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State drinking rates ranked top in nation

By: [Francesca Brumm](#) / The Daily Cardinal

Nationwide, Wisconsin leads in numerous alcohol related trends. The long term problems associated with this range from depression to decreased academic performance.

Wisconsin has the highest rates of both binge and heavy drinking in the nation, according to a report released by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Population Health Institute.

Eight percent of the adult population engages in heavy drinking, defined as 30 drinks in one month for women and 60 for men, according to the report. Twenty-two percent of the population engages in binge drinking, stated as five or more drinks on one occasion, the report said.

Richard Brown M.D., clinical director of the Wisconsin Initiative to Promote Healthy Lifestyles, said he was not surprised by these rankings.

"Wisconsin is always at the top, or very near the top, of these state surveys," Brown said.

No one is 100 percent sure why Wisconsin has had such consistently high rates of heavy drinking, according to Brown. He said that ethnic heritage could be at least partially to blame.

"People in Germanic and Scandinavian countries like to drink. [The cause could be] the merging of that with the Wild West ethic in the United States that getting drunk is fun and should be fun," Brown said.

Whatever the cause, the trend has trickled down to underage citizens. Binge drinking rose 28 percent among 12-20-year-olds in Wisconsin, the report said.

Brown said the physical effects of binge drinking are commonly thought to be harmful, but said he is equally worried about other long term problems.

"There are psychosocial problems that tend to occur more in young people who engage in risky drinking," Brown said. "[Problems such as] depression, academic failure and stress in relationships cause lots of problems in young people's lives."

Brown said the university is not doing enough to make sure students' futures are not being negatively impacted by the Wisconsin drinking culture.

"There are several ways that the state, the city and the university could be doing more," Brown said.

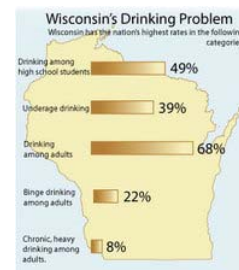
The current proposal to decrease the number of alcohol vendors in downtown Madison could be one way to curb heavy drinking, according to Brown.

UW-Madison sophomore David Abbott, 20, said he does not think Wisconsin has a drinking problem. He said the amount of drinking in Madison is similar to that of the Twin Cities, where he is from.

Abbott also said he does not think the concentrated amount of drinking on campus affects students' academic performance.

"Overall, the attitude here is work hard, play hard," Abbott said.

-The Wisconsin State Journal contributed to this report.



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