

Executive Summary

Vermont residents aged 18 to 29 were surveyed in the fall of 2008 to provide baseline data for the evaluation of Vermont's Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF-SIG). This federally funded initiative is designed to reduce and prevent underage drinking, high risk drinking among persons under age 25, and marijuana use among persons under age 25, in communities throughout the state of Vermont. The Young Adult Survey Statewide Summary Report provides an overview of findings from the survey at the state level.

Survey respondents were recruited through a variety of venues, and invited to participate in the survey by either completing it online or by returning a paper copy through the mail. A total of 991 age-eligible Vermont residents from across the state responded. In addition to providing baseline data for the SPF-SIG evaluation, the survey data provide epidemiologic data regarding alcohol and marijuana use among young adults and perceptions about factors in their communities that may influence these behaviors. As such, the survey helps to fill an important gap in the availability of data on these health-related behaviors and perceptions in the 18 to 29-year age group. Key findings from the survey are summarized below.

Alcohol-Related Topics

Alcohol Use:

- Just over 75% of respondents consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.
- The majority of those who use alcohol (75% of users, and 56% of all respondents) reported “binge drinking” in the past 30 days (defined as having four or more drinks if female, and five or more drinks if male, on a single occasion at least once in the past 30 days).
- The percentages reporting both any alcohol use and binge drinking were lower among persons aged 18 to 20 as compared to persons over age 21.
- College Students aged 18 to 25 reported higher rates of binge drinking than respondents who were not in college.

Drinking and Driving:

- Overall, 5% of respondents reported having driven a motor vehicle in the past 30 days after having too much to drink. A much higher percentage (25%) reported riding in a vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking.
- Rates of both driving after drinking and riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking were substantially lower for the 18- to 20-year age subgroup.

Availability of Alcohol:

- The vast majority of respondents (89%) believe it is easy for persons aged 18 to 20 to obtain alcohol from friends or family members. Much smaller percentages perceive this to be the case for purchasing alcohol in stores (30%) and in restaurants and bars (11%).
- The majority of respondents believe it is likely that an obviously intoxicated adult would be served or sold alcohol at a bar or restaurant (64%) and at a convenience store (60%).

Community Norms:

- Young adults getting drunk “now and then” was viewed as being fairly normal and acceptable in the communities where respondents live by 90% of the respondents.

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Perceived Risk of Use:

- Just under 25% of respondents perceived no risk or only a slight risk to persons who have five or more drinks of alcohol once or twice a week.

Perceived Level of Enforcement of Alcohol laws:

- The majority of respondents believed that enforcement or sanctions would be implemented for various illegal behaviors involving alcohol. Still, 35% of respondents believed it would be unlikely for someone who was driving after drinking too much to be noticed and stopped by the police, and 40% believed it would be unlikely for police to find out about and disperse parties where underage drinking was going on.

Marijuana-Related Topics

Marijuana Use:

- Overall, 29% of respondents reported using marijuana in the past 30 days. There was little variation across age groups.
- Older college students (aged 21 to 25) had higher rates of marijuana use (42%) than both non-students and students who were younger.

Marijuana Use and Driving:

- Just over 11% of respondents reported having driven a motor vehicle in the past 30 days after using marijuana. Twice that many (22%) reported riding in a vehicle driven by someone who had been using marijuana.
- Rates of driving after using marijuana did not differ substantially across age groups.

Availability of Marijuana:

- A majority of respondents (81%) believe it easy for persons their age to obtain marijuana.

Community Norms:

- Just over 74% of respondents perceived that in the communities where they live, young adults getting high on marijuana “now and then” is viewed as being fairly normal and acceptable.

Perceived Risk of Use:

- A slight majority of respondents (52%) perceived no risk or only a slight risk to persons who smoke marijuana once or twice per week.

Perceived Level of Enforcement of Marijuana laws:

- The likelihood of enforcement of marijuana laws was perceived as being high by most respondents. Only 8% thought it would be unlikely for someone caught with marijuana to be cited or arrested.

This summary was developed by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) for the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs. If you have questions regarding the data presented here, or would like to obtain a copy of the full statewide report please contact Amy Livingston at 802-652-4111, or alivingston@vdh.state.vt.us.