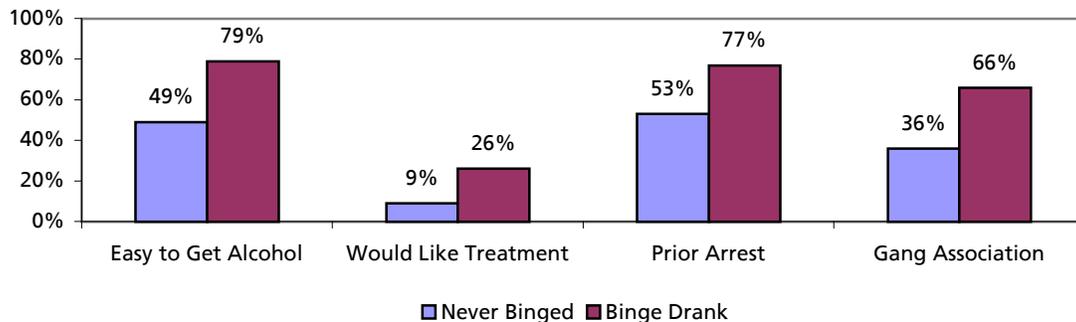


Underage Binge Drinking: A Warning Sign of Other Risky Behaviors

Data from multiple sources paint a disturbing picture of the quantity of alcohol use among adolescents. Findings from the most recent National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NSDUH) shows that underage drinkers are more likely than those 21 years or older to engage in binge drinking, consuming on average 4.9 drinks in one sitting (compared to 2.8 drinks for individuals 21 years and older)¹. Additionally, between one in four and one in five (depending on the study) adolescents reported one episode of binge drinking in the past 30 days, with an increase in frequency during teen years. These findings are even more concerning when juxtaposed with data that nearly half of all alcohol-related deaths nationally could be attributed to binge drinking. Binge drinking in general has also been linked to an increased risk of driving under the influence, engaging in risky sexual behavior, and increase use of illicit drugs².

Local surveillance data from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) administered to high school students in cities across the nation, as well as information gathered from interviews with a higher-risk population of recent juvenile arrestees in San Diego County tells a similar story. Specifically, 22 percent of high school students in the City of San Diego and almost twice as many arrestees (42%) reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days. Additionally, over three-quarters of both samples reported drinking at some point in their life. However, Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) data allow closer examination of the characteristics of these higher risk youth. Specifically, those youth who ever reported binge drinking (in comparison to those who never binge drank), reported easy access to alcohol, wanted treatment for their alcohol use, had a prior arrest history, and were more likely to have been associated with or in a gang.

Figure 1
BINGE DRINKERS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN RISKY BEHAVIOR THAN NON-BINGE DRINKERS



SOURCE: SANDAG 2007 Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region, June 2008.

These data support the call for alarm when a youth is found to be engaging in binge drinking. They also are in alignment with the above cited research that calls for increased environmental prevention efforts to make it harder for underage drinkers to obtain alcohol. To learn more about local and national alcohol trends among youth, visit the SANDAG Web site www.sandag.org/cjc for the latest SAM report and/or the CDC Web site <http://www.cdc.gov> to download the 2007 YRBS results.

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (March 2008). **The NSDUH Report: Quantity and Frequency of Alcohol Use Among Underage Drinkers**. Rockville, MD: Author.

² Town M., Naimi T.S., Mokdad A.H., Brewer R.D. (April 2006). **Health Care Access Among U.S. Adults Who Drink Alcohol Excessively: Missed Opportunities For Prevention**. Prevention Chronic Disease.