

Alcohol Consumption Essay 2.docx

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Why do young people consume alcohol? Is imbibing an individual, social, cultural or economic matter, or a combination?

Do you think that campaigns for drinking in moderation are doomed to fail with some drinkers?

Why youths consumes alcohol is a very important but complex question that must be asked to address the issue of excessive youth drinking. Alcohol consumption among youths has vastly become what can be referred to as a 'binge drinking epidemic'. Binge drinking can be defined as drinking an excessive amount of alcohol in a short amount of time (Drinkaware, 2016). For the purposes of this essay, imbibing is defined as consuming alcohol (Dictionary.com, 2017).

When asking why youths consume alcohol it is imperative to consider all aspects and influences. There are many factors that contribute to youths imbibing, these being individual, social and cultural factors. Individual factors contribute to intoxication because everybody's circumstances are different and each young person has different influences in their life which can affect their attitudes towards drinking, the example applied is one's family influences. Similarly, culture plays a role in analyzing why youths imbibe due to the fact that Australia has a very dominant drinking culture. This impacts youths imbibing because drinking alcohol while socialising is viewed as a 'norm' in Australian culture. Lastly, social influences must be taken into consideration as various studies prove that peer pressure is a major issue among youths in relation to drinking. Many youths feel the need to drink alcohol to be accepted in social situations. In recent media items, it is clear that alcohol campaigns are quite common in modern day society. While they are a great way to educate youths on alcohol and the consequences that can arise from drinking too much, these campaigns are destined to fail with some drinkers. While every young person is different, research does make it evident that there are common reasons why youths consume alcohol.

It is 'normal' in Australian culture to drink to intoxication; some would argue it plays an important component in acceptance and belonging to social group as a young Australian (Advocat & Lindsay 2015, p. 140). Australian culture has evolved into a dynamic where youths feel the need to drink to be socially accepted by society. This has become one of the main reasons for youth intoxication becoming such an epidemic. While the Australian heavy drinking

culture has always been recognized, for the youth of today there are new elements that have been inherited into the Australian culture. These new elements include far more females taking part in heavy drinking; spirits are immensely becoming the drink of choice among youths and 'pre-drinking' has now become a social normality. (Advocat & Lindsay, 2015).

Oxford University Press (2017) define pre-drinking as individuals consuming as much alcohol as they can at home prior to going out, this is usually done to save money as drinks can be expensive at nightclubs and bars. Pre-drinking is a pivotal component in youth intoxication as it can lead to faster intoxication. Alternatively, pre-drinking can reinforce friendships and intimacy leading to them feeling safer later in the night when they arrive at their chosen venue as these places are usually large and crowded (Maclean, S 2016).

Concern about youth alcohol abuse internationally suggests that alcohol is the most serious health risk to young people of all drugs, including illicit drugs (White, R & Wyn, J, 2013, p. 213). White & Wyn (2013) outline that young women's alcohol intake has actually now surpassed that of young men. In Australian culture youth drinking is now viewed as a natural and normal part of growing up making it a common social practice. Advocacat and Lindsay (2015) argue that drinking to intoxication has become a 'rite of passage' to developing strong connections with others and transitioning into adulthood. DrinkWise (2012) outlines the intensity of the Australian Drinking Culture and how it has evolved over time. The speaker reminisces about a time when he himself was young and witnessed a peer secretly filling his beer can with water so that he could appear to his peers to be drinking without actually becoming intoxicated. This is a prime example of the expectation placed on youths to drink to intoxication. The Australian drinking culture has become so extreme that it opens the door to youths become subjected to peer pressure.

Social factors play an important role in youths imbibing, as young people today are being subjected to peer pressure by way of social exclusion and bullying by their peers. Peer pressure can be explained as an individual feeling pressured to take part in a certain action in order to be accepted, in this case we are referring to the pressure placed on youths to consume alcohol. A strong sense has emerged that youths drinking to intoxication is viewed as normal behaviour and is actually a regular part of social life. Most youths are under the impression that all other youths drink alcohol, furthermore they many find that their friends encourage them to drink. Studies that examine drinking patterns among peer groups show that youth alcohol consumption levels look like those of others around them, due to the influence people have over friends. This suggests that alcohol use practices can be transmitted between friends and could be either intentional and ?????intentional (Maclean, S 2016).

Advocat and Lindsay (2015, p.143) support the theory that for many the obligation to drink is illustrated by the "pivotal role alcohol plays in socialising". Many individuals feel that they need to partake in drinking, specifically binge drinking, to be accepted by their peers and to fit into society - this is mostly due to a fear of social exclusion. This fear can be deepened by the belief that they won't have the confidence to take part in conversations throughout social settings.

In addition to youths being pressured to imbibe, they are now feeling obliged to justify the decision to stay sober. Young individuals have reported that alcohol has become such a social normality that if they do decide not to partake in drinking, they feel they must come up with a reason to excuse this behaviour. Common reasons utilized are driving, caretaking, work/study commitments or religious beliefs (Advocat & Lindsay 2015). Maclean, S (2016) argues that youths can be made to feel completely alone and isolated in social settings even if their close friends are present, if everybody except them is consuming alcohol.

In this generation, it is evident that youths feel that the pressures to drink far outweigh the options for not drinking. Advocat & Lindsay (2015) outline an example of a 20-year-old apprentice, who felt pressured to drink by his co-workers and boss. His colleagues would ask him to “come have a beer with us” and on several occasions, he felt as though saying no wasn’t an option due to the workplace environment. On one occasion the apprentice turned down the invitation and his colleagues questioned his reasoning and pointed out that he didn’t drive so he had no excuse not to join them for a beer. This is a prime example of peer pressure being a contributor to young people drinking alcohol. Furthermore, pressure can occur in all avenues of life, not solely one’s peers, for example pressure can arise from friends, colleagues, strangers you cross paths with and even one’s own family.

Every family is different as is every individual, however it is clear that our family play a major role in shaping our attitudes, morals and goals and we can easily adapt habits from family members. Family has a major impact on shaping the life of a young person as these are the first people they ever interact with and usually their greatest influence. Young people are usually first introduced to alcohol in their family home and by a family member. Parents hold a significant influence on their children, as they can be viewed as an authority figure by their children. The Australian Psychological Society (2017) report that youths who take part in regular drinking usually obtain alcohol through their parents and parents who drink alcohol are far more likely to have children who drink at risky levels. This is partly due to alcohol being readily available to them combined with the attitudes their parents have to alcohol being passed on to their children. While most parents believe that introducing youths to alcohol at home teaches them to be accountable and responsible, on the contrary, studies have shown that parents who have open-minded attitudes towards alcohol are more likely to raise children who drink at high-risk levels (Teen Drinking Law, 2011).

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The type of relationship a young person has with their family also plays a pivotal role in their alcohol use. Youths who come from families where there is excessive control or conflict are more likely to imbibe, alternatively, young people who hold positive relationships with their family members have been reported to drink less than others (Teen Drinking Law, 2011).

Parents are not the only family member that can hold an influence over young people, all members of one's family can be an influence. For example, a young person may have an older sibling that they look up to and strive to be like. If that sibling is a heavy drinker it is highly likely that this would have an impact on the young person's attitude towards drinking. We can concur that family is a major influence on youth drinking, therefore it would be fair to say that educating parents on alcohol safety among youths is extremely important.

Those who pay attention to the media would have noticed that alcohol campaigns are everywhere. They can be plastered on billboards, on television, websites, social media, school appearances and charity events. The obvious goal here is to change the drinking culture in Australia and to promote safe drinking and most of these campaigns are directly aimed at youths. These campaigns can be criticized as they could be viewed as glorifying youth drinking, because they focus on showing the negative side of alcohol use. Additionally, they also reiterate the thought already held by most youths, that binge drinking is a social norm and all of their peers are doing it. With this being said, these campaigns are surely doomed to fail with a proportion of drinkers as it simply reinforces the common feeling that to be social and accepted by their peers in social settings they should be imbibing. Alcohol Justice (2011) outlines the different styles of alcohol education or alcohol campaigns available, and analyzes the effectiveness of these strategies. As suggested, the findings agree that alcohol campaigns and warning labels do not reduce alcohol consumption or harm due to intoxication and do not change the drinking tendencies amongst young drinkers. According to Alcohol Justice (2011) out of all of the alcohol campaign strategies available, programs that educate parents seemed to be the most effective in reducing high risk drinking among young people. Furthermore, addiction can come into play when analyzing the effectiveness of alcohol campaigns. If an individual has developed an addiction to alcohol, it is highly unlikely that an advertisement or warning label is going to put them off something they would view as normal, they would most likely need to seek professional help.

Not all alcohol related items found in the media have good intentions, alcohol advertising and promotions are an additional factor that can have a negative influence on youth's drinking habits, by way of encouraging youth drinking. If a young person sees celebrities consuming alcohol on television or social media, they might then think this is a desirable thing to do and increase their alcohol consumption. Celebrities and idols can have a colossal effect on a young person's ambitions and desires, this falls into the social category as, ultimately, they are trying to impress their peers or other members in the community by following someone they idolize. There is consistent evidence linking alcohol advertisements to the uptake of drinking among young people who previously did not consume alcohol, furthermore, the study provides evidence that youth who were already drinkers increased their consumption levels (Anderson et al. 2009).

In conclusion, youth intoxication has quickly become an epidemic and is a major concern for society. There are multiple factors that influence youth intoxication, all of which are essential to understand why youths consume alcohol. Youth imbibing is not solely an outcome of one factor,

it is a multitude of factors, the most common and influential factors being the individual, social and cultural. It is imperative to remember that no person is the same as another and each youth's drive to drink may arise from a different factor. Furthermore, alcohol campaigns can be a good source of education however they have been proven to be ineffective at reducing intoxication among youths. While every young person is different, research does make it evident that there are common reasons why youths consume alcohol. Why do young people consume alcohol? Is imbibing an individual, social, cultural or economic matter, or a combination? Do you think that campaigns for drinking in moderation are doomed to fail with some drinkers?

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