NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

NCADD Focus on Underage Drinking: International Update

For decades the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD) and our National Network of Affiliates have been engaged in national and community-based awareness, prevention, intervention and policy/advocacy efforts to reduce the risks and dangers of underage drinking.

Each year, approximately **5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking**. This includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, and hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.

And, approximately 600,000 college students are unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol. Approximately 700,000 students are assaulted by other students who have been drinking and about 100,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape (from NCADD Fact Sheet: Facts About Underage Drinking).

Unfortunately, in the United States there is a commonly held belief that our young people drink alcohol more frequently and experience more alcohol-related problems than do young people in Europe. And, as a result, this belief is often used as an argument in support of making alcohol policy changes in the United States. Included in the discussion of alcohol policy changes are the reduction or elimination of minimum drinking age laws and support for developing programs that teach young people how to drink alcohol “responsibly.”

Key Question: Do young people in Europe drink less alcohol and experience fewer alcohol-related problems than young people in the United States?

Until recently there were no data or studies available with which to easily answer this question. Fortunately, as a result of a study done by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) within the U.S. Department of Justice DOJ), **Youth Drinking Rates and Problems: A Comparison of European Countries and the United States**, we now have the data.

Based on data from the United States Monitoring the Future (MTF) annual survey of 8th, 10th and 12th grade students and the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), focused on 10th graders in 35 different countries, researchers drew the following conclusions:

- "A greater percentage of young people from nearly all European countries report drinking in the past 30 days;
- "For a majority of the these European countries, a greater percentage of young people report having 5 or more drinks in a row; and
- "A great majority of the European countries have higher intoxication rates among young people than the United States and less than a quarter had lower rates or equivalent rates to the United States.

"Based on this analysis, the comparison of drinking rates and alcohol-related problems among young people in the United States and in European countries does not provide support for elimination of U.S. minimum drinking laws or for implementation of programs to teach responsible drinking to young people."

Over the years, NCADD has developed some very useful resources focused on underage drinking including:

NCADD's Fact Sheet on Underage Drinking, which includes detailed research data on **1).** Age of first use, **2).** Effect on future alcohol dependence, **3).** Effect on adolescent development, **4).** College drinking, **5).** Binge drinking, **6).** Health and safety risks, **7).** Cost **8).** Gender and ethnicity.

ALCOHOL POISONING: A MEDICAL EMERGENCY: Hundreds of people die each year from acute alcohol intoxication--known as alcohol poisoning or alcohol overdose. And, thousands of others are admitted to emergency rooms. Alcohol poisoning is caused

by **Drinking Too Much Too Fast Can Kill You**, and it is increasing in high schools and on college campuses. **Alcohol poisoning is a medical emergency.**

Alcohol Energy Drinks: Double The Risk**:** Caffeinated alcoholic beverages (CAB's) or Alcohol energy drinks (AED's) are premixed beverages that contain not only alcohol but also caffeine and other stimulants. Wake Forest University School of Medicine researchers found that students who mixed alcohol and energy drinks had double the risk of being hurt or injured requiring medical attention, driving with an intoxicated driver, being taken advantage of sexually, or taking advantage of another sexually. A lead researcher explained, "Students whose motor skills, visual reaction times, and judgment are impaired by alcohol may not perceive that they are intoxicated as readily when they're also ingesting a stimulant."

To learn more about the issue of underage drinking, FOR YOUTH: Underage and College Drinking