

What motivates extreme drinking?

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Abstract

Recent public concern in many countries has drawn much attention to young people, among whom extreme drinking peaks in late adolescence to early adulthood (e.g., Hibell, Andersson, Ahlstrom et al., 1999; Hibell, Andersson, Bjarnason et al., 2004; Kuntsche, Rehm, & Gmel, 2004). This drinking pattern is prevalent among young adults and is often seen by them as a culturally appropriate behavior (Engineer, Phillips, Thompson, & Nicholls, 2003). It is also primarily a social phenomenon, typically occurring in public places, such as pubs, bars and nightclubs, and in groups. Alcohol consumption in general can be viewed as a developmental rite of passage for young adults. This practice transcends culture and social class, with drinking being perceived by many youths as more normative than not drinking. However, young people who engage in extreme drinking are at risk for many immediate physical effects—for instance, hangovers, blackouts, impaired cognitive and motor coordination, and injury—as well as the more delayed social consequences, such as having problems at home, school, and work. Moreover, alcohol consumption in or around nightclubs, pubs, bars, or taverns increases the risk of violence as compared to drinking in other contexts (Pemanen, 1991; Richardson & Budd, 2003). In light of these potentially negative consequences, why do young people engage in extreme drinking? We examine this consumption pattern in a young adult population and review research that can help put this behavior into context. Throughout the chapter, examples from focus groups of young people in a number of countries are highlighted. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2009 APA, all rights reserved) (from the chapter)

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