

Supporting Young People who are Concerned about their Drinking

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Background

- The origins of the study lie in the report, Youth'07: The Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in New Zealand: Young People and Alcohol (2011) commissioned by the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand (ALAC).
- Report highlighted that 10.7% of students who were current drinkers were worried **sometimes or a lot about** how much they drank and 12.3% had tried to **cut down or give up**.

Aims

- Gain insight and information about youth who may be ready for, or are actively seeking interventions that will support them to successfully reduce or quit their drinking.
- Gather data that will assist in the development of targeted interventions and programmes for this group of young people, as well as informing relevant policy work.

Methods

- Mixed methods design.
- The quantitative arm involved further interrogation of the Youth'07 data focusing on contextual factors associated with wanting to reduce and /or give up drinking.
- The qualitative arm involved interviews and focus groups with young people who currently, or had in the past, been concerned about their or a friend's drinking and/or had attempted to cut down or give up drinking.

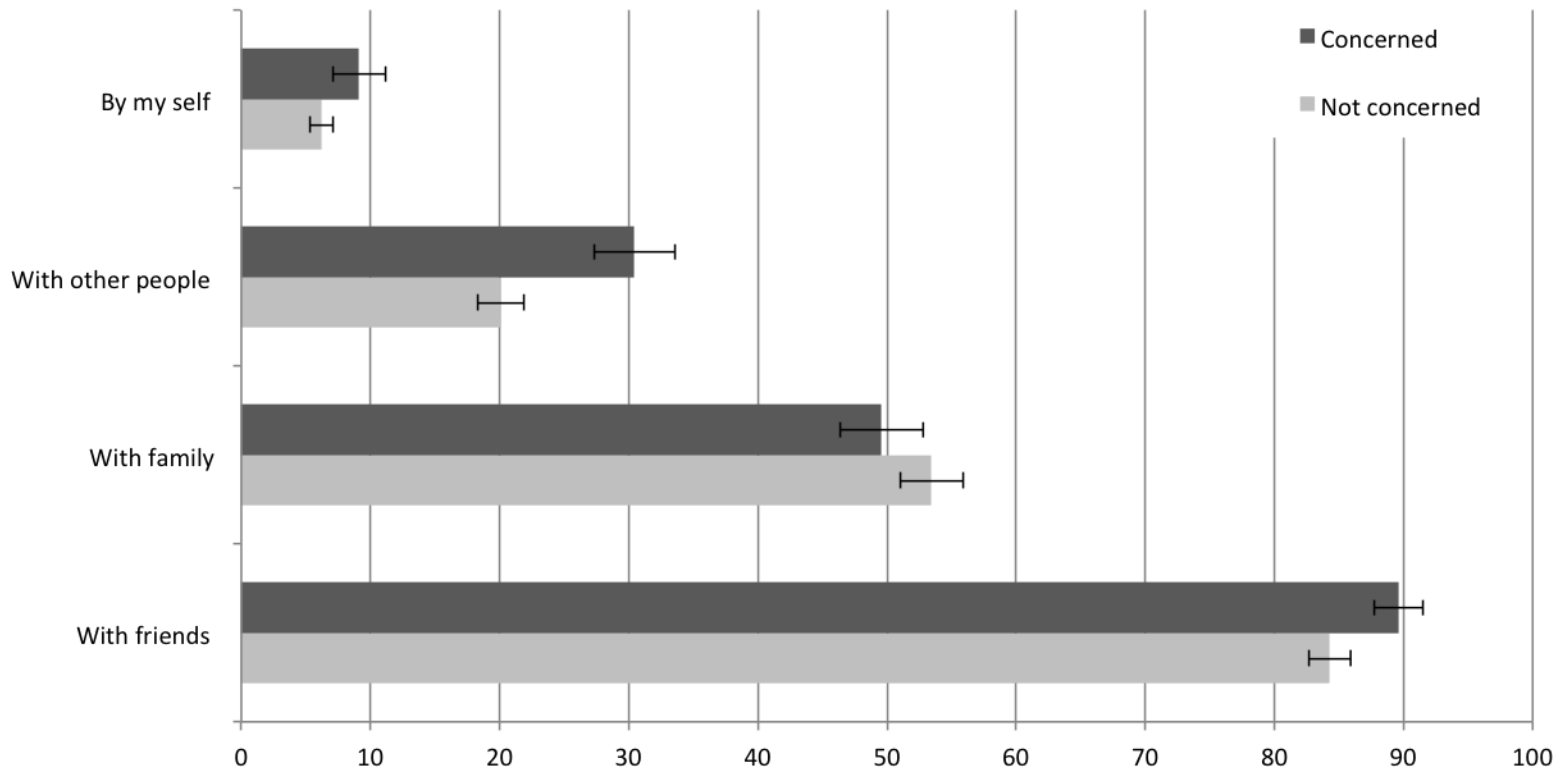
The Quantitative Phase

- 61% (n=5018) of all students responding to the Youth'07 survey indicated that they currently drink alcohol
- Controlling for individual demographic factors including age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status, the odds of being concerned about their drinking was higher among:

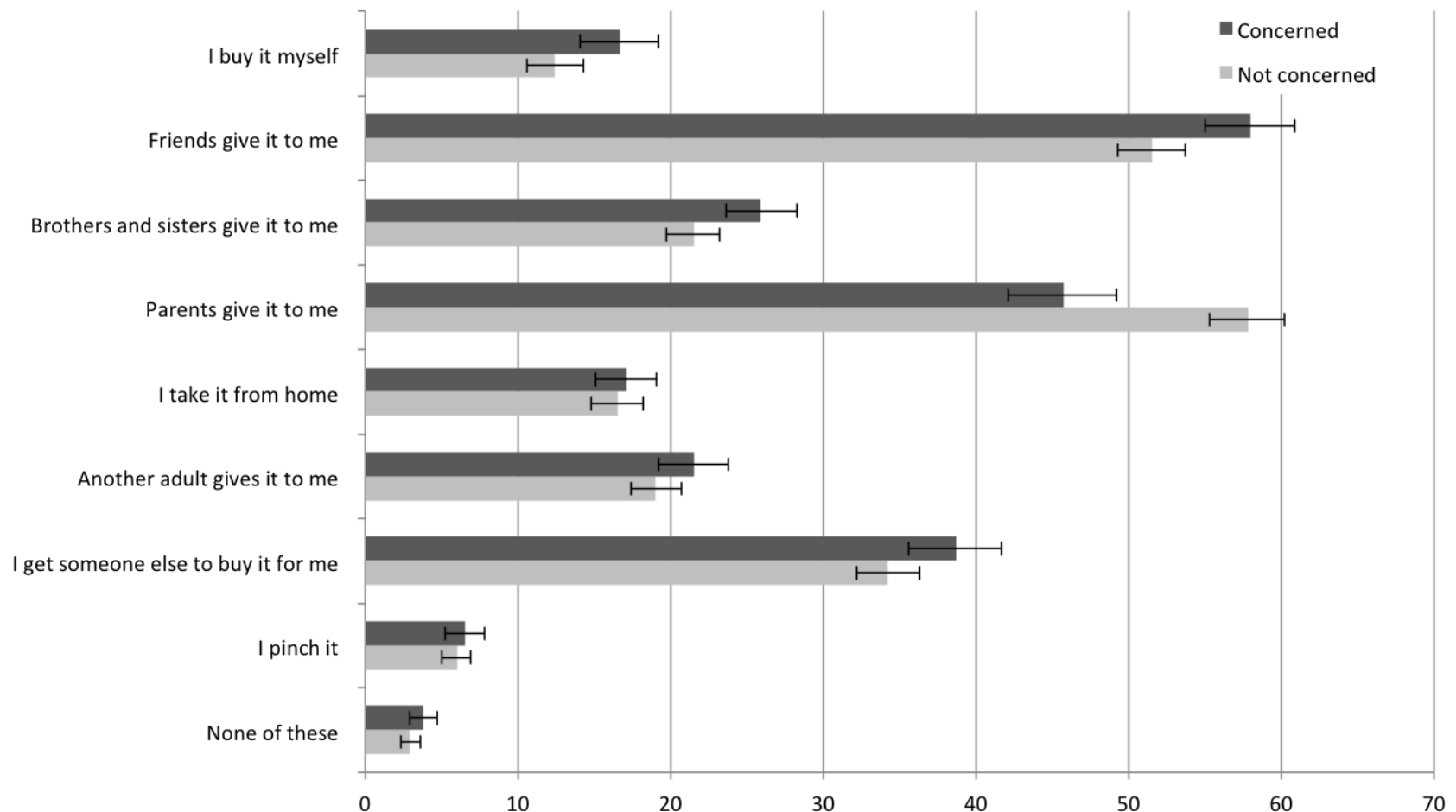
The Quantitative Phase

- Current drinkers who reported binge drinking or having suicidal thoughts.
- Current drinkers with positive connections to school, spiritual beliefs and having plans for after school.

Who students drink with by presence or absence of concern about their drinking



Sources of alcohol by presence or absence of concern about drinking



The Qualitative Phase

- Focus groups and interviews involving 99 young people
 - 15 focus groups :7 female, 3 male, 5 mixed
 - 3 interviews : 2 females, 1 male
- All 16 or older and in years 12 and 13
- 4 large co-educational schools, 1 single-sex boys school and 1 single-sex girls school. (decile 3-10)

Focus Group Themes

1. Why Young People Use Alcohol

- ***Alcohol Availability***

The availability of alcohol was recognised as a problem that impacted on young people. It was clear that underage youth have no difficulty in accessing alcohol.

- ***Drinking Culture***

Participants reported that, among young people, drinking excessively is seen as acceptable and “cool”. Indeed, “going hard out” is seen by some young people as contributing to popularity.

Focus Group Themes

- ***Stress***

Alcohol is used by young people as a way of coping with stress associated with school and other life pressures.

- ***Social pressure and social inclusion***

Drinking alcohol was recognised as a common social activity among youth, and a way of reducing anxiety in social situations. But it was also recognised that there is a good deal of pressure to drink in order to be included in the social group.

Focus Group Themes

2. Individual characteristics associated with reduction/quitting

- ***Ability to learn from experience***

Individuals who had successfully reduced or quit drinking were identified as being able to learn from experience. This might be done through observing or learning of the experiences of others or more often learning from their own experience.

Focus Group Themes

- ***Ability to resist peer pressure***

Although social pressure was a common theme, individuals who had reduced or quit drinking were those who could withstand peer pressure.

- ***Maturity, self-confidence, insight, mental strength and determination***

Those who successfully reduced or quit drinking were described as possessing maturity, self-confidence, insight, mental strength, determination and motivation

Focus Group Themes

3. Strategies and Support

- ***Peer support***

Peer support was purportedly a leading factor associated with successfully reducing or quitting alcohol. While peers were identified as contributing to alcohol consumption, so too were they seen as a key solution to the problem.

- ***Family Support***

Family were identified as another key support that had assisted young people to reduce or quit drinking. Important aspects in this regard appeared to be family connectedness and a positive parent-child relationship which involved caring and trust.

Focus Group Themes

- ***Alternative activities***

Engaging in alternative activities and keeping oneself busy with other activities was a strategy used by young people to avoid situations that involved drinking. In particular, engaging in sporting activity was found to be a useful way of reducing drinking as it is not conducive with drinking.

- ***Have a plan***

A strategy that young people had found helpful in reducing or quitting drinking in social situations was to have a plan. This was important to avoid falling into the trap of bowing to peer pressure or engaging in 'spur of the moment' drinking

Focus Group Themes

4. Barriers to Quitting

- ***Social Pressures***
- ***Lack of self-confidence***
- ***Lack of family support***

- ***Normalisation of drinking***

Unless one recognizes that they are drinking too much, they will not see the need to reduce or quit drinking. Recognizing a drinking problem is difficult due to the normalization of drinking in youth culture.

Focus Group Themes

- ***Pervasiveness of alcohol***

The social pressure experienced by young people is exacerbated by pervasive messages about alcohol and media portrayals of drinking as desirable, 'cool' and contributing to social success.

- ***Emotional problems, depression***

Emotional problems and depression are barriers to cutting back or quitting drinking for young people who lack supports as they use alcohol to try to forget their worries or assuage negative feelings and depression.

Focus Group Themes

5. Other Potential Facilitators

- ***Information provision***

Young people recommended that more information should be made available to make youth aware of the risks and dangers of drinking alcohol.

- ***Speakers***

Another strategy that young people believed would be effective in facilitating a reduction in drinking was the use of speakers who had first-hand experience in the dangers of alcohol to talk to young people in school.

Focus Group Themes

- ***Alternative activities***

Parties were the main social events attended by young people which invariably involved alcohol. Thus, provision and promotion of alternative activities was suggested as a way of supporting a reduction in drinking among young people.

- ***Alcohol restrictions***

Young people suggested a variety of restrictions on alcohol to support young people to reduce or quit drinking. These included a ban on alcohol at sports events, increasing the price of alcohol, raising the drinking age, reducing the number of liquor stores, reducing liquor store hours of sale and reducing the allure of alcohol packaging.

The Final Word

“I want people to see how I feel kind of trapped by alcohol in a way and I’m so young - but I don’t think that I would ever stop (drinking)...I always go back to it in one way or another, but I want people to just like be told the truth about what teenagers do when they are drunk and like, how this effects them and how they’ll be when they are twenty and their health and stuff. I think people just need to know that (the truth)...nobody takes anything seriously these days, you just pass it off.”