

O'Malley, P. M., & Johnston, L. D. (2002). Epidemiology of alcohol and other drug use among college students. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Supplement 14*, 23-39.

## Abstract

*Objective:* This article provides information on the extent of alcohol use and other drug use among American college students.

*Method:* Five different sources of data are examined for estimating recent levels of alcohol (and other drug) use among college students: Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS), the Core Institute (CORE), Monitoring the Future (MTF), National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (NCHRBS) and National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA).

*Results:* Alcohol use rates are very high among college students. Approximately two of five American college students were heavy drinkers, defined as having had five or more drinks in a row in the past 2 weeks. Alcohol use is higher among male than female students. White students are highest in heavy drinking, black students are lowest and Hispanic students are intermediate. Use of alcohol—but not cigarettes, marijuana and cocaine—is higher among college students than among noncollege age-mates. Longitudinal data show that, while in high school, students who go on to attend college have lower rates of heavy drinking than do those who will not attend college. Both groups increase their heavy drinking after high school graduation, but the college students increase distinctly more and actually surpass their nonstudent age-mates. Trend data from 1980 to 1999 show some slight improvement in recent years.

*Conclusions:* Despite improvements in the past 20 years, colleges need to do more to reduce alcohol use among students.