

Are drinking habits really changing? A cross-generational test of the 'new' phenomenon of 'binge-drinking'

Author(s)

McCoy SL, Nieland MNS

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Abstract

Aims:

To investigate whether binge-drinking is new by comparing the behaviour and attitudes of two generations at the same age and of one generation at different ages.

Methods:

Fifty-six student/parent pairs completed questionnaires partially based on the Adolescent version of the Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (Brown, S.A., Christiansen, B.A., & Goldman, M.S. (1987). The alcohol expectancy questionnaire: An instrument for the assessment of adolescent and adult alcohol expectancies. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 48, 483-491). Students reports of their behaviour and attitudes were compared to their parents' memories of their behaviour and attitudes at 18. Parents' memories were compared to their current behaviour and attitudes to explore possible lifespan effects. Data regarding the groups' attachment to aspects of society were drawn on as a possible explanation of differences between generations.

Findings:

Parents recalled consuming more alcohol more frequently, having more favourable attitudes towards alcohol and having fewer ties with their communities when they were 18 than their children. They drank less and had a less favourable attitude towards alcohol at the time of the research than in their youth.

Conclusions:

Despite contrary 'evidence', it may be that today's young people are less prone to binge-drinking than previous generations. Whilst it is recognized that data may be contaminated by parents' 'forgetting', the study highlights the possibility that the binge-drinking crisis is merely media hype, spurious, or both.

Web link

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3109/09687637.2011.562936>

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