



## Beverage-specific patterns of 5+ alcoholic drink consumption by young adults in the U.S.☆



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined beverage-specific 5+ drinking among U.S. young adults.
- 5+ drinks was most common with liquor and beer, followed by wine and wine coolers.
- Men were more likely than women to have 5+ drinks of beer and liquor.
- Women were more likely than men to have 5+ drinks of wine and wine coolers.
- 5+ drinking differed by college enrollment (4-year, 2-year/votech, no college).

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### ABSTRACT

Young adult binge drinking prevalence has been widely researched. However, beverage-specific binge drinking rates for beer, liquor, wine, and wine coolers have not yet been documented for this age group. This study examines consumption of specific beverages (i.e., 5+ drinks in a row in the past two weeks) by young adults aged 19/20. Data from the national Monitoring the Future study were collected one or two years after high school from 2004 to 2014 ( $n = 2004$ ). Logistic regression was used to examine associations between beverage-specific 5+ drinking and gender, race/ethnicity, parent education, college status, and cohort year. Overall 5+ drinking in the past two weeks was reported by 31.4% of young adults. Beverage-specific 5+ drinking was most common with liquor (22.6%) and beer (22.4%), followed by wine (4.5%) and wine coolers (3.0%). Men were more likely than women to engage in 5+ drinking with beer and liquor; women were more likely than men to do so with wine and wine coolers. Beverage-specific patterns differed by college attendance. Compared to four-year college students, two-year college/votech students were less likely to have 5+ drinks of liquor or wine, and more likely to have 5+ wine coolers; those not in college were less likely to have 5+ drinks of liquor and more likely to have 5+ wine coolers. Differences in beverage-specific 5+ drinking by gender and college enrollment suggest that intervention efforts should focus on the beverages that are most commonly consumed at high levels within specific early young adult populations.

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Large-scale epidemiological studies often define binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks on one occasion (Miech, Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2015; Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2015; Kann, Kinchen, Shanklin, et al., 2014). Binge drinking is widespread among young adults: an estimated 30.5% of 18–20 year olds report consuming five or more drinks on at least

one occasion in the past month (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013). Young adult binge drinking is also associated with negative consequences for both drinkers and the general public, including auto accidents, fights, and accidental injuries (Hingson, Edwards, Heeren, & Rosenbloom, 2009). While binge drinking is a clear public health issue, very little research has examined which beverages are consumed at these high levels.

Although beverage-specific binge drinking rates have not been documented among U.S. young adults, a small but growing literature has examined variation in beverage-specific alcohol consumption among adolescents. In terms of overall alcohol consumption, liquor is the most commonly consumed alcoholic beverage among high schoolers, followed by beer, wine, and wine coolers (Siegel, Naimi, Cremeens, & Nelson, 2011). In regard to binge drinking, data that combine responses

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from youth aged 13–20 report liquor consumption in almost half of binge drinking sessions, as compared to beer consumption on less than one-third of such occasions (Naimi, Siegel, DeJong, O'Doherty, & Jernigan, 2014).

Research has demonstrated clear demographic subgroup differences in binge drinking. Binge drinking among young adults is more common in men than women (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013; Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, et al., 2015). In terms of race and ethnicity, underage Black young adults who attend college are less likely to binge drink overall than underage White and Hispanic young adults who attend college (Wechsler, Kuo, Lee, & Dowdall, 2000). Parent education has been found to positively associate with young adult binge drinking (measured as consuming 4+ drinks for women and 5+ drinks for men on 12 or more days in the past year) (Patrick, Wightman, Schoeni, & Schulenberg, 2012). Young adults aged 18–22 who are enrolled full-time in college are more likely to binge drink than peers who are either enrolled part-time or not enrolled in college (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013; Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, et al., 2015). Historically, the prevalence of binge drinking has shown indications of a recent modest decline among all young adults aged 19–28, as well as among full-time college students aged 19–22 (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, et al., 2015).

Very little research has examined demographic differences in beverage-specific binge drinking; available studies have been limited to adolescents. Among high school seniors, boys are more likely than girls to binge drink beer and liquor, whereas girls are more likely than boys to binge drink wine coolers and wine (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, et al., 2015). This pattern also holds for general beverage-specific drinking trends, as beer is more commonly consumed by male high school students than female students, whereas other forms of malt beverages (i.e., hard lemonade) are more commonly consumed by female than male high-school students (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007). Differences in adolescent beverage-specific binge drinking by race/ethnicity have also been noted. In general, White 12th graders had the highest prevalence of consuming beer, liquor, wine, and wine coolers at binge levels, followed by Hispanic and then Black 12th graders (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, et al., 2015). One exception to this pattern was regarding wine coolers, for which Hispanic high school seniors had the lowest likelihood of consuming at binge levels (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, et al., 2015). The prevalence of binge drinking beer and liquor among high school seniors has decreased in recent years, whereas the prevalence of binge drinking wine and wine coolers has increased (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, et al., 2015). The extent to which the demographic and cohort patterns observed for adolescent beverage-specific binge drinking may extend into young adulthood is unknown. Furthermore, the extent to which young adult beverage-specific binge drinking may vary based on college status has not previously been examined.

## 1. The current study

Knowing which beverages are most often consumed in high quantities among young adults has implications for policy and intervention efforts, which may be enhanced by focusing on the beverages that are most commonly consumed at high levels. The current study aims to describe the prevalence of consuming 5+ drinks in a row in the past two weeks of four specific beverages (beer, liquor, wine, and wine coolers) among U.S. young adults aged 19 and 20, as well as demographic and cohort differences in observed prevalence.

Three research questions guided analyses: (1) What is the prevalence of past two-week 5+ drinking for all alcohol, and for beverage-specific 5+ drinking of beer, liquor, wine, and wine coolers? (2) How do rates of beverage-specific 5+ drinking vary based on key demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, parental education, college status, and cohort)?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Sample

Data from the national cohort-sequential Monitoring the Future (MTF) study (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, et al., 2015) were used for this analysis. Since 1975, data have been collected from annual nationally-representative samples of approximately 15,000 high school seniors (modal age 18) from about 130 schools. The survey is usually completed during a typical high school class period. From each annual sample of 12th grade respondents, about 2400 students are selected for longitudinal follow-up (substance users are over-sampled; analyses include weights to adjust for this oversampling). Half of the subsample is randomly selected for follow-up survey participation one year after high school (at modal age 19) and the other half is surveyed two years after high school (at modal age 20). Follow-up surveys are completed in the spring and are accompanied by a modest monetary incentive.

To examine the current rates of beverage-specific 5+ drinking among early young adults, this analysis is limited to the most recent decade of data available, collected from 2004 through 2014 at modal ages 19/20. Respondents include those from the 12th grade cohorts of 2002 through 2012.<sup>1</sup> The alcohol use outcomes for these analyses were included on only one of the six randomly distributed MTF questionnaire forms. Of those who responded to the relevant form in 12th grade, 4245 individuals were selected for the longitudinal study, of whom 2131 participated at modal age 19 or 20 (50.2% response rate; attrition weights were used to adjust for non-response by base year respondents). An additional 127 respondents were excluded due to contradictory responses (i.e., reporting beverage-specific 5+ drinking but no overall 5+ drinking during the same period), leaving 2004 respondents for analysis. The final analytic sample was 56.3% female and 43.7% male, and 71.2% White, 8.1% Black, 10.5% Hispanic, and 10.1% Asian/Other/missing on race.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Alcohol use (modal age 19/20)

Five alcohol use behaviors were examined in these analyses. All measures used the same basic question format and response scale: "Think back over the last two weeks. How many times have you had five or more [specified beverage drinks] in a row?" Response options included "none," "once," "twice," "three to five times," "six to nine times," and "ten or more times." Dichotomous indicators of one or more times (1) versus none (0) were coded for analysis. The five specified beverage/quantity behaviors were:

- Overall 5+ drinking: "...five or more drinks in a row? (A 'drink' is a bottle of beer, a glass of wine, a wine cooler, a shot glass of liquor, or a mixed drink)."
- Beer 5+ drinking: "...five or more 12-ounce cans of beer (or the equivalent) in a row?"
- Liquor 5+ drinking: "...five or more mixed drinks or shot glasses of hard liquor in a row?"
- Wine 5+ drinking: "...five or more 4-ounce glasses of wine in a row (or the equivalent, which is about three-fourths of a bottle)?"
- Wine cooler 5+ drinking: "...five or more 12-ounce bottles of wine cooler (or the equivalent) in a row?"

#### 2.2.2. Demographics (modal age 18)

Gender was coded as female (reference) or male. Race/ethnicity was self-identified and coded as White (reference), Black, or Hispanic. Due

<sup>1</sup> Given that analyses are limited to data collected during 2004–2014, respondents at modal age 19 from the 2002 cohort are excluded, as their responses were collected in 2003.

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