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Prevalence of Alcohol Use in the Deaf Community¹

Introduction

Alcohol is the most commonly abused substance among American adults.² In the United States, Deaf adults can be at greater risk for untreated alcohol-use disorders due to healthcare barriers and lack of qualified and culturally competent substance abuse professionals.³ Prior to this study, the national prevalence of alcohol use among Deaf adults remained largely unknown.

In general, having a large social network of friends can be related to higher alcohol consumption.⁴ In this study, researchers examined whether being close to a large Deaf community can be associated with higher use of alcohol. In addition, using data from the Health Information National Trends Survey in ASL (HINTS  ASL), researchers determined the prevalence of alcohol use within a national sample of Deaf adults who use American Sign Language (ASL).⁵

Findings

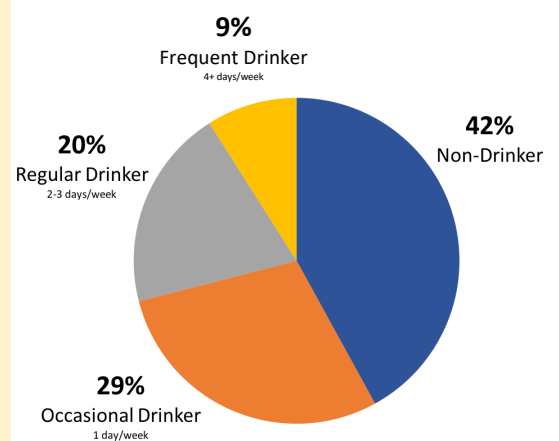
Based on a national sample of 1271 Deaf adults aged 18 or over, more than half (58%) reported that they drank in the last month, which is similar to the general population (56%).⁶ Researchers found that Deaf drinkers are more likely to be younger, male, college-educated, or employed. Retired individuals in particular were five times more likely to be frequent drinkers (4+ days/week) than non-drinkers.

While there is no official record of Deaf communities based on population density in America, researchers determined the density of a Deaf community based on the size of schools for the Deaf and employability of Deaf personnel. The majority of highly dense Deaf communities are located in major metropolitan areas, which has been previously linked to increased drinking in the general population.⁷ The study found that those who lived in highly dense Deaf communities reported higher use of alcohol (59.5%), and are at greater risk for frequent alcohol consumption.

Gaining a better understanding of Deaf individuals' alcohol use can help implement effective policy interventions, including **increasing accessible alcohol health information in ASL** through the internet and schools, and **allocating more qualified and culturally competent substance use professionals** to highly dense Deaf communities. By doing so, we can help reduce Deaf individuals' average annual alcohol consumption by 10% in accordance with *Healthy People 2020*.

Quick Facts

- A national sample of 1271 deaf adults
- Collected between October 2015 and April 2018
- Deaf drinkers more likely to be younger, male, college-educated, or employed
- Large Deaf communities can be at greater risk of frequent drinking



About Deaf Health Communication and Quality of Life Center

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The Deaf Health Communication and Quality of Life Center's mission is to conduct research that links accessibility to health outcomes among deaf/hard of hearing individuals.

The Center's briefs provide a snapshot of noteworthy, data-driven research findings from the Center. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH.

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