

Why we binge drink

“Young people who believe their parents or friends approved of drinking tend to drink more“

In step with the Federal Government's \$53 million pledge to combat binge drinking, Australian Catholic University researcher Dr Rivka Witenberg has conducted two significant studies examining binge drinking behaviour patterns in young adults.

The studies, one completed at the end of 2007 and the other ongoing, look at the underlying attitudes that influence excessive, or binge, drinking in 18-25 year olds.

Using Audit, a screen test developed by the World Health Organisation, the participants' underlying beliefs about drinking were examined through semi-structured interview questionnaires and measured responses to three drinking scenarios.



The scenarios were based on real life experiences related to the drinking histories of young Australians. In each one, the proposed consequences reflected previous research on beliefs about alcohol consumption which identified expectations such as 'having fun and socializing,' 'relaxing,' 'doing something embarrassing' and 'health

risks' as factors influencing the decision to binge drink.

"Many young people embrace prevailing social beliefs that drinking to excess is fun and relieves stress.


After reading the stories, each participant made judgments about binge drinking and explained the justifications for their decisions.

Results showed that negative beliefs about the consequences of alcohol were associated with decreased levels of drinking.

In one scenario where young people faced responsibility for their actions the morning after a night of binge drinking, over 80 per cent rejected binge drinking as a healthy attitude. They instead expressed the desire to be responsible and in control of their actions.

"However, it is interesting to note that when participants held pre-existing positive attitudes towards binge drinking, they endorsed excessive drinking within the scenario and were much more likely to view binge drinking in a positive light," Witenberg said.

Overall the studies showed that participants who valued socialising over health tended to be binge drinkers. Young people who believed their parents or friends approved of drinking tended to drink more and were more likely to drink with potentially harmful consequences.

In addition, the studies also showed that males drank significantly more alcohol than females and that rural respondents consumed significantly more alcohol than their urban counterparts. 

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SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS DON'T ALWAYS SHOW SYMPTOMS!

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