Drinking patterns and violent behaviour amongst young people in England and Wales

Secondary analysis of the Offending Crime and Justice Survey

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Young people’s drinking patterns in UK

• Lifetime alcohol prevalence decreasing in children (11-15 years)…

• Pupils (15-16 years) report more frequent heavy episodic drinking and drunkenness than most of their European counterparts…

• Prevalence of weekly drinking amongst young adults (16-24 years) has fallen…

However

amount of alcohol consumed amongst recent drinkers (in the last week) remains relatively stable (Fuller et al., 2011).

Consequently

experiencing higher levels of alcohol-related harm, including violence (Hibell et al., 2012).

However

increased proportion drinking in excess of recommended weekly limits for men and women in Great Britain from 1988 to 2006 (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009).
What role do attitudes play?

• Cultural variation in alcohol-violence relationship
  (Sumner and Parker, 1995; Plant and Miller, 2007)

• Drinking: cultural and learned behaviour
  (Graham, 1980; Sumner and Parker, 1995; Berridge et al., 2007; Quigley and Leonard, 2006)

• Attitudes may mediate the alcohol-violence relationship
  (MacAndrew and Edgerton, 1969; Graham, 1980; Graham et al., 1998; Quigley and Leonard, 2006; Sumner and Parker, 1995; Plant and Miller, 2007)

• Distinct attitudes in late adolescence / early adulthood
Why a developmental focus?

• Widespread concurrent alcohol use and violent behaviour during adolescence and early adulthood

• Temporally proximal relationship between alcohol and violence

• Little longitudinal research amongst English and Welsh youth
  – Important given cultural dimensions that influence alcohol-violence relationship.
Aims of the study

1. Build on evidence of concurrent behavioural associations between alcohol drinking and violent behaviour identified in many cross sectional studies on English and Welsh youth.

2. Explore the proportion of variation in violence attributable to change between individuals and within individuals, as well as the relative contributions of their drinking patterns.

3. Assess mediating role of attitudes held towards alcohol in the alcohol-violence relationship.
The study: OCJS

- Nationally representative self-report data on young people’s offending and alcohol consumption between 2003 and 2006
  - Assault (with and without incurring injury)
  - ‘Binge’ drinking measure since 2004
  - Attitudinal measures
  - Longitudinal design
Methods

Focus on those aged between 16 and 29

LCA: identify classifications of individuals who held similar attitudes

Lagged regression models: current and earlier drinking and violent behaviour
- as well as drinking attitude classification, age, age^2 and gender

MLM: variation within and between individuals propensity to commit assault, controlling for drinking behaviour
- as well as drinking attitude classification, age, age^2, sweep year and gender
Findings: multilevel models

- **Age**
- **Non drinkers**
- **Never binge drink**
- **Low frequency binge drinking (1-10 times a month)**
- **High frequency binge drinking (11+ times a month)**
Findings: LCA

- Social drinkers (21%)
- Postively motivated drinkers (56%)
- Problematics drinkers (23%)

Graph showing response probabilities for different behaviors:

- Drinking alcohol makes me feel relaxed
- When I drink I often do or say things I regret
- Drinking helps me to forget my problems
- Drinking makes me feel more friendly and outgoing
- I drink to get drunk
Findings: multilevel models

Predicted probability of developing problems with alcohol as a function of age.

- **Social drinkers**
- **Positively motivated drinkers**
- **Problematic drinkers**

The graph shows a decrease in predicted probability with age for all categories.
What are the key findings?

**Heavy drinking frequency associated with increase risk of violent offending**
- risk for males higher than for females
- (although gap narrows as age increases)

**Contemporaneous association between drinking and violence**
- times when young people are drinking more they are more likely to behaviour violently
- (group of individuals who continue to drink heavily and perpetrate violence)

**Attitudes mediate the alcohol-violence relationship**
- problematic drinkers more likely to commit an assault offence
What does this mean for policy?

Reducing drinking
• Situational crime prevention
• Structured programmes in CJ setting

Increase in drinking
• Trigger for prompt intervention

Work with young people to address their difficulties and drinking attitudes/motives

Challenging role of alcohol in (youth) culture
Thank you

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