



The Tipping Point:

A Report on Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use Among
Koreatown and South Bay Youth

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KOREATOWN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTER, INC.

The mission of the Koreatown Youth and Community Center, Inc. (KYCC) is to serve the evolving needs of the Korean American population in the greater Los Angeles area, as well as the multi-ethnic Koreatown community. KYCC's programs and services are directed toward recently immigrated, economically disadvantaged youth and families, and promote community socioeconomic empowerment. Founded in 1975 as a storefront youth program for recently immigrated, at-risk youth, the Korean Youth Center became a 501(c)(3) in 1982. In the aftermath of the 1992 L.A. Civil Unrest, KYC took steps to broaden its scope, changing its name to "Korean Youth & Community Center" and then to "Koreatown Youth & Community Center," in 2004 to better reflect its mission to serve all families within our neighborhood. Along the way, the organizational culture has shifted as well, with over 60 percent of the staff now being non-Korean, and the majority of them bilingual in Spanish, Korean or another language.

ASIAN AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE PROGRAM, INC.

The Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Inc. (AADAP) began in 1972 in the midst of a tumultuous drug epidemic that affected many Asian Pacific Islander communities in Los Angeles County. As many of the founders of AADAP were activists from the civil rights movement, they understood and advocated for treatment and prevention services particularly aimed at meeting the cultural needs of Asian, Latino and African-American addicts. Today, AADAP, Inc., a 501(c)(3) continues its work in providing treatment and prevention services to youth and adults in the Los Angeles County. The mission of AADAP, Inc. is to change lives and save families, by providing comprehensive substance abuse and other social services for Asian Pacific Islander and other diverse communities. Core programs include education, prevention, intervention, treatment, employment, advocacy, and economic development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Located just a few miles west of downtown Los Angeles, Koreatown is a dynamic and diverse community. Although Koreatown is a small residential neighborhood of 2.7 square miles, it is home to over 550 liquor outlets. Such alcohol availability not only fuels crime and drunk driving, but high rates of underage drinking as well. In comparison with national rates, the results of the Koreatown Youth Community Center's (KYCC) 2008 drug use survey show high rates of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use and has sparked this follow-up survey on the relationship between ATOD accessibility, parenting, and drug use.

The community of the South Bay includes the cities in and around the southwest peninsula of Los Angeles County. The diverse South Bay cities of Torrance and Gardena comprise a sizeable Korean American community with a notable presence of Korean-owned businesses, supermarkets, and restaurants. The Asian American Drug Abuse Program (AADAP) has conducted ATOD surveys in the South Bay for the past four years, and continues to examine alcohol trends among young Korean Americans in the South Bay.

METHODS

Participants in KYCC's Youth Drug Abuse Prevention Program (YDAPP) administered over 250 surveys, focusing on high school youth who reside in Koreatown. The confidential surveys were distributed through youth and their social networks. KYCC staff also conducted a small number of follow-up interviews with Koreatown youth to get more detailed and informative responses to survey questions.

AADAP's Korean American Youth Council (KAYC) conducted an alcohol access survey that focused on environmental factors in the home that contribute to underage youth drinking. Seventy-eight Korean American youth under the age of 21 completed surveys. KAYC members used their personal networks to collect these surveys, focusing on youth who reside in the South Bay. In addition to the surveys, KAYC members participated in an informal interview to share their perspectives on youth access to alcohol.

RESULTS

The two surveys found several significant results around high rates of ATOD use, parental monitoring, and access to drugs and substances, which include the following highlights:



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ATOD use

- 40.8% of KYCC survey participants have used alcohol in the past year while 14.7% of underage youth in the U.S. use alcohol, which was the most significant difference in percentages when compared to other drug use.
- There was a strong correlation between youth who used one drug concurrently with another.

Parental monitoring

- The majority of youth in the KYCC survey reported that their parents did not know they used drugs. Only about one-third of parents knew their children used cigarettes; 23% used marijuana; and 6.5% used ecstasy.
- 71% of youth surveyed in Koreatown are unsupervised after school.
- Approximately 18% of youth responded they would drink with permission at home, while about 12% of youth said they drank at home without permission.

Access to ATOD

- One-third of KYCC youth felt it would be "very easy" for them to obtain alcohol and cigarettes, while obtaining marijuana would be "very easy" for 28% of the respondents. Youth felt that ecstasy would be the most difficult to obtain, with 41.5% of the group responding that it would be "very difficult;" in comparison, 19.1%, 27.6%, and 34.6% of youth felt it would "very difficult" to obtain alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, respectively.

- One-third of youth from the AADAP survey reported that alcohol is located in an open area. Of those who reported alcohol was stored away, 92.9% of youth said alcohol was not locked. Thus, alcohol was still accessible for these youth, which helps explain why many felt it was easy to access alcohol without parental knowledge.
- About 8% of those who have used alcohol access it with a fake ID while 13.9% access it without a fake ID. Similar to alcohol, more youth access cigarettes from their communities without fake IDs, where 23.3% can get cigarettes without a fake ID and 10% access it with a fake ID.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parental Supervision

- Parents should make arrangements to find quality after school programs or arrange other types of supervision for their children. It is important for parents to ensure that their children have safe alternatives during the peak hours of juvenile crimes and delinquent behavior.
- As teenagers become more independent, parents still need to know what their children are doing when unsupervised. According to KYCC survey results, 71% of youth reported that their parents knew what they were doing at least half of the time. **However, several interviewees reported that youth lie to their parents about their whereabouts most of the time.** This finding emphasizes the need for parents to not only ask what their children are doing, but follow-up, in particular about ATOD use.
- Parents need to directly discuss ATOD use with their children because youth who use ATOD oftentimes hide it from their parents. According to the KYCC survey, 52.1%, 66.7%, 76.8%, and 93.6% of parents did not know their children used alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and ecstasy, respectively. In addition, results from the AADAP survey indicate that 42% of youth think it is easier to access alcohol without their parent's knowledge. These results highlight the importance of parent-child communication and monitoring.
- Parents should be mindful of their actions and attitudes when it comes to ATOD. Youth often tacitly adopt their attitudes and behaviors. Among KYCC respondents who have parents or siblings who drink, 43% have also had a drink in the past year. However,

among youth who don't have parents or siblings who drink, 28% have had a drink in the past year.

Accessibility

The results also demonstrate the importance of monitoring access to ATOD, including:

- Responsible beverage service training should be required for all liquor license holders. Outlets known to sell alcohol to minors should also be regularly targeted for enforcement of alcohol and tobacco sale laws. Among KYCC survey respondents, a full 31% report being able to obtain alcohol and 50% are able to obtain cigarettes from stores or bars. Given Koreatown's high alcohol outlet density and the correlation between accessibility and use, it is important for law enforcement to work with the community to help monitor liquor and tobacco sales to minors.
- Ideally, homes should be completely alcohol and tobacco-free. If parents choose to store alcohol or tobacco at home, they need to be vigilant about keeping them locked and monitored to prevent underage drinking and smoking. According to KYCC survey results, youth are more likely to get alcohol from home than from their friends and 60% of AADAP respondents report having access to alcohol in their homes. Among KYCC survey respondents who have smoked tobacco, 20% got cigarettes from their parents without their parents knowing. Children are keenly aware of where alcohol and tobacco are located in the home and whether it is locked up. Parents need to understand that their decisions to store alcohol and tobacco at home may affect their children's decisions to engage in ATOD use.



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