Binge Drinking in the Northern Plains Tribes


In most tribes, fewer Indian adults drink than do adults in the general U.S. population; however, the pattern of heavy drinking among those who do drink is associated with a great deal of social and medical pathology. Indeed, severe binge drinking—defined as five or more drinks per day, occasion, or sitting for men and three or more drinks for women—is a major problem among adult American Indians who are arrested in North and South Dakota, where a small number of repeat offenders (17 percent) account for half of all arrests in two tribal police jurisdictions that were studied.

A team of researchers from the University of New Mexico is exploring the interrelationships of alcohol, drugs, and crime among
Researchers also measured the arrestees’ perceptions of their drinking problems using the SOCRATES scale, an instrument designed to assess how ready alcohol abusers are to change their behavior. The scale indicated that the arrestees did not recognize the seriousness of their alcohol problems, were not prone to accept labels such as “problem drinker” or “alcoholic,” and did not express a desire for change.