

Middle-aged drinkers still face peer pressure

December 12 2011

(Medical Xpress) -- Middle-aged drinkers still face pressure from their friends making it hard for them to stay in control of their alcohol consumption, new research from the Medical Research Council (MRC) suggests.

Evidence from friendship groups of men and women aged 35 to 50 reveals that [binge-drinking](#) and drunken behaviour are not unusual among [older adults](#), despite their initial claims that they had become more [moderate drinkers](#) with age.

The authors say the findings, published today in the journal *Sociology of Health & Illness*, suggest [heavy drinking](#) is not the sole preserve of young people. Their findings are also in line with Office for National Statistics figures, which suggest that the proportion of 25 to 44 year olds in the UK who drink more than the recommended weekly amount is similar to that among 16 to 24 year olds (men 26% and 21% respectively; women 19% and 23% respectively).

Lead researcher Dr. Carol Emslie, from the MRC/Chief Scientist Office Social and Public Health Sciences Unit in Glasgow, said: "When it comes to alcohol consumption, middle aged drinkers like to think they are 'older and wiser' than they were in their 20s. Initially, people in our focus groups stated they had moderated their drinking with age and singled out youthful binge drinking as a problem for society. However, as the discussions progressed, stories of recent heavy drinking contradicted these claims.

“In particular, older adults find it hard to say ‘no’ to a drink in social situations, with some feeling they have to make up excuses to deflect peer pressure. This shows how normalised heavy drinking remains in this age group, where not drinking is the behaviour that requires explanation, rather than the other way round. The approaching festive season could make it especially hard to stay in control of [alcohol consumption](#) in social situations.”

The researchers studied 36 participants in Scotland, who were divided into eight focus groups of men and women who knew each other socially and had shared experiences to discuss. Half of the participants reported drinking over the recommended weekly alcohol limits (21 units for men, 14 for women) and six of these were drinking harmful amounts (over 50 units for men and 35 for women).

Some participants recalled feeling compelled to come up with excuses to avoid having another drink. Women sometimes said “I’m de-toxing” or “I’m on a diet” when refusing a top-up, and both men and women reported purposefully taking the car to parties to have a cast-iron reason to avoid drinking at all on a night out.

Professor Dame Sally Macintyre, director of the Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, said: “This intriguing study illuminates what is often an invisible problem. While excessive drinking in young adults often leads to visible disruption in our towns and cities, older adults tend to drink behind closed doors where their behaviour is hidden from society.

“It also demonstrates the importance of in-depth research in understanding the reasons behind observed [drinking](#) behaviours in early mid-life. This can help health promoters and policy makers to develop effective intervention strategies with a greater focus on this age group.”

Provided by Medical Research Council

Citation: Middle-aged drinkers still face peer pressure (2011, December 12) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-12-middle-aged-drinkers-peer-pressure.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.