

The shifting age of peak binge drinking

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Young adults in the U.S. are engaging in binge drinking later into their 20s, according to a recent analysis from the long-term [Monitoring the Future](#) study that has tracked the attitudes and behaviors of young adults since the 1970s. The analysis, led by University of Minnesota Professor Megan Patrick, Ph.D., was recently published in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

The study examined how the peak binge [drinking](#) prevalence has changed in both men and women over time. Historically, research has shown a consistent pattern of binge drinking behaviors in young [adults](#): an increase from age 18 through the early 20s and then subsiding through the late 20s.

However, this recent study—which used long-term data from 58,012 Monitoring the Future participants who were tracked from ages 18 to 30 beginning in 1976—found:

- the age of peak drinking prevalence increased from age 20 to age 22 in women and from age 21 to age 23 in men;
- women reported significantly higher binge drinking prevalence than in previous cohorts, from ages 21 through 30;
- men in the recent analysis reported binge drinking more often at ages 25 to 26, but converged with earlier cohorts by age 30.

"There has been a lot of talk about how the transition to adulthood has changed and how [young adults](#) are delaying or forgoing social roles like marriage," said Patrick, a research professor in the College of Education and Human Development's Institute for Translational Research. "These changes have been accompanied by changes in socialization and drinking patterns, especially for women."

With binge drinking behaviors appearing to last later into young adulthood, the individual and societal risks associated with binge drinking are likewise extended, especially among women.

According to researchers, this conclusion suggests efforts to prevent high-risk drinking are needed at least through the third decade of life.

"Most alcohol-related interventions have focused on adolescents or college students," said Patrick. "Drinking during the later 20s has received less attention, and there are fewer prevention and intervention programs focused on these ages. However, we found that more [women](#) are now [binge drinking](#) and clinicians should think about screening for drinking problems throughout the 20s."

More information: Megan E. Patrick et al. Shifting Age of Peak Binge Drinking Prevalence: Historical Changes in Normative Trajectories Among Young Adults Aged 18 to 30, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.13933](#)

Provided by University of Minnesota

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