

OAKLAND

on the rocks

SURVEYING TEENS ABOUT ALCOHOL 'N OAKLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Underage drinking and driving is a major public health problem with serious consequences for young people and communities in Oakland. Within the borders of Oakland, youth are paving the way for change. At EPIC, Environmental Prevention in Communities, 30 youth gathered with the goal to make changes in their community around alcohol problems. Funded by the California State Office of Traffic Safety, this project is a joint effort between of Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD)/ Emergency Medical Services Division (EMS) and Environmental Prevention in Communities (EPIC). Working with a public health epidemiologist, a diverse group of young people developed, implemented, entered and analyzed the survey data. The full report, "Oakland on the Rocks", summarizes youth attitudes, behaviors, risks and protective factors related to alcohol use. Here, we present the major findings and recommendations of what Oakland youth are drinking, how much, when, where and why; and how they get access to alcohol. Special efforts were made to collect information on environmental predictors of alcohol use, such as the role of parents, community and media.

It is our hope that the survey results and recommendations are used by youth, communities and policy makers in Oakland to increase awareness of the environmental risks and effects of underage drinking on health, and to collectively reduce rates of underage drinking and driving.

VISION

Imagine: An Oakland coliseum where families can enjoy sports without public drunkenness; communities without the blight of alcohol messaging on every corner; neighborhoods that no longer struggle with the disproportionate over concentration of liquor stores; a city where most youth have an alternative to riding in a car with a drunk driver. With certainty, our partners believe that we are on the path to this vision. We need everyone to make a change in how we approach alcohol problems.



MAJOR FINDINGS

How are young people in Oakland reacting to alcohol advertisements? Where do they get their alcohol? How much are they drinking? To find answers to these questions, we asked the young people themselves.

Survey Says...Results

Drinking Patterns

- About 1 in 4 Oakland youth has had a drink in the last 30 days.
- Boys drink more often than girls (22% vs. 13%).
- White and Hispanic youth have significantly higher rates of drinking than Black and Asian youth.
- Binge drinking is a major concern. The majority (42%) say that it takes 5 or more drinks to get drunk.
- On average, 22% of Oakland youth started drinking alcohol before the age of 11. More than 50% had their first drink by the time they were 13.

Access to alcohol

- Most youth in Oakland report getting their alcohol from a liquor store or supermarket (46%), friends or at party (33%), or parents/house (25%). Many report that relatives/siblings (20%) or older adults (18%) also play a major role in providing access to alcohol.

Reasons for drinking

- Most young people report they drink because of stress (59%), because it feels good (57%), or peer pressure (56%).
- Most young people say that being aware of the consequences (38%), accidents (38%) or the stories they have heard (33%) related to alcohol use would prevent them from drinking at all or too much.

Environmental influences

- Media: The majority of youth in Oakland see alcohol ads in at least 5 places: TV, billboards, liquor stores, magazines and sporting events.
- Parents: Youth report that they believe most parents (62%) are not comfortable with their youth drinking anywhere.

Consequences of drinking

- An astonishing 41% have ridden in a car with a drunk driver. A significantly higher proportion of youth who have had a drink in the last 30 days have ridden in a car with drunk driver (58%), compared to 34% of non-drinkers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Communities must take a shared responsibility for creating conditions that support positive choices about alcohol. Environmental prevention is a key step to urban health promotion. It aims to produce much larger effects by creating communities that promote healthy behaviors and attitudes, and reduce high-risk behaviors associated with alcohol use. The youth at EPIC have put together these recommendations for local communities to take into consideration:

- Reduce young people's access to alcohol through their parents and other adults by developing an educational media campaign on underage drinking directed at adults.
- Reduce young people's access to alcohol through the retail environment by requiring strong enforcement of laws against selling alcohol to minors.
- Provide funding for grassroots youth organizations to take action on community alcohol problems. Support and expand youth programs that foster youth empowerment and education.
- Limit alcohol ads in the media, especially on radio stations that play popular music. Promote alcohol-free sponsorship at community events.
- Place store liquor ads away from the clear sight of children and youth. These ads should be at least 4 feet high, and out of windows and doors to improve visibility into and out of stores.
- Raise awareness among government and lawmakers that alcohol use is a serious problem. Make it a priority to educate adults and young people about the consequences of drinking.

CONCLUSIONS

Alcohol use among Oakland youth is a serious problem that requires creative environmental prevention interventions. Oakland youth are significantly influenced by media messages and over-concentration of alcohol outlets. There are major disparities by race, gender and age such that older boys are likely to drink more often and binge drink; and White and Hispanic youth drink more often than Black or Asian youth. The good news is that young people (87%) are aware of the consequences of drinking and driving and perceive it as dangerous. The difficulty is that underage drinking is still considered a rite of passage, a lesser evil than drugs and a social norm. The mixed messages young people receive about drinking are prolific. TV, billboards, peers, sports events, movies and possibly even parental behavior all contribute to mixed signals.

More environmental prevention efforts are necessary to challenge the media and alcohol industry's dominance over our youth's sensory environment. Strategies include limiting access to alcohol, and providing creative options for healthy youth development. More youth programs would benefit the city as a whole. It is our hope that this assessment will fuel dialogue and action that will lead to safer communities and further collaboration between youth and adults.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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OUR VOICE

by Steven D. Lewis

Being a teen at age 18,
Wondering what's going on in the streets.
Growing up in a world with Poverty,
Drug dealers;
Corrupt businessmen
That's alright,
On the scene with their
Phony advertisements
To young kids
Who don't know better
Telling them to drink and smoke;
Doing the best they can
To choke out their dreams
Trying to destroy our brain cells.
Liquor stores
Around every corner of the ghetto;
But only 1 in them
Big fancy neighborhoods;
What's really good,
Going on in my hood?
With a teenager getting killed

Around every corner,
Outside of a liquor store.
Us youth say no more,
You can't fool us,
We know YOU
Don't give a damn about us.
You say to yourself,
What's the rush?
Let these young kids
Kill each other off
By placing these liquor stores
Inside of their ghetto.
We ain't going nowhere,
We gonna STAY and FIGHT.
Let our voice be heard.
What you fancy businessmen
Fail 2 realize,
We got a knowledge for our age
Best believe,
Things are gonna change,
And us youth
Is gonna be here to see it.

And those after us,
Is gonna be here to read about it.
Trust me,
You think Steven Lewis is bad,
Add my voice
To a list of young comrades
Who's not afraid to say
What's on their minds.
To the big corrupt business
Who don't give a damn
U can get the F outta town.
2 the next generation,
To speak up and say something.
To you businessmen,
U might not like it,
We gonna keep shedding a light.
That's a voice of a real 1,
But not the only 1
Who feels this way
I speak for the future
When I say
You can't silence our voice.



WE ALL SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR A HEALTHY OAKLAND

For copies of the full report, please contact:

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