

HOW MUCH IS A BINGE? YOUNG ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HEAVY DRINKING

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Introduction and Aims: Young adults in Australia exhibit high levels of binge drinking (i.e., heavy episodic drinking). Various sociocultural explanations have been provided for this behaviour, including cultural norms, alcohol expectancies, peer pressure, and extensive alcohol marketing. This study explored 18 to 21 year old drinkers' perceptions of binge drinking and their interpretations of their own alcohol consumption behaviours in the light of their assumptions about what constitutes binge drinking.

Design and Methods: The study utilised the sensitisation method of qualitative research, which involved 60 study participants engaging in interviews, focus groups, and written introspections over a six month period in 2014. The data were transcribed and imported into NVivo10 for coding and analysis.

Results: The study participants typically conceptualised binge drinking as resulting in tangible harmful outcomes, such as vomiting and passing out. As a result, most did not consider themselves to be at risk of the detrimental consequences of binge drinking because they did not identify their generally high consumption levels as binge drinking. The participants demonstrated no understanding of the NHMRC guideline for reducing the risk of short-term harm (i.e., no more than four standard drinks on a single drinking occasion). Their perceptions of what constitutes a heavy drinking episode were much higher than the NHMRC guideline.

Discussion and Conclusions: The findings suggest that young adults represent an important target audience for communications relating to the NHMRC guidelines and the rationale behind their development.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This study was funded by a research grant from the Drug and Alcohol Office (Healthway Grant # 24033).