

Current Research

ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE AMONG AMERICAN INDIANS

presented by:

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There is a paucity of solid academic research on the relationship between alcohol and crime among American Indians in general and for specific reservations and cultural areas. In a recent, extensive literature search, we identified only slightly over 100 articles published in academic media on this topic. Twenty-three percent of the articles and books were specifically concerned with Indians of the Southwestern United States.

There is a much more extensive body of literature on alcohol use and abuse in general, separate from crime. Well over 1000 works exist in this area. However, we will report on recent data that we have gathered among tribal members from four reservation areas in the Northern Plains states of the United States. The data are from a random sample of over 1400 adults (16 years and older) on and living around these reservations. This is the largest study of adult drinking patterns ever conducted among Indians.

Here are some of the highlights that will be presented..

The modal pattern of drinking on any single day in Indian Country is abstinence. That is on most days of the month and year, most Indians are abstinent.

1. The respondents who drink at least once in the past year: male = 70.7% and female = 60.4%.
2. Drank alcohol in the past 30 days: male = 59.2%, female = 39.6%.
3. Drank alcohol in the past week: male = 45.0% and female = 26.9%.
4. Days consumed alcohol in the past 30 days: males = 4.7 and females = 2.1.
5. Days when five or more drinks were consumed in the past 30 days: male = 3.0, female = 1.3.
6. Over the age of 40, the drinking prevalence drops considerably, and by the age of 50 the indicators of drinking and heavy drinking are below those of the general population of the United States.

7. Tobacco use is two and one-half times higher in this sample than among the general population of the United States. Among those ages 20 - 29 : males = 67.7% and females = 70.0% smoke. Smokeless tobacco use is also higher than U.S. averages.

8. With the exception of marijuana and methamphetamines, other drug use is not a large problem among respondents. Alcohol is the major drug of choice over all other drugs among the adult population.

9. Most people report that they drink for social reasons and there is very little solitary drinking.

10. When drinking, respondents report a number of problems:

- a. DWI (males = 62%, females = 45%).
- b. Arrested (males = 47%, females = 25%).
- c. Pass out (males = 57%, females = 45%%).
- d. Leave kids alone (males = 8%, females = 9%).

11. Among the binge drinkers (5+ drinks per occasion) these problems are reported:

- a. frequently fight while drinking (males = 29%, females = 35%).
- b. involved in a vehicle crash (males = 44%, females = 23%).

12. Overall, those who are "occasional heavy drinkers" (heavy drinking measured by three different methods) are more likely to report frequent problems with crime and deviant behavior.

Any programs that attempt to intervene on the problems caused by drinking in these populations must address the occasional drinker as well as the regular drinkers. This is especially true of the younger adult population.

The most common pattern of drinking that is related to problems among the respondents of this survey is binge drinking. That is, drinking large quantities on those days when alcohol is consumed.