

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

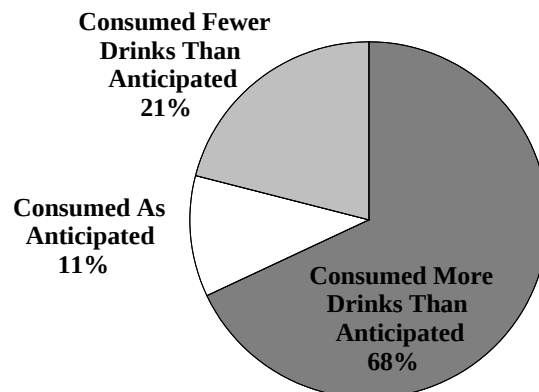
University of Maryland, College Park

More Than Two-Thirds of College Students Who Celebrated Their 21st Birthday with Alcohol Drank More Than They Anticipated; Average of 12 Drinks Actually Consumed, Compared to 7 Anticipated

The majority of college students who planned to drink to celebrate their 21st birthday ended up drinking more than they anticipated, according to a study of 150 college students attending one Southwestern university. More than two-thirds (68%) of celebrants consumed more drinks than they had anticipated (see figure below). Those who underestimated their celebratory consumption anticipated drinking an average of 7 drinks but actually consumed 12 drinks. The study found that students who consumed more drinks than anticipated were more likely to drink faster and drink more shots than students who were accurate or drank less than anticipated. More than half (55%) of celebrants in this study reported drinking free shots in bars. In addition, students who drank more than anticipated were more likely to engage in 21st birthday drinking traditions (e.g., drinking 21 shots, drinking at midnight) and to have more influential peers present that encouraged drinking. Overall, 61% of all those who drank to celebrate had one or more influential peers present and 60% engaged in one or more 21st birthday drinking traditions. According to the authors, “the amount and style of drinking observed during 21st birthday celebrations are excessive and should be viewed as a serious public health threat” (p. 183). They suggest interventions that “encourage responsible peer behavior and teach celebrants skills to stay within their anticipated drinking limits” as well as “community-based interventions to stop or reduce the amount of free shots given to young adults by drinking establishments” (p. 183).

**Alcohol Consumption During 21st Birthday Celebration,
Among College Students Who Had Planned to Drink Alcohol As Part of Their Celebration**

(N=150 college students attending a large public Southwestern university)



SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from Brister, H.A., Wetherill, R.R., and Fromme, K., “Anticipated Versus Actual Alcohol Consumption During 21st Birthday Celebrations,” *Journal of Studies of Alcohol and Drugs* 71(2):180-183, 2010. For more information, contact Heather Brister at hbrister@mail.utexas.edu.