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News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Euro youth drink and get drunk more than U.S. youth

Belief that European teens are more responsible with alcohol is wrong, experts say

BERKELEY, CA -- Many Americans believe that young people from European have less trouble with alcohol because their cultures teach them to handle alcohol responsibly from an early age. A recent report debunks that myth, showing that a great majority of European countries have higher intoxication rates among young people than the United States, and some countries are much higher.

Data collected from 15- and 16-year-olds in 35 European countries – from Greenland to Turkey – show that European kids drink more often, drink more heavily and get drunk more often than American teens, according to researchers from the PIRE Prevention Research Center (PRC) in Berkeley, CA.

“The claim that Europeans learn to drink moderately and safely in a family setting has been used by many in the United States to argue for lowering the drinking age,” said one of the report

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authors, Dr. Joel Grube, director of PRC. “But our research shows that premise is a myth.”

Easy access to alcohol seems to allow young people to drink heavily and in a risky fashion, whether in Europe or the United States, Dr. Grube said. “Raising the drinking age in the United States has been an extremely effective public health and safety policy,” he said. “Based on our research, weakening that policy would be a serious mistake.”

Every European country except Turkey had higher teen drinking rates than the United States. However, lest anyone think that’s widespread but moderate drinking, the rate of binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row) was also higher in every country except Turkey. In the United States, 22 percent of surveyed teens binge drank in the past 30 days, the survey showed. In Denmark, that figure was 60 percent, in Germany 57 percent, in Britain 54 percent, in Italy 34 percent and in France 28 percent.

Intoxication rates in the last 30 days for U.S. teens was 18 percent, compared to 61 percent in Denmark, 53 percent in Ireland, 48 percent in Austria and 46 percent in Britain. Only six European countries had lower intoxication rates than the United States.

The data from Europe were collected as part of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. The U.S. data were from the Monitoring the Future survey conducted annually among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in the U.S. The study, “Youth drinking rates and problems: A comparison of European countries and the United States,” was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. For the full report, go to www.udetc.org/publications.htm and click on *Comparison of Drinking Rates and Problems*.

PIRE, or Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, is a national nonprofit public health research institute with centers in seven cities and funded mostly by federal research and program grants and contracts.

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