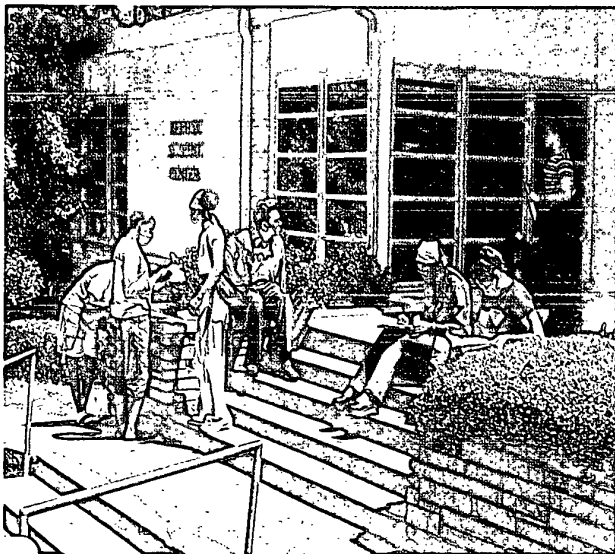


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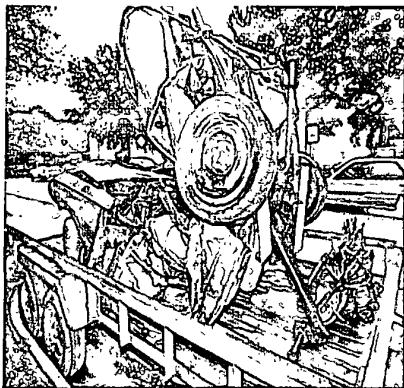
National Institute for Victim Studies Research Report #1

**MADD NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT 2000 DELEGATES:
YOUTH ATTITUDES TOWARD UNDERAGE DRINKING, EFFORTS
AT PREVENTION, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**



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Preface

Even though the minimum legal drinking age is twenty-one, research shows that many American adolescents use alcohol. A majority of adults support measures that would help reduce teen drinking, such as stricter controls in alcohol sales, advertising, and promotion. Beyond the measures it is important that youth become involved in the debate surrounding underage drinking.

MADD's Youth Summit 2000 was an attempt to organize young Americans to develop and implement community-level programs to prevent underage drinking. The purpose of this study was to examine the background characteristics of the Youth Summit, their attitudes toward underage drinking, efforts at prevention, and social responsibility. An important assumption underlying this research is that prevention efforts and policies must involve youth. Youth involvement in the policy making process is a critical, but evolving component in our efforts to change community norms about underage drinking.

James W. Marquart

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Introduction

Statistics, facts, and figures can often be overwhelming to the reader, yet to comprehend the state of underage drinking in America, some facts are in order. The vast majority of Americans today (ninety-six percent) are concerned about underage drinking. A majority of adults support measures that would help reduce teen drinking, such as stricter controls on alcohol sales, advertising, and promotion.¹

Recent advertising expenditures in the United States for beer, wine, and liquor (\$1.2 billion) totaled more than 10 times the amount for milk ads (\$71 million). A total of \$764 million was spent on beer ads, \$131 million on wine ads, and \$291 million on liquor ads.² Not surprisingly, a study of fifth and sixth graders found that those who demonstrated an awareness of beer ads held favorable beliefs about drinking and intended to drink more frequently when they grew up.³

Adult concerns about the level or prevalence of underage drinking are not unwarranted. Recent research shows that almost forty-two percent of ninth graders had consumed alcohol before they were thirteen years old. Roughly twenty-two percent of eighth graders reported that they drink monthly. Among high school seniors, three percent reported they drink daily, fifty-one percent reported drinking in the last month, almost seventy-five percent reported drinking in the last year, and eighty percent reported drinking in their lifetime. Perhaps most importantly, prior research shows that forty percent of children who start drinking before the age of fifteen will become alcoholics at some point in their lives.⁴ The following figure depicts key data on drinking behavior among 8th, 10th, and 12th school grade levels:

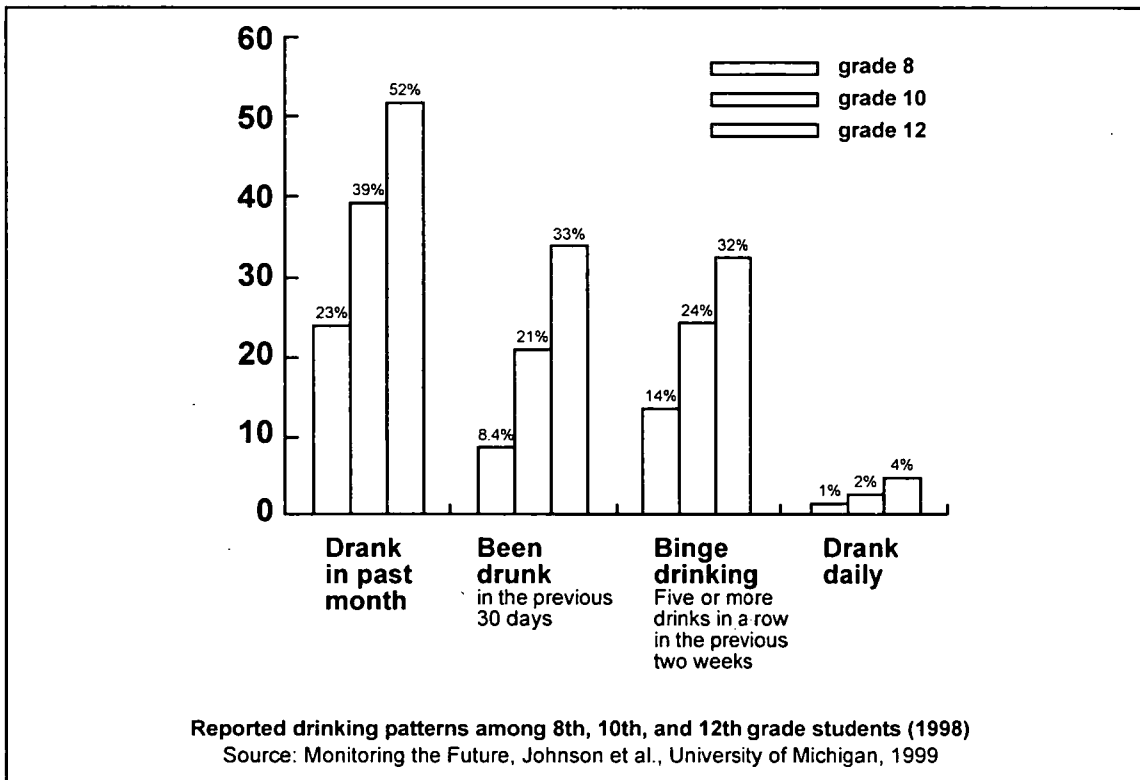


Figure 1. Underage Drinking by Grade

While these latter facts and figures appear to paint a bleak picture, the (1975-1999) prevalence of alcohol use among high school seniors is on the decline. Much of this downward trend can be attributed to efforts including crackdowns on the availability of alcohol. Most importantly, current research suggests that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their activities and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other.⁵ Parental involvement is an important factor in substance abuse prevention; however, other forms of involvement are showing positive signs of affecting youth behavior as well.

Recent efforts to reduce underage drinking recognize that individual and community characteristics shape youth alcohol abuse. One such community level factor

is civic involvement or engagement. Participation in community affairs is a form of “social capital,” which involves interpersonal relations and group ties. As such, social capital is the necessary infrastructure of civic and community life that generates “norms of reciprocity and civic engagement.” Youth can contribute to the civic life of their communities and thereby invest social capital by working in political campaigns, supporting causes, and advising decision-makers on issues of concern to young people. Civic involvement often provides youth new friends and interests, a heightened sense of responsibility to peers and the community, collective regulation, improved leadership skills, increased self-esteem, and a strengthened sense of accomplishment. Theoretically, volunteering and community involvement make sense; civically involved youth have a stake in their communities. Research by Weitzman and Kawachi (1999) indicates that increased levels of social capital (evidenced by higher levels of volunteering) are associated with a low-risk style of drinking.⁶ Theoretically, volunteering and involvement make sense, but research shows that involvement affects high-risk behavior as well.

Enhancing the social capital of youth was a key objective of the National Youth Summit to Prevent Underage Drinking hosted by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The first Summit convened in 1997, and the second met in late September 2000. The Summit 2000 brought together one high school student representing each of the country’s congressional districts and gave the youth delegates a forum to develop their own policy-level recommendations to reduce underage drinking in America. During the five-day event, the youth delegates worked with their peers as well as with adults who

affect policy-making: legislators, law enforcement officials, representatives from federal agencies, the media, and researchers.

There is a growing emphasis today toward involving youth in the policy process. Youth that are involved with their family and in their community are less likely to drink. This article examines the background of the youth delegates who attended the Summit, their experiences with victimization by drunk drivers or alcohol poisoning (or underage drinking), their attitudes towards various alcohol prevention strategies and policies, and their reasons for attending the Youth Summit. Where possible, the findings from the Youth Summit were compared to other recent national level poll data.

A questionnaire to be completed by the youth delegates was developed covering topics such as their attitudes toward alcohol prevention, enforcement policies, and civic involvement. The survey asked attendees about their personal experiences with victimization as the result of a crash involving a drunk driver. Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary. A letter that explained the research and an unsigned consent form (agreement to participate) were sent to each delegate's guardian or parents. Signed consent forms from 420 youth delegates' guardians were received.

Who Were the Delegates?

Table 1 illustrates the basic background characteristics of the attendees. Their average age was sixteen, nearly three-quarters were female, and most (seventy-six percent) were Anglo. Slightly over one-half of the attendees (fifty-five percent) were high school seniors who attended public schools (eighty-five percent). Nearly two-thirds lived with their biological parents, and the vast majority (ninety-four percent) regarded

religion as important. Comparatively, a recent survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) asked 2,000 teens (ages 12-17) a variety of questions about teen substance abuse risk.⁷ In the CASA study, eighty-nine percent of subjects stated that religion was important to them. These data illustrate two interesting issues: (1) the Youth Summit delegates, in terms of attitudes toward the importance of religion, paralleled a national sample of youth, and (2) the importance of religious beliefs in the lives of teens appeared, from these data, to be strong.

The survey asked delegates to respond to a series of questions about alcohol issues (see Table 1). Nearly 100 percent of the delegates reported that underage drinking is a major problem in America. In comparison, a 1997 poll conducted by ABC News found that seventy-seven percent of adults surveyed stated that underage drinking was a major problem in the country. Interestingly, eighty-two percent of the delegates claimed to have had at least one discussion with their parents about the risks associated with underage drinking. In comparison, the CASA survey found that a statistically lower sixty-four percent of its youth respondents had had a discussion with parents about the risks of using alcohol/underage drinking. In comparison, ninety-two percent of parents polled in a 1998 Princeton Survey stated that they had talked with their children about drugs and alcohol. Two thirds of the Youth Summit delegates also reported that there would be “specific consequences” in their homes if they were caught drinking. Over one-half of the delegates (fifty-six percent) thought that their parent or parents had a “pretty good idea” of how many students drink at their school, compared to forty-eight percent of the CASA students. Slightly more than two-thirds of the delegates (sixty-nine

percent) thought that there were no situations in which it “would be okay” for high school students to drink alcohol.

The first set of questions regarding the delegates’ personal experiences with victimization involved knowledge of community members. As Table 2 indicates, one-half of the delegates (forty-three) personally knew someone in their community who had been killed, and sixty-three percent knew someone who had been injured by a drunk driver. Further, fourteen percent of the delegates had had a friend killed, and twenty-five percent had had a close friend injured by a drunk driver. Lastly, fourteen percent of the delegates indicated that they had had a family member killed, and twenty-four percent had had a family member injured by a drunk driver.

When combined, these variables indicated (not reported in Table 2) that seventy percent of the youth delegates knew someone who had either been injured or killed by a drunk driver. These data illustrate the extent to which crashes involving drunk drivers touch the lives of American youth. Interestingly, the average age of the youth delegates was sixteen years. In other words, by the age of sixteen, seven out of ten students had had their lives affected in some way by drunk drivers. For comparative purposes, national-level poll data show that between 1972 and 1998, less than five percent of the American population knew someone who was a murder victim.

Attitudes Toward Alcohol Policies/Proposals

The questionnaire administered to the Youth Summit delegates contained a series of questions about various alcohol policies. The delegates’ responses were then compared to the responses of adults who completed the same questions in recent

nationwide polls. Table 3 presents findings from these analyses. While differences exist in responses to some questions, convergence surfaced on others. For example, more than seven in ten delegates and adults favored a ban on alcoholic drinking on college campuses. A majority of delegates and adults also favored bans on drinking on public beaches and campgrounds, and at concerts and other cultural events. Slightly less than one-half of both groups favored bans on drinking alcohol in sports stadiums and arenas. Interestingly, large percentages of both groups favored a five-cent increase in the cost of alcoholic beverages to fund preventive drinking programs for minors.

Most youth who attended the Summit 2000 were not strict prohibitionists. Sixty-four percent of the delegates and eighty percent of the adults surveyed were opposed to a law forbidding the sale of all beer, wine, and liquor throughout the nation. A sizeable percentage of both groups (ninety percent of the delegates and seventy-eight percent of the adults), however, favored bans on advertisements designed to make drinking appeal to teenagers. At the same time, the majority of both groups (eighty-two percent of the delegates and seventy-four percent of the adults), favored laws that punished teens for testing positive for any amount of alcohol in their blood. In terms of deterrence, over seventy percent of delegates and adults surveyed believed that harsher punishments for teens caught drinking would discourage them from obtaining alcohol.

In the past several years, the tobacco industry has lost a series of lawsuits concerning the harmful effects of smoking brought by ailing and dying smokers. For example, in a recent case, a jury in Oregon ordered Phillip Morris to pay \$81 million to the family of a Marlboro smoker who died of lung cancer-the largest verdict ever against a tobacco company. Similarly, the Youth Summit survey found that sixty-nine percent of

the delegates believed that the liquor industry should be held equally accountable for injuries and deaths attributed to alcohol. Seventy percent of the delegates believed that lawsuits should be brought against the liquor industry.

In summary, many similarities emerged between the delegates and adults (from selected national polls) on a series of questions pertaining to alcohol policies, especially those regarding drinking in public places. Important differences emerged as well. Nearly ninety percent of the delegates, compared to seventy percent of the adults, favored protecting the minimum twenty-one drinking age law. Sixty-one percent of the youth delegates, compared to forty percent of adult poll respondents, also favored the elimination of “happy hour” promotions. Clearly, additional research is required on the attitudes of adults and youth (future alcohol consumers) on alcohol policies. However, this research indicates that more similarities in opinion seem to exist between youths and adults than differences.

Social Capital

As previously mentioned, the concept of social capital generally accepts that all individuals are important and vital community members and that all have a responsibility to themselves, their families, their communities, and the wider society. Most importantly, social capital refers to involvement in the social and civic affairs of one’s community. An important message of the Youth Summit 2000 was that involved youth could make a difference in civic life by contributing time and energy to their communities. Our survey posed various questions designed to tap the delegates’ attitudes

toward social involvement. Table 4 presents the survey items and the delegates' responses.

Nearly all of the delegates claimed commitment to civic involvement. Over ninety percent felt "good" about performing civic activities without expecting anything in return and believed that they are responsible for their actions. The vast majority of the delegates claimed that they "always do their part," valued being team members, considered others' points of view, believed that their involvement in the community empowers the lives of others, and thought that voting is an important activity. Almost all of the delegates indicated that they volunteered for special projects at school. Also interesting to note, most of the delegates believed that they could make a difference in their communities. In short, they believed that their being teenagers is not a "detriment" to effecting change in the community. Finally, nearly all delegates indicated that students and adults have an obligation to volunteer some of their time to help others.

What Can We Make of This?

Surprisingly, the Youth Summit delegates, almost to the person, were highly committed to teamwork and civic involvement. They have social capital and were probably highly committed and involved youth before attending the event. These findings suggest that there are youth in this country committed to civic involvement who want to improve life in their communities. These youth also believe that underage drinking is a national problem.

The Youth Summit was an excellent opportunity and venue for identifying and assembling highly committed and involved youth to sensitize them to the issues surrounding underage drinking. The delegates were precisely the kind of youth that can

make a difference in a community's attitude toward underage drinking. Our data were further strengthened by the fact that ninety-five percent of the delegates indicated that if "we the youth of this century, don't act now, the underage drinking problem will become more difficult to change in the future."

Summit Expectations

The delegates were asked about their reasons for attending the Summit. Table 5 presents their responses to five questions. Ninety-eight percent attended the Summit to learn more about underage drinking. All of the delegates attended to develop a plan of action to promote change in their communities. Forty percent attended to learn more about underage drinking. Thirteen percent of the delegates attended to participate, even though they believed that "young" people have little impact on important public policy issues. Finally, ninety-eight percent attended to meet other young people and work together to prevent underage drinking.

The most important contribution of this research centers on the delegates' attitudes toward involvement. Virtually every delegate was eager to participate in the Summit. Large percentages valued teamwork and regarded personal involvement highly as a vehicle for community change. A large percentage of the delegates also believe that underage drinking is a major problem. Combining the delegates' appreciation for teamwork and civic involvement (social capital) with efforts to decrease underage drinking would seem to be an important objective for MADD. Underage drinking is clearly a problem among youth. Perhaps the best way to decrease this problem is to energize a grass roots movement among youth. As previously stated, most of these youth firmly believe that they can have an impact upon public policy.

Discussion

The Youth Summit 2000 assembled youth from across the country into one cohesive group to learn about a wide variety of issues concerning underage drinking. This research found that these youth were very interested in doing “something” about underage drinking. Furthermore, when compared to adult data from a series of polls, the data from the Youth Summit indicated a convergence of opinion on many alcohol prevention policies. While differences of opinion surfaced, the gap between youth and adults was not a major chasm. These differences that did emerge can be explained by copious social science research documenting the negative effect of peers on delinquency, substance abuse, and risk taking. Certainly, parents should discuss the challenges associated with underage alcohol use with their children; perhaps the best messenger is an informed peer. Change in community norms takes years and may even require a generational shift. A critical first step in the process is youth involvement.

Tables

Table 1: Background Characteristics of Youth Summit Delegates, n= 420

Variables	Delegates
Mean Age	16
Gender	
Male	28%
Female	72
Race/Ethnicity	
White	76%
African-American	7
Hispanic	6
Other	11
Education	
9 th	3%
10 th	14
11 th	27
12 th	55
Race/Ethnicity	
Public School	85%
Private School	15
Family Structure	
Both Biological Parents	63%
Other	37
Importance of Religious Beliefs in Life	
Important	94%
Not Important	6
Attitudes Toward General Alcohol Issues	
Percent who think underage drinking is a major problem in America	98%
Percent who have had discussions with parents about the risks of drinking	
Never	18%
Once	9
2-3 times	20
4 times	53
Percent who indicated that there would be specific consequences in their homes if they were caught drinking	66%
Percent who say their parents have a "pretty good idea" of how many students drink at their high school	56%
Percent who believe that youth start using alcohol because of peer pressure	76%
Are there situations in which it would be okay for high school students to drink alcohol?	
No	69
Yes	31

Table 2: Victimization Experiences of Youth Summit Delegates

Questions	Delegates
	Percent answering "true"
I personally:	
Knew someone in my town who was killed by a drunk driver	43%
Know someone in my town injured by a drunk driver	63
A close friend of mine was killed by a drunk driver	14
A close friend of mine was injured by a drunk driver	25
A family member of mine was killed by a drunk driver	14
A family member of mine was injured by a drunk driver	24

Table 3: Delegates' and Adults' Attitudes Toward Selected Prevention Policies

<u>Questions</u>	Delegates (n=420)	Adult Poll Data
<u>Percent who favor the following major proposal:</u>		
Keeping drinking age at 21	88%	70%
Eliminating "happy hours"	61	40
Banning the sale of beer kegs to individuals for homes/parties	70	32
Banning alcoholic drinking on city streets	72	77
Banning alcoholic drinking in public parks	79	63
Banning alcoholic drinking on college campuses	67	60
Banning alcoholic drinking on public beaches and campgrounds	58	53
Banning alcoholic drinking at concerts and other cultural events	51	51
Banning alcoholic drinking in sports stadiums and arenas	43	48
Banning youth-oriented cartoons and music in advertising to promote alcoholic drinks	87	67
Banning beer advertisements on TV	75	55
Banning advertisements designed to make drinking appealing to teenagers	90	78
Increasing alcohol prices by five cents to pay for preventive drinking programs for minors	89	82
Legislating a law forbidding the sale of all beer, wine, and liquor throughout the nation	36	20
Penalizing adults who illegally provide alcohol to youth	97	83
Enacting a law that punishes teens testing positive for <u>any</u> amount of alcohol in their blood	82	74
<u>Percent who believe that:</u>		
Stiffer punishments for teens caught drinking will discourage them from obtaining alcohol.	76	71
The liquor industry should be held legally accountable for injuries and deaths attributed to alcohol.	69	NA
Lawsuits should be brought against the liquor industry.	70	NA

Table 4: Delegates and Social Responsibility, n= 420

Items	Delegates
Percent who agree	
It feels good to do something without expecting anything in return.	98%
I am responsible for what happens to me.	98
I can give credit and praise to others for a job well done.	98
I always do my part.	97
I value being a member of a team.	97
I try to think about the point of view of others.	96
It's more important to play fair than to win.	95
Things get done better when people work as a team.	94
My involvement in the community improves other's lives.	94
It is my responsibility to do something about problems in my community.	91
Teenagers can make a difference in improving their communities.	88
I can change things in my community.	83
If something is worth starting, it's worth finishing.	95
In an election, every vote counts.	93
I vote in elections whenever possible.	88
Every person should give some of their time for the good of their own town or city.	86
I volunteer for special projects at school.	93
People have an obligation to volunteer some of their time to help others who are in need.	91

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Table 5: Delegates' Reasons for Attending, n= 420

Items	Delegates
Percent who agree	
I came here to learn techniques to help change the way my community perceives the problem of underage drinking.	98%
I want to develop a plan of action to promote change in my community.	100%
I don't know much about underage drinking, so I just came here to learn something.	40%
I am participating even though young people have little impact on important public policy issues.	13%
I came here to meet other young people so we can work together to prevent underage drinking.	98%

Endnotes

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