

BINGE

DRINKING

arthead by Madison Ames

## UNDERAGE DRINKERS EXPLORE CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL

by Madison Ames

It's Sunday morning. Aria\* wakes up to a splitting headache and the top of a blender on her bed. She remembers the party last night where she drank nine drinks in two hours. She also remembered the strong desire she had to steal the blender.

"I was drunk, and I don't know why, but I just really wanted a blender," Aria said. "I thought it would be fine because I only took the top of the blender and they could still use the bottom part. I hid it outside in the bushes, and I still have it."

Aria is part of the 70 percent of teenagers under the age of 18 who have engaged in heavy drinking, according to the United States Department of Public Health. Binge drinking is defined by having four drinks for females and five for males in less than two hours, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism (NIAAA). By consuming this amount, a person's blood alcohol content reaches 0.08 grams of alcohol in one deciliter, making the person legally drunk.

"I think that number is ridiculous," Aria said. "I've done over 10 shots in 30 minutes.

I got drunk and had fun, but I didn't throw up or blackout or anything."

According to the NIAAA, 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by people underage is in the form of binge drink-

ing. Counselor Jim Flax attributes this trend to peer pressure.

"I think teenagers drink to be accepted," Flax said. "Some of their friends do it, some people feel socially inadequate so one of the things they can do to make themselves feel better is to binge drink because they think they're going to have more fun that way. It might just be that

they are at home all during the week and on a Friday or Saturday night the parents let them out and, as an escape, they binge drink."

The first time Aurora\* binge drank, it was at an overnight college visit. She drank half a bottle of vodka in four hours.

"It was the absolute worst," Aurora said. "I had never gotten drunk before, but the girl who showed me around campus took me to a party. She told people that I had never gotten drunk before, so someone gave me a bottle of vodka and said, 'have fun.' I didn't know what to do, but everyone else was drinking and seemed to be having a good time, so I thought why not? I don't really remember anything else. The next morning, I woke up in the bushes across campus. Apparently I had lost a shoe in the process. I felt horrible and I ended up throwing up about five times that day. After that, I don't want anything to do with alcohol, and I encourage my friends to not make the same mistakes that I did."

According to Wichita Police Officer Jess Hancock, it is easy to charge underage drinkers because drinking any alcohol is illegal.

"At parties the small breathalyzers are valid because anyone under the age of 21 cannot have any alcohol in their system," Hancock said. "It doesn't have to be a

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*KMC student Aurora\**



# DATA OF DRINKING

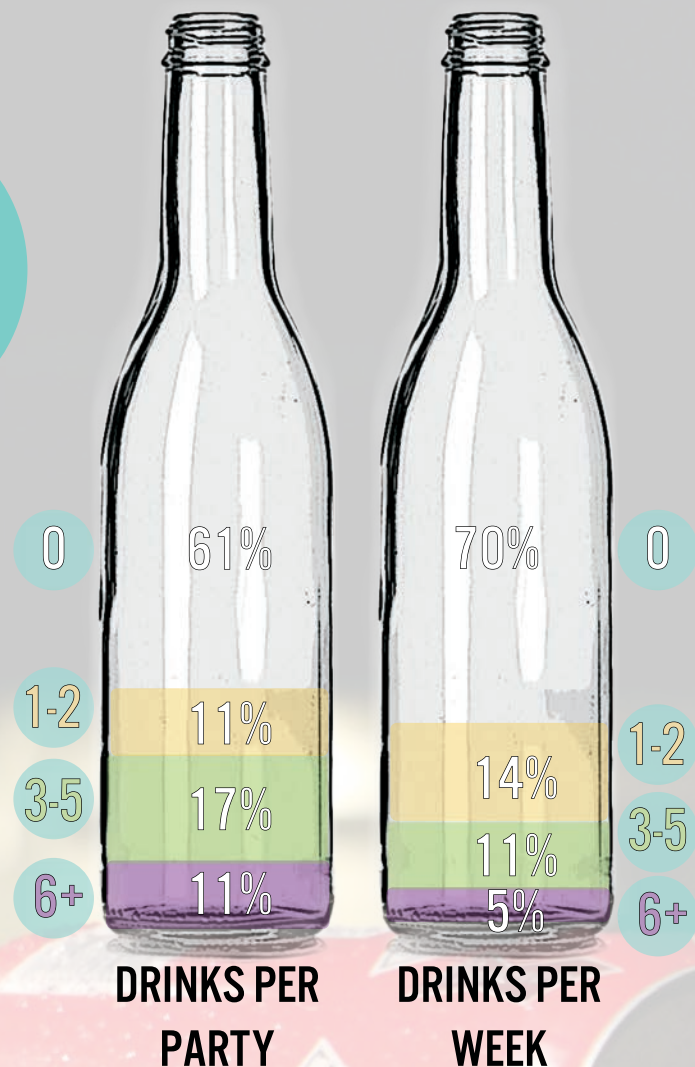
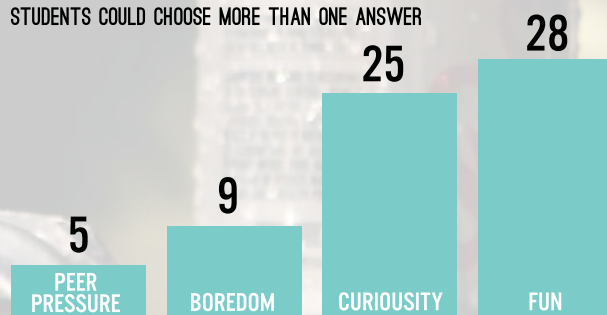
**69%**  
OF STUDENTS HAVE  
HAD AN ALCOHOLIC  
BEVERAGE

**42%**  
OF STUDENTS HAVE  
GOTTEN DRUNK

**73%**  
OF STUDENTS KNOW  
SOMEONE WHO HAS  
DRIVEN WHILE  
INTOXICATED

## WHY STUDENTS DRINK

STUDENTS COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE ANSWER



data based on 100 surveyed students Feb. 24; infographic by Brittney Korte and Madison Ames

specific amount; it just has to be there. So when we break up an underage drinking party, all we have to do is test them, and if the machine confirms any trace of alcohol, they get charged with possession of alcohol. It is the only drug we can charge a person with once they have already consumed it."

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), alcohol is the most common drug used in the United States, and underage drinking accounts for 11 percent of alcohol consumption.

"Alcohol is so readily available," Flax said. "Teenagers can steal it from their parents' house if they can't buy it themselves. They can also go into places and buy it if people don't check IDs very closely, so an 18 year old can buy liquor with a 21-year-old license that they borrowed from someone. It's so easy. Because of

this, I think, for high schoolers, alcohol is the drug of choice."

In a survey taken Feb. 24, seven percent of Kapaun Mt. Carmel students have driven while intoxicated. Seamus\* said he is concerned for his friends' welfare, so he drives his drunk friends home.

"I drive drunk people home all the time," Seamus said. "It doesn't bother me. I'd rather me drive than have them risk getting into a wreck or getting pulled over."

According to the CDC, binge drinking accounts for more than 4,300 deaths of people 15-20. It is also associated with poor school performance, increased sexual activity and sexually transmitted infections. According to science teacher Jo Mittman, the worst consequence of underage drinking is how it affects learning.

"It impairs the ability to form memories and the ability to put memories together,"

Mittman said. "It takes away your short-term memory, and messes with your ability to consolidate memories and make connections, which is what learning is."

According to Hancock, officers have standardized training to determine if someone has been drinking.

"It's so easy to tell when a teenager has been drinking," Hancock said. "Bloodshot eyes, smells of alcohol, slurred speech—there's a lot of clues that the officers are trained to look for. The officer always has the right to ask if someone has been drinking. Kids always say no; they always lie. The issue with underage drinking is that kids always make stupid mistakes and it can end up with someone being killed. There's never a good outcome to underage drinking."

\*names changed to protect identity

photo illustration by Madison Ames