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A German survey finds 51% of young adults got too drunk to walk straight in the past year

The poll also found 40% of respondents ages 18 to 30 saw a parent drunk at least once a month

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A new survey in Germany points to a split picture of alcohol use among young adults: a noticeable minority say they have never drunk alcohol, but many others report heavy drinking and frequent exposure to intoxication at home while growing up.

On Tuesday, November 24, Pronova BKK, a German health insurer, released findings from a representative online survey of 1,228 adults that found more than two-thirds of respondents had seen at least one parent drunk at some point. The pattern was especially pronounced among people ages 18 to 30. According to the survey, 40% of that age group said they had seen their parents under the influence of alcohol at least once a month.

The same age group also reported high levels of risky drinking in their own lives. Pronova BKK said 51% of respondents ages 18 to 30 had been so intoxicated at least once in the previous 12 months that they could no longer walk straight. Nearly as many in that group said they had experienced memory loss, vomiting after heavy drinking, or shame about their behavior the next day.

The survey suggests that alcohol is a visible part of daily life in many German households. Half of respondents said alcoholic drinks such as beer, wine, or sparkling wine are almost always kept at home. Pronova BKK also found that 64% of Germans had seen their father drunk and 44% had seen their mother drunk.

The findings point to a link between what people saw at home and how often they drink later in life, though the survey does not prove cause and effect. Among people who said they drink alcohol at least once a week, 37% reported that their parents had been drunk at least once a month. Among people who do not drink or who have stopped drinking, that figure was 24%.

The study also found that many respondents encountered alcohol at a young age. One in three Germans said they first drank alcohol before age 16. That share rose to 41% among respondents ages 31 to 45 and stood at 37% among those under 31.

For many people, the first drink happened with friends or acquaintances, but parents were also present in a notable number of cases. Among Generation Z respondents, 30% said their parents were there when they had their first sip of alcohol. That was 12 percentage points higher than among respondents older than 30.

Pronova BKK quoted Patrizia Thamm, a health promotion specialist at the insurer, as saying that parents serve as important role models because children and teenagers observe how adults handle alcohol. She said clear boundaries and open discussions about health risks are important, and that young people should know they can seek help from their parents if they have drunk too much.

The survey found that heavy intoxication is common across the broader population as well. Three-quarters of Germans said they had experienced at least one episode of severe drunkenness in their lives. One in eight said their first such episode happened before age 16. The most common age for a first episode was 16 or 17, cited by 27% of respondents.

At the same time, the data also showed that not all young adults drink. Pronova BKK said 9% of respondents ages 18 to 30 reported never having consumed alcohol, more than double the overall average. The figures suggest that Generation Z is not a uniform group. For producers, retailers, bars, and restaurants, they may offer a more complicated view of Generation Z, with some abstaining from alcohol while intense episodic drinking remains common for others, a distinction that could shape responsible sales and service practices.

The survey also found that confidence in drinking ability remains high among some young adults despite the reported harms. Pronova BKK said 39% of Generation Z respondents agreed with the statement that they could easily drink others under the table.

The insurer said the study, titled Alcohol in Everyday Life, Family and Work, was conducted online in July and August 2026. It included 400 respondents from Generation Z, defined in the survey as people age 30 or younger. The study examined alcohol use in family life, daily routines, and business settings, based on respondents’ personal experiences and self-reported behavior.