

distinguish by the way he speaks that he is already half-drunk. As he continues drinking and contradicting himself, in mostly a one-way conversation—him talking to me—I have to listen to a lot of nonsensical talk that makes me feel like he is using me as someone to call so he can unload all the problems that went on with his job for the day. After 10 to 15 minutes of listening, I often try to end the conversation by saying, “I have to get up real early tomorrow morning so I need to get to bed.” This usually ends the conversation. I realize he is lonely (living by himself), but why do I have to endure this nearly every night? I guess I feel sorry for him, but it is unfair to be used this way. He often claims he is an alcoholic and says at least he is a functioning alcoholic. I know he puts in many hours at work, and probably because he sees so many of his customers drinking all day long maybe he develops some kind of thirst for alcohol when he is off work. How many times he asks me to take him to the liquor store to buy vodka, and the funny thing is that I hardly drink anymore. Each time I take him to buy liquor on days when he is off work he always comes out with a half-gallon bottle of vodka that is usually consumed within a week. He cannot drive since his driving record is abominable with four DUIs to date. He says in 10 years he will be able to drive again—God help us when he does! At a very young age when he received his first DUI he went off the road completely drunk and hit a barn, actually went through a barn, and killed a steer with his car! I sometimes laugh about this when I picture the accident but it is not funny. Just imagine if it was a pedestrian or another car? I know he has a big alcohol problem but it appears he also knows it without either desiring or seeking help for his alcoholism. I keep imagining what hell it must be if I had to live with him as his roommate. (From Venturelli's research files, male high school teacher in a small Midwestern town, age 53, July 4, 2010)

Alcohol Consumption in the United States

Similar to nearly all societies, past and present, alcohol has always been a part of American society. The preceding quotes illustrate how an individual can consume an excessive amount of a psychoactive and addictive substance without necessarily coming to the attention of anyone except

perhaps a neighbor or friend, a lone liquor store owner or employee, or even a bar owner and his young son's observation. Furthermore, this same depressant chemical is often not perceived as a drug by many Americans. It is considered more of a social lubricant, something that is “always” consumed at social gatherings and perceived as normal at social gatherings.

Consider these findings from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse in 2014 (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality [CBHSQ] 2015):

- There were 139.7 million **current drinkers** (past month) of alcohol aged 12 or older in 2014, including 60.9 million who were **binge alcohol users** and 16.3 million who were **heavy alcohol users**.
- In 2014, the percentage of people aged 12 or older that were past-month alcohol users (48%) was similar to the percentages in 2009 through 2013.
- The percentage of people aged 12 or older in 2014 who were past-month heavy alcohol users (6%) was similar to the percentages in 2011 through 2013. Estimates of binge drinking among people aged 12 or older did not change over the period from 2002 to 2014 (22.2% in 2014).

Figure 8.1 shows that the 21 to 25 age group has the highest consumption of alcohol, with 69% using alcohol, 43% bingeing, and 13% engaging in heavy use. The group with the second highest consumption, those aged 26 to 29 years, shows 68% using alcohol, 38% bingeing, and 9% engaging in heavy use (CBHSQ 2015). Additional statistics on

KEY TERMS

current drinkers

at least one drink in the past 30 days; can include binge and heavy use

binge alcohol users (binge drinking)

a pattern of drinking five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women on a single occasion, such as at the same time or within 2 hours of each other, on at least 1 day in the past 30 days; includes heavy use

heavy alcohol users (heavy drinking)

five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days or consuming an average of more than one alcoholic beverage per day for women and an average of more than two alcoholic beverages per day for men and any drinking by pregnant women or underage youth

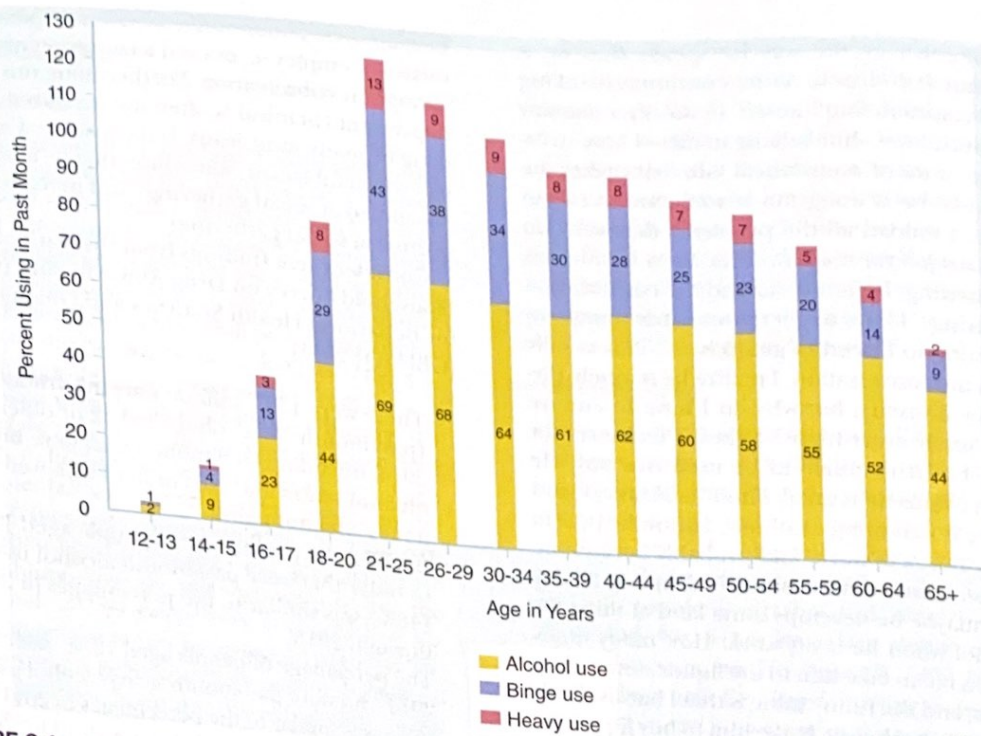


FIGURE 8.1 Current, binge, and heavy alcohol use among persons aged 12 or older, by age: 2014.

Data from Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ). Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. SMA 15-4927, NSDUH Series H-50). Rockville, MD, 2015. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabs2014/NSDUH-DetTabs2014.pdf>, Table 216B.

age and alcohol consumption are as follows (summarized largely from CBHSQ 2015, unless otherwise designated):

- Although alcohol use peaks at ages 21 to 25, a steady decline begins at 26 to 29 years of age through age 65 in using alcohol, bingeing, and engaging in heavy use.
- The 17.3 million people aged 12 or older who had an alcohol use disorder in 2014 represent 6.4% of all people aged 12 or older.
- Approximately 4.3 million young adults aged 18 to 25 in 2014 had an alcohol use disorder in the past year. This number represents 12.3% of young adults, or about one in eight young adults.
- In 2014, approximately 12.0 million adults aged 26 or older had an alcohol use disorder in the past year, representing 5.9% of the adults in this age group.
- In 2013, 52% of current underage drinkers reported that their last use of alcohol occurred in someone else's home, and 34% reported that it had occurred in their own home. Most

current drinkers aged 12 to 20 (78%) were with two or more other people the last time they drank alcohol. The rate of drinking alone the last time that underage persons drank alcohol was highest among youths aged 12 to 14 (approximately 15%) (SAMHSA 2014).

- Among current underage drinkers, 28% paid for the alcohol the last time they drank, including 8% who purchased the alcohol themselves and 21% who gave money to someone else to purchase it. Among those who did not pay for the alcohol they last drank, 37% got it from an unrelated person aged 21 or older; 25% got it from a parent, guardian, or other adult family member; and 16% got it from another person younger than 21 years old.
- In 2013, underage current drinkers were more likely than current alcohol users aged 21 or older to use illicit drugs within 2 hours of alcohol use on their last reported drinking occasion (20% vs. 6%, respectively). The most commonly reported illicit drug used by underage drinkers in combination with alcohol was marijuana (SAMHSA 2014).

- Most (84%) of the 4.6 million past year alcohol initiates in 2013 were younger than age 21 at the time of initiation (SAMHSA 2014).
- In 2013, 39% of youths aged 12 to 17 perceived great risk in having five or more drinks once or twice a week. Similarly, 39% of youths perceived great risk in smoking marijuana once or twice a week (SAMHSA 2014).
- In 2013, adults aged 21 or older who had first used alcohol at age 14 or younger were more likely to be classified with alcohol dependence or abuse than adults who had their first drink at age 21 or older (15% vs. 2.3%) (SAMHSA 2014).
- For persons aged 65 or older, 44% drank alcohol, 9% binged, and 2% reported heavy alcohol use (see Figure 8.1) (SAMHSA 2014).

An encouraging finding is that the rate of current alcohol use among youth aged 12 to 17 declined from 14.6% in 2008 to 11.6% in 2013. Youth binge and heavy drinking rates in 2013 were also lower than in 2008. Further, the 2013 rates for current and binge youth alcohol use were lower than those in 2012 (12.9% and 7.2%, respectively). More recent findings from the 2014 national Monitoring the Future Survey reveals that alcohol use by middle and high school students has been steadily declining to record low percentages. Past-month alcohol use by 12th graders decreased from highs above 70% in the late 1970s to 37% in 2014, the lowest rate since data collection began in 1975. Similarly alcohol use by 8th and 10th graders declined (Center for Substance Abuse Research [CESAR] 2015). These trends may indicate that perhaps the enforcement of alcohol drug laws (especially motor vehicle alcohol violations), campaigns and advertisements against heavy alcohol use, and increasing enforcement expenditures in the recent past have had an impact on decreasing the number of underage drinkers.

Current Statistics and Trends in Alcohol Consumption

In a 2013 Gallup poll, 64% of the adult population reported drinking alcohol, with 26% reporting excessive alcohol consumption patterns. In an earlier Gallup poll, 29% of the population reported that drinking alcohol had caused family problems, and 77% of those questioned indicated that, in comparison to all other drug problems, alcohol creates the most family problems in our society (Jones 2007; Newport 2000).

In looking at more detailed figures about consumption patterns, we find the following (summarized largely from Newport 2000, unless otherwise designated):

- Gallup polls indicate that drinking patterns have not changed much over time. As of July 9, 2012, 66% of people reported themselves as being current drinkers. In 1976 and 1977, the average was 71%. Gallup reports that the average amount drunk in the past week was 4.2 alcoholic beverages. In 1996, the average was below three drinks (Gallup 2013).
- “Nearly half of male drinkers, 48%, say they most often drink beer, followed by liquor at 26%, while 51% of female drinkers prefer wine. This pattern is consistent with prior years, although the preference for beer is down slightly between both groups compared with 2010” (Saad 2012).
- “For only the second time in two decades, wine ties beer as the top choice when U.S. drinkers are asked whether they most often drink liquor, wine, or beer. Gallup now finds nearly as many U.S. drinkers naming wine (35%) as beer (36%), while liquor still registers a distant third at 23%” (Saad 2012).
- “Gallup has consistently found a wide gender difference in preferred alcoholic beverage, going back to the initial asking of the question in 1992. Currently, 53% of men name beer as their favorite drink, while 22% say liquor and 20% wine. Among women, 52% say they drink wine most often, while 24% say liquor and 20% beer” (Jones 2013).
- In 2012, 66% of men drinking alcohol reported an average of 6.2 alcoholic beverages per week, whereas women reported 2.2 alcoholic beverages per week (Saad 2012).
- As men age, their preference for beer steadily decreases (Newport 2000).
- Overall, as both men and women age, they say wine is their favorite alcoholic beverage (Newport 2000).
- Lower-income drinkers prefer beer, whereas higher-income drinkers prefer wine (Newport 2000).
- The highest rate of family drinking problems is among 18- to 29-year-olds (Newport 2000).
- Currently, 42% of the population report family disputes caused by excessive drinking; 17% reported this problem in 2013 (Jones 2013).
- Sixty-four percent claim they drink and 36% report that they abstain. In 1999, 61% drank and 39% abstained (Newport 2000).

Preferred drinks

Favorite

- “Americans who drink alcohol are about equally likely to say they drink beer (36%) or wine (35%) most often. Another 23% say liquor is their beverage of choice. That continues the trend in which beer has declined as the preferred beverage of U.S. drinkers, shrinking its advantage over wine from 20 percentage points in 1992 to one point today” (Jones 2013).
- “Twenty-one percent of drinkers say they sometimes drink more than they should. This percentage has been fairly consistent over time, ranging between 17% and 25% over the past decade. The historically high point was 35% in 1989” (Jones 2013).
- Worldwide, adults (age 21 or older) consume on average 5 liters¹ of pure alcohol from beer, wine, and spirits per year. The average alcohol consumption is highest in Europe, followed by the Americas and Africa. Alcohol consumption tends to increase with economic development; however, consumption remains low in some regions where the majority of the population is Muslim (GreenFacts 2009).
- Throughout the world, the highest per capita consumptions of alcohol from 1970 to 2006 were in Romania (10.5 liters), Austria (10.5 liters), Hungary (10.4 liters), and Russia (10.3 liters). Consumption was lowest in Norway (4.9 liters). The United Kingdom (8.3 liters) was mid-range in European consumption. Alcohol consumption in most European countries was stable from 1970 through 2006; however, in some European countries, consumption fell substantially. For example, France fell from 17.2 liters in 1970 to 10.0 liters in 2006, and Italy fell from 16.0 liters in 1970 to 8.1 liters in 2006 (Coghill, Miller, and Plant 2009).
- Illicit drug use in 2013 varied by the educational status of adults aged 18 or older. The rate of current illicit drug use was lower among college graduates (6.7%) than those with some college education but no degree (10.8%), high school graduates with no further education (9.9%), and those who had not graduated from high school (11.8%) (SAMHSA 2014).

KEY TERM

teetotalers

individuals who drink no alcoholic beverages whatsoever; a term in common usage a decade past, today, teetotalers are referred to as abstainers

¹ One liter is equivalent to 1.26 gallons.

- Drinking is commonly believed to be associated with poverty, yet according to a Gallup poll, the people most likely to drink have higher incomes, are younger than age 65, do not attend church, live in regions of the United States other than the South, and are more likely to identify themselves as liberals (Newport 2000).
- Prior research shows that much of the economic burden of alcohol and drug problems falls on the population of taxpayers who do not abuse alcohol and drugs. Government, private insurance, and other members of households bear most of these costs (Office of Applied Studies [OAS] 2001).

Percentages of the Drinking Population: A Pyramid Model

What percentage of our society drinks alcohol? A pyramid can be constructed based on the amount of alcohol consumed, the pattern of drinking, or the “problem” or “illness” dimension (e.g., by attempting to calculate what proportion of Americans are “abusers” or “dependent”). For example, at the beginning of this chapter, several interviews discussed people who bought and consumed liquor and are prime examples of alcohol drinkers who probably imbibe approximately 1 quart per day. This, by most definitions, is a clear diagnostic criterion for a diagnosis of alcoholism. Interestingly, all four of the chapter’s opening examples indicate that the alcohol drinkers are apparently functional, or at least they manage to create this impression.

The pyramid shown in Figure 8.2 has a base of 35% who are **teetotalers**, then a layer of about 13% who occasionally drink, and a top 52% who

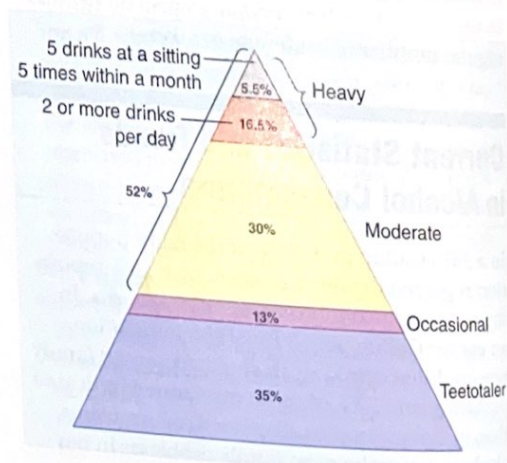


FIGURE 8.2 Broad distribution of drinking behaviors.

drink regularly. In 2013, 24.6% (58.5 million) of those aged 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month; 6.8% (16,248) reported that they engaged in heavy drinking in the past month (SAMHSA 2014). Different definitions of what constitutes heavy drinking exist. Thus, if we define heavy drinking differently—for example, as more than two drinks per day—we come up with a much larger slice of the pyramid—three times as large.

In a study based on data from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), nearly two-thirds (65%) of U.S. adults are current drinkers (CESAR 2013). The majority of these current drinkers were infrequent (11 drinks or less in the past year) or light (3 drinks or less per week) drinkers. Around one-fourth were moderate drinkers and 8% were heavier drinkers. Men were more likely than women to be not only current drinkers (71% vs. 60%) but also moderate or heavier current drinkers (29% vs. 13%).

■ Dual Problems: Underage and Adult Drinking

As we saw in Figure 8.1, alcohol consumption does not have any age boundaries. Although all states have had a legal drinking age of 21 since 1988, a high percentage of the underage population drinks alcohol. Overall, in looking at a larger and more detailed picture of the percentages and types of groups reporting alcohol use in 2013, the following findings have been reported:

UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE

- In 2013, about 8.7 million persons aged 12 to 20 (22.7% of this age group) reported drinking alcohol in the past month. Approximately 5.4 million (14.2%) were binge drinkers, and 1.4 million (3.7%) were heavy drinkers. All three of these rates were lower than those reported in 2012 (24.3%, 15.3%, and 4.3% percent, respectively) (SAMHSA 2014).
- Rates of current, binge, and heavy alcohol use among underage persons declined between 2002 and 2013. The rate of current alcohol use among 12- to 20-year-olds decreased from 28.8% in 2002 to 22.7% in 2013. From 2002 to 2013, the binge drinking rate declined from 19.3% to 14.2% and the rate of heavy drinking declined from 6.2% to 3.7% (SAMHSA 2014).
- Rates of current alcohol use increased with age among underage persons. In 2013, 2.1% of persons aged 12 or 13, 9.5% of persons aged 14 or

15, 22.7% of persons aged 16 or 17, and 43.8% of persons aged 18 to 20 drank alcohol during the 30 days before they were surveyed. This pattern by age has been observed since 2002. The rates in 2013 for youths aged 14 or 15, and those aged 16 or 17 were lower than the rates in 2012 (11.1% and 24.8%, respectively) (SAMHSA 2014).

- Males and females aged 12 to 20 in 2013 had similar rates of current alcohol use (23% and 22.5%, respectively). However, underage males were more likely than underage females to report binge (15.8% vs. 12.4%) or heavy alcohol use (4.6% vs. 2.7%) (SAMHSA 2013).
- Students may be more likely to drink and drive on prom and graduation nights, according to a survey of 11th- and 12th-grade students across the country. Nearly all of the students surveyed (90%) said that their peers are more likely to drink and drive on prom night, and 79% report the same for graduation night. Despite this belief, students do not seem to think that driving on these nights is dangerous. Less than one third (29%) reported that they believe that driving on prom night comes with a high degree of danger, and 25% said the same for graduation night. These findings suggest that there is a need to provide high school students with prevention messages that paint an accurate picture of the risks and consequences for drinking and driving during prom and graduation season (CESAR 2010).

ALCOHOL USE: AGE 12 OR OLDER BY ETHNICITY AND RACE

- **Figure 8.3A** shows that, among persons aged 12 or older in 2014, whites were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to report current use of alcohol (57.7%). The rates were 49.5% for persons reporting two or more races, 44.4% for Hispanics or Latinos, 42.3% for American Indians or Alaska Natives, 44.2% for blacks, and 38.7% for Asians (CBHSQ 2015).
- In 2014, among youth aged 12 to 17, Asians had the lowest overall rates of current alcohol use as well as the lowest current use and binge drinking rates across all age groups (CBHSQ 2015).

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL

Figure 8.3B shows that in 2013, an estimated 10.9% of persons aged 12 or older drove under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year.

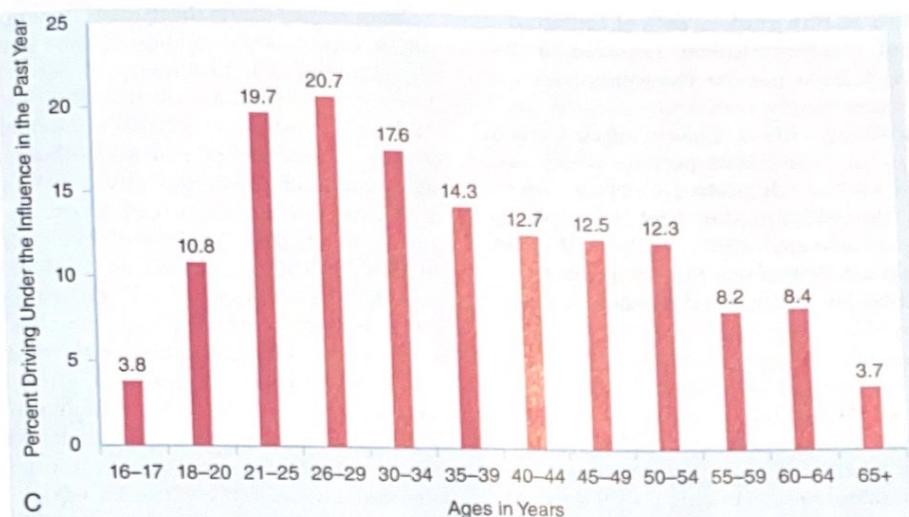


FIGURE 8.3 (continued) (C) Driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year among persons aged 16 or older: 2014.

Data from NSDUH Series H-48, HHS Publication No. SMA 14-4863, Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year. Beyond age 29, these rates show a general steady decline in driving under the influence with increasing age (SAMHSA 2014).

EDUCATION AND ALCOHOL USE

- Among adults aged 18 or older, the rate of past-month alcohol use increased with increasing levels of education. Among adults in 2013 with less than a high school education, 36.5% were current drinkers. In comparison, 69.2% of college graduates were current drinkers (SAMHSA 2014).
- Among adults aged 18 or older, rates of binge and heavy alcohol use varied by level of education. Among adults in 2013, those who had graduated from college were less likely than those with some college education but no degree to be binge drinkers (23.1% vs. 26.4%) or heavy drinkers (6.0% vs. 7.6%) (SAMHSA 2014).

COLLEGE STUDENTS AND ALCOHOL USE

- Young adults aged 18 to 22 who were enrolled full time in college were more likely than their peers who were not enrolled full time (i.e., part-time college students and persons not currently enrolled in college) to report current, binge, or heavy drinking. Among full-time college students in 2013, 59.4% were current

drinkers, 39.0% were binge drinkers, and 12.7% were heavy drinkers. Among those not enrolled full time in college, these rates were 50.6%, 33.4%, and 9.3%, respectively.

- The pattern of higher rates of current alcohol use, binge alcohol use, and heavy alcohol use among full-time college students compared with rates for others aged 18 to 22 has remained consistent since 2002.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND ALCOHOL USE

- The rate of current alcohol use in 2013 was 65.8% for full-time employed adults aged 18 or older, which was higher than the rate for unemployed adults (53.8%). Rates of binge drinking were similar for adults who were employed full time and those who were unemployed (30.5% and 31.3%, respectively).
- Among adults in 2013, most binge and heavy alcohol users were employed. Among the 58.5 million adults who were binge drinkers, 44.5 million (76.1%) were employed either full or part time. Among the 16.2 million adults who were heavy drinkers, 12.4 million (76.0%) were employed.

ALCOHOL AND THE VERY YOUNG

Use of either of the two major licit drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, remains more widespread than use of any of the illicit drugs. In 2015, 27% of 8th

graders, 49% of 10th graders, 66% of 12th graders, and 79% of college students reported lifetime use of alcohol; active use was also widespread. Most important was the prevalence of occasions of heavy drinking—five or more drinks in a row at least once in the prior 2-week period—which was reported by 4.6% of 8th graders, 10.9% of 10th graders, 17.2% of 12th graders, and 35% of college students (Johnston et al. 2016). A noteworthy finding is that on a daily basis for 8th, 10th, and 12th graders combined, marijuana usage now exceeds alcohol usage.

Of greater concern than just any use of alcohol is its use to the point of inebriation. In 2014, 11% of 8th graders, 30% of 10th graders, and 50% of 12th graders said they had been drunk at least once in their lifetime. The prevalence rates of self-reported drunkenness during the 30 days immediately preceding the survey were strikingly high—3%, 11%, and 24%, respectively, for grades 8, 10, and 12 (Miech et al. 2015; see “Point/Counterpoint: Lower the Legal Drinking Age?”).

With regard to the three major types of alcohol (beer, wine coolers, and liquor) used by junior high and high school students, alcohol consumption increases dramatically from 9th through 12th grades (Miech et al. 2015). In looking at 12th graders' consumption of alcohol, white undergraduates are much more likely to binge drink (24%) compared with African American students (11%) and Hispanic students (20%). Finally, boys in 12th grade are more likely to drink alcohol on a daily basis compared with girls of the same grade and age; daily use among boys was reported at 3%, whereas the rate among girls was reported at 0.8%. Boys are more likely than girls to drink large quantities of alcohol in a single sitting: 26% of 12th-grade males reported drinking five or more drinks in a row 2 weeks prior to being surveyed, but only 16% of the 12th-grade females reported drinking the same amount (Miech et al. 2015). When reviewing the statistics, keep in mind that females differ from males in terms of their alcohol drinking capacities.

▶ POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Lower the Legal Drinking Age?

Only seven countries throughout the world—the United States, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, and Sri Lanka—are the only seven countries throughout the world that—set the minimum legal drinking age at 21. **Table 8.1** and the following figure show the exceptions to the minimum age of 21 for the consumption of alcohol as of 2015.

A clear majority of countries throughout the world, 101 of them, specify the age of 18 as the minimum age to drink alcohol (see Table 8.1). Fifteen other countries, Austria (age 18 in some areas), Belgium,* Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany,* Georgia, Haiti, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Macao, Malaysia, Netherlands,* Sudan, Switzerland,* and Tokelau, set the legal drinking age to 16. Two countries, Cyprus and Malta, set the minimum at 17 years of age. Nineteen countries—Albania, Angola, Armenia, Cambodia, Comoros, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, Romania, Swaziland, Togo, Uruguay, and Vietnam—do not specify any specific legal age for alcohol consumption (Hanson 2015). The majority of countries have set the minimum drinking age at 18 years, but the global average minimum

age for legal drinking is 15.9 years (Hanson 2015). Internationally, the average age at which drinking alcohol first occurs is 12 years, and about 80% of young people begin drinking alcoholic beverages regularly at age 15 or younger according to the World Health Organization (WHO) (Hanson 2015).

Arguments against lowering the legal limit for consuming alcohol are as follows:

- A higher minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) is effective in preventing alcohol-related deaths and injuries among youth. When the MLDA is lowered, injury and death rates increase; when the MLDA is increased, death and injury rates decline (McCartt and Kirley 2006; Wagenaar 1993).
- A higher MLDA results in fewer alcohol-related problems among youth, and an MLDA of 21 years saves the lives of more than 1000 youth each year. Conversely, when the MLDA is lowered, motor vehicle crashes and deaths among youth increase. At least 50 studies have evaluated this correlation (McCartt and Kirley 2006; Wagenaar 1993).
- Research shows that when the MLDA is 21, people younger than age 21 drink less overall and continue to do so through their early 20s (O'Malley and Wagenaar 1991).

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Lower the Legal Drinking Age? (continued)

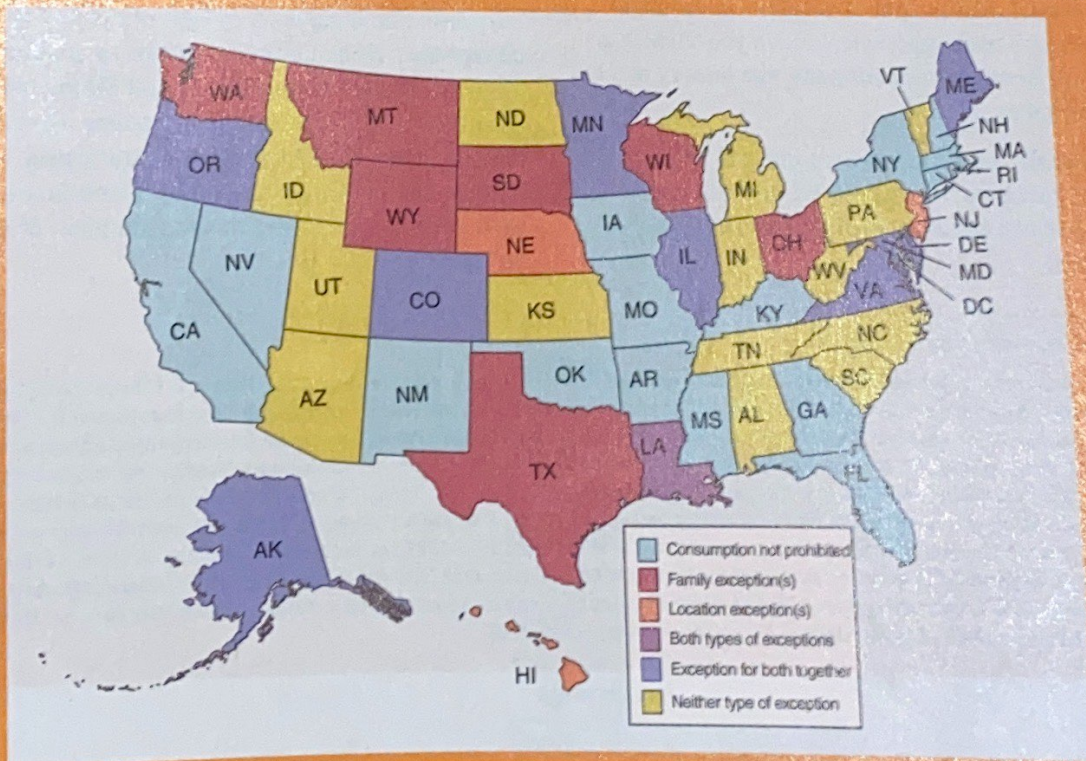
- Higher MLDA reduce traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by saving approximately 1000 lives each year (American Medical Association 2011).
- Although younger drivers are less likely than adults to drink and drive, their risk of crashing is substantially higher when they do drink and drive. (McCartt and Kirley 2006).
- The evidence is clear that a MLDA can deter underage drinking and driving and reduce alcohol-related crashes among young drivers (McCartt and Kirley 2006).

Arguments for lowering the legal limit for consuming alcohol are as follows:

- The United States has the strictest youth drinking laws in Western civilization and yet has the most drinking-related problems among its young, and there seems to be a connection between these two facts (Hanson 2009).
- A study of a large sample of young people between the ages of 16 and 19 in Massachusetts and New York after Massachusetts raised its drinking age revealed that average self-reported daily alcohol consumption in Massachusetts did

not decline in comparison with New York (Hanson 2013b).

- Comparison of college students attending schools in states that had maintained, for at least 10 years, a minimum drinking age of 21 with those in states that had similarly maintained minimum drinking ages below 21 revealed few differences in drinking problems (Hanson 2013b).
- A study of all 50 states and the District of Columbia found "a positive relationship between the purchase age and single-vehicle fatalities." Thus, single-vehicle fatalities were found to be more frequent in those states with high purchase ages (Hanson 2013b).
- Comparison of drinking before and after the passage of raised minimum age legislation has generally revealed little impact on behavior. For example, a study that examined college students' drinking behavior before and after an increase in the minimum legal drinking age from 18 to 19 in New York found the law had no impact on underage students' consumption rates, intoxication rates, drinking attitudes, or drinking problems. These studies were corroborated by other researchers at a different college in the same state (Hanson 2013b).



Acceptability and exceptions to the minimum age of 21 for consuming alcohol in the United States as of January 1, 2011.

Reproduced from Hanson, D. J. "Minimum Legal Drinking Ages Around the World." *Alcohol Problems and Solutions*. 2015. Available <http://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/LegalDrinkingAge.html>

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Lower the Legal Drinking Age? (continued)

• An examination of East Carolina University students' intentions regarding their behavior after the increase of the MLDA to age 21 revealed that only 6% intended to stop drinking, 70% planned to change their drinking location, 21% expected to use a false or borrowed identification to obtain alcohol, and 22% intended to use other drugs. Anecdotal statements by students indicated the belief by some that it "might be easier to hide a little pot in my room than a six pack of beer" (Hanson 2013b).

Research and the information from sources in this chapter indicate that with regard to under-21 alcohol violations, the United States continues to have serious problems. Thus, we are not any better than most countries regarding the percentage of minors consuming alcohol, despite our unique MLDA of age 21 for alcohol consumption. Instead of prohibiting alcohol consumption to those younger than age 21 (which, to date, continues to be ineffective), perhaps we need to teach moderation at an early age so that the percentage of youth who decide to consume alcohol can learn to do so responsibly. Given that the MLDA of 21 years has not deterred our nation's youth from consuming alcohol, and in light of younger and younger age groups consuming alcohol, do you think it is time to reconsider lowering the age limit of alcohol consumption so that:

1. We are more in alignment with the majority of countries. At present, 82 countries allow alcohol consumption at 18 years of age and older.

2. We can eliminate costly, burdensome, and unnecessary underage drinking violations. These infractions with the law include fines, legal costs, imprisonment, court time, legal expenses, and introducing our nation's youth into the criminal justice system (which many believe should remain "lean and mean" so it can effectively prohibit and prosecute serious law violators).
3. We can teach responsible drinking and drinking in moderation, and alcohol consumption can be promoted and taught to be a "normal" part of behavior when eating or socializing with friends (like consuming coffee or fruit juice). Such prevention measures can clearly emphasize that excessive alcohol consumption is a sign of immaturity and lack of self-respect.

How successful do you think a campaign calling for lowering the legal drinking age would be with (1) family members, (2) your school, (3) your community, (4) your city/town, and (5) U.S. society in general? Would it be successful? If yes, why? If no, why not? Have you had any experiences in foreign countries where alcohol consumption was not severely restricted? If so, what did you observe?

In essence, do you think we should try to change the current drinking laws, in light of the fact that the current laws continue to be violated by youths under 21 years of age? Should the United States become like other progressive nations regarding age limits on the use of alcohol? What are the pros and cons of lowering the drinking rates in the United States? At what specific age should the consumption of alcohol be legal?

* 16 to 18 depending on the beverage

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