

**Awareness of Binge Drinking:
An Investigation of the Levels of
Awareness of Teenagers and
Young Adults in Relation
To Binge Drinking.**

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Acknowledgements:

Interview Participants

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Abstract:

This Research project investigates the level of awareness that the younger generation have towards binge drinking. The research was carried out using qualitative methods, and the use of thematic analysis. Semi structured interviews were carried out on six participants. The main results that the research uncovered was a lack of awareness to the main aspects of binge drinking and the problems that may arise as a result of binge drinking. Also the factors that influence young adults to engage in binge drinking. The main conclusions that were drawn from this research was the role that education can play in promoting awareness and help prevent binge drinking among young adults.

Introduction:

This research project sets out to investigate what may influence those most at risk of binge drinking within our society. The research will investigate the areas in which these influences may emerge through outlets like the media, also how starting college can play a role, and finally how education can play a role in preventing binge drinking, and the problems that may emerge as a result of binge drinking.

Over the last ten years binge drinking has become one of the biggest problems in Irish society. The term binge drinking is surrounded by negativity, and this negativity has been largely focused on the younger generation, that is those of thirty years of age and younger. The media has played a significant role in hyping up this negativity, and focusing on identifying the younger generation as the worst culprits. But this may not be the case. The younger generation in our society may not be solely responsible for the new epidemic that is binge drinking but the older generations may also be contributing equally, and may be as irresponsible as their younger counter parts.

The media has brought binge drinking more into the public awareness, and has been suggested as fuelling the negativity rather than helping find solutions to the problem. Campaigns such as drinkaware.ie have been set up across Ireland to highlight binge drinking, however the approach that has been taken has been to construct the younger generation, that is those that are unable to legally drink, as those that are indulging in binge drinking. Radio stations like Spin103.8 that are aimed at the younger sets, recently broadcasted advertisements set up by Diageo, one of the

leading alcoholic drink producers in the world, that depicted young girls and boys being talked about by their peers for their recent behaviour at a party that saw them behave unacceptably as a result of their binge drinking.

Websites have been set up recently to try and combat the issues of binge drinking, by introducing campaigns that are seen across the country. This can be clearly seen with Drink aware. Drink aware (Drinkaware.ie 2007) set up a campaign “Had Enough”, which showed teenagers harassing members of the public and behaving anti socially as a result of intoxication. The adverts and campaigns were directed at the younger generation and focused on them being responsible for anti social behaviour as a result of binge drinking. It states on the website that the primary aim of the campaign is to remove the social permission for public drunkenness and anti-social behavior that has been tolerated in Ireland for so long. Research into how young adults feel about excessive drinking, public drunkenness and the entrenched cultural perceptions in Ireland around the whole issue of alcohol consumption showed that Irish society is ready for a new strategic approach to addressing the negative consequences of alcohol abuse and misuse (Drink Aware). These campaigns were also featured in bars, nightclubs, cinemas and were featured heavily on the internet. These campaigns were marketed in such a way as to target the younger groups in society by advertising in places like colleges throughout the country as to aim at those who are most at risk of binge drinking.

It has been suggested that the younger generation greatly contribute to the problems that can arise as a result of engaging in binge drinking, however it may not

be fair to hold them solely responsible. Binge drinking is a new name for a problem that has been present in society for many years.

There are many different opinions and understanding of what people classify as binge drinking, and the amount of drink that needs to be consumed to be classified as binge drinking. A medical outlook views binge drinking as the dangerous practice of consuming large quantities of alcoholic beverages in a single session (Webster's, 1998). The World Health Organisation has defined binge drinking as drinking six or more standard drinks during one occasion (World Health Organisation, 2008). However this definition has been highly contested amongst other researchers as this level of alcohol consumption could easily occur over an evening of eating and socialising. A study carried out on Irish teenagers defined binge drinking as having five or more drinks in one sitting (Condon, 2004). There are many different ideas of what constitutes binge drinking and these do differ between adults and teenagers. A Survey was carried out by the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland on 947 people across Ireland on their views of what is constituted as binge drinking. Of the 947 people that took part in the survey, 27 % believed that binge drinking was drinking ten or more alcoholic beverages on one occasion. This is nearly double the amount of what is considered binge drinking by medial experts. A further 27% believed that binge drinking was consuming between seven and nine drinks on one occasion. This represents a significant difference of views on binge drinking. With only 24% of people surveyed considering binge drinking, drinking between five and six alcoholic drinks it is clear that the definitions of binge drinking are significantly blurred in the public mind, and opinions on binge drinking greatly differ across society (Drink Industry Group Ireland, 2007).

There have been many studies and investigations that have been carried out in the areas of binge drinking amongst teenagers and amongst young adults. From a reading of this previous research indicates that binge drinking was a new name for an old problem that has existed since the 1800's (Borsay, 2007). Binge drinking has been present in societies throughout history, and it is this that has led to the confusion of what people actually deem as "binge drinking" and the number of drinks and circumstances that qualify you to be a binge drinker. Binge drinking also seems to exist across all generations, but it has been the media and society and general public who have led the negativity to be placed upon the younger generations. Binge drinking has historically been part of Irish culture, and a view can be taken that the younger generations are now just following examples that have been laid out by society. It is very difficult to conduct research on binge drinking if it is not possible to get a clear or universal definition.

Another key issue that arose in previous research was teenager's awareness to the effects that alcohol and binge drinking had on a person (Mendleson et al, 1986). A research paper, Parent Child Communication, focused on the awareness of teenagers and the effects of alcohol and focused on the parent's role in educating their child on the hazards of binge drinking. This paper was based on first year college students, when they move away from home and no longer have strong parental influences. First year college students have been recognised as some of the heaviest drinkers in our society today. This is because many students leave home for the first time and are exposed to environments that encourage high risk drinking (Creemens et. Al, 2008). Universities have recognised that the college environment in

some cases does promote heavy drinking patterns and have implemented strategies to encourage students to be more drink aware. In America the college's role in promoting binge drinking has been recognised and as a result substance-free alternative programs have been introduced across the country. These programmes can now be seen in major campuses like Boston College and the University of North Carolina. These programmes consist of late night alcohol free activities that were designed to show students that it is possible to have fun without alcohol. The research that was carried out looking at the effectiveness of the parent child communication, spoke to both parents and children who were in college. Of the parents that were interviewed 90% talked to their college bound children about alcohol use and ways to avoid it. Of these students that were talked to by their parents they were less likely to have a positive perception of activities regarding drinking. Parents said that they had numerous conversations with their child throughout their schooling and then a more serious discussion on the effects of alcohol abuse as they embarked to college. This research that was carried out in America showed in its results how positively students can respond to serious issues like binge drinking, and how they can eradicate the major problems like teenage pregnancy and drink driving that can arise from reckless binge drinking. One of the most important issues that surrounds binge drinking is if people are fully aware of the consequences that may arise as a result.

When researching binge drinking it is also necessary to look at what provokes groups in society to consume dangerously high levels of alcohol? In recent years in relation to adolescents, it was seen that those abusing either alcohol or drugs were doing so because of peer pressure (Jaccard, 2005). Although peer pressure may be a factor in this, there are numerous other factors that have emerged. A previous

study that was carried on the drinking patterns of college students saw that drinking was something that could be done to lead to social acceptance. Many of the college students that were interviewed said that drinking in a group of people experienced greater euphoria than drinking the same quantity alone (Courtney & Polich, 2009). This research also supports findings that were found in the parent child communication that reported that freshmen college students are exposed to new concepts like drinking, that they part take in without parental awareness. The first few months of college are also the most vulnerable months in that freshmen students engage in risky behaviour, like heavy drinking and drug experimentation.

Another major influence in Binge Drinking, is the almost glamorisation of consuming heavy volumes of alcohol while socialising. Celebrities are constantly being admitted into Rehab, for their addictions to drugs and now more commonly with the younger generation in Hollywood, their addiction to alcohol. Many celebrities like Lindsay Lohan, who had been perceived as role models to their fans across the world, have been very publicly attended rehab for alcohol addiction and alcohol abuse, despite at the time they were underage drinkers. Major newspapers like the New York Times have run features on Lindsay Lohan and her alcohol related problems (Halbfinger, 2007) People like Lindsay Lohan who are made stars by the Disney Corporation and who have a huge following of young fans, are looked up to and perceived as role models to these younger generations. These young Hollywood stars make headlines in newspapers and magazine and feature heavily on the internet purely for their addiction rather than their talent (O' Doherty, 2008). The idea of rehab seems like a norm for celebrities in today's society. Unlike years before where rehab was seen as embarrassing and if leaked out to the press it could cause a lot of

shame and damage to those in the public eye, however in today's society it is having the opposite effect. Many reality shows film these celebrities on their journeys throughout the rehabilitation process. In January 2008, *Celebrity Rehab* aired in America on the national TV station VH1 which followed celebrities as they underwent various treatments for alcohol and drug abuse. With these reality programmes being aimed at the younger generations, the idea of alcohol consumption and heavy alcohol abuse are being used purely for entertainment purposes. With the media being outlets for these advertisements of these young celebrities, they could be seen encouraging underage drinking by suggesting these role models to the younger generations.

It is thought those most at risk of binge drinking are the younger generations in our society. But it is necessary to find out why these groups are the most vulnerable in society. Studies have been carried out to look at the education that young adults receive to increase their awareness to the possible dangers of heavy drinking. With previous research suggesting that first college students are most at risk of binge drinking, further research has moved on to look at their levels of awareness. Results from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (2001) found that 44% of college students were classified as binge drinkers and that 23% were classified as frequent binge drinkers (Wechsler et al., 2002). Results from the same survey also showed that there is a strong positive relationship between the frequency of binge drinking and alcohol-related health and other problems. Wechsler et al. (2002) reported that frequent binge drinkers were more likely than their non-binge or infrequent binge counterparts to have serious alcohol-related problems. A

report by Hingson et al. (2002) indicated that binge drinkers are more likely to not use protection when having sex, to engage in unplanned sexual activity, to get hurt or injured, or to engage in dangerous driving.

With this research carried out by Hingson a new innovation called *Alcohol 101* has been introduced to college campuses in the United States. This CD Rom has been introduced to address the drinking behavior of college students. The CD Rom provides an interactive party scene for students in which they can make safe or unsafe decisions concerning alcohol and they are then able to see these decisions play out virtually (The Century Council, 2003). The designers of *Alcohol 101* based the program on factors known to influence volitional behavior and presents information in a way that is appealing to college students. The software addressed three factors relating to behavior change, including self-efficacy in maintaining personal control and safety while using alcohol, attitudes and related expectations regarding the physiological and behavioral consequences of alcohol consumption, and peer norms regarding alcohol consumption. Students who have participated in the program describe it as being "interesting" and like the fact that "it doesn't lecture." A formal assessment done by Reis et al. (2000) found that *Alcohol 101*, when compared to both traditional class presentations and no intervention, showed significant positive results in the following measures of self-reported learning: being more knowledgeable about the symptoms of alcohol overdose; what to do on behalf of a friend in an emergency condition; how to intervene with a friend who has been drinking too much; the interplay between blood alcohol concentration (BAC), time, amount of alcohol consumed, and the effects on judgment; and maintaining control and safety.

A Further study was carried out within *Alcohol 101* (Martin et al, 2007) in which it was investigated the way in which *Alcohol 101* was received by the first year college students across the campuses and how this could influence their utilization of this program. There are four main elements required for the diffusion of innovations: the innovation, the communication channels, the time, and the social system. This research is evaluating the communication channels, specifically the communication channels between resident advisors (RAs) and their residents. The results found that the method of distribution by the residential advisors did have a significant impact of the utilization rates of the college students using *Alcohol 101*. The first year college students that received their *Alcohol 101* CD ROM personally from their RA were more than likely to utilize it than those receiving it in a group setting. This could suggest to us that education of alcohol abuse and the effects of binge drinking may be better on a personal level rather than larger group settings (Martin et. Al, 2007).

Binge Drinking has been recognised by society as a growing problem. However there is the question of if the term “Binge Drinking” is just a new label for an old problem. Binge drinking exists across many cultures and can be particularly noticed within Irish culture, but there are still many areas and issues of Binge Drinking that have not been explored or explained. The younger generation in our society seem to be portrayed as the main offender’s of this social problem but it is necessary to look at why that is. In today’s society there are many areas that encourage the idea of drinking, through television advertisements that glamorise drinking. But do these advertisements prey on the vulnerability and to a degree naivety of these young teenagers, by influencing their decision to consume a certain type of beverage by portraying young confident glamorous people socialising at a bar or nightclub. Alco pops like “Wicked”, are purely aimed at young teenagers with the

slogan “Bring out your wicked side” and by manufacturing their drink in recognisable bottles and bright blue alcohol. Manufacture’s of these kinds of Alco pops advertise these kinds of alcoholic beverages in gossip magazines that are regularly read by teenagers and young adults. If the media is constantly encouraging these advertisements they are in turn encouraging these young and highly impressionable teenagers not only to drink but to drink certain kind of drink. The level of awareness of these teenagers regarding alcohol and alcohol related problems are not been communicated efficiently through the media. Programmes that were introduced like drink aware, only show teenagers engaging in binge drinking and causing problems, rather than showing teenagers the effects of binge drinking in a positive and encouraging manner.

With binge drinking rapidly increasing in society it is necessary to look at what educational programmes exist to increase the awareness of the possible dangers of high levels of alcohol consumption. It is also necessary to look at to what degree the younger generation are responsible for binge drinking or if the older generations are just as at fault. With very mixed and hugely conflicting ideas still of what constitutes binge drinking, it is quite obvious that across society awareness and understanding of binge drinking is not quite black and white.

This research aims to concentrate on the younger generation’s ,of ages 17-27 awareness to binge drinking, and the awareness of the possible problems that can be encountered as a result of consuming large amounts of alcohol. The research also intends on investigating the different drinking patterns of the older and younger participants and looking at if these have changed as they got older and became more

aware of consequences and if starting college has been an influenced their drinking patterns. Finally this research plans to investigate the importance of education in relation to binge drinking or the lack of educational programmes that are available and if this may affect the awareness of problems that may be encountered. It is necessary to explore the manner in which they are communicated to ensure that awareness of binge drinking can be portrayed more positively across society.

Methodology:

The aim of the research that was conducted was to investigate the attitudes and the level of awareness that the younger generation have in relation to consuming high levels of alcohol, and if education can play a role in helping this awareness expand and prevent teenagers from being at risk of binge drinking.

Apparatus:

For this research only one piece of apparatus was needed. This was a Dictaphone. (Philips, pocket memo 381). Also a sufficient number of tapes were needed, that allowed the half hour interviews that were carried out to be recorded. The software that used was Nvivo 7.

Participants:

The total number of participants that were required for the research was six people. In order to investigate the younger generation it was necessary to look at the group of ages that were most at risk of binge drinking within this generation, and investigate the age bracket between seventeen and twenty seven. The participants consisted of three males and three females. All the participants in the study had attended or are still attending private secondary education. Two of the six participating had completed college and are now established in the workforce aged

twenty six and twenty seven, two were still present in college aged nineteen and twenty, and the remaining two are still in school, both aged seventeen with plans to attend college in September. The three subsets of groups were all comprised of one male and one female.

Ethics Consideration:

All aspects of this research that was carried out was cleared before an ethics committee prior to conducting the research.

Design:

The research was carried out using qualitative methods, and adopting a thematic analysis. This was the most effective as this research was looking for an in depth source of data. A cross-sectional design was the most appropriate and effective for carrying out this research. The interviews that were carried out were semi-structured which allowed the option to investigate further into a topic that may arise during the interview process. A basic set of twenty questions were followed which allowed the ideas related to binge drinking to be explored.

Procedure:

The interviews that were carried out with the participants were conducted on a one on one basis. Before the interview commenced the participants were briefed on the research that was been carried out, too much information was not divulged that

could sway the participants answers a certain way throughout the interview, only providing them with the basic outline of the research that was carried out. The participants were also reminded that the Dictaphone could be turned off at any stage of the interview and they could choose not to take part in the research at any stage. They were also asked to sign a form that explained that all aspects off the research would be confidential and their names would not be mentioned or appear anywhere in the research, and by signing the consent form they gave permission to use the information that was received throughout the interviews in the research. Throughout the interviews helpline numbers were on hand for the participants for alcohol related problems that a trained professional could help deal with if an issue was stumbled upon during the interview process.

The interview consisted of a basic set of twenty questions that was asked of every participant (see appendix). However with some participants further questions were asked in relation to a particular topic that had emerged. The only recording device that was used was a Dictaphone, and it was explained that notes were to be taken throughout the interview.

The participants were briefed again after the interview was carried out and they were allowed to ask any questions that they might have regarding the research that was been carried out or the questions that had been asked throughout the interview process.

No problems or concerns were encountered throughout the interview that may have affected the research.

Results:

From the coding and analysis of the raw data that was collected, there were a number of common themes throughout the research that all participants had touched upon, that were uncovered through the thematic analysis.

Unawareness:

The first major theme that was observed was a lack of awareness and a lack of understanding to what actually classified as binge drinking. This lack of awareness was not specific to one age group, but was common to all. When the participants were asked what their understanding of the term binge drinking was all participants took the view that binge drinking was drinking for the purpose of getting drunk.

“Drinking too much just for the sake of it, like drinking just so you can get drunk”

Along with the view of drinking just to get drunk there was also a significant difference in opinion in the amount of alcoholic drinks that needed to be consumed to classify as binge drinking. As previously stated, medical opinion views binge drinking as five or six alcoholic drinks on one occasion. The results indicated a wide variety of answers when asked what they think classifies as binge drinking. The seventeen year old male, the youngest of the participants responded as,

“Eh...a lot. I dunno, over ten drinks I'd say”

This indicates nearly twice the amount that is considered to be a binge drinker. The oldest of the participants a twenty-seven year old male's classification of the amount of alcohol that is needed to be consumed to be a binge drinker, showed similar results despite the ten year difference in age and experience.

"Oh, I dunno! Probably drinking eight or nine drinks in one night?"

However the results of the female participants did differ from the males, in that there was awareness that the recommended female consumption of alcohol is considered lower than that of males.

"There's a difference for girls too... Like they are supposed to drink less"

The issue of the amount of time that the alcoholic drinks needed to be consumed in, also indicated in the results that there was a lack of understanding across all aspects of binge drinking. A female participant still in college classified binge drinking as drinking five or six drinks within the space of one hour.

"I'd say like...um...five or six drinks over like an hour or two. Or maybe an hour?"

Three of the participants, one from each the school environment, college environment and work environment, specified that binge drinking was consuming large volumes of alcohol before you went to a club, but then you could still continue to drink once inside.

“...say about seven or eight drinks in one night, like before you go out, but then you still continue to drink when you’re in the club and stuff”

The results did show up slight differences in awareness between genders. The three male participants all stated that Binge drinking was consuming ten drinks or more, which is considered twice the acceptable limit.

“I’d say probably drinking more than ten drinks”

While the results showed that the female participants stated between five and eight drinks, which is slightly over the recommended consumption level, but could indicate a higher level of awareness within females.

With the participants of the study being so unaware of what binge drinking is defined as, and the number of drinks that is necessary to be considered a binge drinker, the participants were unaware that they were engaging in a dangerous activity from such a young age. Two of the six participants started drinking more than five or six drinks in one night from the age of fifteen, while three started at sixteen, and only one started drinking more than five or six drinks in one night at the age of eighteen. When asked if the participants had ever drunk so much that they were unaware of what they were doing, all six responded yes.

“Em... Yeh a few times I’ve been told the next day that I’ve done stuff that I can’t remember”

Although all six participants had never required medical treatment themselves from drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, all six stated that they had friends or knew some who had required medical treatment.

“No...I probably did need it though once or twice! But I didn't acquire it! But people in my year did though, like other friends of mine have been carted off to the hospital on nights out, and you just kinda sit there really drunk watching them go!”

The results also revealed another level of unawareness, in that the parents of these teenagers were not aware that their teenagers were drinking illegally.

Of the six participants, only one admitted that their parents were aware that they were drinking at that age. The five remaining participants stated that if their parents were aware then they would have been in trouble for drinking at a young age.

“No, they'd clearly be mad at me if they knew I started drinking. I wasn't supposed to be drinking until I was at least sixteen, well in our family anyway, so if they knew that I was drinking I would have been killed!”

The one female participant who is attending college, whose parents were aware that she was drinking, also said that it was her mother who bought her alcoholic drinks, so that a level of control of what she was drinking could be maintained.

“Yeh my mum would buy it for us, because she thought it was better if she was aware of what we were doing and she could kind of control it cause she would be the one buying it, so em she felt it was better to do it that way”

The participants of the study were also completely unaware of the medical effects that binge drinking can have on a person. Three of the six mentioned liver damage as an effect, and out of those three they said they were only aware of this because of the footballer George Best dying from liver failure as a result of heavy alcohol consumption. Only one of the female participants mentioned that girls are more at risk of getting pregnant while under the influence of alcohol. The two youngest participants who are still attending school were not aware of any medical consequences as a result of indulging in binge drinking.

Peer Pressure:

The second major theme that was discovered through the thematic analysis was the influence of peer pressure. The youngest participants of the study both stated that peer pressure was a huge influence in their decision to start drinking. The female participant still attending school started drinking alcoholic drinks at the age of fourteen, which is four years younger than the legal age to drink. When asked if peer pressure was a factor in this decision to engage in drinking at this level she said it was the main reason.

“Yes definitely. Everyone else was drinking so I wanted to drink, so I could be on like the same level as everyone else. Like people in my year were drinking so me and my friends started to drink too.”

The female participant also admitted that it was a given thing to be drinking at such a young age.

The older participants also admitted that peer pressure was the reason for starting to drink at a young age. All the participants also were engaging in illegal under age drinking, with all starting to drink between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.

The older participants who took part in the study, who are now in college, felt that the peer pressure was indirect, in the sense that at the time they weren't aware that it was peer pressure that had influenced their decision, but they felt that at that time it was just a given that you drank at that age and there was nothing unusual about it.

“ Yeh I suppose it was a factor in that I did it because everyone else was, but I never felt that I was forced into it, like at the time I did it because I wanted to fit in with my peers, but equally if I chose not to drink I don't think my friends would have commented about it or treated me differently to those that did drink”

Peer pressure either direct or indirect is the answer that all participants of the different age groups cited as their main reason for starting to drink illegally. With

all participants stating that they drank illegally it introduced a new theme of how easy it was to avail of drink, despite being two to four years under the legal drinking age.

Three of the participants admitted to using a fake ID regularly to purchase drink illegally, and said that obtaining drink was very easy.

“Yeh my brother would buy drink for me, and I had a fake ID that I used too. Between that and my group of friends who had ways of getting drink, we were never not able to get drink!”

The female participant who is still attending school and started drinking at fourteen, says that she has no problems obtaining alcohol, and older brothers also provided the alcohol for her and her underage friends.

“Oh really easy! I have three older brothers, and I have fake ID’s as well so it’s never a problem getting drink. All my friends have fake ID’s too. Or sometimes we would get people to go into the off license for us”

All the participants stated that alcohol was widely available to them and obtaining it was not a problem, It was also found that there was more than one option available to them in purchasing alcohol illegally through the different means of fake ID’s and older brothers, and friends which saw them being able to partake in under age drinking without encountering any problems.

College:

The issue of college also became a major focal point in the research. Starting college was one of the main reasons why the participants drinking pattern has changed and increased the volume of drink that they consume. The youngest two participants who are still attending school said that college will change the way that they drink. These participants are already preparing themselves for drinking more on nights out as a result of starting college, when asked if college will influence they way in which they drink.

“Yeh it will be a lot more hardcore, its gonna get a lot more regular, maybe two or three nights a week going on mad nights out”

“Yeh I’ll be going out a lot more, and have more freedom and stuff, like I’ll be going out during the week and everything and then there will always be parties on in your college, so yeh I’ll probably be drinking a lot more then!”

For the two participants that are still attending third level education, they felt that college did have an influence over the manner in which they drink. Both felt that there was more freedom in the college environment than in the school environment and allowed them to socialise more regularly, two or three times a week.

“I’ve been drinking a lot more, like I go out so much more now than I did in school obviously. Like there’s always different events and nights out planned in college every

week, there more freedom in college too, so I'm able to go out two or three times a week"

Both participants still attending college also felt that alcohol was necessary for a night out, and felt that their night would be more fun with alcohol rather than going out without drinking.

"If you're going out to a club or something like that then definitely, because every other person is off their face and it's not enjoyable to just sit there and talk to drunks while you're stone cold sober"

"I've gone out once or twice with friends and not drunk but it wouldn't be as fun definitely as having drink"

For the two participants who are now established in the workplace, college was also an influence on the amount they drank. The eldest of the participants said that subconsciously college and the college environment did influence her decision to drink more.

"Like I was going out so much more and you would drink a lot more too, and there would be certain places you would go on certain nights where they had student nights or promotions on. Like you used to get texts all the time from the club and if you showed the text at the door you would get free in or a free drink at the bar or something"

When asked now if their drinking pattern has changed over the last few years since finishing third level education, both stated that alcohol was no longer a necessity for a night out.

“No alcohol is not a necessity for a night out anymore! I suppose with working now I can go out and drive and not drink, no problem! But when I was in college that would not have been an option! I don’t think I can ever recall going out in college and not drinking!!”

Advertising and the Media:

The discussion about college led into a new theme of how advertising is another factor in binge drinking. Five of the six participants said that advertising had led them to drink a certain brand of drink on a night out. Three of the five participants said that the advertisements for Alco pops like Smirnoff Ice and Wicked Blue, that were featured heavily on television did influence their choice in what alcoholic drink they would drink on a night out.

“We always knew the ads for drinks like Wicked; they used to be funny and had the slogan bring out your wicked side! Everyone used to drink them in the clubs, and probably cause they were advertised so much everyone knew them so that’s why everyone would drink them”

Also special offers and promotions that both off licences and clubs had on, also had an impact in deciding what they would drink. Special promotions

advertising cheaper drink was the deciding factor in four of the six participant's decision to choose a particular brand.

"I'm always aware of special offers on drink, so I'll usually just go for that so I can buy more cause it's cheaper"

With the youngest male in the group, it was the advertisement itself on television that convinced him to buy a certain branding of alcohol, he felt if the ad was a good one on television then he would choose that brand over the other brands.

"If it's a good ad I drink it, Like the Budweiser ad, I drink it"

Education:

The issue of education also became apparent as a theme during the thematic analysis. Of the six participants, five did not receive any formal education in secondary school regarding the effects of binge drinking. Although three did say that it was touched upon in classes like Biology and Religion but nothing of importance or relevance that made an impact on their decision to drink, or be aware of the consequences of drinking.

"In school? not really, none at all actually. Like they just told us the drinking age was eighteen and stuff like that, but that's pretty much it"

Only one participant received education regarding alcohol awareness in school. This participant however attended the first half of her secondary education in Australia. This education was available to all schools and was funded by the Australian government, and took place every year. When she finished her two years of education in Ireland she did not receive any education about alcohol and the effects of binge drinking.

“In Australia we got education from when you were about thirteen years old onwards, and it was like this government funded course that would come into the school once a year to talk to you about it, but in Ireland there wasn’t anything”

Discussion:

This research that was carried out, aimed to investigate the levels of awareness of the younger generation, aged between seventeen and twenty seven in relation to binge drinking. It looked at focusing on the understanding of what is classified as binge drinking, and the problems that may arise from indulging in binge drinking. This research also focused on what prompts a young person to engage in dangerous drinking habits. The issue of college was also another major focal point with this research, and investigating how college can influence a person into partaking in dangerous drinking patterns through this new environment. The media and advertising was also an important element of this research that was carried out, and how the media provides outlets for encouraging either consciously or subconsciously, a motive to consume dangerous levels of alcohol. The impact of advertising was also investigated to look at how certain alcoholic drinks are more appealing through advertisements that are specifically aimed at the younger generation in society. The final aim of this research was to look at the role of education in preventing binge drinking among young adults. This role of education focused on how the parents may influence their children to drink, also if education in secondary school can provide an awareness to problems that may arise as a result of binge drinking.

From the analysis of the raw data the results uncovered some of the main aspects of binge drinking. The first major theme that was identified from the analysis was a complete unawareness of many of the issues involved. This lack of awareness was relevant across many of the key elements that are related to binge drinking. Although there is a variance in the ages of the participants this did not affect the

results and showed that the older participants, who are now in college or established in the work place had the same level of awareness as the younger participants. This unawareness applied to both what classified as binge drinking, i.e. the number of drinks that has to be consumed to be considered as binge drinking, and the time period that these drinks need to be consumed in. Of the six participants that took part in the study there were no common answers as to what classified as binge drinking, or no answers that corresponded to the medical definitions of consuming five drinks or more during one sitting (Webster's, 1998). An interesting area that was uncovered during this analysis of the research was the idea that drinking before you go out on a night out classifies the amount of alcohol that you have consumed, but continuing to drink in a club and doing shots does not. Many of the participants touched upon this idea of drinking in the club not counting as the amount of alcohol that is consumed over one occasion. This idea lead into another theme, are this younger generation actually aware that they are engaging in some cases not only illegal behaviour but also in dangerous behaviour? With almost all the participants they were unaware of this, and this made no difference to the difference in ages, with both the youngest participant and the oldest participant both being unaware of the dangers of binge drinking. These findings in this research also correspond with other research that has been done in similar areas. The survey carried out by the Drinks Industry Group on 947 participants also showed a similar unawareness to the classification of binge drinking. This study showed three different answers in response to the amount of drink needed to be consumed to be classified as binge drinking, and these answers all differed greatly between the drinking of five drinks or more, and also double this with ten drinks or more. This survey carried out in Ireland suggest that there is little or no

understanding of the term binge drinking, which was also reflected in the research that was carried out for this Thesis.

In relation to the medical consequences of binge drinking, one interesting response which was consistent within the male's participant's answers was their only knowledge and example of the problems that can arise as a result of binge drinking was due to the fact that the famous football player George Best died of liver failure due to consuming excessive amounts of alcohol. This showed how the media and celebrities can influence the awareness of people through a positive way and can educate on the effects of binge drinking. However there was very little awareness to other consequences of binge drinking with only one female participant stating that girls are more at risk of getting pregnant as a result of binge drinking. The youngest two participants who are most at risk of binge drinking were unable to state any medical consequences as a result of engaging in binge drinking, despite still attending secondary school and doing exams in subjects like Biology and Home Economics.

The issue of peer pressure was one of the major factors in this research that lead the participants to engage in both underage drinking and also in binge drinking from a young age, although there did seem to be a difference in the types of peer pressure encountered. The older participants stated that the peer pressure was direct in the sense that the decision to drink alcohol at a young age was their decision but looking back now it was probably just to fit in with their fellow peer group. These finding also correspond with previous research that has looked at what may prompt a young person to abuse both alcohol and drugs (Jaccard, 2005). Other research that was carried out in this area also looked at how peer pressure influences those most at

risk of engaging in binge drinking to consume high levels of alcohol (Courtney & Polich, 2009). This study showed how in particular college students decided to drink heavy volumes of alcohol as they thought that this was the way that could lead to social acceptance amongst their peer groups. The college students that participated in this study stated that they felt a greater euphoria drinking high levels of alcohol in a group setting rather than drinking alcoholic drinks on their own. This research also supports the findings in the parent child communication (Creemens et al, 2008) which showed that when young teenagers are exposed to new concepts like binge drinking, particularly in the college environment they are more at risk in partaking in binge drinking due to the influence of peer pressure.

The participants of this research that was carried out all stated that alcohol was readily available to them. All the participants engaged in under age drinking and all the participants encountered no problems purchasing or obtaining alcohol. The participants also stated that they had more than one option available to them in purchasing alcohol and as a result they never had to go without alcoholic drink when they needed it. Half of the participants that took part in the study admitted to using a fake ID regularly to obtain alcohol. Other participants also admitted that it was their older brothers or sisters, or older friends that obtained their alcohol for them. Other participants left it to chance by waiting outside off licences to ask a passer by to purchase drink for them.

The influence of college and starting college was not only a huge area of interest in this research but also in previous research that has been carried out in the same area. It has been reported that starting college and being exposed to that

environment is one of the main reasons why a person's drinking pattern would change drastically and why they would partake in binge drinking (Creemens et al, 2008). In a college environment there is a lot more freedom, and in many cases parents have less of an influence over their children as many also move away from home for the first time to attend third level education. For the two college students that took part in this research they stated that college was the reason that their drinking pattern had changed so much since leaving secondary school and starting third level education. The reason they cited for this was due to the fact that in a college environment they are faced with a lot more freedom, and this in turn was allowing them to socialise a lot more regularly, in settings that alcohol was readily available. The two students still attending college also stated that they thought that alcohol was necessary for a night out, and would be the difference in them having a fun night as opposed to not drinking and not enjoying themselves. The college environment was also responsible for the participants that are established in the workplace for partaking in binge drinking. Both participants stated their colleges would have certain clubs that they would go to during the weekends that had special drink promotions on, that would offer them a free drink if they were in the club before 11pm. This encourages the student's not only to go to a particular place on certain night by the influence of a free drink but also puts them in an environment where they are encouraged to drink for a longer period. These results also indicate the same results of those in Binge Drinking in Young Adults (Courtney & Polich, 2009). This was also reflected in the Parent Child Communication research (Creemens et al, 2008) that recognised that the first few months for a freshman college student are the most vulnerable months in that they are exposed to risky behaviours such as binge drinking and experimentation with drugs, and are more at risk of engaging in this dangerous behaviour.

The discussion of college and its influence on binge drinking also lead into another area of interest of binge drinking which is media and advertising and how it can influence the younger generation to binge drink. With this research that was carried out, five of the six participants stated that the advertisements of a certain brand of drink have lead them to drink that particular brand. Out of the five participants three of these mentioned in particular Alco pop drinks like Wicked, influenced their decision to drink that particular alcoholic beverage due to the slogan “Bring out your wicked side” and humorous advertisements that were featured not only on the television but also in magazines. Also, where some brands would have special offers; this was also a deciding factor of what they would choose to buy either in the off licence or a club on a night out. Brands that advertised cheaper drinks would be the main reason in deciding to drink that particular brand.

The final area that arose in this research and was also consistent with previous research was education and the role that education can play in preventing binge drinking. With this research that was carried out, of the six participants’ only one received a formal education regarding alcohol and alcohol awareness. The interesting point in this one person was that they did not attend secondary school in Ireland, but attended in Australia. The education on alcohol and alcohol awareness was a government funded programme that visited the schools every year and this programme was offered to every student from the age of thirteen. The other remaining participants, who did attend their secondary level education in Ireland, did not receive any education on alcohol or alcohol related problems that can emerge from partaking in binge drinking. Although it may have been touched upon in classes such as

Biology, Religious Education and Social, Political and Health Education, all participants stated that there was nothing covered in these classes that impacted their decision or gave them a further awareness to the problems that may arise as a result of binge drinking. With the student that did receive a formal education in the area of alcohol related issues there was a slightly higher level of awareness that was shown, which could be a result of the education that was received. This participant was the only participant that was able to cite both how the liver and the brain can be damaged as a result of exposing the body to years of binge drinking. With college students who are at a high risk of engaging in binge drinking, much research has been carried out in the role that education can play in preventing binge drinking and making young adults aware of the possible consequences of binge drinking (Hingson et al, 2002). A new educational innovation Alcohol 101 has been introduced to college campuses around the United States. This innovation is a CD Rom that through the use of an interactive party scene shows students how to make safe or unsafe mistakes and also shows how their decisions can pay out on screen. The idea of this interactive CD Rom is to show and help increase the awareness of the dangers that can arise in college situations from binge drinking and in turn help prevent these problems from materialising in later life, through education. With Alcohol 101 being distributed across campuses further research has taken place on the manner in which it is distributed (Reis et al, 2000). This research that was carried out found that the success of Alcohol 101 was due to its informal nature and that fact that it did not lecture students on the dangers of alcohol but rather encouraged them to be able to make safe decisions while they were drinking. Alcohol 101 focused on self learning and provides more knowledge around the symptoms of an alcohol overdose, what to do if a friend has drunk too much in an emergency and how to intervene with a friend who has drunk too much.

With this research that was carried out there were some areas that need to be researched further. The issues of education are one area that needs to be looked at in greater detail, and how this may affect the prevention of binge drinking or providing a greater awareness of binge drinking and its consequences. The manner in which education is provided is also another area of interest and if it is to be done in the school environment where children are exposed to alcohol and social settings or if it is the responsibility of the parents to provide an education and increasing the awareness of the children. It may be interesting to investigate how both the role of the school and parents combined can provide an education in the area of binge drinking. Also the area of gender is another topic that may be interesting to research further. In this research there were slight variations of awareness to the dangers of binge drinking between the male and female participants. The female participants showed a slightly higher awareness in their knowledge of binge drinking which indicates that further research is required to fully investigate the level in difference of awareness of the two sexes.

In conclusion, in this research the findings were very clear. First there is a definite unawareness and lack of knowledge of binge drinking and its effects that it can have among the younger generation. This lack of knowledge extends into all aspects of binge drinking, and is not age specific but shows slight differences within genders. Also the lack of education either from parents or the school environment is a huge factor in this lack of awareness. Secondly there are many influences like peer pressure, advertising and the media that are responsible for encouraging binge drinking by young adults by promoting certain drinking patterns and alcoholic

beverages. Finally the college environment is the one area in which young adults are exposed to heavy drinking and experimentation, and without education of the serious effects that binge drinking can have on a person, this results in college students being most at risk of the dangers of binge drinking.

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Appendix:

What's your understanding of the term binge drinking?

How many drinks do you think classifies binge drinking and over what period of time?

What age did you start drinking?

What prompted you to start drinking?

Has peer pressure been a factor that would make you drink on a night out?

Were your parents aware that you were drinking?

If underage how easy was it for you to obtain alcohol?

What would a typical night out consist of regarding the level of alcohol consumption?

What age would you of had more than 5 or 6 drinks in one night?

Have you ever drunk so much that you were unaware of what you were doing?

Would this happen on a regular occasion?

Have you ever required medical treatment or hospitalisation requiring drink?

Has your drinking pattern changed in the last few years? If so how?

Would you be aware of the medical consequences of heavy drinking? If so which aspects?

What health education information regarding alcohol did you receive in school?

How have your parents influenced you regarding drink?

In what way has advertising influenced what you drink or how you drink?

Do you feel that alcohol is necessary on nights out to socialise?

Has starting college influenced or changed the way you drink? / How will college change your drinking pattern?

