
Introduction	30
The Findings	30
What do the Findings Mean	32
The Relationship to Other Studies	33
Summary	35
6. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations . .	36
Introduction	36
What the Study is About	36
Why the Study is Important	37
Methods of Research	37
Findings	38
Conclusions	39
Recommendations	40
Bibliography	42
Appendix A	44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Group Information	17
2. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: Would your parents agree or disagree with this statement: Frequent use of alcohol can cause serious physical and psychological harm?	20
3. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: What are your parent's feelings about drinking?	21
4. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: Does your father/mother drink beer, wine or liquor?	22
5. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: What are the two most important reasons for people not drinking?	23
6. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: During an average month, how often do you usually drink <u>any</u> amount of beer, wine, or liquor?.	24
7. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: How old were you the <u>first time</u> you ever had your own glass of beer, wine, shot of liquor or a mixed drink of any kind?	25
8. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: Imagine that you stopped at a friend's house after school. No members of your friend's family are home. Your friend takes two cans of beer out of the refrigerator and offers you one. What would you do?	26
9. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: Imagine that you and your friends are planning what you are going to do before and after a school dance. Two of your friends suggest having a few drinks before the dance, and then after an hour at the dance, go to an apartment for a party. What are you likely to do?	27
10. Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: Has your behavior toward alcohol been influenced by what you have learned in school?	28

CHAPTER 1

The Problem

Introduction

Abuse of alcohol is one of the biggest health and social problems in the United States today. It is estimated that there are more than fifteen million persons whose drinking is associated with serious personal and social problems, including about ten million who are alcoholics. Alcohol use is often associated with crime, poverty, and other social problems. Alcohol also contributes to physical illness, mental illness, and family conflicts. More than fifty percent of the fatal accidents and a high proportion of the injuries occurring on the nation's highways involve drivers or pedestrians who have had too much to drink. (Nusbrunner, 1981).

Despite relatively recent concerns about marijuana and other drugs, drinking among young people has been a consistent cause of friction between the generations. Barthal (1980) points out that in American society, drinking has long been permitted only for adults. Until recently, the sale, purchase, or use of alcoholic beverages to or by persons under the age of twenty-one was illegal in most states. Following the lowering of the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, many states reduced the legal drinking age to eighteen. There is still a great deal of controversy over this question, however, and Kentucky, which many years ago changed the voting age to eighteen and now considers an eighteen-year-old a legal adult, still prohibits drinking before the age of twenty-one. (Beck, 1979). Some states which lowered

the drinking age are now considering raising it. (Torres, 1982).

One of the reasons cited as influencing the increase in adolescent drinking may be the examples, attitudes, and restrictions of adults, which may have enhanced the attraction of alcohol for young people as a symbol of adult status. Biddle (1979) believes that, as a result, adults seem to have stimulated the kind of drinking that involves risks more than they have controlled it. The same thing has also been true of much of the education about alcohol--required by the laws of every state--which, until recently, appears to have inspired the very behavior it was intended to discourage. (Smith, 1981).

For a few years, concern about alcohol use among youth seemed overshadowed by concern about use of other drugs, notably amphetamines and marijuana. (Babst, 1979). In more recent years, however, young people have been turning to alcohol in increasing numbers. Surveys have shown that eighty percent of adolescents have tried alcohol and fifty percent identify themselves as current users. (Milgram, 1982). Nearly seventy percent of the young adults and thirty percent of the teen-agers between the ages of twelve and seventeen were current users of alcohol. (Milgram, 1982). Since this survey was based on interviews with people living in households--but not places of traditionally high alcohol use, such as military installations and college dormitories--the survey, if anything, may underestimate alcohol use by young people.

By comparison, Milgram (1982) found marijuana use to be well behind alcohol use. Only sixty percent of those in the eighteen-to-twenty-five-year-old group and twenty percent of those in the twelve-to-seventeen-year old group had tried marijuana, and about twenty-five percent of the young adults and fifteen percent of the youths were current users.

Whenever a society permits the use of alcohol, some people drink to the point of drunkenness and others drink enough so that their inhibitions against antisocial behavior are weakened. (Mayer, 1980). In some societies, intoxication generally occurs only in connection with certain ceremonial events, and provisions are made for protecting drinkers from themselves and society from their drunkenness. In some segments of American society, by contrast, drunkenness is socially reinforced. (Mayer, 1980).

Not only has there been an increase in alcohol consumption by teenagers in recent years, but young people are also drinking at younger and younger ages. (Milgram, 1982). A survey by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in 1974 discovered that among high-school seniors, ninety-three percent of the boys and eighty-seven percent of the girls had tried alcohol. Among seventh graders, sixty-three percent of the boys and fifty-four percent of the girls reported that they had tried it.

Further evidence of the extent of drinking among teen-agers comes from studies done at one suburban school system in San Mateo County, south of San Francisco. (Petrillo, 1979). In 1973, forty percent of the senior-class boys and twenty-nine percent of the senior-class girls reported that in the previous year they had drunk some sort of alcoholic beverage fifty or more times. Among the ninth graders (thirteen- and fourteen-year-old students), twenty-three percent of the boys said they drank just as often. In each case, these percentages were nearly double what they had been in a 1970 study of similar social groups of students. (Petrillo, 1979).

Widespread teen-age drinking is apparently one factor in the

popularity of the new, so-called "pop wines," the fruit-flavored beverages that are too sweet for the tastes of many adults but which seem to be a transition drink between soda pop and harder alcoholic beverages for many young people. Beer, however, still remains the number one choice of young drinkers. It contains significantly less alcohol (6.4 percent in most states) than the pop wines (about nine percent).

Not surprisingly, the rise in the amount of drinking among teenagers has also brought an increase in their drinking problems. Finn (1979) says that twenty-three percent of student have signs of a potential drinking problem, which is defined by Finn as getting drunk four or more times per year. Approximately five percent of the students were already problem drinkers, defined as getting "high" or "tight" at least once a week. Arrests of people under age eighteen for drunken driving increased by more than 400 percent between 1960 and 1973, and Alcoholics Anonymous reports that it is getting more and more teen-age members. (Finn, 1979). Research has shown that a rapid increase in alcohol use by junior high students has created problems never before known in our society. (Babst, 1979). These problems include teen-age alcoholism and a rising rate in alcohol-related traffic deaths.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate how alcohol influences ninth grade students. The Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Alcohol and Drug Survey was selected to determine the extent of alcohol consumption and the importance placed on drinking by these junior high school students. The research will also focus on whether peer pressures and group conformancy strongly influence many young people to use alcohol.

Importance of the Study

On the basis of data presented in the preceding paragraphs, there seems to be a great need for such a study as the one proposed here. The population as a whole should become aware of our youth's growing use of and dependance on alcohol. Auto accidents and alcoholism are only two of the problem areas that are to be addressed. This study will open new avenues in understanding and dealing with youthful drinking. This study will help all involved understand why students drink and will give explanations for dealing with it. The study will not present a cure for alcohol use, but only information on ways of dealing with and understanding the problem.

Assumptions

The basic assumptions relevant to this study are:

1. Alcohol use is prevalent among a high percentage of the student body.
2. The problem of alcohol use has spread to students in all secondary levels.
3. Alcohol use is affected by peer pressure among youth.
4. Programs need to be established so that alcohol-related problems can be met and dealt with on the secondary level.
5. Alcohol use is a status symbol among youth.
6. The instrument is appropriate to a study in the area of alcohol use among ninth graders.
7. Students will be able to understand the instrument and will answer honestly.

Limitation of the Study

1. Only students in the ninth grade in one school system will be included in the survey.
2. The questionnaire may not contain all necessary questions to properly survey the attitudes of ninth graders.
3. Availability of alcohol use information may be questionable as students reveal their personal information.
4. Respondents may be unable to relate or remember problems or even to realize they are encountering them.

Definition of Terms

Exposed Student: Student who has responded to the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI's) Survey on Alcohol.

Adolescent: Time of life between puberty and adulthood, usually characterized as the age group thirteen to eighteen.

Overdose: Excessive use of a particular alcoholic beverage or combination of drugs so as to cause a negative or even fatal reaction to the mixtures used.

Peer pressure: The impact of perceived attitudes and expectations of individuals and groups within a similar age range upon attitudes, values, and behaviors of respondents.

Contemporary: Experiences and events which occur during the present time period.

"High": Experience described by drinkers as the ultimate "good" feeling or illusionary effects created by alcohol.

School Counselors: Those people directly working with and trained to deal with the problems encountered in secondary schools.

Underground: Alcohol use which is hidden rather than public.

Addiction: Habitual and compelling use of alcohol which requires extra doses in order to meet the user's needs.

Abstainer: A person who never uses alcohol.

Occasional Drinker: A person who uses alcohol no more than once a week and has two drinks or less on each occasion.

Regular Drinker: A person who consumes alcohol one or more times a week.

Problem Drinker: A person who consumes alcohol in heavy dosages.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

The problem of this study has been identified as an attempt to investigate the importance which ninth grade students appear to have regarding the use of alcohol. This chapter will present a review of relevant literature. Material will be grouped under the areas of Historical Data, Informational Sources, Usage of Alcohol by Students, and a Summary.

In reviewing related literature, it was found that while many reports on alcohol have been made, few have been done on the growing problem of teen-age values towards drinking. However, it was possible to retrieve accounts of values and usage in not only journals of education, but also news magazines which report on more recent studies in this area. The major areas which will be covered in the chapter will include historical data of alcohol use in the United States, and why it is such an accepted activity for the older majority of our population. Also, the need for information in this area as alcohol becomes an integral part of the teen-age years. How do we deal with and understand the teen-ager's need without alienating them. What is the usage by age and amount among our youngsters and whether it is or is not excessive, and finally, what can we do, if anything, to better educate our adolescents in the proper use of alcohol.

Studies show school dropout rates and runaways to be drug related problems. (Knudson, 1964). In his research in runaway and dropout problems, Kundson concluded that many of the adolescents either left

home due to alcohol use or began using alcohol shortly after leaving home or school. The reasons for this are listed as follows:

1. Problems at home
2. Peer pressure by friends
3. Television and media coverage
4. Trying to break in with new friends
5. Poor self-concept
6. Trying something new
7. Emulating adult behavior

Alcohol has been a common problem among school-age children for years, but only recently has the problem of combining drugs and alcohol been recognized as a problem. According to Smith (1981), not only alcohol but ingested drugs are being used by school-age children, often with fatal consequences. Students do not seem to take seriously the warnings of health officials, parents, and school officials regarding the dangers of drugs. (Babst, 1979).

Historical Data

Alcohol is no stranger to mankind. From the earliest civilizations, humans have mastered ways to ferment concoctions from the most unbelievable sources. The realm stretches from potatoes to apples. The science of alcohol processing had advanced to a fine art by the time the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. (Milgram, 1972).

Milgram (1972) gives a very thorough history of youthful drinking, and also presents material about the present. The U.S.A. has had many changes in attitudes toward youthful drinking in the period extending from colonial America to the present day. To the Pilgrims, alcohol was

a safe beverage; water in seventeenth century Europe was considered unsafe and harmful because of the sickness incurred due to pollution. More beer than water was brought by the Pilgrims on their voyage to America. "Liquor was more than a luxury in the colonial mind; it was a necessity to be kept close at hand" (Lenden and Martin, 1980, p. 290).

Although beer was shipped to the early colonies it was not possible to meet the increasing demand; rather the imported beer was used as a supplement to the home-brewed beverages produced by the colonists. (Milgram, 1972). By the mid 1600's, the regionally produced beer and distilled spirits were considered respectable and had become popular with the colonists.

After the Revolutionary War, attitudes and patterns of drinking changed. A greater tolerance for heavy drinking began to surface as more people saw alcohol as an escape from the rigors of frontier life. Youthful drinking habits also began to alter as college drinking and debaucheries began to appear. (Milgram, 1982).

Milgram (1982) also points out that by 1828 the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance crystallized the sentiment that it was necessary "to remake the common man in their own sober image." The Temperance Movement was a force to be reckoned with by the mid-nineteenth century. This movement originally focused on the temperate use of alcohol and on the evils of drunkenness. Although the Temperance Movement's goal changed to prohibition, it did not highlight the issue of youthful alcohol consumption and drinking practices; the damage done to the family and the neglect of children, however, received wide publicity. (Smith, 1981). The laws of the time were not aimed at stopping youthful drinking, but only at curbing the service and sale to young people.

Drinking was still not considered a complete evil, as many people still reflected colonial values. (Smith, 1981).

The worry of family upheaval and youthful crime eventually led to Prohibition, through the passage of the Volstead Act of 1920. (Milgram, 1982). The Volstead Act was an attempt to prohibit the use of alcohol in the U.S. during the 1930's. Prohibition did little to stop the sale of alcohol and merely produced a method of capital gain for many bootleggers and smugglers.

There have been different societal attitudes toward youthful drinking in various time periods of the U.S.A., ranging from approval to controversy over the various aspects and issues to outright disapproval. The legal-minimum-age debates going on today in many states focus on society's attitude toward alcohol use, in general, and, in specific, toward adolescent alcohol use. The "yo-yo" phenomenon on alcohol acceptance and non-acceptance seems to best describe the situation. States which lowered their minimum legal age in the mid 1970's, Michigan and New Jersey, raised them in the early 1980's. (Milgram, 1982).

Information Sources

This portion of the chapter will address the published sources that are of great importance in the school setting in supplying alcohol use information. The sources of the published works includes the federal government, state government, commercial publishing companies, and weekly news magazines.

Smith (1981) states that adolescent drug abuse and alcoholism have become topics of public concern that have not been limited to the poor or to racial minorities living in economically depressed, inner-city

neighborhoods. Drug abuse and alcoholism are seen to cut across racial and socioeconomic lines.

A recent survey by the Research Triangle Institute of North Carolina found that nearly one-third of all teen-agers are problem drinkers. (Milgram, 1982). To combat this, legislators and concerned citizens in many states are working on a number of proposals, focusing most of their attention on raising the legal drinking age. (Milgram, 1982). After 1971, when a constitutional amendment lowered the voting age to eighteen, twenty-seven states lowered the legal drinking age as well. (Smith, 1981). Because laws vary from state to state, young people often drive to a neighboring state to do their drinking.

Raising the drinking age to nineteen has been popular in many states because legislators are most concerned with keeping alcohol out of the high schools. Their reasoning is that if older students can buy alcohol--and some high school students are eighteen--they can give it to their younger friends. Some states that have previously allowed eighteen and nineteen-year-old citizens to drink beer and wine while prohibiting harder liquor are now making twenty-one the legal age for buying any alcoholic beverages.

Time Magazine, (1979), points out the fact that today colleges and high schools are returning to the old drug abuse of alcohol. The same magazine also conducted a survey which showed that:

-- More than ninety-five percent of the undergraduates report at least occasional drinking, compared with fifty-nine percent who smoke marijuana, eleven percent who snort cocaine, and ten percent who pop tranquilizers.

-- Twenty percent of the men and ten percent of the women say

getting drunk "was important" to them.

-- The category of heavy drinkers -- those who regularly consume more than a six-pack of beer or five shots of liquor at a sitting--now includes twenty percent of under-graduate men and eleven percent of the women.

-- More freshmen than upperclassmen say they drink heavily.

Buying liquor and having it at parties when their parents aren't around gives teen-agers adult status in eyes of their peers. Like adults, teen-agers drink to have a good time, to be part of a group. (Babst, 1979). And, like adults, they sometimes drink to escape from problems and the stress of school or a job. But unlike most adults, who drink to relax, teen-agers often drink for the express purpose of getting high, even drunk. They also have a tendency to underestimate the potency of alcoholic beverages and to overestimate their ability to drive after drinking.

Because alcohol use is either illegal or forbidden by parents or school authorities, many teen-agers drink surreptitiously and in a hurry, often without food or mixers, causing the alcohol level in their blood to suddenly shoot up, thereby producing intoxication. Low body weight is another factor in youths becoming intoxicated more quickly than adults. The smaller the person, the sooner the effects of alcohol are felt. (Babst, 1979).

Usage of Alcohol by Students

Gibbs (1979) points out that it is a misconception to believe that drugs are being slowly screened out of the school setting. This is especially true with the use of alcohol, which seems to be increasing.

The increased use of alcohol lowers the achievement and creativity of students who become steady users. They tend to give up their goals in life, desiring only the alcohol they enjoy or have even come to depend upon. (Jung, 1970).

The counselor can be a vital link in student education on alcohol according to Leviton (1977) who believes a more concerted program needs to be developed to force home the harmful effects, including brain damage, which can result from the use of alcohol. Butler (1974) also lists the importance of runaway houses which can utilize former users and people of the same age who can directly relate to the young users of today. Smith (1971) wrote a handbook for parents of all children which could help adults understand the problems of students and perhaps relate to them, thereby making it easier for the parents and students to understand each other.

Summary

To summarize, many problems influence youthful drinking, but several seem to be prominent. Mitic (1980) points out that in a society in which the use of alcohol has been symbolically associated with an adult behavior pattern and in which the use of alcohol is legally regulated, surveys have noted that few adolescents wait until they reach drinking age to sample alcohol.

Sexual maturity and peer pressure is probably the next most profound reason for juvenile drinking. (Mitic, 1980). In order to be accepted in a group, something vitally important to teens, the individual thinks that he or she must conform with other group members. Since drinking is a popular activity of the group, many feel pressure to drink.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

Procedures to be Used

Since the problems of youth and the methods of dealing with them are so important in our contemporary society, it was decided that a study of the importance placed on alcohol consumption among youth was needed. Most studies would seem to indicate that the drinking attitudes of teenagers are absorbed from the home environment. However, the question pursued in this investigation is whether friends and peer connections play as important a role in influencing the drinking behavior of teens as does the home environment. In Chapter 2, a review of literature was undertaken to research the history, nature, and the extent of the problem of teen-age attitudes toward drinking and to gather information which might point toward a method of alleviation. The information in Chapter 3 will report the design of the study.

Source of Data

The design and method will be to survey a representative body of this group from one small community in Northeast Iowa. A survey form used by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction was utilized to obtain as much information as possible on the attitudes and values toward alcohol use. The sample consisted of 208 ninth graders from a medium-sized rural midwestern junior high school and were thought to represent conservative value systems. Ninety-seven of the students were male and 111 were female, with an average age of fifteen years. The students were

believed to be representative of this age group and it was believed this group would reflect the attitudes of most adolescents. Most of the students' backgrounds are either agricultural or that of a small town in Iowa. Few have ever resided in large cities and none in slum areas. Most of the students' backgrounds reflected conservative midwestern values and ideals.

Instrument

The survey instrument was developed by the researcher from the Iowa Department of Public Instruction's survey on drug and alcohol use by school-age children. Twelve questions were selected from the instrument to more closely reflect only the usage of alcohol by students who are in the ninth grade.

The researcher selected the DPI survey because it has been used every three years since 1970. It was also prepared to measure the attitudes and values of students toward alcohol rather than how much they drink. The survey contained over 100 questions on both drugs and alcohol, but only fifteen questions were selected because these specifically concern attitudes on drinking. The DPI instrument has been used in many schools throughout the state.

Methods of Gathering Data

The instrument was given to all ninth graders, (a total of 208 students), in the Spring of 1983. Students who were absent were not allowed to fill in the instrument and any forms which were not done correctly were thrown out.

Data regarding the group was gathered in the classroom. One day was

chosen during which questionnaires were handed to each of 208 ninth graders during the first fifteen minutes of the social studies classes. The social studies teacher asked each student to answer the questions of the survey. The students were asked to return the questionnaires to the researcher as soon as possible. Participants were advised that names were not to be used on the forms and that all forms would be destroyed as soon as the data was taken from them. Also, students were informed that no school names would be used or compared in any other than confidential form. All forms handed out were returned and all were usable.

Figure 1

Group Information

Classifications	Number of Students
Total number of students	208
Male	97
Female	111
Grade	9th
Size of Community	2500
Grade Point Average of Participants on a 4.00 Scale	2.43

Analysis of Data

Data was compiled by the researcher and placed on a final tally sheet. The respondents will be cross-referenced in an effort to determine whether sex, peer pressure, and parental values have influence on the drinker. The data will then be analyzed to determine the extent of

use. Data will be entered and tabulated according to the attitude of the user toward alcohol.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

The Problem

The area to be studied has been identified as the attitudes and values placed on alcohol use by rural Iowa ninth grade students. Prior to the present research, the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (DPI) had developed and conducted a survey of alcohol and drug attitudes and behaviors among youth. Certain key questions were taken from the DPI alcohol survey to include in the present study. This chapter presents the findings in each of the areas of the survey.

Methods of Gathering Information

Since this is an attitude and opinion study, the best data gathering instrument was expected to be a value scale with each student selecting the response that best reflected his/her values toward alcohol. This type of analysis was believed to be the most appropriate method of determining each student's opinion. Each question used will be carefully explained and a figure will be provided with it to report the results of the survey.

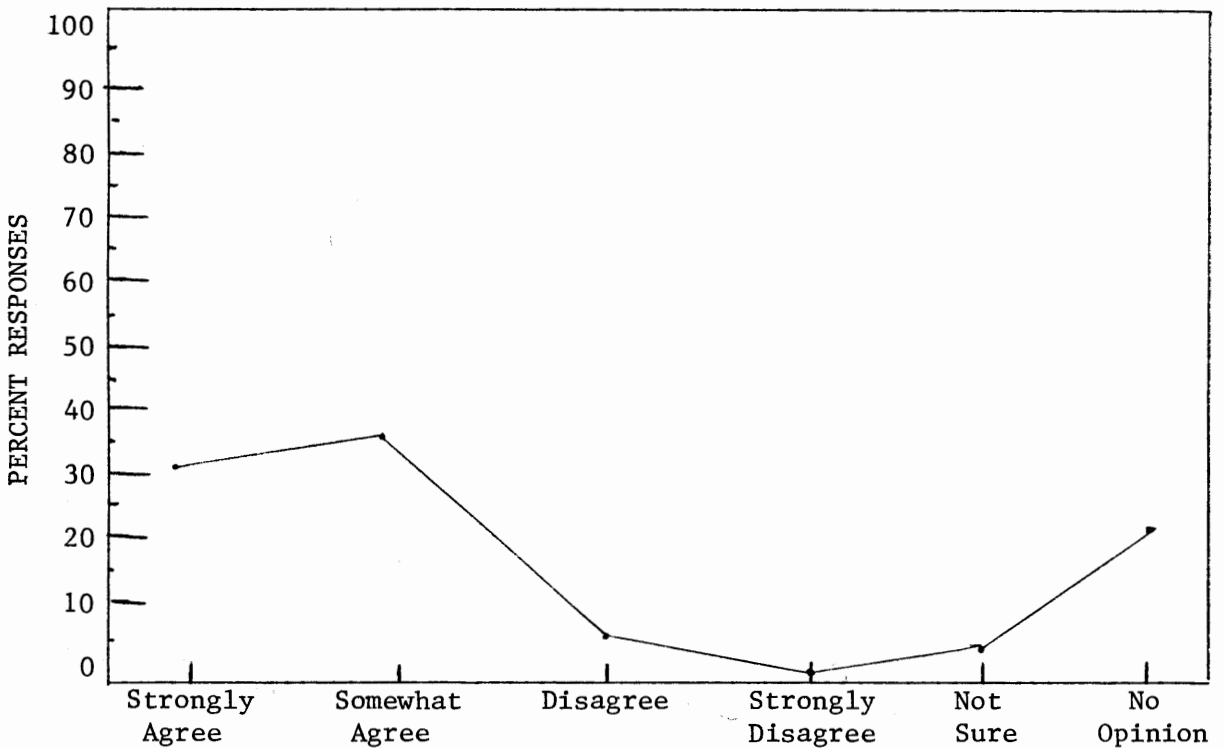
Alcohol Values and Attitudes

The following two questions, numbered seven and eight on the instrument, were used to gather information regarding how students' parents felt about drinking and how this may have affected each individual student's values regarding alcoholic consumption. Question number seven,

as shown in figure two, shows parental attitudes on the effects of alcohol as viewed by the students.

Figure 2

Would your parents agree or disagree with this statement about alcohol: Frequent use of alcohol can cause serious physical and psychological harm?



N = 208

STUDENT RESPONSES

It is shown that thirty-one percent of parents strongly agree that alcohol can cause serious harm. Also thirty-five percent of the students surveyed believed their parents felt alcohol is at least somewhat harmful.

Responses to question number eight give basic information regarding the extent to which the students believe their parents feel positively or negatively about the effects of drinking in general.

Figure 3

What are your parent's feelings about your drinking?

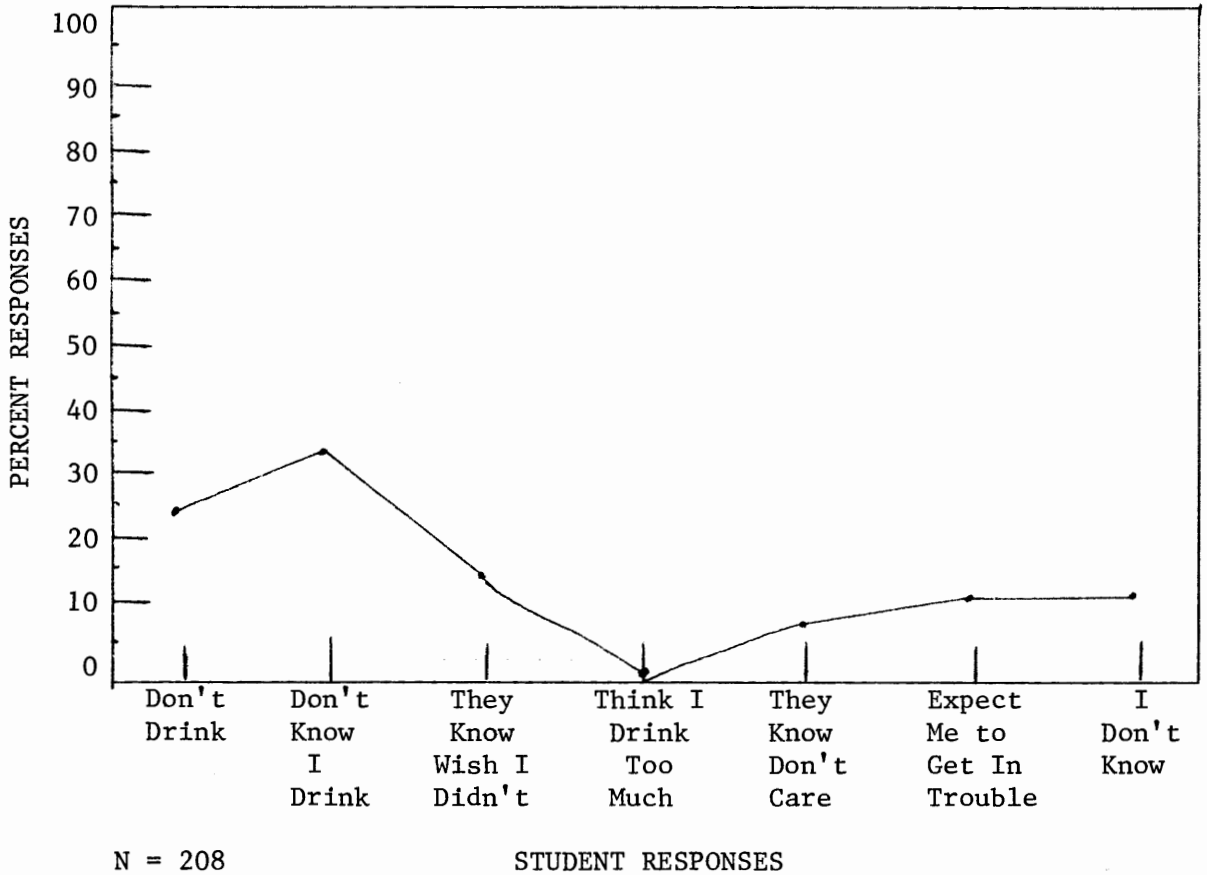
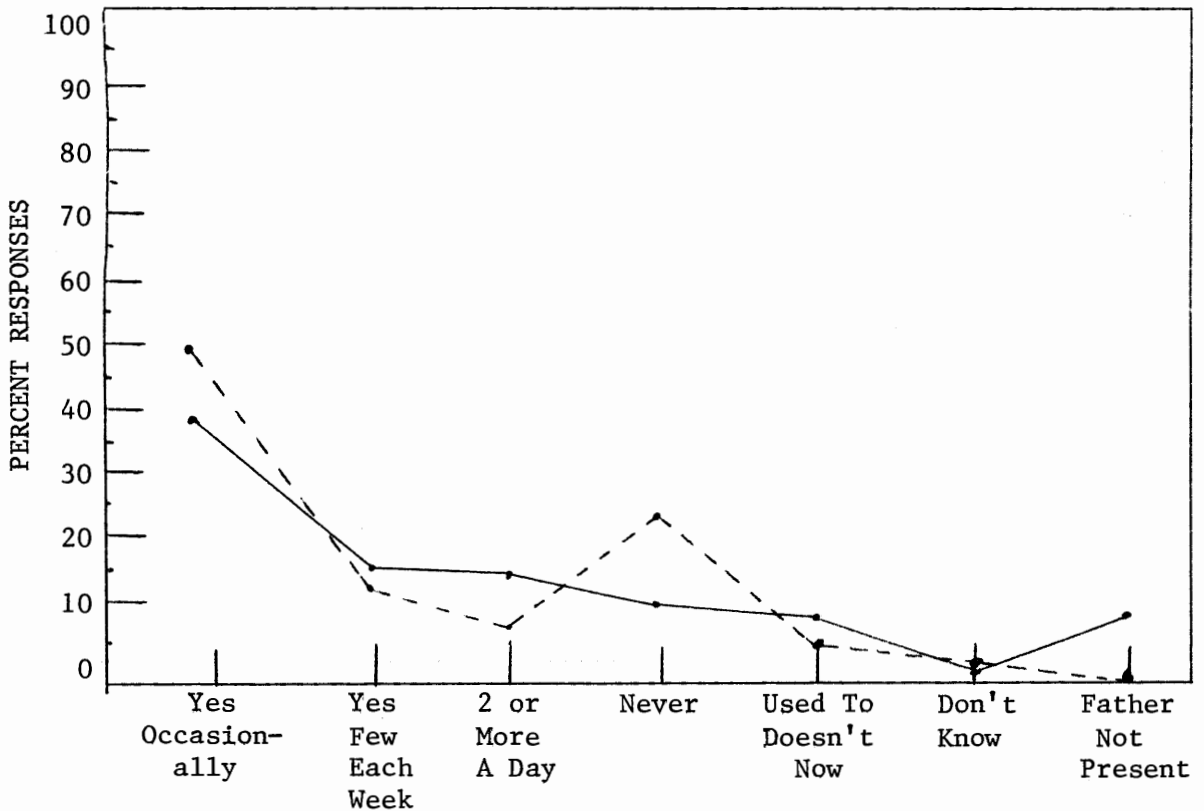


Figure 3 shows that although twenty-four percent of the students surveyed did not drink and couldn't answer the question, thirty-four percent did drink and felt their parents didn't know. Only fourteen percent felt their parents knew and wished they didn't, while six percent reported they believed their parents didn't care.

In figure four the approximate amount of alcohol consumed by the students' parents, as perceived by the students, was investigated. Positive attitudes toward consumption would be expected to arise if the young people believed alcohol was a perfectly acceptable part of domestic life. Thus, parents set the precedent for the adolescent to follow. On the other hand, if alcohol was not used in the home, the young users might be less likely to use it. Figure four measures parental consumption at home as perceived by the students and reflects questions thirteen and fourteen in the DPI survey.

Figure 4

Does your father/mother drink beer, wine or liquor?



N = 208

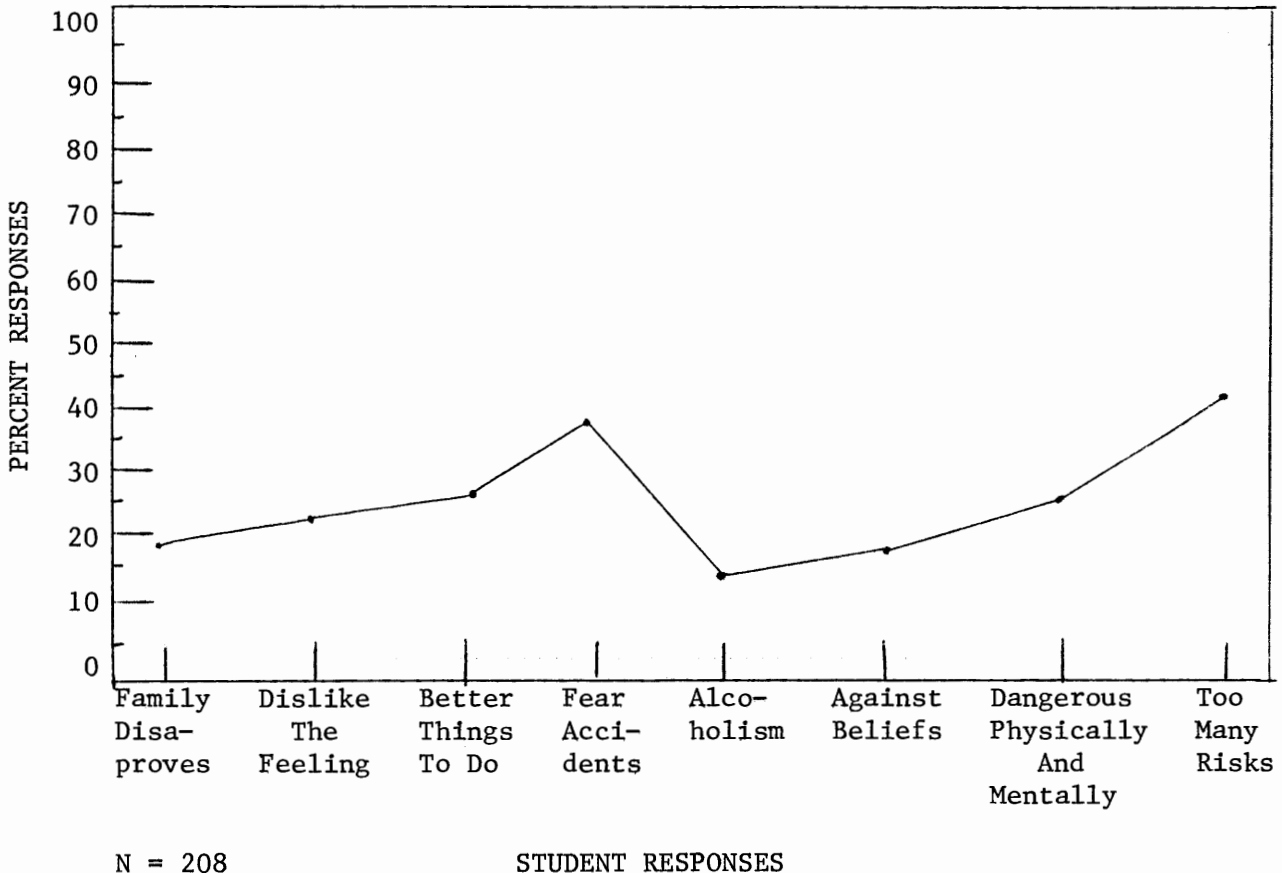
STUDENT RESPONSES

It is shown in figure four that, according to responses of the students, a high percentage of parents drink. Thirty-nine percent of the fathers, along with forty-nine percent of the mothers were reported to occasionally to use alcohol. Only ten percent of the fathers and twenty-four percent of the mothers were reported to never use alcohol.

Question number nine on the DPI survey is shown in figure six. This question attempts to measure the reasons why adolescents feel they should not drink. This question asked each participant to check a response to get a better overall understanding of the values placed on drinking by adolescents. It also reflects the kind of formal education in the home and the parental beliefs toward consumption.

Figure 5

What are the two most important reasons for people not drinking?

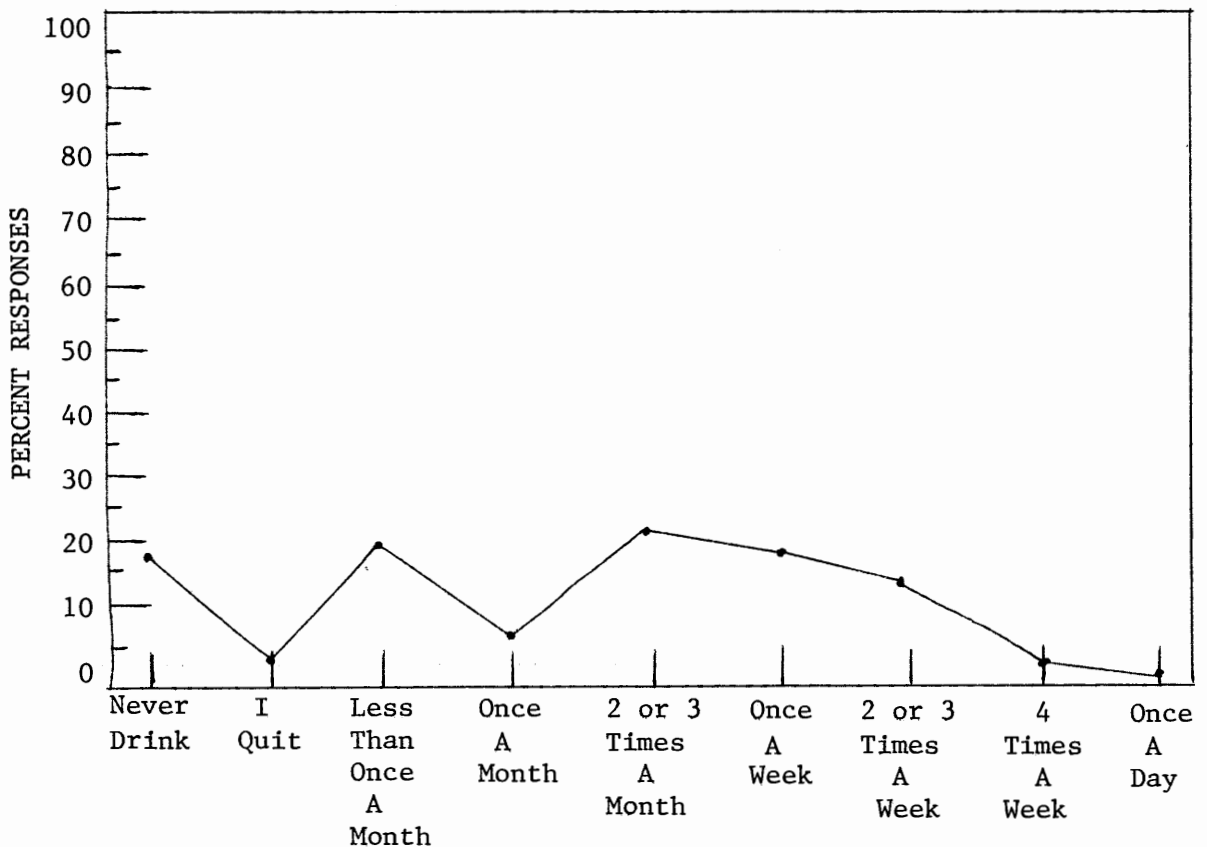


It appears that the major reason for not drinking is the fear of accidents and the fear of dangerous physical and mental injuries. Surprisingly the fear of alcoholism is very low.

The next question, number eleven on the DPI survey, shows alcohol usage by the sample. Question eleven, shown in figure seven, charts how much alcohol the adolescents used. This question was used to gain information regarding frequency of consumption by the youths and also at what age they first used alcohol.

Figure 6

During an average month, how often do you usually drink any amount of beer, wine, or liquor?



N = 208

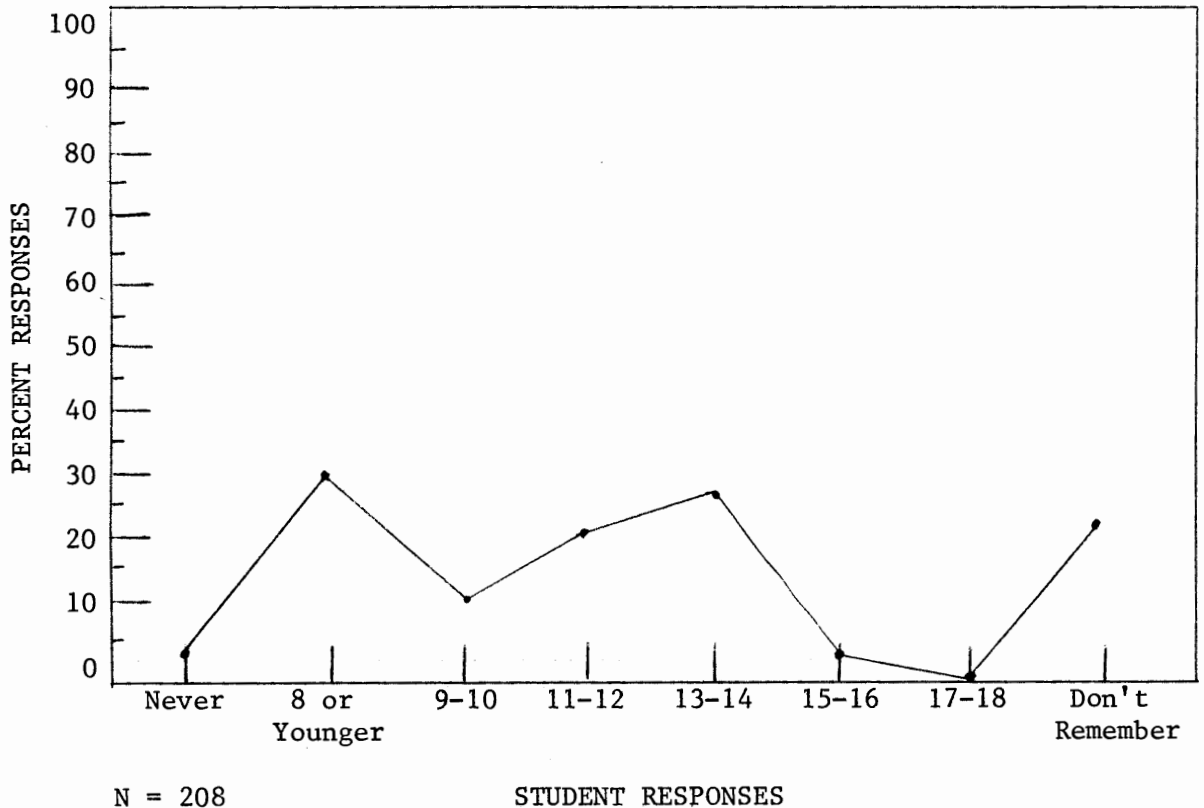
STUDENT RESPONSES

Over seventy-nine percent of students responded by saying that they used alcohol at least once a month. A high percentage reported using it at least once a week.

The next question was used to determine the age most adolescents begin to use alcohol.

Figure 7

How old were you the first time you ever had your own glass of beer, wine, shot of liquor, or a mixed drink of any kind?



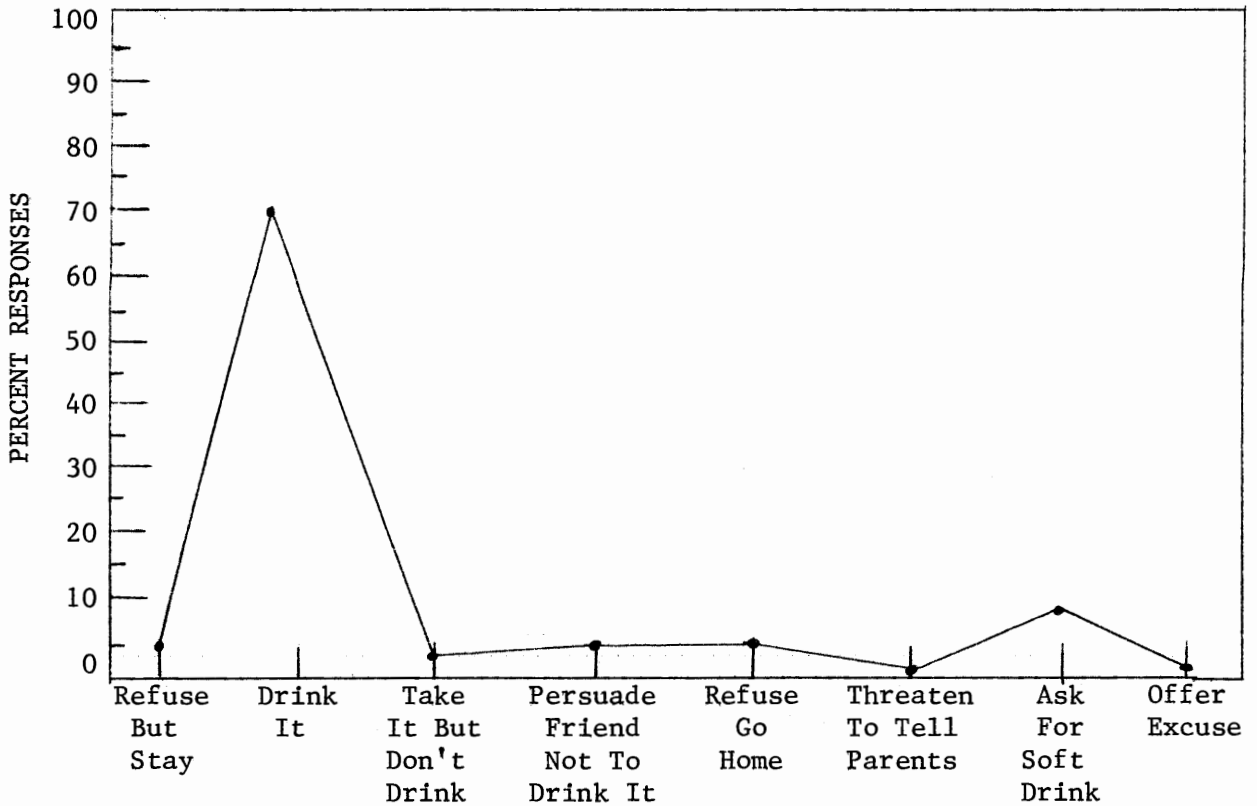
It is shown in figure seven that twenty-nine percent of all respondents were exposed to alcohol use by the age of eight or younger. Only four percent said they had never been exposed. Seventy-eight percent

reported they had been exposed to alcohol by the age of sixteen.

Question number fifteen on the DPI survey is a value question based on peer and group pressures. What effect, if any, does peer and group influence have on adolescent alcohol usage? Do young people tend to follow the pressures of their own age group, or will they use their own judgement? Question fifteen, which is reflected in figure nine, shows how being at a friend's home can be a pressure situation for young people in drinking.

Figure 8

Imagine that you stopped at a friend's house after school. No members of your friend's family are home. Your friend takes two cans of beer out of the refrigerator and offers you one. What would you do?



N = 208

STUDENT RESPONSES

Figure eight shows that seventy percent of the students in the sample would be affected by peer pressure. They said they would not turn down a drink offered them by a friend. None of the respondents said they would tell their parents about the alcohol use.

Question number sixteen, reported in figure nine, measures youth activities and peer-related drinking situations.

Figure 9

Imagine that you and your friends are planning what you are going to do before and after a school dance. Two of your friends suggest having a few drinks before the dance, and then after an hour at the dance, go to an apartment for a party. What are you likely to do?

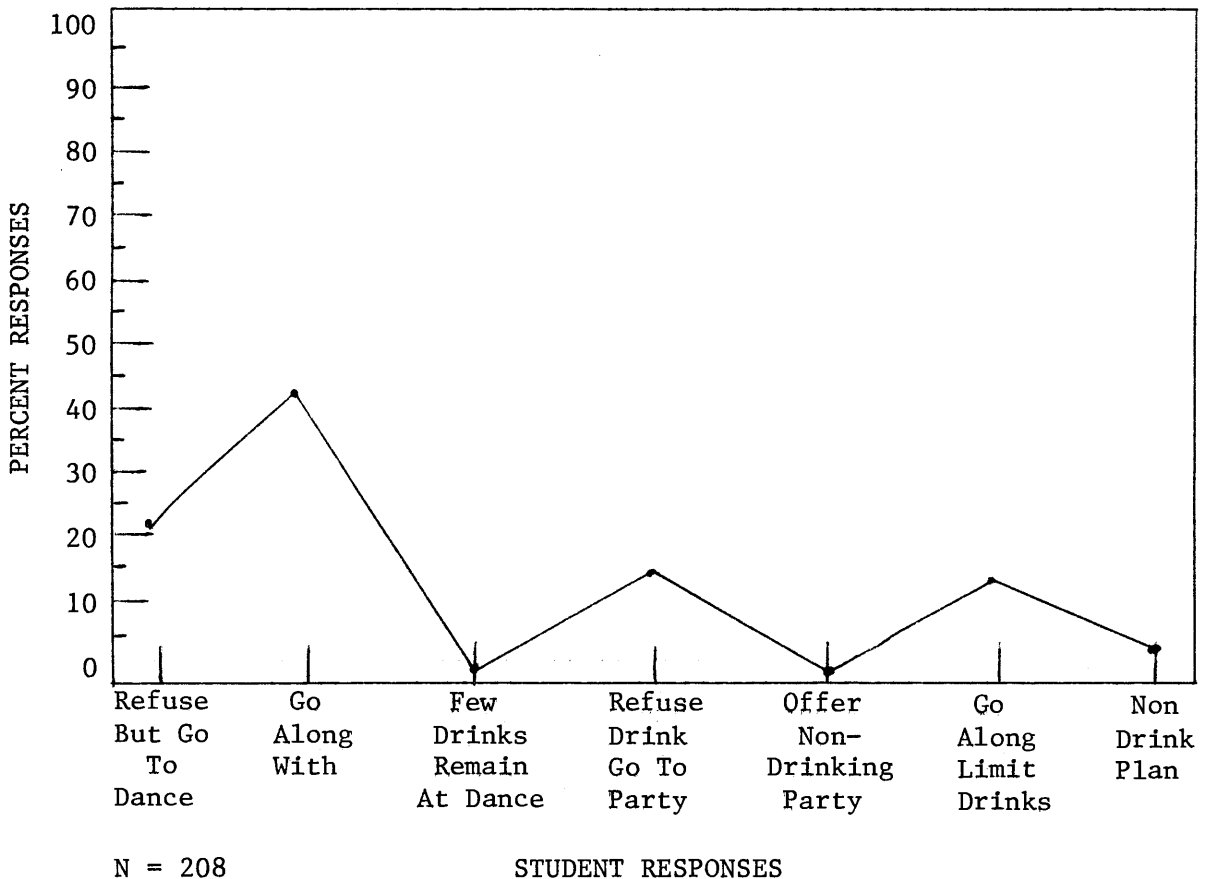
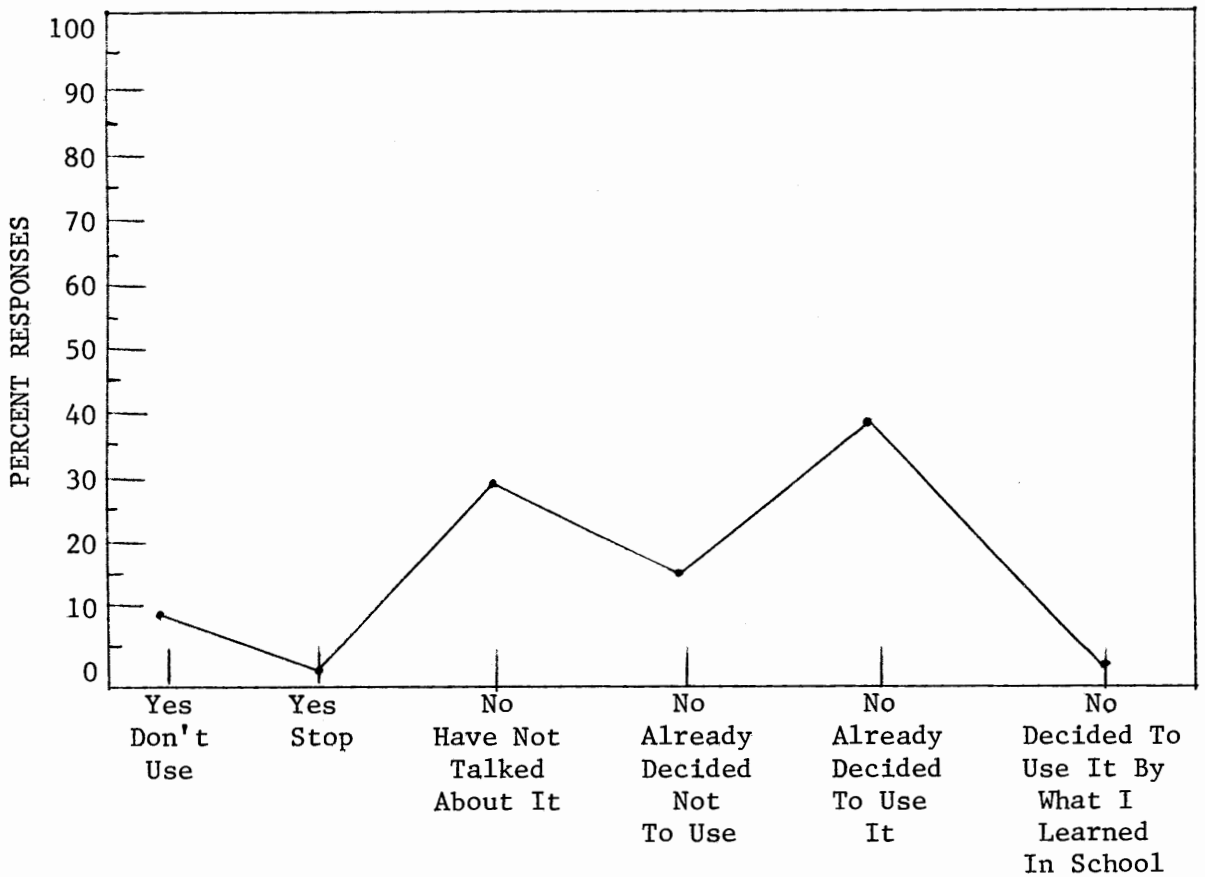


Figure nine shows that most students would go along with their friends if offered a drink at their house. Forty-two percent responded they would accept a friend's offer.

Finally, question number ten, as reported in figure ten, reveals how the students have been influenced in their values toward drinking by school programs.

Figure 10

Has your behavior toward alcohol been influenced by what you have learned in school?



N = 208

STUDENT RESPONSES

Figure ten shows that most students have already decided whether or

not to use alcohol regardless of training at school, although seventeen percent decided they were not going to use it.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion of the Findings

Introduction

The identified problem of the attitudes, values, and peer and parental influence on adolescent drinking patterns of the ninth grade students, and research on such, is the subject of this study. In this chapter, the findings of this survey will be discussed and compared with findings of other studies.

The Findings

In Chapter 4, findings from the Iowa Department of Public Instruction's survey of alcohol and drug attitudes and behaviors among youth were presented. In the following accounts, the correlations and comparisons of those findings will be discussed.

1. It was shown in figure two that a large percentage of parents believe that alcohol is harmful. Well over sixty percent of the students agreed that alcohol was at least somewhat harmful to its users. Fewer than eight percent disagreed with this statement and thirty-two percent were uncertain as to the harmfulness of alcohol.
2. The information taken from figures four and five, seek to ascertain the percentage of parents who drink alcohol in some form. According to the survey, more than seventy-five percent of the fathers drank to some extent, while seventy percent of the mothers used alcohol. From this information it is evident

that most children are exposed to drinking by their parents. This makes drinking a socially and family-accepted activity. It may therefore be assumed that children accept alcohol usage as a perfectly normal part of the family surrounding.

3. The findings shown in figure three reflect the extent of alcohol usage by the young people surveyed. Well over seventy-five percent have used alcohol to some extent. This also correlates very closely with the findings in figures four and five, which showed that most teen-agers drink in emulation of parents who drink. The values placed on not drinking are quite apparent to the adolescents, but evidently the idea of emulating adult behavior is much stronger. These findings also emphasize the fear of parents that their children may be injured or get into trouble if they drink. Evidently these values are known by adolescents, but as the parents' warnings are unheeded, so apparently are the fears of the youth as shown in figure six.
4. Figure six shows that even though most teens appear to be fully aware of the hazards of drinking, few seem to take them seriously. The main concern of this age group was that of being injured in accidents.
5. Information shown in figures seven and eight refers to actual usage and exposure findings. Most children are exposed to alcohol at a very young age, thirty percent by the age of eight. Only four percent had never tried alcohol at age sixteen, and well over eighty percent had tried alcohol by age fourteen. This exposure could range from a sip from the beer can to heavy use. Most have begun to realize the effects of alcohol at an

early age. The overall use of alcohol can be seen in figure seven. Only seventeen percent have never tried alcohol and over fifty percent use it once a week. This means over eighty percent of the ninth graders surveyed use alcohol at least once a month.

6. Peer pressure also places great emphasis on drinking among youth, as is revealed in figures nine and ten. This is shown by the importance attached to not being the social outcast in the peer group. Over seventy-five percent would drink and not try to deviate from group activity. Even though most realize the dangers of drinking, the social acceptance by peers and group authority is strong. Drinking and partying, which have long been part of the adult world, appear to be becoming just as important to the young people surveyed. Schools seem to have little impact on drinking, as seen in figure ten.

What Do the Findings Mean

The study appears to support the idea that the ninth graders put a great amount of importance on the use of alcohol. The research has found support for the statements of problem and assumptions in most instances. The findings indicate that most students feel the need of alcohol due to social acceptance of drinking by both their peers, and by their parents. It certainly appears that the copying of an adult lifestyle is very important to them. It could also be assumed that more intense drinking takes place due to peer pressure and the need to feel they are conforming to their own particular group's valued ideals. This was shown when few students said they would have turned down a drink if

offered in front of their friends. The results of the two peer-related questions showed great reluctance to change or defer from a group-related drinking experience.

The study revealed that most young people are exposed to alcohol at an early age and quickly accept drinking as a part of a mature lifestyle. They see their parents drinking, which places great emphasis on drinking as being an important part of young adulthood and the "in crowd" concept.

The area of most concern in the study was how little education students had received on alcohol use prior to the ninth grade. Since children spend so much of their growing and influential years in school, it would seem relevant to have more of that time spent on alcohol education. It should be noted, however, that in the district in which this study was conducted, a health education course at the high school level is now in use and includes a thorough chapter on alcohol.

Relationship to Other Studies

In the introduction to this study, the researcher tried to show the importance of the study. The results indicate that drinking among adolescents is a problem and is accepted as the lifestyle they prefer to emulate in their peer-related activities. These results support many studies done on alcohol use among teen-agers. In addition to this study, many areas of research back up the findings conducted here. Studies by Babst (1979), Barnes (1981), Brown (1982), Finn (1979), Gibbs (1979), Hahn (1982) point out that the problem of alcohol abuse among junior high students is a present and growing problem. Babst (1979) reported that while there are many papers which describe problems of junior high

use, few provide the rates at which these harmful consequences occur.

In the studies done by Babst (1979), Jung (1970), Milgram (1982), and Pipher (1979) it is shown that few schools spend much time educating junior high students in alcohol abuse. Pipher (1979) says "Alcohol education programs operate without a clear-cut philosophy; there is no evidence of their impact."

Studies by Gibbs (1979), Mayer (1980), Smith (1981), and Milgram (1982) show the tremendous numbers of young people who are exposed to alcohol at very young ages. Milgram (1982) points out that "the high percentage of "ever tried" alcoholic beverages indicates the significant extent of adolescent exposure to alcohol." She also states that alcohol education needs to become an educational priority due to the fact that over eighty percent of our adolescents have, at the very least, tried various types of alcohol and over fifty percent constitute themselves as users.

Barnes (1981), Biddle (1980), Liccione (1980), Mitic (1980) show the various peer group and adult influences which adolescents copy in drinking. Liccione (1980) believes a number of sociological studies indicate that adolescent's parents and friends influence their use of alcoholic beverages. He also believes another factor is the "teen-ager's willingness to talk about parents as if they represented peers." On the basis of his suggested evidence, it seems probable that an adolescent's friends and parents are instrumental in whether he/she will or will not drink.

The serious health effects of drinking on teens has been continually pointed out. Studies by Bell (1983), Chafetz (1979), Foster (1982), and Nusbrunner (1981) all indicate the dangers of alcoholism and auto

injuries. Foster (1982) reveals the statistics of teen-age deaths which are due to alcoholism and drinking. He also says that fifteen percent of high school seniors are heavy drinkers and eighty-two percent have tried alcohol.

Summary

Finally, in summary, it is important to take a look at a few of the more important areas covered. In this study it was found that, although peers play an important role in a teen-ager's use of alcohol and in specific drinking practices, the biggest influence is the example set in the home by the parents.

While there are few warning signs to indicate if a son or daughter is likely to misuse alcohol, certain patterns have been observed. It is well known, for example, that the children of alcoholic parents are at high risk of later having drinking problems. (Chavetz, 1979). On the other hand, teens who don't drink most often come from parents who drink little or abstain from alcohol use.

Most adults are neither alcoholics nor complete abstainers, so statistically, at least, many teen-agers with drinking problems come from homes in which parents are moderate social drinkers. These are the parents who may well be preaching one message about drinking to their teen-aged children but who are inadvertently sending quite another message with their own drinking behavior.

CHAPTER 6

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The problem has been identified as that of determining what importance, if any, ninth grade junior high school students in Iowa place on alcohol usage. Alcohol importance was measured by using the Iowa Department of Public Instruction's survey of alcohol and drug usage for secondary-age children. In this chapter, the researcher will review the nature of the study, the methods of research used, and the findings. He will draw conclusions based on the study and will make recommendations.

What the Study is About

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance which ninth grade students place upon the use of alcohol, the usage by age, amount consumed by our youngsters, the sources of their values towards drinking, and how much influence peer pressure has on them. The study also attempted to establish the importance of the need for information with which to educate students on the use of alcohol.

The hypothesis was that the amount of alcohol consumed would be in direct relation to parental drinking habits and to the social pressures placed upon young adults by their peers. Also, having liquor and using it when their parents weren't around was expected to be found to give most teen-agers an opportunity to emulate adult styles. It was further expected that, like adults, they sometimes drink to escape from problems

or from the stresses of the educational system. This study was conducted to determine to what extent these assumptions are valid for the population under investigation.

Why This Study is Important

This study was developed to investigate the importance placed on alcohol use by ninth graders and the perceived need for information on this use by parents, school officials, community leaders, and the students themselves.

It is important that everyone recognize the use of alcohol by adolescents. With the increasing amount of social acceptance placed on drinking, only knowledge of its use would allow a more complete understanding of the consequences of consuming alcohol. This is very important for young people as they may not understand the serious effects of consumption.

The Methods of Research

An assessment of alcohol use and the importance placed on alcohol was conducted by the researcher to determine the effects of alcohol on the ninth graders in one rural Iowa junior high school. The study was conducted by the researcher in late April and early May, 1983, at a midwestern junior high school. The freshman class, selected to participate in the study consisted of 208 students in one group. The 1974 edition of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction's drug and alcohol survey were used in the study. Twelve questions pertinent to alcohol use were selected from the DPI survey and placed on the instrument.

The treatment consisted of exposing the control group to the

selected questions from the DPI's survey. The first fifteen minutes of one social studies class was utilized to administer the instrument. The data was then collected, compiled, and placed in chart form to determine the results.

Findings

The average age of the survey group was fifteen years and all persons represented a midwestern rural community. Ninety-seven of the participants were males and 111 were females. Over seventy-five percent of the students lived with both parents and only twenty-eight percent were from a one parent family. The students had a 2.8 grade point average on a scale of 4.0, which meant they were an above-average class. The findings would be representative of a rural, conservative area.

Findings on the survey indicate that a substantial percentage of the students in the study, twenty-eight percent, were exposed to drinking alcohol by the age of eight. Also, a total of sixty-two percent have tried alcohol by the time they reach the age of twelve. Only .03 percent indicated they had never tried alcohol by the age of sixteen. The students also indicated that at least fifty-four percent drank at least three times a month and sixteen percent drank at least three times a week. Seventeen percent of the students surveyed indicated they have tried alcohol, but chose not to drink.

Parental attitudes and drinking habits show that most parents, eighty-nine percent, did not favor drinking by their children. Only .06 percent did not care if they knew their children drank. A high percentage of parents, sixty-six percent, believe that alcohol is very harmful to users and twenty-two percent didn't know their parent's opinions.

Parental drinking appeared to be high as the students indicated seventy-one percent of their fathers drank and sixty-six percent of the mothers. Only ten percent of the fathers and twenty-four percent of the mothers said they never drank.

Students were positive about alcohol when it referred to drinking with their friends. Seventy-five percent of them agreed that if a friend offered them a can of beer, they would accept it. Less than .05 percent said they would say no or try to talk their friends out of it. A total of sixty-six percent indicated that if they went to a party or dance, they would drink if it was offered to them. However, thirty-six percent said they would abstain if asked. A trend in party drinking seemed to be to limit their drinking. This was indicated when fifty-six percent said they would limit their drinking or abstain entirely.

Finally, when asked if the respondents had benefited from school-absorbed knowledge about alcohol, only 10.5 percent indicated they had done so. Almost seventy-two percent said they had either already decided to use alcohol and school had not influenced them or indicated they had received no alcohol education in school. Only seventeen percent said they had already decided not to use alcohol.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study.

1. Students have been exposed to alcohol at an early age and feel quite comfortable with it. Sixty-two percent have been exposed, by taste, before the age of twelve.
2. Most of the students reported that their parents did not favor

- drinking for fear of the harmful effects it had on the user. However, seventy-one percent of the fathers drank as well as sixty-six percent of the mothers, which shows a double standard for the parents.
3. Most students indicated they would drink with their friends at parties and social gatherings. The stigma of refusing a drink was very strong in a peer group situation.
 4. School seems to have little effect on the alcohol habits of youth. Most have already decided whether or not to drink.
 5. Schools appear to offer very minimal alcohol education programs as many respondents indicated they had received little information from the school.

Recommendations

Below are recommendations for further study and training in alcohol awareness that appear to be relevant.

1. It is recommended that parents be more aware of the early age of exposure to alcohol by their children.
2. It is recommended that all adults be made aware of the amount of drinking many students do each week.
3. It is recommended that parents realize their drinking habits may influence their children and that they carefully educate their children regarding the effects of alcohol.
4. It is recommended that students be educated about the pressures exerted by their friends and encouraged to use more of their own judgement in their everyday activities.
5. It is recommended that schools develop extensive drug and

alcohol programs to educate our youth on the effects of each.

6. It is recommended that parents, teachers, and community leaders form organizations concerning alcohol use to better understand and interact with youth.
7. It is recommended that media and advertising carefully screen their alcohol-related material so it does not influence our youth.

APPENDIX A

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTIONS
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Please mark the item which best describes you at this time.

1. Are you:

- 1 _____ Male
2 _____ Female

2. How old were you on your last birthday?

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 _____ 11 or younger | 6 _____ 16 years old |
| 2 _____ 12 years old | 7 _____ 17 years old |
| 3 _____ 13 years old | 8 _____ 18 years old |
| 4 _____ 14 years old | 9 _____ 19 years old |
| 5 _____ 15 years old | |

3. What grade are you in?

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 _____ 6th grade | 4 _____ 12th grade |
| 2 _____ 8th grade | 5 _____ other |
| 3 _____ 10th grade | |

4. In what size community do you live?

- 1 _____ On a farm
2 _____ In a small town (up to 2,599 people)
3 _____ In a small city (2,600 - 19,999 people)
4 _____ Suburban area near a larger city
5 _____ In a city (20,000 - 99,999 people)
6 _____ In a larger city (100,000 and more people)

5. Who do you live with?

- 1 _____ Both parents
2 _____ Mother only
3 _____ Father only
4 _____ Mother and step-father
5 _____ Father and step-mother
6 _____ Guardian/Foster parents
7 _____ Other relatives

6. What grades do you usually get in school? (Check one)

- 1 _____ All A's
2 _____ Mostly A's and some B's
3 _____ All B's
4 _____ Mostly B's and some C's
5 _____ All C's
6 _____ Mostly C's and some D's
7 _____ Nearly all D's or below

7. Would your parents/guardian agree or disagree with this statement about alcohol: Frequent use of alcohol can cause serious physical and psychological harm? (Check one)

1 _____ Parents would strongly agree
 2 _____ Parents would agree
 3 _____ Parents would disagree
 4 _____ Parents would strongly disagree
 5 _____ Parents would not be sure
 6 _____ I don't know what their opinion would be

8. What are your parent's feelings about your drinking? (Check one)

1 _____ I don't drink
 2 _____ They don't know I drink
 3 _____ They know I drink but wish I did not
 4 _____ They think I drink too much
 5 _____ They know I drink and don't care
 6 _____ They expect me to not get in trouble when I am drinking
 7 _____ I don't know how they feel

9. Check what you think are the TWO (2) most important reasons for people not DRINKING.

1 _____ The families disapprove of drinking
 2 _____ They don't like the way it makes them feel or behave
 3 _____ They have better things to do
 4 _____ They might get into an accident and hurt someone
 5 _____ They might become an alcoholic
 6 _____ Drinking is against their personal or religious beliefs
 7 _____ Alcohol is dangerous to their physical or mental health
 8 _____ There are too many risks of trouble with the police, employers, or school people

10. Has your behavior toward alcohol been influenced by what you have learned in school?

1 _____ Yes, I decided to not use alcohol
 2 _____ Yes, I decided to STOP using alcohol
 3 _____ No, we have not talked about alcohol in my classes
 4 _____ No, I had already decided to not use alcohol
 5 _____ No, I had already decided to use alcohol
 6 _____ No, I decided to start using or to use more alcohol because of what I learned in school

11. During the average month, how often do you usually drink any amount of beer, wine or liquor? (Check ONE answer)

1 _____ I never drink alcoholic beverages
 2 _____ I have drunk, but I don't drink now
 3 _____ Less than once a month
 4 _____ About once a month
 5 _____ 2 or 3 times each month
 6 _____ About once a week
 7 _____ 2 or 3 times each week
 8 _____ 4 or more times a week
 9 _____ About once or more each day

12. How old were you the first time you ever had your own glass of beer, wine, shot of liquor, or a mixed drink of any kind?
(Check ONE answer)

1 _____ I have never tried alcohol
2 _____ 8 or younger
3 _____ 9 or 10
4 _____ 11 or 12
5 _____ 13 or 14
6 _____ 15 or 16
7 _____ 17 or 18
8 _____ Don't remember

13. Does your father drink beer, wine, or liquor? (Check ONE)

1 _____ Yes, drinks occasionally at a party or with friends
2 _____ Yes, a few drinks each week
3 _____ Yes, several drinks (2 or more) each day
4 _____ Never drinks
5 _____ No, used to drink, but doesn't now
6 _____ I don't know
7 _____ Father not present in home

14. Does your mother drink beer, wine, or liquor? (Check ONE)

1 _____ Yes, drinks occasionally at a party or with friends
2 _____ Yes, a few drinks each week
3 _____ Yes, several drinks (2 or more) a day
4 _____ Never drinks
5 _____ No, used to drink, but doesn't now
6 _____ I don't know
7 _____ Mother not present in home

15. Imagine that you stopped at a friend's house after school. None of your friend's family are home. Your friend takes two cans of beer out of the refrigerator and offers you one. What would you likely do?

1 _____ Refuse the can of beer but stay there
2 _____ Take the can of beer and drink it
3 _____ Take the can of beer but not drink it
4 _____ Try to persuade your friend to not drink the beer
5 _____ Refuse the beer and go home
6 _____ Refuse the beer and threaten to tell your friend's parents
7 _____ Refuse the beer and ask for a soft drink
8 _____ Offer an excuse for not taking the beer ("I don't like the taste" or "Dad will be angry")

16. Imagine that you and your friends are planning what you are going to do before and after a school dance. Two of your friends suggest having a few drinks before the dance, and then after an hour at the dance, go to an apartment for a party. What are you likely to do?

- 1 _____ Refuse to go along with their plans but go to the dance with your date
- 2 _____ Go along with your friends' plan and get drunk
- 3 _____ Have a few drinks with your friends before the dance and then remain at the dance
- 4 _____ Refuse to drink before the dance but go to the party and limit your drinking
- 5 _____ Offer to host a non-drinking party at your home after the dance
- 6 _____ Go along with your friends' plan but limit the number of drinks you have
- 7 _____ Propose a non-drinking plan for the evening

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