

# Providing alcohol to underage youth: The view from young adulthood

## MAJOR FINDINGS:

Underage drinking is a significant public health problem perpetuated by widespread availability and provision of alcohol to minors. This study analyzes data on alcohol provision to minors among 755 young adults, ages 22 to 26, who had been enrolled in a longitudinal research study for the past seven years, beginning with their college entry in 2004. Individuals who had been approached by a minor for alcohol at least once were selected for this analysis.

Participants were asked if they provided alcohol to either younger minors (under 18 years old) or older minors (18 to 20 years old). They were also asked their general attitudes about people providing alcohol to minors. Further information was collected on participants' demographics, family history of alcohol use, alcohol policy violations during college, age at their first drink of alcohol, and peer drinking norms, defined as the typical number of alcoholic drinks their peers consumed on a given Saturday.

Participants were twice as likely to be approached for alcohol by an older minor as by a younger minor. Results show that most participants (85%) provided a minor with alcohol at least once. Once approached, participants were significantly more likely to provide alcohol to older minors (83%) than to younger minors (21%). Underage friends and family members—namely siblings—were more common recipients of alcohol than strangers or acquaintances. Interestingly, only 15 participants were ever caught for providing alcohol to minors, or 2% of those who provided. Participants were more accepting of provision to older minors than to younger minors, and tended to have more legal concerns than health concerns about providing alcohol to minors.

Compared with individuals who never provided alcohol to minors, those did were more likely to be white and male and had higher rates of alcohol use disorder, but were less likely to have health and legal concerns about providing alcohol to minors. Additionally, Greek affiliation, overestimating the prevalence of drinking among peers, and alcohol policy violations during college were all associated with providing alcohol to minors on a more frequent basis.

### *Of major interest to:*

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



**Practice and Policy Suggestions:** Targeting young adults who have recently turned 21 might be an important prevention strategy for combatting underage drinking. The results of this study suggest that many young adults who provide alcohol to minors might not understand or appreciate the potential health consequences for the minor. Thus, it could be useful to educate this age group about alcohol-related health consequences of underage drinking, such as alcohol poisoning, accidental injury, and unprotected sex. Such educational messages could be presented in various contexts. For example, parents should discourage their young-adult children from providing alcohol to minors, especially younger siblings. Healthcare providers can reinforce a similar message in the context of broader conversations discouraging excessive drinking and other unhealthy behaviors. Information about both the legal consequences of provision and the health consequences of underage drinking could also be disseminated via social media to young adults in this age range. The participants in this analysis saw little risk of getting caught when providing alcohol to minors, suggesting potential legal consequences were not a strong deterrent to provision and highlighting a potential opportunity to strengthen enforcement of laws pertaining to provision.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., Moshkovich, O., Bugbee, B.A., Vincent, K.B., O'Grady, K.E. (2014). Providing alcohol to underage youth: The view from young adulthood. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*. 38(6), 1790-1798. doi: 10.1111/acer.12426; PMC4049187



## About the College Life Study (CLS)

The CLS is a longitudinal study of 1,253 college students at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university. This study is one of the first large-scale scientific investigations that aims to discover the impact of health-related behaviors during the college experience. Any first-time, first-year student between 17 and 19 years old at the university in the fall of 2004 was eligible to participate in a screening survey. The researchers then selected students to participate in the longitudinal study, which consisted of two-hour personal interviews administered annually, beginning with their first year of college. A full description of the methods used is available.<sup>1,2</sup> Inherent to all self-reporting research methods is the possibility for response bias. Because the sample is from one large university, the ability to generalize the findings elsewhere is uncertain. However, response rates have been excellent and attrition bias has been minimal.

For more information about the study, please visit [www.cls.umd.edu](http://www.cls.umd.edu) or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland School of Public Health at [aarria@umd.edu](mailto:aarria@umd.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O'Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fitzelle, D.B., Johnson, E.P., Wish, E.D. (2008). Drug exposure opportunities and use patterns among college students: Results of a longitudinal prospective cohort study. *Substance Abuse*. 29(4), 19-38. doi:10.1080/08897070802418451; PMC2614283

<sup>2</sup> Vincent, K.B., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Pinchevsky, G.M., O'Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2012). Maintaining superior follow-up rates in a longitudinal study: Experiences from the College Life Study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*. 6(1), 56-72. doi:10.5172/mra.2012.6.1.56; PMC3255097

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