

Parents important for keeping adolescents off alcohol

March 7 2011

Parents who are both present and engaged are the very best way of preventing teenagers from consuming large quantities of alcohol. Adolescents who smoke, stay out with their friends and have access to alcohol - from their parents, for example - when they are as young as 13 are at greater risk of becoming binge drinkers in their late teens, reveals a new thesis from Karolinska Institutet.

"Initiatives that focus on strengthening the parent-child relationship and limiting parental provision of alcohol can prove effective in limiting risky consumption among adolescents," says Anna-Karin Danielsson from the Department of Public Health Sciences. "Parents also play an important role when it comes to teaching young people how to resist [peer pressure](#) to drink."

In her thesis, Anna-Karin Danielsson monitored 1,200 pupils from the age of 13 to the age of 19 between 2001 and 2006, and investigated which factors can reduce the risk of high alcohol consumption (protective factors) and which constitute [risk factors](#). The results show that adolescents exhibiting [risky behaviour](#) in their early teens need help quickly as they are at greater risk of high consumption in the future, and of associated problems with their health, school, parents and friends, for example. This is where parental input can make all the difference.

"But boys and girls are slightly different," says Anna-Karin Danielsson. "The risk of high alcohol consumption among boys who smoke and who have friends who drink is considerably reduced when parents keep an

eye on what teenagers get up to, and with whom. Whereas girls in the risk zone benefit most from an emotionally stable and close parent-child relationship in terms of protective effect."

The thesis also examines alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems among youngsters in 23 European countries. It is clear that the Nordic countries and the UK differ from the other European countries in that it is as common for girls to drink large quantities of alcohol in one session as it is for boys. In other countries, boys report higher [alcohol consumption](#) and more alcohol-related problems than girls.

"16-year-old girls in the Nordic countries and the UK binge drink to the same extent as boys, in other words at least five consecutive drinks in one go," says Anna-Karin Danielsson. "We're also seeing a strong correlation between this and problems such as fights, accidents and unwanted sexual relationships."

Danielsson believes that the fact that most reported problems originate with the broad majority of alcohol consumers rather than with the heaviest drinkers amongst adolescents speaks in favour of preventive measures being directed at youngsters in general in the first instance.

"At the same time, it's important to develop prevention strategies that target adolescents with the highest consumption and the most problems", she says. "[Adolescents](#) who, for various reasons, do not have the full support of their parents, must not be forgotten."

More information: Adolescent alcohol use: Implications for prevention, *ISBN: 978-91-7457-205-6*. The thesis was successfully defended on 25 February 2011 at the Department of Public Health Sciences.

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

Citation: Parents important for keeping adolescents off alcohol (2011, March 7) retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-03-parents-important-adolescents-alcohol.html>

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