

## Young People's Street Drinking Behaviour: Investigating the Influence of Marketing & Subculture

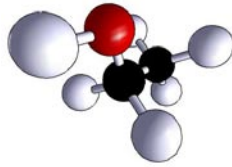
### Introduction

Previous research has revealed that much binge drinking among young people takes place in outdoor/hidden locations. The unsupervised nature of these locations and the products typically preferred by these individuals, have been linked to immodest consumption and an increased risk of alcohol-related harm. This qualitative study, examined the street drinking behaviour of young adults (aged between 16 and 25). Twenty four focus groups were conducted with naturally-occurring groups of street drinkers (N=98) recruited in outdoor locations. Participants included both male and female drinkers from a range of subcultures (i.e. 'neds', 'alternatives' and 'mainstream') in order to provide a more appropriately gendered perspective as well as more insight into the differences which might exist in the behaviours and views of groups of young adults from different cultural backgrounds. Overall, the aim was to provide further knowledge about patterns of off-trade outdoor drinking culture among drinkers in this age group. A specific focus of the investigation was to discover what alcohol products were preferred by these individuals and why. The relative roles of alcohol marketing and sub-cultural beliefs as factors affecting consumer choices were of particular interest in this respect. The study was carried out by Josie Galloway, Alasdair Forsyth & David Shewan at the Glasgow Centre for the Study of Violence.

### Findings

#### *Perceived Risks of Street Drinking*

- Being detected by the police and the threat of violence were major concerns whilst drinking outdoors but were afforded varying degrees of importance according to the age, gender and cultural background of group members. 'Ned' drinkers described feeling excessively targeted by police officers due to negative stereotyping of their cultural group. 'Alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers were more concerned with the threat of violent victimisation by 'neds' describing experiences ranging from physical intimidation to serious violence. 'Neds' also discussed experiences of violence whilst drinking outdoors but referred to gang fights with other youths from similar cultural backgrounds.



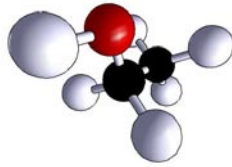
- Females (though occasionally reporting fights with other females) were perceived to be at a lower risk of violence than their male peers when drinking outdoors but at greater risk of sexual harassment. Though most females acknowledged these potential dangers, such threats did not appear to be taken too seriously.

#### *Reasons for Street Drinking*

- For many participants outdoor drinking represented a forced choice, arising from exclusion from indoor settings which occurred due to age; by association (i.e. individuals were prevented from entering pubs and clubs due to the age of their friends); due to the drinkers' own behaviour (i.e. being barred from indoor drinking locations); or by being 'costed out' (i.e. discouraged from spending part or all of their night in indoor drinking locations due to the expense of such activities). This said, drinking outdoors was seen as advantageous in some respects being less physically and socially restricting. Street drinking was also viewed as good value for money allowing drinkers a chance 'preload' on cheap alcohol before going to pubs and clubs later in the night.

#### *Locations for Street Drinking: Choices and Risks*

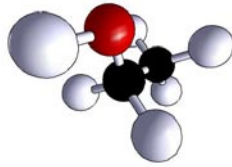
- The settings chosen for drinking were intended to minimise the risks street drinkers' felt they faced when drinking outdoors. This varied according to cultural group. For 'neds,' the priority was to choose settings that might reduce the risk of detection by the police. As such, groups tended to move around whilst drinking and preferred well-hidden, isolated locations. Current policing strategies involving group dispersal appeared to encourage this pattern of street drinking further. The high mobility of these groups increased the risk of violent territorial clashes with other youths in their local areas whilst their choice of drinking locations exposed group members to environmental hazards.
- Locations chosen by 'alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals were intended to minimise the risk of victimisation. These participants typically



travelled from their local communities (where they felt outnumbered and persecuted) to central areas where other like-minded youths and ‘safety in numbers’ could be found. Drinking locations were very public and well-lit. A police presence was often considered an advantage in terms of increasing (if not assuring) safety despite the risk that alcohol might be confiscated.

#### *Drinks Marketing and Product Preference*

- Heavily promoted drinks were not popular (with the exception of ‘Lambrini’), as street drinkers could not afford these beverages. Other promotional activity (3 for 2 offers and cut price offers) seemed to have a more widespread impact and could tempt drinkers to change brands and less often the type of alcohol they chose to drink.
- In general, preferred drinks were considered good value for money in terms of cost-strength ratio, had a pleasant taste and were convenient for drinking outside (e.g. easy to carry and conceal with screwcaps which were easily opened and resealed)
- The cultural significance of the beverage to the individual’s social group was also important. Preference for specific drinks was linked to brand image and the degree to which this reflected that which the drinker wished to project as an individual and at a group level. For example, ‘Buckfast Tonic Wine’ was the subject of a marked cultural division with ‘ned’ groups expressing a strong preference for this drink and ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ groups expressing an equally powerful aversion.
- Though ‘Buckfast’ was considered ideal by ‘neds’ in terms of cost, strength and packaging, the drink’s popularity appeared to owe more to its cultural significance (being symbolic of masculinity, group affiliation, class and national identity to these youths). Indeed, ‘Buckfast’ was preferred to drinks that represented better value in terms of cost-strength ratio demonstrating that in some cases subculture may override marketing as an influence on consumer activity.



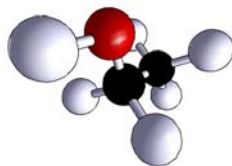
- 'Alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers viewed 'Buckfast' as a drink stereotypically preferred by individuals perceived as problematic street drinkers (i.e. 'neds' and 'jakeys'). The desire to avoid being associated with these groups was linked to their rejection of this product. Perceptions that drinking 'Buckfast' might induce violent tendencies also acted as a deterrent. Given these combined factors, these individuals chose products that had fewer negative connotations and which were deemed acceptable by their social group (i.e. vodka/'Lambrini' etc.).

*Source of Supply: Preferred Outlets*

- In general, participants preferred to purchase their alcohol from smaller off-licenses and corner shops and were tempted into larger outlets (such as supermarkets) only by promotional activity. Underage participants targeted small stores they believed to be struggling for profit with the view that they would be less likely to be asked for proof of age and/or refused service. Purchases of alcohol were made by agents (adult strangers) or female group members. Overage participants also preferred to make their purchases from smaller off-sales as this was viewed as a more discrete method of buying beverages associated with street drinking, thus avoiding embarrassment. Importantly, smaller outlets were also more likely to sell the products street drinkers preferred and were in addition more likely to sell these drinks chilled and therefore ready for immediate consumption.

*Suggested Improvements*

- Suggestions concerned the management rather than the prevention of street drinking (as the latter was seen as unlikely). Underage individuals called for the provision of more age-appropriate leisure activities (though comments suggested that young people saw such places as safer, more comfortable venues in which they could continue drinking). Others felt that reducing the age limit for drinking in pubs and clubs



would allow drinkers earlier access to these locations and limit risk by removing them from harm's way. Designated areas for drinking outside were suggested as a way of reducing risk of alcohol-related harm by containing drinking so that it could be monitored.

- Observations that 'Buckfast' bottles were frequently used as weapons and irresponsibly disposed (as was the case for other drinks packaged in glass), led to suggestions that recognised 'street drinks' (but especially 'Buckfast') should instead be packaged in plastic in order to limit alcohol-related injury.

#### Implications

Findings suggest that street drinking was considered a risky activity by young adults but represented a forced choice due to exclusion from inside drinking locations. Participants' desire to minimise perceived risks (and the practice of dispersing groups of street drinkers) appeared to displace street drinking to settings which could increase exposure to environmental hazards and the threat of harm. An examination of current policy and policing may inform strategies to reduce alcohol-related risk, whilst the provision of indoor drinking locations or designated areas for drinking outdoors may allow street drinking to be contained and monitored as a way of increasing the safety of drinkers. Current findings may also inform educational programmes for street drinkers designed to make young adults more aware of the potential harms of drinking outdoors. Results regarding beverage preference highlight a number of potentially harmful design features which might be designed out to reduce the immodest consumption and alcohol-related injuries associated with irresponsible disposal and street violence. Encouraging socially responsible practice among retailers would also seem important at a national level and more especially at the local level in the smaller off-sales preferred by street drinkers.

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#### ALCOHOL INSIGHTS

*Alcohol Insights* are brief summaries of the findings made from research or development grants.

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