

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this consumer research was to explore perceptions of alcohol use among 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade youth in Sarasota County, Florida. The research was conducted by Sarasota County researchers (youth and adult) and researchers at the University of South Florida Prevention Research Center. The specific study objectives were:

Specific objectives of the research were to identify:

- the factors that motivate Sarasota youth to use alcohol;
- the factors that deter use of alcohol among Sarasota youth;
- effective information channels and spokespersons for preventing alcohol use among Sarasota youth; and
- effective strategies for preventing alcohol use among Sarasota youth.

The study was conducted in three phases. Phases I and II were conducted among 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth. The first phase was qualitative research followed by a more standardized survey research phase. In phase I, 206 youth participated in 22 focus groups and 112 individual interviews. The youth were interviewed by eleven Sarasota youth who had been trained to conduct both focus groups and individual interviews.

The second phase of the study focused on using the qualitative research results and literature to develop, pilot, and implement a standardized survey of youth in grades 6 to 10. All public middle and high schools participated in the survey. Among the 13 private schools invited to participate, 9 declined. Of the remaining four, one participated with the other three expressing interest to participate in the future. A total of 113 classes, comprised of 2,407 students were surveyed.

Phase III consisted of qualitative research (focus groups and interviews) with Sarasota County parents of middle and high school youth. Forty-seven parents participated in 6 focus groups and 12 individual interviews. Recruitment of parents proved to be difficult.

Overall, youth do **not** believe it is acceptable for young people to drink alcohol; however, many have tried or are current users. They appear to distinguish between the types of alcohol (e.g., beer, wine, liquor).

***Perceived benefits of drinking*** included coping with problems, having fun, looking mature, and social image. Social image encompasses fitting in, being more popular, and looking cooler.

***Perceived costs of drinking*** included unpleasant taste of alcohol, looking “dumb,” automobile accidents, health problems, and addiction. Some mentioned fear of getting caught by parents, school or the authorities (police).

Parents have an important influence on their children's drinking behavior. Youth see their parents as modeling drinking (or in some cases not drinking), and are learning when it is acceptable to drink through their parents. Family structure, sibling influence and behavior, as well as peer influence/peer pressure impact one's decision to initiate drinking or continue to drink.

Gaining access to alcohol appears to be relatively easy for youth in Sarasota County.

Trustworthy spokespersons for providing information about risks of drinking alcohol varied widely among grade levels. Sixth and seventh graders noted a DARE officer/resource officer, number one and two, respectively. Whereas, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders said that "other kids my age who drink" would be their first choice. Parents, other relatives, friends, and other kids my age were information sources ranked in the top ten by students in all grades.

Youth suggested a wide range of interventions they believe to be effective in preventing underage drinking.