

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE ON ADOLESCENT  
ALCOHOL COMSUMPTION AND POSSIBLE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EFFECTS

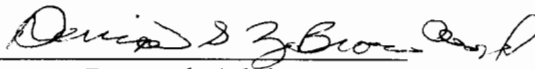
By

Aaron L. Hass

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Research Advisor  
Dr. Denise Zirkle-Brouillard

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

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The Graduate School  
 University of Wisconsin Stout  
 Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Hass	Aaron	L	
(Writer) (Last Name)	(First Name)	(Middle Initial)	
A Critical Analysis of the Literature on Adolescent Alcohol Consumption and Possible Personal and Social Effects			
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The purpose of this literature review is to analyze adolescent alcohol consumption patterns amongst differing individuals and investigate the relationships between adolescent alcohol consumption with other aspects of the adolescent's personal and social life. The purpose for investigating adolescent alcohol consumption in relation with other aspects of the adolescent's personal and social life is to determine if alcohol consumption relates highly with other common concerns pertaining to adolescents.

This thesis explored and differentiated the wide array of statistics pertaining to adolescent alcohol consumption. This thesis examined the rates at which all adolescents

consume alcohol through the Monitoring the Future Study. This thesis also differentiated the alcohol consumption patterns between racial/ethnic groups, sexes, grades, and demographic areas. Additionally this thesis also examined the relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption and other adolescent activities including: drinking and driving, criminal activity, sexual intercourse, and declining academic performance in school.

The findings from this thesis indicate that adolescent alcohol consumption remains a societal problem. Adolescents are continuing to consume alcohol for various reasons and the age of initial use continues to drop. The relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption and other activities remains a concern as certain patterns seem to exist between the two.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
.....	
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i> .....	4
<i>Definition of Terms</i> .....	4
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	6
Chapter III: Discussion.....	30
References.....	37

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*“I don’t drink to feel high. I drink to get drunk.” –Johnny Seventeen*

*“Thank God my child is only drinking beer, and not using drugs.”*

(Ketcham & Pace, 2003)

Adolescence is a time of change from being a child to an adult. Adolescents are changing physically, mentally, and emotionally, thus change the way they view themselves in society (Gordon, 2003). Adolescents tend to be more influenced by their peers than their parents, have increased mobility, and have monetary resources that they may not have experience in the past. All of these entities tie into the fact that adolescence is a time for experimentation and for many this includes the consumption of alcohol.

There are two major contributors to the phenomenon of adolescent alcohol consumption. These contributors are *availability* and *acceptability* (Gordon, 2003). Availability refers to ease of obtaining alcohol. A recent survey suggested that up to almost eighty-percent of adolescents’ report that alcohol is easy to buy through school contacts. As opposed to past generations, today’s adolescents have the monetary resources to purchase alcohol and usually do not have to travel far to find a willing seller. The other major contributor is acceptability and this refers to the idea of how acceptable adolescents are of each other using alcohol. This is vital because it does not matter how easy it is to obtain alcohol, if it is not acceptable among their peer groups adolescents will not use it. Because alcohol use by peers and older role models seems acceptable to

adolescents strongly influences others to experiment and become habitual users themselves.

The idea of adolescent alcohol consumption is no sleeping giant; in fact it is the complete opposite. Despite America's ever present "War on Drugs", adolescent alcohol consumption remains a major health and social issue (Monti, Colby, & O'Leary, 2001). Some of the most recent data pertaining to adolescent alcohol consumption states that eighty-percent of adolescent have consumed alcohol by their senior year of high school with over fifty-percent having done so by the eighth grade. Additionally, adolescent are not just consuming a couple of drinks and then stopping. Statistics show that over fifty percent of seniors have reported being drunk at least once. The problem isn't getting any better either. Adolescents are reporting the onset of first alcohol use and alcohol related problems earlier and earlier than in past generations.

Some may still not be convinced that adolescent alcohol consumption is a problem. However, these individuals may want to consider the following before making such a bold statement. Alcohol is the drug most preferred by adolescents, most adolescents have tried alcohol by the time they graduate from high school with nearly two-thirds reporting that they have become drunk, the average age of initial alcohol consumption is thirteen, individual alcohol consumption increases exponentially throughout high school, and the alcohol consumption gap between genders is decreasing (Graeber, 1995). Not enough yet? How about this, adolescents tend to drink more on a given occasion than any other age group, adolescents who are labeled "problem drinkers" are more inclined to mix alcohol consumption with other drug use, and adolescents who drink heavily are much more likely to develop an alcohol addiction as an adult. Still not

convinced, here are some more startling statistics. The economic cost of alcohol consumption by adolescents is \$53 billion dollars a year, alcohol kills nearly seven times more adolescents than all illegal drugs combined, and an estimated 3.3 million adolescents will start drinking alcohol each year (Ketcham & Pace, 2003).

Undoubtedly, alcohol is the principal drug problem in the United States by adolescents (Torr, 2002). Much of the controversy surrounding alcohol revolves around the lasting effects it has on adolescents. Motor vehicle accidents, homicides, and suicides are the three most common forms of unexpected death among adolescents, with motor vehicle crashes being the highest (McClellan, 2004). Much like motor vehicle accidents caused by drinking and driving, alcohol seems to play a vital role in homicide and suicide attempts. Suicide attempts are three to four times as high among adolescent who drink as opposed to those who do not. Overall, adolescent alcohol is often related to unexpected tragedies that lead to death among adolescents.

Alcohol is the drug of choice among all adolescents in middle and high school today (Torr, 2002). While nearly sixty-six percent of all high school students say that have binged on alcohol during the last month, only three percent of high school students' parents think their children have done so. This gap in awareness between not only parents, but also teachers, counselors, administrators and other community members has serious consequences for the adolescent of today's generation.

Alcohol is everywhere, in 1998, about 10.4 million drinkers throughout the United States were adolescents (Torr, 2002). Though the legal drinking age is 21, 75% of all adolescents say that alcohol is easy to acquire. Approximately 66% of adolescents report buying their own alcohol. Whether these adolescents are using fake identification

cards or friends are selling it to them at the local grocery store doesn't matter. What does matter is the alcohol is everywhere and easily within adolescents' grasp.

Adolescent alcohol consumption is a very important subject for all adolescents because it plays such an integral role in their adolescent years (Claypool, 1997). Society is constantly reminded about the horrific tales of adolescent alcohol consumption through media statistics and special reports. However, many of today's citizens remain in denial about the realms of adolescents consuming alcohol. The reality though is that adolescent alcohol consumption is a major problem with in our society and one that does not seem to want to go away.

*Statement of the Problem:*

The purpose of this study is to critically analyze the literature on adolescent alcohol consumption and possible personal and social effects. An extensive literature review will be used to analyze data from the last seven and be collected through January 2005. Data will be collected through a variety of reputable sources.

*Definition of Terms:*

For the purpose of this study the following are defined as

Adolescent- An individual who is between childhood and adulthood. In terms of an education setting, adolescents are students who are in grades sixth through twelfth or students in the traditional middle and high school.

Alcohol Consumption- the consumption of any amount of an alcoholic beverage including but not limited to beer, wine, spirits, and liquor.

Drink- a drink of alcohol consist of the following 12 once beer, 10-12 ounces of spirits, 1 once 80 proof liquor, and 4-5 once wine.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

*-“I don't use drugs. I only use alcohol”*

*-“Alcohol is only a drug for people who can't handle it”*

Kids everywhere (Ketcham & Pace, 2003)

The above quotes are very powerful because they illustrate the dangers that alcohol presents adolescents and the rest of society. It shows the ignorance and lack of knowledge adolescents have regarding the use of alcohol. The power of alcohol and its effects are endless. Once an individual has become addicted to alcohol their life becomes turned upside down, as they no longer have the wherewithal or the power to quit drinking. This is why it is so vital that society help stop drinking before it starts and for many this occurs during adolescence. Research shows that the average age of alcohol initiation is 15.9 years of age (Windle, 2003). This is vital as early initiation of alcohol use (prior to 15) has been associated with an increased risk for alcohol related problems later in life. Consider this, a study published by Ketcham and Pace, (2003) showed that more than 40 percent of people who began drinking before fifteen were later classified as alcoholics later in life. In comparison, only 10 percent of people who began drinking after the age of 21 were later classified as alcoholics. Also, the early onset of alcohol use and the severity of the alcohol use by adolescents in this age group (14-15) continues to be an enormous concern. Studies show that 35% of adolescents who begin consuming alcohol at this age will develop at least one symptom of alcohol dependence and abuse by the age of 19 (William & Ricciardelli, 1999). These statistics are alarming, but just as

alarming is the fact that an estimated 3.3 million adolescents between the ages of twelve and seventeen will start drinking alcohol each year. The dangers of alcohol use are profound. The economic cost of adolescent alcohol use is equivalent to \$53 billion dollars! This includes traffic accidents, violent crimes, burns, drowning, suicide attempts, alcohol poisoning, fetal alcohol syndrome, and alcohol treatment.

### Why Adolescents Drink

According to the 2002 Monitoring the Future Survey, 47 percent of eighth graders have used alcohol, and even more frightening is that 78 percent of twelfth graders have used alcohol (Ketcham & Pace, 2003). According to a Columbia University survey more than five million or 31 percent of high school students have reported binge drinking, five or more continuous drinks, in the last month. The survey also shows that male and female high school freshman are almost as likely to consume alcohol 41 versus 40 percent. Additionally, 33 percent of sixth and ninth grade students report taking alcohol from their own home. With all this in mind professionals and researchers predict an epidemic. They also foresee many dangers occurring to those adolescents who use alcohol on a regular basis. However this does not answer the question “Why are adolescents using alcohol?”

As stated earlier professionals recognize the dangers of adolescent alcohol use and ask themselves “Why do adolescents choose to drink when they know they have so much to lose and so little to gain?” Even adolescents understand the dangers of alcohol consumption as they openly talk about the unwise things they have done while consuming alcohol. These include things like drinking and driving, fights, unprotected sex, and serious hangovers. To understand why adolescents consume alcohol we must

place ourselves in their shoes and understand what they are thinking and experiencing. With that said, there is no one reason why adolescents consume alcohol; in fact there are a variety of reasons. Excluding hereditary factors, and looking specifically at environmental and sociological reasons, most adolescents consume alcohol for one of the following reasons: drinking to feel better, drinking “to have fun,” drinking to be like friends, and drinking to be like adults (Graeber, 1995).

When adolescents choose to consume alcohol because it makes them feel better they usually do so to relieve anxiety and depression (Graeber, 1995). Often, the anxiety and depression is usually persistent and the adolescent feels better as the alcohol temporarily relieves these symptoms. Unfortunately, adolescents don't understand that though alcohol may make them feel better for a short period of time, the lasting effects cause a natural depression and amplify the existing condition. Other reasons for consuming alcohol by adolescents is to make themselves feel better, to combat shyness, and low self-esteem. After the use of alcohol adolescents feel more relaxed and secure, thus more social and willing to take risks they otherwise would shy away from (Ketcham & Pace, 2003). Adolescents may also use alcohol to overcome loneliness, fears, insecurities, stressful situations, tension, and to become more relaxed. The reasons for adolescents consuming alcohol to make themselves feel better are virtually endless, as they are transitioning between life stages and going through some very difficult situations. All too often though, adolescents turn to alcohol for support instead of other healthier choices.

What most would consider the number one reason for adolescents consumption of alcohol is that adolescents view drinking as fun. Adolescents consume alcohol because

they believe without it they will not be able to have fun or that an ordinary evening can become fun just by including alcohol (Graeber, 1995). In addition, adolescents feel that alcohol will guarantee them a fun time. It is this notion that alcohol guarantees fun that can lead to experiences that would be considered unpleasant.

It is well known that peer pressure can be very powerful and saying no to friends can be a very difficult. This explains why adolescents consume alcohol to be like friends. Research shows that adolescents who socialize with friends who consume alcohol and belong to peer groups who encourage alcohol consumption are likely to consume alcohol as well (Graeber, 1995). One of the reasons given by adolescents for consuming to be like friends is that they wanted to involve themselves with their friends while they were drinking and having fun. The problem with friendships occurs with adolescents who don't drink and their friends do. In these circumstances the nondrinking friend is usually abandoned by their drinking friends. The loss of friendship is so powerful that it can sometimes push the nondrinking adolescent into drinking. This is a defense mechanism by the nondrinking adolescent not to be abandoned by their friends. What tends to happen in these situations is that the friendships reinforce the behavior and the behavior reinforces the friendship (Graeber, 1995).

Against popular belief, most adolescent don't have their first alcoholic beverage with friends or at a tavern, but at their home with their parents and other adults (Graeber, 1995). Adolescents tend to mimic the adult's behavior in their life. When adolescents see their parents and others adults drink they believe that it is alright and safe. What the adolescents don't realize is that many of these adults are responsible and make the right choices involving the mixing of alcohol with other activities.

The problem with alcohol is that once an individual has become addicted they begin to psychologically and physically depend on its use (Graeber, 1995). Those adolescents who do become addicted and are deprived of alcohol show symptoms of aggression, anxiety, and violent tremors. Also, the use of alcohol on a frequent and substantial basis causes damage to all parts of the body, especially the liver, brain, central nervous and digestive systems. In addition to the signs of withdrawal and the effects of alcohol internally, alcohol drastically affects the behaviors that adolescents demonstrate (Ketcham & Pace, 2003). Depending on the levels of blood alcohol concentration adolescents can exhibit a variety of behaviors. These behaviors include: impaired judgment and decision making, slower reflexes, light headedness, increased risk-taking, loss of balance, slurred speech, increased tiredness, black/pass out, and death to just name a few.

#### Adolescent Alcohol Consumption Patterns and Rates

Adolescent alcohol consumption is a nationwide epidemic. According to the 2004 Monitoring the Futures Survey (n.d.) 43.9% of eighth graders, 64.2% of tenth graders, and 76.8% of twelfth graders have drunk alcohol in their lifetime. Additionally, the same survey found that 19.9% of eighth graders, 42.3% of tenth graders, and 60.3% of twelfth graders have been drunk in their lifetime. The survey like many others defines drunk as someone who has consumed five or more consecutive drinks in one setting. The Monitoring the Future Surveys are probably the most well known and long standing surveys conducted in the United States (Windle, 1999). The Monitoring the Future Surveys have studied substance abuse, including alcohol use, since 1975. Every year the survey provides annual national results demonstrating adolescent substance abuse

practice. In continuation with the Monitoring the Future Survey theme Lewinsohn and Rohde (1996) reported with the early onset of alcohol abuse and dependence has produced approximately 300,000 new adolescent alcoholics in the United States. Additionally, among adult alcoholics over 35% developed at least one symptom of alcoholism between the ages of 15 and 19.

The real danger of alcohol use among adolescents is the sheer number of adolescents who have a diagnosable alcohol disorder. Based on a number of national surveys there could be anywhere from 3% to 32% of the adolescent population meeting the diagnostic criteria for an alcohol disorder as per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) (Windle, 1999). Within this 3% to 32% population, three quarters of these adolescents are either moderately or severely dependant on the use of alcohol. A study by Lewinsohn and Rohde (1996), found that 17%, of U.S. adolescents were having serious problems with drinking and 6% met criteria for a DSM-IV diagnosis for an alcohol dependence problem. Of the remaining adolescents in the Lewinsohn and Rohde study, 24% were classified as either lifetime abstainers, 13% had experimented with alcohol only a few times, and 40% were social drinkers. To provide a framework for comparison, adults in the same study were classified as follows: 12% of adults were abstainers, 60% were social drinkers, 14% were heavy problematic drinkers, and 14% met DSM-IV criteria for diagnosis as having an alcohol use disorder. As can be noted through the following study and others like it the exact percentage of adolescents with a clinical alcohol disorder is unknown, but it is prevalent enough that the number of alcohol disorders among adolescents merit concern from those who are involved with their wellbeing.

Though most adolescents who drink are not alcoholics, they are what experts would classify as a problem drinker (Graeber, 1995). Experts define problem drinking in terms of adolescents as those individuals who drink frequently and/or experience negative consequences as a result of the consumption of alcohol. These negative consequences include a number of areas, including school, family, friendships, dating, community, and the law. The reason that it is imperative to curb or lessen the drinking among adolescents is that alcohol consumption by individuals who are young, immature, irresponsible, etc. can result in chronic and progressive drinking habits. In other words, alcohol consumption and its effects begin to accumulate over time and in severity. Finally, adolescents who drink increase their risk of becoming alcoholics as adults.

Adolescent alcohol consumption is an unbiased epidemic reaching all of American's adolescents. The use of alcohol by adolescents reaches all demographic populations. Though it effects these populations differently it still reaches all races, genders, ethnicities, socioeconomic statues, ages, and regions. The next couple of paragraphs will detail and describe how the above listed differences can influence an adolescent's alcohol consumption pattern.

#### *Male versus Female Alcohol Consumption*

When examining the alcohol use of females and males, people may expect there to be a large difference in alcohol consumption in favor of the males. Contrast to popular belief this is not the case. According to Windle (2003), 19.1% of eighth grade males had drunk alcohol in the past thirty days. In comparison 20.0% of females had drunk alcohol in the past thirty days. When looking at the tenth grade 35.3% of males and 35.7% of females had drunk alcohol in the past thirty days. Now in the twelfth grade 52.3% of

males and 45.1% of females had drunk alcohol in the past thirty days. Windle (2003) also explored the prevalence of being drunk in the past thirty days with the following results. The eighth grade results were 7.1% of males and 6.3% of females reported being drunk in the past thirty days. The tenth grade results were 19.3% of males and 17.4% of females reported being drunk in the past thirty days. Finally, 34.3% of males and 26.9% of females in the twelfth grade reported being drunk in the past thirty days.

A study conducted by Lewinsohn and Rohde (1996) found similar results but also noted a few added details. This study reported that over 50% of adolescents have been drunk at least once in their lifetime and more than 25% have been drunk seven or more times. The study also concluded that males started drinking slightly earlier, drank more often, consumed more alcohol per average drinking period, and were more likely to have had periods of very high levels of consumption defined by a fifth of liquor or equivalent than females. The study did however note that males and females showed relatively the same amount of prevalence in terms of abuse, dependency, and addictive behaviors. On the other hand female adolescents have an earlier onset age for alcohol abuse, dependence, and addiction and are more likely to relapse from a recovery attempt than their male counterparts.

The other factor in this equation is how or if alcohol affects males and females differently. According to McClellan (2004), alcohol affects females drastically different from males. A female will get more intoxicated drinking the same amount of a male even though the male and female have the same make-up, things like weight and height. The reason for this is that the female's hormones and enzyme levels are different than that of a male. Females have more fatty tissue which absorbs the alcohol quicker and

thus enters the bloodstream faster. This is part of how and why females become more intoxicated than males even with the same type and amount of alcohol.

### *Demographic Factors and Alcohol Consumption*

Various studies conducted throughout the United States, point to varying amounts of adolescent alcohol consumption based on geographic locations (Nielsen, 1990). The research shows that adolescents who live in the Midwest and Northeast consume more alcohol than those living in other regions of the country. In addition to geographical region, urban, rural, and suburban residence also dictates how much alcohol an adolescent might consume. Research shows that adolescents living in a suburb will use alcohol more than an urban and rural dwelling adolescent.

Another family-related factor is the family situation from which the adolescent resides. Adolescents who live in a one-parent household or whose families have problems are more likely to consume alcohol (Nielsen, 1990). Also male adolescents whose parents knowingly do not disapprove of their alcohol consumption are twice as likely to be heavy drinkers as male adolescents whose parents do disapprove.

### *SES and Alcohol Consumption*

When examining adolescent alcohol consumption patterns based on socioeconomic status researchers have found one particular interesting fact. Outcomes from studies show that there is no difference in adolescent's alcohol consumption patterns in relationship to socioeconomic status (Nielsen, 1990). This is interesting because 95 percent of adolescents from wealthy families have open bars in their households. Yet, even with this open access to alcohol, adolescents from wealthy

families do not consume more alcohol than those adolescents from low and middle income families.

### *Racial/Ethnic Groups and Alcohol Consumption*

Another area of concern is examining the various alcoholic patterns of various racial and ethnic groups. Windle (2003) reports the following percentages of alcohol use over a thirty day period for a couple of different ethnic and racial groups. While in the eighth grade the following percentages were reported: African-American 14.8%, Caucasians 21.5%, and Hispanics 26.5%. Tenth grade results are of the following: African-American 24.3%, Caucasians 40.0%, and Hispanics 37.9%. It is interesting to note that during this two year period that Caucasians jumped Hispanics in terms of percentages drinking alcohol. The twelfth grade results also follow the same trend with Caucasians the highest at 54.0%, followed by Hispanics at 47.5%, and then again African-Americans reporting the least amount of alcohol consumption at 30.1%. Over the same time frame Windle (2003) found that in the twelfth grade 36.6% of Caucasians, 23.5% of Hispanics, and 12.1% of African-Americans reported being drunk at least once over a thirty day period. All of these statistics are quite clear in that for some reason more Caucasian adolescents are consuming alcohol, followed by Hispanics, and African-Americans. What these statistics don't tell us however is why, with countless hypotheses available.

### *Local Alcohol Consumption Rates and Patterns*

A new program being developed in Eau Claire and Dunn Counties is aimed at county alcohol retailer and students in an attempt to curb underage drinking. The new

program, called Reality Check 21, is meant at reminding retailers and underage students about the dangers that can occur as a result of underage drinking (Giffey, 2004).

Adolescent alcohol consumption as stated earlier is a nationwide epidemic and Northwest Wisconsin is not left out as a result. Due to this fact and the complexity of the drinking problem in this area, school officials have referenced a series of surveys that show the complicity of underage drinking in Eau Claire and Dunn Counties and the need for something to be done (Giffey, 2004). For example, a survey of Menomonie High School students showed nearly half, 46%, of the students classified themselves as drinkers averaging more than five drinks a week. Furthermore, a survey conducted in the summer of 2004 showed that again nearly half of all Dunn County alcohol retailers sold liquor and/or beer to underage youths working undercover. A second round of checks in September of 2004 showed that 35% still sold alcohol to underage students. In Eau Claire County a survey showed the 41% of eighth graders said beer is easy or fairly easy to obtain, and 25% of the same eighth graders have reported drinking alcohol in the previous 30 days. The obvious goal of anything the schools in these areas do then is to reduce the access adolescents have to alcohol, reduce the use of alcohol by adolescents, and reduce the negative effects of underage drinking on the individual and community.

The research of various studies could go on forever, but what is clear is that wherever you live, whatever racial/ethnic group you belong to, no matter how rich or poor you are, or whatever, alcohol use will find you. Alcohol use amongst adolescents is like a disease without a cure running rampant through all of our communities. It doesn't matter that all of these adolescents are legally underage; the disease of alcohol use is rampant and scary. The high use of alcohol by such young individuals bodes poorly for

their personal, social, career, and academic development because of the increased risk for both alcohol related and co-occurring problems (Windle, 2003).

### Alcohol Consumption and Related Behaviors

The prevalence of adolescent alcohol consumption is profound but rarely do surveys, research reports, scholarly journals and other reputable sources examine the contextual confines of the adolescents' alcohol consumption. The contextual confines of the adolescents' alcohol consumption refer to such things as the location and environment of the adolescent alcohol consumption. Adolescent alcohol consumption can occur almost anywhere and at anytime, with a short list including the adolescents own home, friend/acquaintance's house, bar/restaurant, outdoor locations like parks, beaches, and forest, school/work, and in a moving vehicle (Windle, 2003). Research shows the three most prevalent areas for adolescent alcohol consumption are at a friend's house, an outdoor setting, and in a moving vehicle. Drinking and driving and drinking at an outdoor setting are thus then highly related with adolescent who choose to drive even though they are impaired. The same research shows that adolescents who drink and drive are 2.5 times and those that drink at an outdoor setting are 1.5 times more likely to involve themselves either individually and/or as a group with someone who is impaired and continues to drive.

The range of risky behaviors associated with adolescent alcohol consumption does not stop as drinking and driving. Other risky behaviors include but are not limited to tobacco use, sexual activity, violence, and suicide. For example, adolescents who reported binge drinking in the last thirty days were seventeen times more likely to smoke during the same time frame than were adolescents who did not report binge drinking

during the same time frame (Windle, 2003). Also, 82% of those adolescents who have not participated in binge drinking also do not smoke tobacco. This is just one of many examples that show the correlation between adolescent alcohol use and other risky behaviors.

Looking more in-depth at the seriousness of adolescent alcohol one can see the profound and endless amount of possible consequences that are associated with adolescent alcohol consumption. Some of the more serious consequences include nearly ¼ of adolescents reporting blacking out (passing out) and engaging in sexual behavior they would not have engaged in without the help of alcohol (Arata, Stafford, & Tims, 2003). Some of the more common problems reported by adolescent during alcohol consumption include: 33% getting into fights, acting bad, or doing mean things, 36% causing shame or embarrassment to someone, 32% having a fight, argument, or bad feelings with a friend, 31% having a bad time, and 30% reporting usual alcohol consumption exceeding five drinks. Other less common, yet notable problems include: 15% missing school or work, 27% finding oneself in a place you could not remember getting to, 20% driving after two drinks, and 14% driving after four or more drinks. These consequences are again just a snapshot of the number of consequences that can occur to adolescents as a result of consuming alcohol. These behaviors are obviously risky and potentially life threatening, thus the need for some sort of control on the alcohol consumption of adolescents.

It has been said that adolescence can be characterized as a time of increased experimentation and exploration with this experimentation and exploration including alcohol use (Spirito, Jelalian, Rasile, Rohrbeck, & Vinnick, 2000). In a study conducted

by Spirito et al. (2000) they found that overall approximately 15% of adolescents reported some form of injury as a result of consuming alcohol in the last six months. In terms of genders male reported a higher incidence of injuries related to alcohol than females, 17.3% and 13% respectively. Looking more extensively at different racial groups illustrates that Caucasians report the highest percentage of injury due to alcohol consumption at 16.4% followed by African-Americans at 12.9%, Asians at 6.9%, and then Hispanics at 5.0% respectively. The same study found that 17 year olds reported more injuries related to alcohol use than 14 and 15 year olds, 20.2% versus 14.4% and 15% respectively. The study also revealed that alcohol consumption resulted in injury six times as often when the individual was involved in some form of risky behavior.

#### *Drinking and Driving*

Drinking and driving by adolescents can be very easily avoided and demonstrates how quickly and foolishly one can shatter the dreams of themselves and other with one preventable mistake. Underage drinking followed by driving brings about many dangers for the driver, other drivers on the road, and any passengers in the vehicle being operated by a driver who has consumed alcohol (Fiscus, 2003). The dangers of drinking and driving as an adolescent include, but are not limited to, impaired driving and judgment, slower reaction times, injury to self and/or others, legal penalties including jail time and loss of licenses, a sense of false confidence prompting greater risk taking, and all to sadly death to self and others.

The prevalence of adolescents who drink and drive is astounding. Adolescent drinking and driving rates and riding with a driver who has been drinking have steadily declined from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's (O'Malley & Johnston, 99). However,

the steady decline that was present at this time no longer exists. According to study conducted by O'Malley and Johnston (1999), 18.3% of high school seniors have reported drinking and driving at least once in the past two weeks. Over the same two weeks 26.1% of the same seniors have reported being a passenger in a vehicle that was being operated by an individual who had consumed alcohol. In addition, about one-third of the same seniors have reported being a passenger in a vehicle being operated by an adolescent who had previously drank alcohol at sometime in their life. The same study conducted by O'Malley and Johnston (1999) illustrated even more frightening statistics. These statistics are that 11.5% of U.S. high school seniors have reported driving after what experts deemed heavy drinking. Heavy drinking is defined as an individual who has consumed five or more drinks in a row. Additionally, 15.4% of U.S. high school seniors have reported being a passenger with an individual who has been drinking heavily. Overall, 19.1% of U.S. high school seniors have had some exposure to impaired driving or being a passenger with someone who has.

The statistics of drinking and driving as an adolescent are scary, as well they should be. According to Windle (1999), on average eight adolescents die each day from alcohol related vehicle accidents and nine out ten adolescent vehicle accidents involve the use of alcohol. Even more, according to Susan Hipsley (2004), more than two-thirds of the adolescents killed in alcohol related automobile accidents were not drinking and driving, but riding in a vehicle with someone who had. Additionally, Hipsley (2004) reports that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that between 1997 and 2002, a total of 12,335 adolescents died as a result of an alcohol related vehicle

crash. 68% of those killed were again not driving, but riding with someone who had been drinking.

Adolescents who drive are already accident prone and scary enough. Add to the fact that some adolescents who drive may have been drinking is even scarier. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 37% of all adolescent drivers who were involved in a fatal traffic accident were intoxicated and 14% of those had blood alcohol concentrations exceeding .10 (Grube & Voss, 1996). In response, most states have now lowered their legal blood alcohol concentrations to .08, showing the need to put a stop to drinking and driving. Another disturbing fact is that adolescents are at risk even though they may not be drinking and driving. In a survey that was published in the August 2003 of *Alcoholism*, found that of the 1,534 adolescents surveyed, nearly 50% had ridden in a vehicle with a drunk driver in the last twelve months (Bjerklie, 2003). This shows that though adolescents may make the right choice in not drinking and driving, but still place themselves in imminent danger when they chose to ride with a driver under the influence of alcohol.

Another disturbing fact is that adolescents drink and drive and unknowingly to them have different side effects than a normal adult. According to the Young Adults Educating Responsible Drinkers (YAERD, 2005), several studies demonstrate that young drivers who have been drinking have a greater risk of involvement in fatal crashes than adults with similar blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) levels. The YAERD also reports that young drivers with BACs of .05 to .10 are far more likely to be killed in single vehicle crashes than their sober young driver counterparts. The relative risk of fatal crash involvement is substantially higher for adolescent drivers at lower BAC levels than for

drivers age 25 or older. YAERD also reports male drivers age 16 to 20 have six times the driver fatality risk in single vehicle crashes at BACs of .01 to .04 compared to male drivers age 25 and older at these low levels.

In examining drinking and driving and being a passenger with individuals who have been drinking in a demographic sense, highlights a number of things. The first thing to note is that the rates of driving or riding with someone after drinking are higher among adolescents who are male, Caucasian, those living in the western and northeastern regions of the United States, and finally those living in rural areas (O'Malley & Johnston, 1999). With respect to racial/ethnic groups, young men of Latin American descent are 1.82 times more likely to drink and drive, or to ride in car being operated by a person who has been drinking and driving than Caucasian adolescents (Wise, Grube, & Light, 2003). Caucasian, male, adolescents are more likely to engage in drink driving than females, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Caucasians were nearly twice as likely to drink and drive as compared to Asian-Americans, making Latin Americans nearly four times as likely to drink and drive as Asian-Americans. Gender comparisons show that male adolescents are more likely than females to drink and drive and ride with a drunk driver. In conclusion, these statistics demonstrate the significance between race, ethnic, and gender when examining the behaviors of adolescents who choose to drink and drive and ride with a drunk driver.

Another indicator of predicting drinking and driving and riding with a drunk driver behavior is to look at the adolescent's religious commitment. Those adolescents with the highest religious commitment have the lowest rates of both drinking and driving and riding with a drunk driver (O'Malley & Johnston, 1999). On the other hand those

adolescents with moderate and low religious commitments had much higher rates of both drinking and driving and riding with a drunk driver. The two groups of low and medium religious commitment produced fairly similar rates to each other, with no significance towards either group.

### *Alcohol, Crime, and Violence*

Studies of criminal and violent behaviors have demonstrated that these behaviors are repeatedly and often found within the adolescent age group (Rossow, Pape, & Wichstrom 1999). Additionally, there is significant evidence that adolescent alcohol consumption is related to physical aggression and violent offending. Experimental research suggests that these behaviors are more easily triggered after an adolescent has consumed alcohol. Moreover, research conducted using police reports and records have revealed that a high proportion of violent offenders, who are adolescents, appear to have been intoxicated or consuming alcohol at the time of the incident. Studies conducted on the adolescent population all seem to be in agreement. All of these studies suggest that there is an interconnected phenomenon between adolescent alcohol consumption, involvement in crime, and violent activities.

Alcohol use is the most strongly and consistent variable associated with both violent and nonviolent crimes amongst adolescents (Dawkins, 97). Frequent studies have revealed a positive association between criminal behavior and adolescent alcohol consumption. As some research states, as opposed to other hard drugs, alcohol use is usually associated with less serious crimes like crimes against property. In contrast, other studies have found alcohol abuse is the most important substance-related factored in

homicides and other types of violent crime. These same studies state that homicide offenders tend to drink heavily prior to committing the murder.

Similar to the relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption, crime, and violence, there is also a strong relationship between adolescent alcohol use and school violence (Daane, 2003). There appears to be a direct relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption and school violence. As the alcohol consumption increases so does the school violence related behaviors and victimization. The likelihood for school violence is greatest amongst students who reported using alcohol on school property, lower for students who used alcohol off of school property, and lowest among students who do not use alcohol at all. Additionally, Daane (2003) found that students who use alcohol and fought in school were more likely to believe that using violence is an acceptable means of resolving conflict than were students who again do not use alcohol.

According to Best Practices Alcohol Prevention (n.d.), every year adolescent alcohol consumption results in significant and costly health and social problems throughout the country. These problems include but are not limited to traffic accidents, accidental falls, burns, drowning, suicide, alcohol dependence and abuse, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and crime. Like everyone else adolescents who engage in the consumption of alcohol are not immune from experiencing any of these problems. Though adolescents may not experience any of these problems, it has been proven that alcohol is the most common contributor to adolescent injury, death, and criminal behavior.

Though the age of 21 is the minimum purchasing age in all States, adolescents continue to purchase and consume alcohol every day across the nation. Researchers suggest that adolescent consumption of alcohol often leads to crime and a higher

incidence of victimization for adolescents under the influence of alcohol (Best Practice: Alcohol Prevention, n.d.). Statistics supporting these claims that alcohol consumption is associated with over 27% of all murders, 31% of all rapes, 33% of all property offenses, and more than 37% of all robberies committed by adolescents.

Although not specifically focusing on adolescent alcohol consumption, studies suggest that a reduction of alcohol availability within a community may also reduce rates of crime (Best Practice: Alcohol Prevention, n.d.). In a recent study researchers assessed the relationship between risk of physical violence and alcohol availability in Los Angeles County. Data was collected on various crimes, including the number of assaults and robberies from 74 Los Angeles County municipalities. An analysis was then conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between the number of alcohol outlets in a given area and the total number of assault incidents. Results indicated the greater the alcohol outlet density the greater the number of assaults in a community. Based on this study and other like it one can make the conclusions that the implementation of any strategies related to the reduction of alcohol availability for adolescents would also aid in the prevention of crime.

#### *Adolescent Alcohol Consumption and Sex*

Adolescent alcohol consumption is a frightening occurrence. Combine adolescent alcohol consumption with the adolescents high rates of sexual risk taking and you have yourself a serious and dangerous problem. Alcohol consumption has often been cited as increasing adolescents' risk of having sex, either unprotected or protected, and thus increasing their risk for acquiring a sexual transmitted disease and having an unwanted pregnancy (Morrison, Gillmore, Hoppe, Gaylord, Leigh, & Rainey, 2003). According to

Ketcham and Pace (2003), adolescents who drink are seven times more likely to have sex, and twice as likely to have sex with four or more partners. Adolescents who use alcohol also tend to become pregnant at a younger age. At times adolescents can feel pressured to have sex when they may or may not want to, and the use of alcohol makes it harder to say no (Bellenir, 2002). Accordingly, adolescents' alcohol consumption impairs their judgment about sex and contraception, placing them at an increased risk for again unplanned pregnancy, sexual assault, and becoming infected with a sexually transmitted disease.

Again, adolescent alcohol consumption has been negatively associated with adolescent sexual practices as many studies have been done to show this relationship. In a study conducted by Morrison et al (2003), found that 42% of adolescents rarely or never, 51% sometimes, and 7% always or almost always consume alcohol before sexual intercourse. This is vital because according to Bellenir (2002), studies show that adolescents are less likely to use condoms when having sex after drinking alcohol than when sober. This places them at a higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned parenthood. The thing that should scare adolescents the most is that HIV/AIDS has been the sixth leading cause of death among 15-20 year olds for the last three years. One in five of all new AIDS cases are found within the 20-29 year age group, meaning that HIV transmission occurred during their adolescent years.

The Morrison et al (2003) study found that of all the adolescents who sometimes drink alcohol before sexual intercourse that 37% used condoms the same proportions of times regardless of whether they had been consuming alcohol or not. However, 29% of adolescents reported using condoms less frequently after drinking and 34% reported

using condoms more frequently after consuming alcohol. These statistics once again highlight the dangers of consuming alcohol and then being involved in risky sexual encounters.

The use of alcohol as an adolescent doesn't just affect your sexual decisions as an adolescent, but as a young adult as well. At age 21, young adults reported having sex with 1.9 different sexual partners over the course of a year (Guo, 2002). Young adults whose adolescent patterns of alcohol use reflected no alcohol use reported having 1.7 sexual partners over the course of a year. In comparison, those young adults whose adolescent patterns reflected that of a chronic/binge alcoholic drinker reported having 3.0 sexual partners over the course of a year. In a study conducted by Guo (2002), 82% of all young adults reported not using condoms during sexual intercourse. However, 90% of young adults whose adolescent past reflected that of a chronic/binge alcohol drinker reported not using condoms. In comparison, only 80% of the nondrinking adolescent young adults reported not using a condom. Though there is only a 10% gap between the two groups, one must consider the number of partners and the non use of a condoms to totally realize the potentially serious and dangerous effects that consuming alcohol as an adolescent has on a person's sexual activity and safe sex practices.

#### *Adolescent Alcohol Consumption and Academics*

No Child Left Behind, IDEA, 504 Plans, and other educational laws have been instituted nation wide as an attempt to raise the academic performance of all students. Though these laws have been instrumental in producing higher grades for those children who suffer from a disability, they fail to recognize other factors like the use of alcohol by adolescents that reduce academic achievement. A study conducted by Jeynes (2002)

found that an increased frequency of alcohol use by adolescents is found to negatively affect the adolescent's academic achievement. However, this does not answer the question, does the use of alcohol by adolescents lower their academic performance like many would be lead to believe, or is it the opposite? Does the adolescent's poor academic performance lead them to use alcohol? Whatever the relationship may be, there is a definite consequence between adolescent alcohol consumption and their academic performance.

The relationship between alcohol use and academics has been proven to be profound. Students with negative school experiences including low academic achievement, low motivation, truancy, and/or acting out in the classroom are more likely than those with more positive experiences to drink alcohol (Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2003). Another result of alcohol use is that students are not behaviorally or mentally engaged in their learning, thus they tend to skip classes, fail to complete assignments, and otherwise just misbehave in the classroom. The misbehavior shown by adolescents in the classroom can then sometimes transfer to outside settings and the use of other illegal substances and drugs. Another link between adolescent alcohol use and academic achievement comes not only in terms of lower grades, but lower expectations as well (Sanders, Field, & Diego, 2001). Additionally, high school students who have dropped-out are three times more likely to rate themselves as heavy drinkers and report frequent drunkenness as compared to those in good academic standing. Though we are still unsure of what exactly is to blame for the low academic achievement, we do know that alcohol and academics do not mix.

The common trend of initial alcohol use by adolescents has been on increasingly earlier use, which does not bode well for academic achievement. In a study conducted by Ellickson, Tucker, and Klein (2003), found that early drinking by adolescents and experimentation with alcohol has been associated with poor academic achievement as well as behavioral problems in the classroom and delinquency. This study was used in comparison to nondrinkers and drinkers and done in both the middle and high school.

The early use of alcohol by adolescents is proven by a number of problems that exists because of it. One of these problems has been identified in seventh graders who have begun drinking alcohol. These students tend to skip school, be sent out of the classroom, miss five or more days of school, earn grades of C or lower, and even have to repeat grades more than their nondrinking counterparts. At grade twelve these students were again more likely to skip school, achieve poor grades, grade retention, and be suspended more than their nondrinking counterparts. The statistics illustrate a similar pattern of events. Statistics show that at the seventh grade level adolescents who choose to drink are three times more likely to sent out of class or skip class, two times more likely to be frequently absent from school, and one and half more times to receive poor grades than those who choose not to drink. At the twelfth grade level, students who began drinking at an early age are 1.3-2 times more likely to have school problems, and 1.5 times more likely to have skipped class, earned poor grades, and have been suspended than those students who do not consume alcohol. These statistics and facts again only prove the devastating effects that mixing alcohol and school can have on an adolescent's academic achievement.

## Chapter III

### Discussion

#### *Introduction*

The final chapter of this thesis will review the purpose of the study of the literature, summarize the key findings, critique the research findings, make final conclusions, and provide recommendations for further studies.

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this literature review was to analyze adolescent alcohol consumption patterns among differing individuals and investigate the relationships between adolescent alcohol consumption with other aspects of the adolescent's personal and social life. The purpose for relating adolescent alcohol consumption with other aspects of the adolescent's personal and social life is to determine if there is a relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption with other common concerns pertaining to adolescents.

In recent years there has been a certain amount of attention given to adolescent alcohol consumption by such programs as Students Against Drunk Drivers (SADD), Arrive Alive, and Reality Check 21. The question remains if these programs and others like it are effective in the fight against adolescent alcohol consumption. However, the purpose of this literature review was not to determine the effectiveness of these programs, but to inform others about the sleeping giant known as adolescent alcohol consumption.

Adolescent alcohol consumption remains a continuing problem because adolescents of all races, sexes, and ethnicities are choosing to drink alcohol. The overall trend with alcohol consumption is the initial age of use continues to plummet.

Adolescents are no longer first experimenting with alcohol in their late high school years like many would think, but are beginning to use alcohol as early as middle school.

Research shows that the average age of alcohol initiation is 15.9 years of age (Windle, 2003). Additionally, 33% of adolescents between the sixth and ninth grade report taking alcohol from their home for personal and social use. These adolescents and others are part of estimated 3.3 million adolescents each year who begin to use alcohol (William & Ricciardelli, 1999). That means that there are 3.3 million more adolescents in our communities who have the opportunity to be involved in an alcohol induced experience.

Many people may ask why adolescents consume alcohol, but may not know the true reason behind this choice. Adolescents of all ages choose to consume alcohol for various reasons. These reasons include drinking to feel better, drinking to have fun, drinking to be like friends, and drinking to be like adults (Graeber, 1995). However, it is after this choice is made is where many of the startling statistics arise from. Statistics that show the differences between racial and ethnic groups, genders, overall alcohol consumption, variations in alcohol consumption based on grade, and demographic data.

According to the 2004 Monitoring the Futures Survey (n.d.) 43.9% of eighth graders, 64.2% of tenth graders, and 76.8% of twelfth graders have drunk alcohol in their lifetime. Additionally, the same survey found that 19.9% of eighth graders, 42.3% of tenth graders, and 60.3% of twelfth graders have been drunk in their lifetime. Further research shows that in the twelfth grade 52.3% of males and 45.1% of females had drunk alcohol in the past thirty days (Windle, 2003). Racially, 54% of Caucasians, 47.5% of Hispanics, and 30.1% of African-Americans reported to using alcohol in the last thirty days. Demographic factors show that adolescents who live in the Midwest and

Northeast consume more alcohol than those living in other regions of the country (Nielsen, 1990). Additionally, adolescents living in a suburb will use alcohol more than an urban and rural dwelling adolescents. .

The relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption and other adolescent related activities are staggering. After the initial data regarding adolescent alcohol consumption has been collected one can then disseminate adolescent alcohol use to other related behaviors like drinking and driving, crime/violence, sexual intercourse, and school performance.

The prevalence of adolescents who drink and drive and ride with someone who has been drinking is astonishing and startling. According to O'Malley & Johnston (1999) 18.3% of high school seniors have reported drinking and driving at least once in the past two weeks and 26.1% of the same seniors have reported being a passenger in a vehicle that was being operated by an individual who had consumed alcohol. Even more terrifying is that 11.5% of high school seniors have reported driving after an episode of heavy drinking and 15.4% have reported being a passenger with an individual who has been drinking heavily. Overall, 19.1% of high school seniors have had some exposure to impaired driving or being a passenger with someone who has.

There is significant evidence that demonstrates a strong relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption, physical aggression, and violent offending (Rossow, Pape, & Wichstrom 1999). Adolescent alcohol consumption is also a strong and consistent variable associated with both violent and nonviolent crimes amongst adolescents (Dawkins, 97). Statistically, according to Best Practice: Alcohol Prevention, (n.d.) over 27% of all murders, 31% of all rapes, 33% of all property offenses, and more

then 37% of all robberies committed by adolescents are done while under the influence of alcohol. Based on these findings an individual would have to assert that by lowering the consumption of alcohol by adolescents would also lower crime, violence, and victimization.

Adolescent alcohol consumption has often been mentioned as a cause for increasing adolescent's sexual endeavors. According to Ketcham and Pace (2003), adolescents who drink are seven times more likely to have sex, and twice as likely to have sex with four or more partners. Mixing alcohol with sexual advancements makes it more difficult for adolescents say no to these sexual advancements (Bellenir, 2002). The increased sexual activity caused by the alcohol consumption makes adolescents more susceptible to unplanned pregnancy, sexual assault, and becoming infected with a sexually transmitted disease.

The relationship between adolescent alcohol consumption and academic performance is compelling. Adolescent who tend to use alcohol also experience low academic achievement, low motivation, truancy, and/or acting out in the classroom, whereas adolescents who do not consume alcohol are much more likely to have more positive experiences during their academic career (Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2003). Adolescents who consume alcohol also tend to skip classes, fail to complete assignments, and otherwise just misbehave in the classroom. Finally, high school students who have dropped-out of school are three times more likely to rate themselves as heavy drinkers and report frequent drunkenness as compared to those in good academic standing (Sanders, Field, & Diego, 2001).

*Critique*

As a graduate student and future guidance counselor I have found this topic to very relevant to our field and yet very scary. At one point or another all guidance counselors in their career will be faced with situations where they will have to deal with adolescent alcohol consumption. Counselors must then determine the best reactive solution whether that is individual counseling, group counseling, and/or referrals to outside mental health agencies. Counselors should also determine an appropriate proactive means for dealing with adolescent alcohol consumption. These means could include alcohol education, seminars, guest speakers, alcohol programs, or other productive means for dealing with adolescent alcohol consumption. At this time the counselors and the school community should determine their stance on adolescent alcohol use. This stance could be straight abstinence, moderation, making appropriate choices towards alcohol, etc., or a combination of multiple stances.

Often times when dealing with adolescent alcohol consumption it takes a tragedy for people to realize the dangers of alcohol use and realize that a problem exist. Often times adolescents are too frightened to acknowledge that they use or are addicted to alcohol because of what their parents/guardians and/or school will do. Though I have research to support my belief, I believe based on experience that adolescents who use alcohol should be nurtured into making positive decisions regarding alcohol and not treated as an outcast where adolescents continue to drink as a form of rebellion. Again without supporting research It is my belief that adolescents must be taught that alcohol is acceptable in moderation and not keep pushing abstinence. This researcher believes

abstinence is an unrealistic goal with many adolescents so we must in return then teach these adolescents the skills necessary to make good sound decisions regarding alcohol consumption.

### *Conclusion*

According to the facts and data discovered through this literature review there are many statistics that support that adolescent alcohol consumption is problematic. Some of these include 31% of high school students reporting that they binge drink, nearly 80% of adolescents report that they drink alcohol, an estimated 53 billion dollars worth of damage caused by adolescent alcohol consumption each year, and 35% of adolescents develop at least one symptom of alcoholism. These are just a few of the statistics addressing adolescent alcohol consumption. There are many more discussed and dissected within this thesis. However, statistics on alcohol consumption don't tell the entire story. To read the entire story the researcher must determine what effect alcohol plays in the adolescent's personal and social life. This thesis furthermore discussed the implications of adolescent alcohol consumption on such things as academics, drinking and driving, sexual intercourse, and crime/violence. Reading into these other areas tells a more thorough story of the implications alcohol can have on an adolescent's well-being.

### *Recommendations*

The following are recommendations for further research on adolescent alcohol consumption:

- Explore what effect alcohol advertising has on adolescent alcohol consumption
- Explore the short and long-term effects of alcohol consumption by adolescents

- Explore the relationship between illicit drug use and adolescent alcohol consumption
- Collect data on the prevalence of alcohol victimization among adolescents
- Explore what determines the adolescent's alcohol consumption pattern
- Explore how adolescent alcohol consumption develop from other social and personal problems in the adolescent's life
- Understand adolescent alcohol consumption as a possible cause and relationship with delinquency and future imprisonment
- Explore the effectiveness of alcohol prevention programs and policies on adolescent alcohol consumption
- Understand what role alcohol play in the adolescents life in comparison to the community in which they live

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