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Teens Who Work Are More Likely to Drink Heavily

CALVERTON, MD (January 7, 2004) — Teens who work more than ten hours per week are more likely to engage in heavy or “binge” drinking, according to a recent study by the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE). The study results, published in the January 2004 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, are particularly troubling in light of the recent report to Congress made by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council which indicated that underage drinking costs the U.S. more than \$53 billion per year in addition to thousands of personal tragedies and destructive behavior such as violence, suicide, unwanted pregnancies, sexual assault, and academic failure. Underage drinking also increases the likelihood of alcohol abuse and dependency, and other negative consequences.

“One of the most consistent and troubling discoveries is that the more adolescents work, the more they drink,” says M.J. Paschall, Ph.D., the author of the study and a research scientist at the Prevention Research Center of PIRE. He goes on to explain that while the study indicates that working more than 10 hours per week significantly increases the risk of heavy drinking (defined as five or more drinks on one occasion), working fewer than ten hours per week does not appear to lead to more drinking.

Dr. Paschall explained that employment increases teens’ access to alcohol through greater personal income, which allows them to purchase alcohol directly or obtain it indirectly through others. “Working also means that the teens spend more time with older peers and adults who drink. This increases their belief that alcohol use and heavy drinking are common and socially acceptable,” says Dr. Paschall. In 2002 almost 80% of high school

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seniors had consumed alcohol at least once in their lifetime, 50% had consumed alcohol within the past 30 days, and 30% had consumed enough within the past 30 days to be intoxicated.

The study, which was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, also found that teens who work more than ten hours per week have a lower level of school commitment, a lower grade point average, and are less motivated to attend college than those who work fewer hours per week. There is evidence that low school commitment and poor academic performance are at least partly the result of heavy alcohol use.

About PIRE

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) is a leading independent nonprofit organization specializing in research related to health and social issues and translating science into practice in solution of real-world problems. The organization's focus includes individual and social problems, issues related to public health and safety and the applications of social policy. Areas of specialty include: treatment and prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, driving under the influence, tobacco use, adolescent high-risk behavior, and the economic costs associated with these problems.

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