

# Parental behavior regarding alcohol is a heavy influence on American Indian teenagers, study says

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Urban American Indian teenagers with alcoholic parents perceive their parents to be less restrictive about drinking and tend to face more alcohol-related problems at age 18, according to a new study by Colorado State University's Tri-Ethnic Center. The study recently was published in the *The American Journal on Addictions*, a peer-reviewed journal.

The Tri-Ethnic Center has spent the past 35 years studying the epidemiology of drug abuse on Indian reservations, but this is the first study of its kind that evaluates young American Indians in an urban setting. The study tracked teens from age 13 through 18.

Authors of the research include Randall Swaim and Fred Beauvais, senior research scientists in Colorado State's Department of Psychology, and Dale and Patricia Silk-Walker, professors in the Department of Psychiatry at Oregon Health and Sciences University. The project was funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, which is part of the National Institutes of Health.

The researchers interviewed teens and their parents or caregivers in 251 households over the six-year period. Generally, they found that parental norms against alcohol reduce levels of use at younger ages. More important, the researchers established that urban Indian youth are not unique among their peers when it comes to perceived parental norms and

alcohol-related problems at age 18.

American Indian men are 50 percent more likely to experience alcohol dependence compared with other men, according to a national survey. Other studies reveal that alcohol and other drug use are among three leading causes of death among American Indian youth, with alcohol dependence the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric condition.

“When you have a parent diagnosed with alcoholism, we know there’s some genetic influence of alcoholism that increases your chances, but you also have the social influence of the parent,” Swaim said. “You have a double whammy.”

The authors suggest that American Indian families should continue to be involved in alcohol-use prevention discussions as long as possible – even after schools begin to get involved in drug education – to ultimately reduce morbidity and mortality among Indian youth.

Key findings of the study:

- Youth with one or two parents diagnosed with alcohol abuse/dependence were less likely to perceive family norms against alcohol use.
- Youth with two parents diagnosed were more likely to report alcohol-related problems at age 18.
- Higher rates of perceived family norms against alcohol use protected youth from high rates of use at age 13, but higher rates of [alcohol](#) use at age 13 predicted more alcohol-related problems at age 18.

Provided by Colorado State University

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