

Society to blame for binge drinking

February 18 2013

Peer pressure has long been blamed for binge drinking among teenagers, yet new research from Flinders University reveals it may not be the root of the problem.

The study, which aimed to investigate why young females drink, has found that social and cultural norms are the foundation – rather than a contributing factor – for risky drinking.

PhD candidate Belinda Lunnay's ongoing research involves a "photo elicitation" method whereby groups of teenage girls aged 14-17 are given digital cameras and asked to document their drinking-related life in pictures.

Preliminary findings, Ms Lunnay said, showed young people's decisions to drink excessively were not entirely influenced by their peers but rather a response driven by the perceived need to "exhibit behaviour that is congruent with socially accepted norms".

"We already know that drinking styles adopted by young people often resemble that of their peers," Ms Lunnay, who is being supervised by Professor Paul Ward, Dr Joseph Borlagdan and Dr Darlene McNaughton, said.

"However, my findings go beyond the limited explanatory power of peer pressure or cause/effect understandings of young females' drinking that form the basis of many popular risky-drinking interventions," she said.

"Reasons for drinking are more complex. For many young people, drinking [alcohol](#) and consuming particular types of drinks in a socially desirable way is central to their relationships, friendships and to their position in [social hierarchies](#).

"Drinking, and the associated behaviours that go with it, transform alcohol into a socially symbolic, valuable object – as one participant said 'no one pressures you to drink, you just want to'."

Ms Lunnay said further research was needed to create a complete picture of young females' drinking behaviours.

"A sociological approach to exploring the complex relationship between drinking and contextual [social factors](#) among young Australian females is an uncharted area of inquiry," she said.

"While this research offers a new perspective to alcohol research that venerates the centrality of social relations, more work needs to be done to better understand the processes of social influence which underpin young females' drinking behaviours."

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: Society to blame for binge drinking (2013, February 18) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-society-blame-binge.html>

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