

Binge drinking is a growing problem

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Faith & Family
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If it seems that half of today's college students are drunk much of the time, you aren't far from the truth.

According to a study released by the Harvard School of Public Health, the number of students who binge-drink, or drink to get drunk, remains at 44 percent of all students. A new report by a task force of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism concluded that four college students die every day in accidents involving alcohol, and an additional 1,370 students suffer alcohol-related injuries. Drinking by college students contributes to more than 1,400 student deaths, 500,000 injuries and 70,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year.

I understand why so many young people abuse alcohol. I quit drinking



Therese J. Borchard

Our Turn

the stuff before I was legal because I so much enjoyed its effects.

Like a magic potion, alcohol granted me social ease and grace. A few beers or a shot of vodka helped me to mingle with folks I wouldn't dare approach sober. Conversations seemed deeper and more fluid, void

of that awkwardness I feared in sober dialogues. Under the spell of booze I felt more popular, more beautiful and more lovable.

That's what young folks are after: love and acceptance. It seems easier to down a shot of rum to shed the personal insecurities than to risk rejection as they approach a stranger.

That's why college students drink. And that's why some don't outgrow binge drinking.

"I think actually getting the numbers out will help the public understand that this is perhaps a larger problem than people might otherwise have thought," says Dr. Ralph Hingson, associate dean for research at Boston University's School of Public Health. "The harm that college students do to themselves and

others as a result of excessive drinking exceeds what many would have expected."

The NIAAA task force recommends colleges and universities collaborate with surrounding communities to tackle the growing problem. Changing the culture of college campuses demands the effort of everyone involved in the lives of students: professors, friends, campus ministers, parents and administrators.

Only then can the first four years away from home be the experience that it is intended to be. Only then can colleges resume their responsibility of nurturing minds and souls for the future.

Therese J. Borchard is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

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