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*Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
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AADIF/MICAP

(517) 999-0013

info@micap.org

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Alcohol Problems Are More Serious Than Previously Thought, and Getting Worse

By Vernon K. Smith, PhD, MICAP Board Member

Alcohol problems, known to be serious issues for generations, are actually getting worse as alcohol use has increased dramatically since 2001, according to a major new report just published in the September 2017 issue of *JAMA Psychiatry*.¹

The findings were so significant that they make “a compelling case that the United States is facing a crisis in alcohol use, one that is costly and about to get worse,” wrote Mark Schuckit, MD in an accompanying editorial titled “Remarkable Increases in Alcohol Use Disorders.”²

ALCOHOL IS OUR NUMBER ONE DRUG PROBLEM

The new report shows that significant increases in alcohol use, abuse, dependency and related behaviors occurred over the period of just over a decade, from 2001-2002 to 2012-2013. The results are based on face-to-face interviews with 43,000 U.S. adults for the earlier survey, and over 36,000 adults in the second survey, each a representative sampling of the nation.

“We haven’t seen these increases in three or four decades,” Dr. Bridget Grant, a leading researcher at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and lead author of the article, said in a Bloomberg.com news story on the report. Dr. Grant went on to say the rise was “startling.”³

“This should be a big wake-up call. Alcohol is our number one drug problem, and it’s not just a problem among kids,” said David Jernigan of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who was not part of the study (quoted by John Tozzi in the Bloomberg.com news report.)

The reason experts are so concerned is easily seen in the study findings, highlighted in the graphs below. First, across all demographic groups, alcohol use of any kind was up significantly over the decade, with the share of the U.S. population consuming any amount of alcohol during the previous 12-months increasing from 65% to 73%.

Said another way, the share of Americans who consumed no alcohol during the previous year declined by one-fifth, from 35% to 28%.

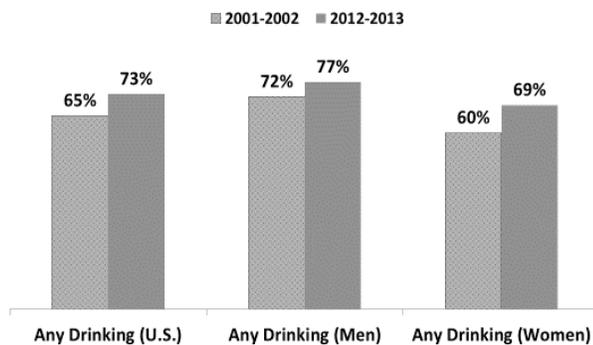
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LARGEST INCREASE IN USE OF ALCOHOL WAS AMONG WOMEN

Notably, alcohol use was up across all demographic and economic groups, but the largest increase was among women, whose use of alcohol increased from 60% to 69%. (Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Alcohol use increased significantly, particularly for women, from 2001-02 to 2012-13: % with any alcohol use in past year



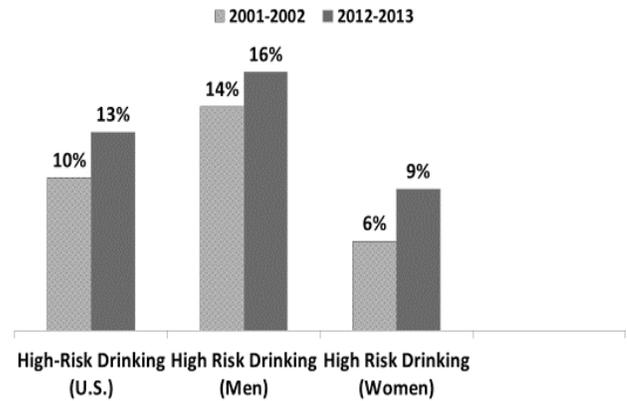
Source: MICAP graphic, based on: Bridget F. Grant, et al., "Prevalence of 12-Month Alcohol Use, High-Risk Drinking, and DSM-IV Alcohol Use Disorder in the United States, 2001-2002 to 2012-2013." JAMA Psychiatry, September 2017.

HIGH-RISK USE OF BEVERAGE ALCOHOL IS SIGNIFICANT AMONG MEN AND WOMEN

Of great concern, as alcohol use in general increased, high-risk use increased even more, up by almost one-third over the decade from 10% to 13% of the adult population. It was high-risk alcohol use by women that stands out, as the proportion of women consuming four or more drinks on one occasion in the previous week jumped upward by 58 percent, from 5.7% of adult women in 2001-2002 to 9.0% in 2012-2013. The increase among men was also significant, as the proportion engaging in high-risk drinking, defined as five or more drinks on one occasion for men, increased from one out of every seven adult males to one-in-six. (Figure 2.)

To put these percentages in context, this means that about 30 million American adults were "binge drinking" every week, and that number was almost 8 million higher than it was just a decade earlier in 2001-02.

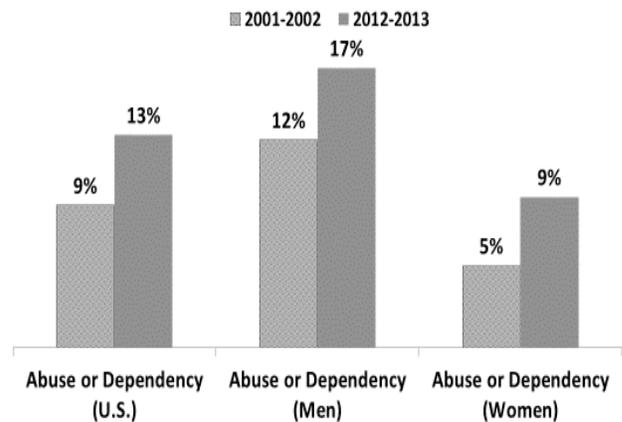
Figure 2: High-risk drinking increased significantly, especially among women, from 2001-02 to 2012-13: % with excessive drinking at least once a week



Note: High-risk or excessive drinking is defined as more than 5 drinks per day for men, 4 drinks per day for women. Source: MICAP graphic, based on: Bridget F. Grant, et al., "Prevalence of 12-Month Alcohol Use, High-Risk Drinking, and DSM-IV Alcohol Use Disorder in the United States, 2001-2002 to 2012-2013." JAMA Psychiatry, September 2017.

The increase in the numbers of American adults meeting the clinical criteria for alcohol abuse and dependence was even greater, increasing from about 22 million in 2001-02 to 33 million in 2012-13, a 50 percent increase. The share of the population with these symptoms of alcohol use disorder was up over this period from 9% to 13%, and the increase was similarly significant for men and for women. (Figure 3.)

Figure 3: Alcohol abuse and dependency increased significantly for men and women from 2001-02 to 2012-13: % meeting clinical criteria



Note: Alcohol abuse or dependency is defined by clinical guidelines as DSM-IV alcohol use disorder. Source: MICAP graphic, based on: Bridget F. Grant, et al., "Prevalence of 12-Month Alcohol Use, High-Risk Drinking, and DSM-IV Alcohol Use Disorder in the United States, 2001-2002 to 2012-2013." JAMA Psychiatry, September 2017.

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The study looked at the results for various demographic groups, and found that the increases in alcohol use, abuse and dependency occurred across the spectrum of American adults, although the increases were greatest among women, older adults, minorities and individuals with lower educational level and family income.

Why alcohol use, abuse and dependency are surging is not completely clear. Experts like Dr. Jernigan, interviewed by Bloomberg, suggested that likely explanations relate to widespread marketing by the beverage industry, more availability of alcoholic beverages in restaurants and stores (including online sales), more disposable income and the fact that alcohol taxes and the cost of alcoholic beverages are lower now as a percentage of average incomes than at any time since at least 1950.

The dramatic rise in alcohol use, abuse and dependency are significant to all Americans, in terms of impacts on individuals, families and costs to society. Alcohol use was estimated to have cost society \$250 billion in 2010, including significant costs borne by all of us in the form of public and private programs for treatment and prevention,

health insurance and personal costs to cover the consequences of alcohol-related accidents and disease.

The study authors concluded with a powerful statement that "Increases in alcohol use, high-risk drinking and DSM-IV AUD [clinically-defined alcohol use disorder] in the US population and among subgroups, especially women, older adults, racial/ethnic minorities and the socioeconomically disadvantaged, constitute a public health crisis. Taken together, these findings portend increases in many chronic comorbidities in which alcohol use has a substantial role."

1. Bridget F. Grant, et al., Prevalence of 12-Month Alcohol Use, High-Risk Drinking, and DSM-IV Alcohol Use Disorder in the United States, 2001-2002 to 2012-2013. *JAMA Psychiatry*, September 2017.
2. Mark Schuckit, MD, "Remarkable Increases in Alcohol Use Disorders," *JAMA Psychiatry*, September 2017.
3. John Tozzi, "America's Drinking Problem is Much Worse this Century," accessed Sept. 24, 2017 online at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-08-09/america-s-drinking-problem-is-much-worse-this-century

Have You Heard of J.A.D.E.?

The Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education (JADE) is published by the American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation (AADIF) of Lansing, Michigan. Like MICAP, it is also a dba of AADIF. JADE is published three times per year and sold both domestically and internationally. It serves as a forum for various educational philosophies and differing points of view on alcohol and drugs. It reports teacher experiences and experiments and provides a reference for actual teaching materials

and is a factual guide for prevention techniques and procedures. Some of our volumes provide both editorials and book reviews on global health issues that include substance abuse issues which can be used as references for any community. It also reports news and effective, exciting programs of education that can be used in both academic and treatment settings. We invite you to visit JADE's website at: www.jadejournal.com

OUR SPEAKER'S BUREAU

If your group or church or class/school would like to hear something more about MICAP, or Alcohol Problems in Michigan or the USA, please contact Rev. Bill Amundsen at (517) 323-2445. Please leave a message if no one answers. He

will return your call soon to arrange a mutually convenient time. We are a temperance organization concerned with under-aged and abusive drinking. We work with the State Legislature to encourage a better social policy on beverage alcohol.



MICAP/AADIF

Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation
Mailing address: P.O. Box 10212, Lansing, MI 48901

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MICAP is a small non-profit organization with a mission to provide information about the consequences of alcohol abuse, and to promote public policies that address these issues. It is a big task, and we are committed to doing our part.

For this work, MICAP depends 100% on gifts from people like you. Our work year-round depends directly on these gifts. MICAP could not do its work without your financial support, which truly makes a difference in this important work.

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