

# Government anti-drinking messages irrelevant to young binge drinkers, study finds

March 23 2015

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Government advertising campaigns to tackle excessive drinking are dismissed as irrelevant by young binge drinkers, because consuming extreme quantities of alcohol is part of their sub-cultural social identity, according to research published this week (18th March) in the *Journal of Business Research*.

Researchers from Royal Holloway, University of London, together with a team from three other UK universities, discovered that official messages are unlikely to work with groups where behaviour is motivated by the need to subvert rules and norms.

Indeed, their study suggested that multi-million pound anti-[drinking](#) campaigns could even have an adverse effect on the people most at risk of drinking excessively. Instead, the researchers suggested that more targeted and practical interventions may be more effective than mass media campaigns.

In England, alcohol is responsible for 1.2 million annual hospital admissions, 15,500 deaths, and an annual cost to the UK National Health Service of £3.5 billion.

Professor Chris Hackley, from the School of Management at Royal Holloway, said: "The insight that heavy drinking can be part of a rule-breaking sub-culture may seem obvious, yet huge sums have been spent in the past on Government anti-drinking advertising campaigns that simply fuel the sense that sensible drinking is boring and conformist, while [binge drinking](#) is subversive fun."

The researchers analysed data from a sample of 89 [young people](#) in the UK between 2004 and 2007. Data sets included interview and discussion group transcripts, ethnographic field notes compiled on nights out, and analysis of 200 alcohol advertisements. The study is the latest in a series of work deriving from the data.

"Government messages that say 'drink sensibly' ignore the ways many young people actually enjoy drinking. This research also has implications for other areas of Government health policy, where compulsive and excessive consumption can sometimes be fuelled by a need to defy and subvert official rules."

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

Citation: Government anti-drinking messages irrelevant to young binge drinkers, study finds (2015, March 23) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-anti-drinking-messages-irrelevant-young-binge.html>

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