

Tanked-up teens: Cheap alcohol strongly linked to harmful underage drinking in the UK

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Researchers writing in the open access journal *BMC Public Health* studied the drinking habits of 9833 15-16 year olds in the North West of England, finding that excessively low cost alcohol products and illicit purchase are strongly related to harmful underage drinking.

Mark Bellis worked with a team from Liverpool John Moores University and Trading Standards (North West) to survey the teens' [alcohol](#) consumption patterns, drink types consumed, [drinking](#) locations, methods of access and harms encountered. He said, "Regretted sex after drinking, having been involved in violence when drunk, consuming alcohol in public places and forgetting things after drinking had all been experienced by relatively large proportions of teen drinkers.

For children who drink alcohol we did not find any typical drinking patterns where children were at no risk of harms. Accessing alcohol through parents did not remove the risks of alcohol related harms but was associated with lower levels of risk". While 19.9% of teen drinkers whose parents provide alcohol and who drink once a week had been involved in violence when drunk, this rose to 35.9% in those who only access alcohol through other means.

The researchers found a strong relationship between consumption of cheaper alcohol products and increased proportions of respondents reporting violence when drunk, alcohol related regretted sex and

drinking in public places. Drinking large cider bottles was, in particular, associated with drinking in public areas such as streets, parks and outside shops. At the time of the study, alcopops were not associated with increased risk of harm, perhaps because their relatively high price per unit of alcohol limited their abuse potential.

Bellis said, "The negative impacts of alcohol on children's health are substantial. Those parents who choose to allow children aged 15-16 years to drink may limit harms by restricting consumption to lower frequencies (e.g. no more than once a week) and under no circumstances permitting binge drinking. However, parental efforts should be matched by genuine legislative and enforcement activity to reduce independent access to alcohol by children and to increase the price of cheap alcohol products".

More information: Teenage drinking, alcohol availability and pricing: a cross-sectional study of risk and protective factors for alcohol-related harms in school children, Mark A Bellis, Penelope A Phillips-Howard, Karen Hughes, Sara Hughes, Penny A Cook, Michela Morleo, Kerin Hannon, Linda Smallthwaite and Lisa Jones, [BMC Public Health](#) (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpublichealth/

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