



Youth

Reducing alcohol consumption by young people and so improve their health, safety and wellbeing

Key messages

- Over the last few years alcohol consumption has decreased slightly among young people.
- Among those young people who consume alcohol, some are consuming increasing amounts – particularly 11–13-year-olds.
- There are a range of harms associated with alcohol use among young people – including those related to their physical, emotional and social wellbeing.
- Of particular concern with regard to longer-term harms are those young people who, by 16 years of age, are binge drinking or drinking so that they experience being very drunk.
- There appear to be a range of influences on young people's levels of alcohol consumption, including their age, family dynamics and cultural background, school, access to money and ability to purchase alcohol.
- Programmes that have shown promise in reducing alcohol consumption among young people include those that:
 - engage and work with families to improve the quality of familial relationships
 - assist pupils to learn about alcohol and apply what they have learned to resisting drug and alcohol use
 - seek generally to improve the quality of pupils' experience at school
 - provide young people with enjoyable out-of-school activities that contribute to their sense of achievement.

The research review tells us, among other issues, what has worked to date with regard to reducing alcohol consumption among young people. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching and analysis of key data. It summarises the best available evidence that will help service providers to improve services and, ultimately, outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Institute of Education, University of London carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted the data work.

Who are the key stakeholders?

- Young people
- Parents and carers
- Policy-makers
- Schools
- Youth services
- Health
- Police.

Their contributions are valuable in the process of improvement

- **Young people:**
 - Learning about and reviewing the implications of review findings to identify whether and in what ways local policies and programmes can be made relevant to their needs.
 - Involvement in small-scale, local studies that focus on alcohol consumption and what can be done locally to reduce alcohol-related harms (this may not, for example, focus specifically on young people's alcohol consumption as young people may wish to enquire into the patterns of alcohol use among adults and how these influence the lives of young people).
- **Parents and carers:**
 - Learning about and using information about alcohol-related harms among adults and young people.
 - Identifying ways that families could be supported locally to improve the quality of familial relationships.
- **Policy-makers:**
 - Ensuring that alcohol-related issues are included in all local policies that focus on young people's health and wellbeing, safety, enjoyment and achievement, contribution to local communities, and economic education and wellbeing.
 - Ensuring that professionals are encouraged to work towards multi-layered and multi-component alcohol use programmes.
- **Practitioners and professionals (to include those in schools, youth, and health services, as well as the police):**
 - Identifying how existing programmes and activities (such as healthy schools, positive activities, family intervention projects) can include components to address alcohol use.
 - Learning from young people what they identify as key alcohol-related issues to address among local communities and how problematic alcohol use can best be tackled.
 - Engaging in practitioner-led enquiry and evaluation to contribute to the development of local programmes (drawing on principles of what has worked well elsewhere) so as to identify locally-developed principles of successful practice which are sensitive to local contexts.

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What data is available to inform the way forward?

There are a number of data sources about young people's alcohol consumption that enable us to build a national picture of the proportion of young people who drink regularly, how this has changed over time and the characteristics of these young people. Local authorities can access information about young people's drinking behaviour in their area from the TellUs4 survey (Chamberlain *et al* 2010). This allows local authorities to compare local responses to other authorities and to regional and national results. TellUs4 was a sample survey, however, and not all schools in a local authority will have participated, which is worth considering when drawing conclusions and assessing performance.

C4EO's interactive data site at www.c4eo.org.uk enables local authority managers to evaluate their current position in relation to a range of key national indicators and to easily access publicly available comparative data on young people's alcohol consumption.

Information is available at the national level to inform the development of local practice. This includes information about young people's patterns of alcohol use and the principles that might best be followed to inform programmes to reduce alcohol use among young people.

At the local level, it would be possible to identify whether young people's use of alcohol is included in a range of documents that inform local practice when working towards the Every Child Matters five outcomes. Local policymakers can also draw on other local proxy data including youth A and E admissions, school exclusion data and licensing authority data to build up a more comprehensive picture of the nature of young people's alcohol misuse. However, it is likely that other information about local contextual factors that influence young people's use of alcohol will need to be collected – perhaps through action-oriented young people- and/or practitioner-led forms of enquiry.

The evidence base

There is much research on young people's consumption of alcohol and the factors associated with consumption. Much of this is in the form of surveys and there remains little which enquires into the cultures of young people's (and their families') use of alcohol. Evidence is beginning to emerge about the sorts of activities and programmes that have shown some promise with regard to reducing alcohol consumption among young people.

However, most studies have been conducted in the USA and there is a need for further enquiry – particularly evaluations – into the experiences of different constituencies of young people, including those from black and minority ethnic communities and among young people of different ages (such as 11-13-year-olds as well as older young people).

Research review methods

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, recommendations from our Thematic Advisory Group, and considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting'). The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. This approach attempts to eliminate bias in the selection of literature, to ensure that the review's findings are as objective as possible.

Data contained within the data annexe was obtained by a combination of search methods but primarily by obtaining online access to known government publications and access to data published by the Office for National Statistics.

Next steps

An updated version of the review is due to be published in spring 2011. This will include validated local practice examples and views from children, young people, parents, carers and service providers. It will also reflect changes to the policy context that have occurred in the meantime.

C4EO reviews on young people's participation in positive activities and targeted youth support are also available on the C4EO website. Local decision-makers and commissioners working in local authorities and Children's Services may also find it helpful to read the Youth Directors' summary, which presents the key messages from all three reviews.

C4EO is using the main messages from the three Youth reviews to underpin its knowledge sharing and capacity building work with Children's Services, and through them the full range of professions and agencies working with young people.

Research summaries

This summary is a concise and accessible overview of the key messages from the research review on this topic.

Please go to www.c4eo.org.uk to download full and in-depth versions.

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