Alcohol issues in Australian society: What can schools realistically do?

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Interesting times ...

Alcohol-related violence has attracted great media attention and sparked calls for action

- concern about Australian 'binge drinking' culture, particularly links to violence
- influence of alcohol and hotel lobby groups on policy decisions has lead to inaction
- does the community really want change?
- governments now have no choice – they have had to act
- without a doubt, schools will once again be asked to 'fix' this problem ...
What is the school's role here?

Schools do not operate in a vacuum – to be successful there must be a partnership with parents, as well as community support, however ...

- age-appropriate drug education (not necessarily drug information) is vital
- recent research suggests that drug education programs need to be quite broad to be successful, targeting problem behaviour more generally, rather than specific drug use
- all teachers have a role to some degree
What is happening with our young people?

Australian drug use
Prevalence (%) of lifetime drug use (excluding tobacco, and alcohol) among 12-17 year old students

2011 ASSAD Survey

Apart from a small number of substances, drug use is uncommon amongst this group. Analgesics continue to be widely used across all ages, with inhalants being favoured by younger groups and tranquilisers more popular with the older students. Cannabis use had risen from 2008 from 13.6% to 14.8% in this survey.
Prevalence (%) of 12-17 year old students who have never drugs (excluding tobacco and alcohol)

2011 ASSAD Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug Type</th>
<th>Prevalence (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analgesics</td>
<td>82.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tranquilizers</td>
<td>95.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>82.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inhalants</td>
<td>97.0</td>
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<td>Hallucinogens</td>
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<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>96.0</td>
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<td>Steroids</td>
<td>96.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opiates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>98.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>97.3</td>
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Overall, the story is a positive one. **Once again, most secondary school students do not use drugs.** However, this is the first time that cannabis use has not decreased and hallucinogens are now the second most popular drugs amongst this population.
What is happening in Australia? Are we drinking more than in the past?
What Australians are drinking has changed substantially since the early 60s. Beer consumption has decreased dramatically, while wine and spirits account for a much greater proportion of all alcohol consumed.
Apparent consumption of pure alcohol per capita has fluctuated over the past 50 years, hitting a peak in the late 70s. We’re drinking less but our drinking patterns have changed.
So what is happening?

Unfortunately it is how we drink that is the problem – when we drink, we drink a lot (usually quickly, over a short period of time) – we are a nation of binge drinkers.

When we drink less, alcohol companies profits drop – aggressive marketing and great resistance to restrictions on advertising and sponsorship regulations.
Alcohol

How about school-based young people? Is it getting worse?
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey

The majority of young people across all age groups have tried alcohol, with use increasing as they get older. That said, it is important to remember that almost one in five Year 10 students have never consumed alcohol.
Australian secondary school students who describe themselves as non-drinkers (%), 2011

Even though many of them have tried alcohol, the vast majority of them still regard themselves as 'non-drinkers' until they reach 16 years of age.
Proportion of 12-15 year old current drinkers and the proportion drinking more than four drinks on a single occasion in the past seven days, 1984-2011

2011 ASSAD Survey

The proportion of 12-15 year old 'current drinkers' continues to decrease. Less young people are drinking and the number who report drinking more than four drinks on a single occasion in the past week has also dropped since a peak in 2002 (7% down to 3%)
The proportion of 16-17 year old 'current drinkers' has also decreased. Once again, less young people are drinking and the number who report drinking more than four drinks on a single occasion in the past week has also dropped since a peak in 1999 (24% down to 16%)
Respondents were classified as 'non-drinkers' (never had a glass of alcohol), 'moderate drinkers' (had a full glass but not more than four drinks on a single occasion in the last month) or 'risky drinkers' (had more than four drinks on one or more occasions in the last month). Although there are more small numbers of 'risky drinkers' in Years 8 and 9, it is Year 10 where things begin to change.
Average number of drinks consumed by current drinkers in past seven days, by age and gender, 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey

Unfortunately 'current drinkers' consumed a lot of alcohol. Across all ages, average drinking levels reported exceeded recommended levels for adults.
So what does this mean?

Many young people consider themselves 'non-drinkers'

Number of 'current drinkers' is actually decreasing - however, a small, but consistent number of these are putting themselves at great risk

- they're drinking a lot, doing it regularly
- likely to be spirit drinkers
- Yr 10 appears to be the year where drinking patterns change – much smaller numbers in Yr 9 and below ...
Why shouldn't young people be drinking?

Growing evidence that we should be delaying alcohol use for as long as possible – key concerns ...

- the **developing brain**
- increased risk of **liver disease**
- increased cancer risk, particularly **breast cancer in young women**
- the earlier you drink, the greater risk of future alcohol problems, including **dependency**
- more likely to be **sexually active** at earlier ages, to have sexual intercourse more often, and to have unprotected sex
- more likely to be **victims of violent crime**, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery
What can schools realistically do in this area? Can they make a difference?
The relationship between alcohol and violence
Morgan & McAtamney, 2009

Not simple or straightforward – **heavy drinking and intoxication are associated with physical aggression** – but majority of drinkers do not become offenders or victims …

Is result of a complex interaction of variables …

- **pharmacological effects of alcohol** on the cognitive, affective or behavioural functioning
- **individual characteristics** – age, gender, personality traits, predisposition to aggression, etc
- **effects of the drinking environment** – crowding, role and behaviour of venue staff, etc
- **societal attitudes and values**, including a culture of drinking to deliberately become intoxicated
The effect of alcohol on cognitive functions
Beck & Heinz, 2013

Graham's disinhbition hypothesis (1980) states that alcohol promotes aggressive behaviour by affecting self-regulation, attention, information processing and decision-making ...

Alcohol myopia – alcohol-induced narrowing of attentional resources
- like a camera showing only a small part of the scene in sharp focus. Plays a role in social contexts when something simple like being bumped in a bar is interpreted as a supposed attack, other possibilities are seen as less significant

Hostile attribution bias (HAB) – alcohol disrupts processing of threat-related information – ambiguous interpersonal cues may be misinterpreted as hostile
Individual characteristics

Beck & Heinz, 2013

Range of factors have been identified

- sex (men have a greater risk of reacting aggressively)
- personality traits such as sensation-seeking
- high underlying irritability
- lack of empathy
- maladaptive reasons for drinking, e.g., for coping
- aggression is seen as an acceptable form of social interaction
- genetic predisposition

'Alcohol outcome expectancies' (AOEs) – stored as memory schemata and activated when drinking

- measurable in preschoolers with no experience of alcohol, indicating learning from family or other influences, e.g., media
Where the drinker drinks is extremely important

Licensed premises are high-risk settings – 40% of all assaults occur in or around such premises

- hotels and nightclubs are most problematic, particularly those with extended or 24 hour trading

Strongest predictor of violence is the venue itself

- identified risk factors include queues outside the building, queues for public transport, crowding, poor ventilation and high temperature and inconvenient access to the bar

Australia – a general trend towards the liberalization of liquor licensing legislation, deregulation of the sale of alcohol and growth in the night-time economy ...
In honor of Australia Day, let's get drunk at nine in the morning and then pass out on a beach somewhere, mate.

Societal attitudes and values

The impact of the 'drinking to get drunk' Australian culture
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Societal attitudes and values
So what do we do?

In addition to school-based drug education (universal prevention), we try to prevent, delay or modify behaviour through health promotion messages

- targeted messages designed for a specific audience
- credible and meaningful
- usually have a 'call to action'

Key to success is a simple message – no mixed messages
Alcohol-related violence sets unique challenges - this behaviour is not usually planned – what possible message will work?
Growing concern around the world

Here are just some of the media campaigns that have been developed
Alcohol. When does it stop being social and start becoming anti social?
Have your say.

WHO'S GOING OUT TONIGHT?
Volatile? Nasty? Violent?
Is that you after a few drinks? Do you become someone you'd avoid? Don't turn a good night into a nightmare by cheapening to excess, know your limits.

During the Semesters Humberside Police are out in force to reassure and protect these out for a good time.

Night Out
Lights Out!

One Punch
could shatter your world.
You could end up in prison for manslaughter if you get involved in a drunken fight... take a breath and count to ten...

DON'T BE A DRUNKHEAD THINK MORE DRINK LESS.
But really, how do we battle this?

No way that governments can compete with the money that the alcohol industry spends on promoting their product.
Here are some Australian examples – emphasis on the 'one punch' and the 'king hit' ...
Difficult to get the message through when we see violence justified and even celebrated in Australian sport...
And then there's the UFC .....
Pre-loading, side-loading and post-loading – all new phenomenon identified across all ages

Alcohol and sport – locked in tight! Very difficult to disentangle the two ...

Now competing with supermarket chains – no one knows how to market like they do and the retail alcohol market is worth $1.5 billion a year

Discount alcohol, bought in bulk – alcohol not that much cheaper in the past but you’re encouraged to buy more when you do purchase..

It's Australian!
What does the research say that schools can realistically do around alcohol?

Bremner, Burnett, Nunney, Ravat & Mistral (2011)

Appears to be little benefit in aiming to prevent young people from trying alcohol, we should rather seek to prevent short and long-term harm

Findings suggest efforts best directed at **supporting and educating parents**

- positive message about how they can influence their child's behaviour
- stress the importance of parent's own drinking and what their children see and think about this

Schools should also be a channel for information, getting targeted messages to parents encouraging actions at specific times in their child's development
What does the research say that schools can realistically do around alcohol?

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Schools should challenge incorrect perceptions about the regularity and scale of heavy drinking by peer groups

- positive social norms – 'not everyone does it'

We need to acknowledge that we cannot inoculate our children against possible drug use – we can, however, build their resilience

- if they come into contact with alcohol or other drugs, or other issue, they are able to 'bounce back', successfully maneuvering through with as few problems as possible
Preventing violence

Support parents and families – strengthen relationships between parents, carers and children - long-lasting violence prevention benefits
- home visiting programs
- parenting programs

Develop life skills in children and young people – build social and emotional competencies and teach conflict-avoidance skills – particularly useful targeting at-risk children early in life
- preschool programs
- social development programs
- academic enrichment programs
- bullying prevention programs

Work with high-risk youth and gangs
- talking therapies
- family therapies and family interventions
- gang-focused strategies
- mentoring programs
- hospital-based programs
- community-based interventions
True prevention starts early – simple messages that may contribute to changing the culture

Not everyone will choose to drink – and many of those who do, don't always drink a lot. Examine the messages you convey by your behaviour ...

Bullying is not acceptable in any form – talk about the consequences and make your values clear

Most people who get punched do not get back up again without an injury – the violence we see on the TV or in movies does not reflect what really happens

Footballers are footballers – they aren't gladiators – a punch on a football field is still violence and can be deadly. It is not sport!

Start to challenge the alcohol culture, as well as attitudes towards violence, from an early age ... going to be difficult!
'Grass roots' campaigns

Often set up by parents or concerned others of those who have been killed as a result of alcohol-related violence.

Sam Davis, 17, died in 2008 as a result of a violent assault. The Sammy D Foundation provides a range of services across SA.

In 2006, 15 year old Queenslander Matthew Stanley lost his life after being bashed outside a teenage party. The Matthew Stanley Foundation has worked with Queensland Police to stop youth violence.

The Thomas Kelly Youth Foundation - set up after the death of 18 year old Thomas in Kings Cross. His parents are lobbying for change and raising money for a range of initiatives through the Foundation.
For further information or you are interested in more of what I have to say …

Teenagers, Alcohol and Drugs is available at your local bookstore or on-line

If you would like a hard copy of this presentation, or a list of the references, please feel free to contact me by email - p.dillon@darta.net.au

You can also follow DARTA on Facebook or Twitter
I write two blogs - 'Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon' and 'The Real Deal on Drugs' – a space for young people to ask me questions on alcohol and other drug issues