

IN THE LITERATURE

Suicide

SAMHSA Unveils Data on Youth Contemplating Suicide. SAMHSA recently released new data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) showing that there were approximately 3 million youth ages 12 to 17 years who thought seriously about suicide or attempted suicide in 2002. These data were collected for the first time in the 2000 survey. The data show that 13.7 percent of youth aged 14 to 17 years considered suicide in the past year, but only 36 percent of at-risk children received mental health treatment or counseling. The data also reveal that youth who used alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year were more likely than youth who did not use illegal substances to consider taking their own lives. Of the 3 million youth ages 12 to 17 years who thought about suicide or attempted it during the past year, one-third, or 37 percent, actually tried to kill themselves. Females (16 percent) were more likely than males (8 percent) to report contemplating suicide during the past year. The risk was higher among youth aged 14 to 17 years than among those aged 12 to 13 years. The likelihood of suicide risk was similar among white, black, Hispanic, and Asian youth. More information is available at www.samhsa.gov.

Alcohol Use

Harvard Study Finds College Neighbors More Than Twice as Likely To Be Plagued by Vandalism, Assault, and Other Disturbances Due to Binge Drinking. New findings from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study show that neighbors living within 1 mile of college campuses are 135 percent more likely to suffer from public disturbances—also called “secondhand effects”—due to college students’ binge drinking than those who live more than a mile from campus. Neighbors near high-binge colleges are also 81 percent more likely to experience these secondhand effects than those near low-binge colleges. Secondhand effects include vandalism, assault, noise, litter, drunkenness, and other public disturbances. As a result of experiencing these effects, college neighbors reported a much lower quality of life.

The study appears in the July 2002 issue of the international journal *Social Science & Medicine* (Volume 55, Number 3) and was funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The new findings were based on a telephone survey of adults from 4,661 households in the United States. Reports from residents living near campus, who were asked about the quality of neighborhood life and the number of alcohol outlets—bars and liquor stores—in their neighborhood, were compared with reports from those residents who did not live near colleges.

Binge drinking is defined as men who had five or more drinks—or women who had four or more drinks—in a row at least once in the 2 weeks before completing the survey. Secondhand effects are problems associated with high levels of alcohol use. High-binge colleges are those where 50 percent of students are found to binge drink.

Additional information on the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study can be found at www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas.

New CDC Study Shows Stronger State Prevention Activities May Discourage Alcohol-Impaired Driving. Strong State activities designed to prevent driving under the influence (DUI) may reduce the incidence of drinking and driving, according to a new study from the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The study, published in the June issue of *Injury Prevention*, finds self-reported cases of drinking and driving were linked with the strength of State activities to prevent DUI.

CDC analyzed data collected from a national telephone survey, the 1997 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Rating the States 2000 survey, which graded States on their DUI countermeasures from 1996 to 1999. Results showed that residents of States with a MADD grade of “D” were 60 percent more likely to report alcohol-impaired driving than were residents from States with a MADD grade of “A.”

The CDC study also found 4.2 percent of the residents who consume alcohol reported they had driven after having too much to drink during the previous month. Men were nearly three times as likely as women to report alcohol-impaired driving. Single people were about 50 percent more likely to report alcohol-impaired driving than married people or people living with a partner. MADD based the grades on 11 categories that included legislation involving DUI and underage drinking, political leadership, availability of statistics and records, resources devoted to enforcing DUI laws, administrative penalties and criminal sanctions, regulatory control, availability of alcohol prevention and education, and victim compensation and support.

For more information or a copy of MADD’s Rating the States 2000 report, visit the MADD Web site at <http://www.madd.org/news/0,1056,1280,00.html>.

Researchers Shed Light on Mechanics of Voluntary Alcohol Consumption. Researchers at the Ernest Gallo Clinic and Research Center, University of California-San Francisco, reported in the June 14 issue of *Cell* that the brain’s chemical messenger dopamine and ethanol (beverage alcohol) act through independent mechanisms to synergistically produce a common cellular response that sustains voluntary alcohol consumption. The work may provide an additional target for pharmacologic treatment of alcoholism. A copy of the article is available by contacting press@cell.com.

More Than One in Three College Students Can Be Diagnosed With Alcohol Disorders. The new Harvard University School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) shows that 6 percent of college students meet criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol dependence (also referred to as alcoholism), and 31 percent meet the clinical criteria for alcohol abuse. The study found that more than two of every five students report at least one symptom of these conditions, putting them at increased risk of developing a true alcohol disorder. Previous studies on college drinking have concentrated on the type, frequency, and amount of alcohol consumed. This is the first study to assess the actual extent of alcohol diagnoses among college students.

These findings released by CAS researchers may be reviewed online at www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas. The article appears in the May 2002 issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*.

Researchers based their findings on survey responses from more than 14,000 students at 119 4-year colleges. The survey included questions that correspond to criteria set by the American Psychiatric Association to diagnose alcohol disorders, the most severe of which is alcohol dependence (alcohol abuse is a less advanced, although still a serious disorder). The diagnostic guidelines can be found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition.

Heavy episodic drinkers (often called binge drinkers), and especially frequent heavy episodic drinkers, are at increased risk of alcohol disorders. Heavy episodic drinkers are defined as men

who had five or more drinks—or women who had four or more drinks—in a row at least once in the 2 weeks before the students completed the survey questionnaire. Frequent heavy episodic drinkers have consumed these amounts at least three times in the previous 2 weeks.

The citation for the article in this release is Knight JR et al. Alcohol abuse and dependence among U.S. college students. *J Stud Alcohol* May 2002;63(3):263-70.