

Here's How!

Are Parents Showing Kids The Way to Alcoholism?

Two current trends in teen-age alcohol drinking are causing mounting, anxious concern among highway safety experts and authorities on the treatment of alcoholism.

Within the past year there has been a spate of legislation in a number of states lowering the legal age for the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

Teen-agers are also reported turning away from a faddish preoccupation with so-called "hard" drugs to a revival of interest in alcohol, especially beer and wines.

Critics of both trends focus on two main issues: highway safety (since so many young people drive), and the risk of alcohol addiction.

On March 1, 1973, Massachusetts became the 15th state to lower the minimum legal age for the purchase of alcoholic beverages to 18.

The Bay State thus joins the ranks of Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Two states, Iowa and Montana, have approved similar legislation, to become effective next July 1.

Four other states — Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, and Nebraska — now permit 19-year-olds to buy liquor. In Wyoming, 19-year-olds may do so legally as of next May 25. Delaware has dropped its minimum age to 20.

According to a survey conducted by Liberty Mutual Insurance Co., legislation allowing 18-year-olds to buy alcoholic beverages is currently pending in California, Indiana, and Ohio.

In the opinion of some experts in the field of alcohol, the trend toward lowering the legal-drinking age is seen as part of an effort to assist young people to adapt themselves "realistically" to a predominantly "drinking" society. (Roughly two thirds of the American population over 15 use alcohol to some extent.)

For example, the prestigious Cooperative Commission on the Study on Alcoholism, which included leading alcohol experts in the country, in its "report to the nation," pointed out that though the legal age for the purchase of alcohol is 21 in most states, "the actual facts about drinking in the under-21 age group are very different."

Summarizing research studies, the commission stated: "Over 75 per cent of high school students report that they have had alcoholic beverages more than once prior to graduation (age 17 to 18), and more than one third state that they drink with some regularity."

"The age limit of 21," the commission's report observed, "is largely unenforceable."

Howard Pyle, the highly respected president of the Chicago-based National Safety

FASHION SHOW

St. Joseph's Rosary Guild of Penfield will have their annual banquet and fashion show, "Frills n' Things," on Wednesday, May 2. A catered dinner will be served at 6 p.m., followed by a fashion show at 8 p.m. Reservations may be made with the following: Joan Wiig, 43 Hillrise Drive, 377-9187; Georgia Alford, 586-7808; and Bette Kauffman, 385-2607.

Council, has come out adamantly against legalizing sales of liquor to teen-agers. In a recent speech, Pyle declared that the interests of traffic safety "will not be served" by such legislation.

"Studies have shown," Pyle argued, "that younger drivers who drink are more likely to become involved in traffic crashes than older, more experienced drinking drivers — even though the young persons may have fairly low blood-alcohol concentrations."

Currently, 15 per cent of the liquor-related accidents in Massachusetts involve drivers in the 18-21 age group. In New York State, according to one official, persons 18 to 21 account for 25 per cent of the accidents in which liquor is connected.

A study by Liberty Mutual shows that in Michigan, where liquor for 18-year-olds was legalized in 1972, the number of fatal alcohol-related accidents by drivers under 21 increased by 120 per cent in the first nine months as compared with the corresponding period in 1971 — from 2,658 in 1971 to 5,841 in 1972.

The proliferation of young drinkers is being viewed with deepening concern by alcoholism experts.

Said Newsweek (March 5, 1973): "From nearly every quarter of the nation, school authorities and teen-agers themselves report that the latest fad in juvenile drug abuse is one that has a familiar ring to the older generation: the drug of choice these days, they say, is alcohol."

The most serious aspect of the current drinking revival, authorities believe, is that the use of alcohol appears to be

spreading down to school-children in the lower grades.

In a recent study of youthful drinking habits in the upper-middle class Boston suburb of Brookline, 36 per cent of the eighth-grade pupils reported having been drunk on wine or beer.

According to Norm Southerby of the Los Angeles County Alcohol Safety Action Program, one reason for the multiplication of young imbibers is widespread tolerance by their parents, most of whom are drinkers themselves.

"Parents who hassled their kids about other drugs," Southerby says, "are willing to look the other way on alcohol."

Noting that alcohol is a drug with a high potential for addiction for many drinkers, Southerby points out that in southern California one teen-ager out of every twenty has "a drinking problem."

The New York-based National Council on Alcoholism reports that in 1972 the age of the youngest alcoholics who came to its attention dropped from 14 to 12.

Contrary to popular opinion, studies demonstrate that adolescent attitudes toward alcohol are imitations of adult behavior and attitudes. Teen-age drinking is not, typically, an expression of rebellion and hostility toward adult authority.

Milton Wolk of the Alcoholism Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health puts it bluntly: "Because teen-age use (of alcohol) is patterned after adult use, there's no way kids are going to stop drinking until adults do."



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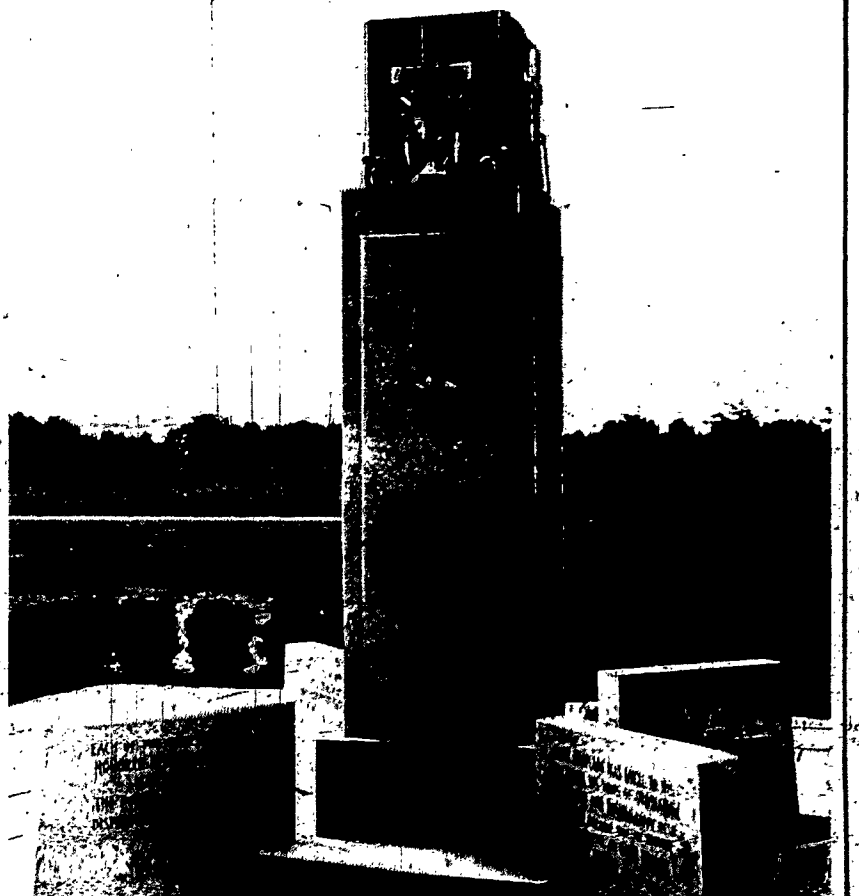
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