

T'is the season to be jolly?

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As the party season approaches, a timely reminder of the issues surrounding the binge drinking culture are again highlighted by research into 'young people and alcohol' a team lead by Professor Christine Griffin, at the University of Bath. The research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) suggests several considerations for future policy.

Focusing on the role of marketing practices in shaping young people's attitudes to alcohol consumption, the research included analysis of 216 alcohol adverts, both in print and broadcast. While extreme drinking and determined drunkenness may be perceived as the norm amongst young people, there is some positive news from the research. Evidence suggests that increases in young people's alcohol consumption is levelling off.

Previously, representations of binge drinking as a source of entertainment, coupled with pervasive coverage of drunken celebrities has increased the social acceptance of binge drinking. Advertising representing the 'coolness' of excessive drinking, along with the increasing use of internet based social networking sites that are used to share images of drunken nights out,, also enable the linkage between alcohol and 'having fun'.

Looking at what steps society may need to take to tackle the scourge of binge drinking, Professor Griffin says, "Top of my list would have to be to stop demonizing and making generalisations about young people and their drinking. We also need to listen and incorporate their views and perspectives."

Professor Isabelle Szmigin commented "Although many young people recognise the damage that 'drinking too much' can do to their health, and the associated risks of physical and sexual assault, few view these as more than short term problems."

"The study suggests a radical re-thinking of national alcohol policy is required which takes into account the social character of alcohol consumption and the identity implications for young people," said Professor Chris Hackley.

Source: Economic & Social Research Council

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