

Think before you drink, says research

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People are being urged to think before they drink as part of a research project aimed at changing people's binge drinking habits.

A team of health psychologists at The University of Nottingham plan to discover whether using the workplace to supply information on the health effects of binge drinking and asking employees for a small commitment to reducing the amount they drink in a single session could change people's binge drinking behaviour in the long term.

Dr Martin Hagger, of the Risk Analysis, Social Processes and Health Research Group in the University's School of Psychology, said: "The workplace offers an existing network that could allow us to get the message about binge drinking out to as many people as possible.

"That could include people who are regularly going out for a few post-work pints, having one too many at the weekend or are simply unaware of the actual units of alcohol they are consuming at home."

Binge drinking has a huge impact on the UK's health, economy and society — Department of Health figures show that up to 22,000 alcohol-related deaths occur every year, mainly resulting from stroke, cancer, liver disease, accidental injury or suicide; half of all violent crimes are associated with alcohol abuse; and around 70 per cent of all A&E attendances between midnight and 5am on weekend nights are alcohol-related.

Initially, staff working for organisations participating in the study would

be given a leaflet highlighting the harmful health effects of binge-drinking, guidance on the recommended daily units (3–4 for men and 2–3 for women) and some helpful strategies for reducing alcohol intake.

Employees will be asked to spend five minutes engaging in a mental exercise that will encourage them to run through the benefits of reducing their binge drinking and help them to develop a basic plan for achieving their goal.

Dr Hagger said: “It’s all to do with raising people’s awareness of situations in which they might binge drink and asking them to think of a plan of action they could use to change this behaviour. For example, if they know they are likely to go for drinks after work, they might visualise themselves only having a couple of alcoholic drinks before switching to a soft drink.”

The researchers will then follow up with the employees by telephone one month and three months later to find out how successful they have been to sticking to their strategy.

The one-year project has been awarded more than £85,000 from the European Research Advisory Board, which funds projects through compulsory contributions from the alcohol industry for research into drink-related issues.

The team will also replicate the study at a number of public and private organisations in cities in Estonia, Finland and Sweden, which have comparable levels of binge drinking to the UK. The researchers are hoping to establish whether their approach could be successful in helping these nations tackle the adverse effects of binge drinking.

Source: University of Nottingham

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