

# RESEARCH BRIEF

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Social  
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Group



## ADULT-SUPERVISED DRINKING DURING ADOLESCENCE PREDICTS ALCOHOL MISUSE IN ADULTHOOD

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### MISSION of SDRG

To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- Conduct research on factors that influence development
- Develop and test the effectiveness of interventions
- Study service systems and work to improve them
- Advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems
- Disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research

Some parents and caregivers of teens believe in *teaching* youth how to drink alcohol responsibly, for example, by allowing youth to drink with adult supervision or teaching skills like counting or limiting the number of drinks per occasion, alternating glasses of water with alcoholic drinks, or eating food with drinks to help absorb the alcohol. The logic behind this is that youth will then be able to better manage their drinking as young adults in unsupervised settings. A study by SDRG Research Scientist Jennifer Bailey and her colleagues challenges the idea that parents should *teach* their children how to drink safely at home as a harm-reduction practice. Allowing youth to drink at home may contribute to more problematic use in the long run, not less.

### SUPERVISED DRINKING AND LATER ALCOHOL MISUSE

Dr. Bailey's research team examined the relationship between supervised drinking during adolescence and alcohol misuse in adulthood. Supervised drinking included allowing kids to have alcoholic drinks with dinner or on special occasions or at parties where adults were present. Data came from the International Youth Development Study, a long-term study involving people from Washington State in the U.S. and from the state of Victoria in Australia—a region where adult-supervised adolescent drinking is more common. Participants in the study were 13-16 years old when reporting on how often they drank alcohol with adult supervision (in years 2002-2004), and they were 25-31 years old when reporting on their alcohol misuse in adulthood (in years 2014, 2018, and 2020).

The research team found that the more often teens drank in a supervised setting, the more likely they were as adults to report the following behaviors:

1. More alcohol use, including excessive consumption
2. More symptoms of alcohol dependence, like blackouts, injuries, and inability to stop drinking once they started
3. Driving after drinking alcohol
4. Riding with a driver who recently drank alcohol

The research team also examined whether adult-supervised drinking would predict later use of strategies to moderate alcohol intake among young people—a common reason caregivers initiate this practice. Again, this could be strategies like alternating glasses of water with alcoholic drinks, counting drinks, or having food with drinks. Here, no evidence of a relationship was found.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE FINDINGS FOR ALCOHOL USE PREVENTION

Dr. Bailey and colleagues' work is the first study to show that adult-supervised teen drinking may make it more likely that teens will grow up to use alcohol in harmful ways as adults. Although prior studies have documented links between supervised teen drinking and alcohol misuse, most of that work was limited to capturing alcohol use behaviors in the teen years.

Findings from this study are not consistent with the idea that young people can learn *safe drinking habits* at home, and they even contradict this idea. There are better ways parents can teach their children about responsible alcohol use, such as clear rules and communication about their family policy regarding alcohol use, and the modeling of responsible alcohol consumption.

**||** *Allowing youth to drink at home may contribute to more problematic use in the long run, not less.*

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In the U.S., a number of states provide legal loopholes for underage drinking depending on the context. Most states require parental consent on private property, but not all do. There are states where a person under age 21 can drink on private property without parental approval. Some states allow underage drinking in a public restaurant or bar with parental permission. It is important that parents know their state-specific parental exemptions and educate themselves on the potential long-term harm of supervised drinking during adolescence. Education and clear messaging are essential, so much so that, as of 2020, the Australian national government changed their recommendations from encouraging parents to teach responsible drinking in the home to recommending that teens under the legal purchase age not drink alcohol in any context.

### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC, PLEASE REFER TO THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE:

Bailey, J. A., Le, V. T., McMorris, B. J., Merrin, G. J., Heerde, J. A., Batmaz, E. A., & Toumbourou, J. W. (2024). Longitudinal associations between adult-supervised drinking during adolescence and alcohol misuse from ages 25–31 years: A comparison of Australia and the United States. *Addictive Behaviors*, 153, 107984.

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