

Alcohol misuse by 16-24 year olds is a health issue in New Zealand because [...]

Three major determinants of health that contribute to alcohol misuse in youth in New Zealand are social, political and cultural.

The social determinant refers to the interactions that youth have with each other in the environments in which they live, work and play. Due to the widespread availability of alcohol through factors such as political and the binge-drinking culture in New Zealand, in many peer groups and across many social situations, drinking alcohol (and drinking to get drunk) is seen as the normal and expected thing to do when socialising [...]

The political determinant of health can also influence alcohol use in young people. Political determinants can include government laws and policies that influence young people's attitudes and behaviours regarding alcohol. Two main ways the political determinant influences alcohol misuse in youth in NZ is because of the laws around advertising/sponsorship and the laws around sale and supply of alcohol.

Alcohol advertising has the potential to encourage young people's alcohol use. According to NZ research, constant exposure to alcohol, especially at a young age increases positive expectations about drinking (1). The media can have a large influence encouraging young people to drink alcohol. Alcohol advertisements cannot be shown on TV between 6.am and 8.30pm, but through magazines, billboards and social media, alcohol advertising is easily accessed at any time of the day. Alcohol is used to sponsor sporting events (eg the Heineken Open) and sporting teams (eg the All Blacks – Steinlager) (2). This creates the association with drinking alcohol with role models, which encourages youth to drink.

1

The legal purchasing age of alcohol in New Zealand is 18. Since the legal purchasing age dropped back to 18 years, more young people have had access to alcohol so have been consuming alcohol and the age at which youth begin drinking is getting younger: "In the past decade drinking behaviour of youth has grown more steadily more extreme and is increasingly normalised in younger age groups" (3). It is important to note that (unlike in some other countries) we do not have a 'drinking age' in New Zealand, therefore some youth may legally access alcohol before they reach the purchase age of 18. This may influence youth to drink to excess, as they are not as mature as adults, and may set up the situation where they begin to rely on alcohol when socialising with others or to cope with the demands of a stressful life (3).

The cultural determinant [...]

Alcohol misuse by 16-24 year olds has many implications for the well-being of New Zealand society, people's relationships and for individuals.

At a societal level, alcohol misuse by young people can have an impact in the short-term on services like hospitals and policing. According to Paul Quigley from Wellington Hospital's Emergency Department, young people who are intoxicated are a huge drain on the

emergency department, and take resources away from other ill people. Nearly three quarters of those who come to the emergency department on weekend evenings are drunk (4). ACC says that a quarter of claims are related to injuries that occurred due to alcohol use (5). These figures show that these young people are lacking a positive attitude to their own well-being and are outing others in danger as well. In the long-term, alcohol is associated with a variety of serious illnesses, which are a strain on the taxpayer. According to the Healthy Christchurch paper on alcohol harm, the direct cost of alcohol harm in NZ is \$1,200 million per year (5). This includes costs to the health system, policing, local councils for vandalism/clean-ups, car crashes.

2

A number of people and community groups are disadvantaged by these short and long term societal impacts. Taxpayer money is spent on alcohol-related harms, when it could otherwise be used to support families and communities, and healthcare services to treat those who are ill from non-alcohol causes. With policing, more time could be spent on keeping communities safe, and communities will be safer if there was less fighting, car accidents, vandalism and injuries due to alcohol use.

Interpersonally, alcohol misuse by young people can cause problems in relationships and can interfere with a person's performance at school or in the workplace [...]

Personally, alcohol is associated with a large number of short-term and long-term negative health effects, but also has some positives [...]

I recommend two major strategies to address alcohol misuse by young people in New Zealand. These strategies seek to address the determinants of health I have explained above, and link to the National Drug Policy 2015-2020.

The first strategy is to place a ban on alcohol sponsorship by sports teams and sporting events in New Zealand, and place firmer restrictions on alcohol advertising across print, TV and social media. This has been recommended in 2014 by the Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship, who found that restricting advertising and sponsorship would have a positive impact on youth drinking (12). This would involve finding new sponsors for teams such as the All Blacks and events such as the Heineken Tennis Open, but this should not be too difficult, due to popularity. This would address part of the political determinant discussed earlier in my work, and relates to 'demand reduction' from the National Drug Policy because with less advertising and sponsorship, young people will see alcohol being promoted less, so demand for drinking might be reduced. This will lead to equitable health outcomes in relation to the health issue by reducing the chance of early drinking behaviour and harms to young people.

3

The second strategy is to [...]

Note that a chart was provided by the student to show bibliographic details for the references used in the analysis.