

Alcohol prototypes and drinking places:

A focus group study to explore the suitability of the Prototype/Willingness Model as the basis for an intervention with young people in the UK

Emma L Davies, David Foxcroft & Jilly Martin, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, edavies@brookes.ac.uk

Background and Method

Although overall trends indicate a slight reduction in the number of young people who drink alcohol, the evidence suggests that 11-13 year olds who do drink are consuming greater quantities(1-2).

The Prototype Willingness Model (3), characterises young people's health risk behaviours, such as drinking, as a social process. The 'prototype' images that young people have about those their age who drink or abstain from drinking are influential for an individual's 'willingness' to drink. Evidence suggests that changing these prototypes could reduce risky drinking (4).

The aim of this study is to explore the nature of these prototypes with UK adolescents in order to assess the suitability of this model as the basis for an alcohol misuse intervention.

Four focus groups took place, two with 16 and 17 year olds and two with 11-13 year olds (14 females and 13 males). Sessions took place during school time in a quiet room with the researcher and a note taker present and lasted between 40-60 minutes. They were audio recorded and the transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (5).

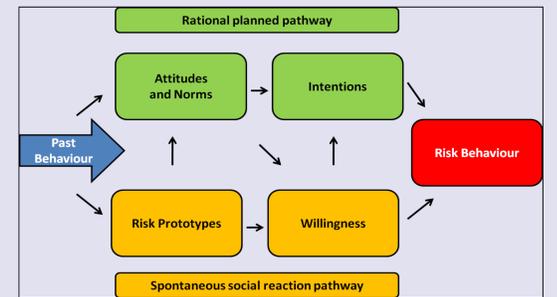


Figure 1. The Prototype Willingness Model (3-4)

Results

Three main themes were identified in the analysis.

1. Advice and knowledge

This theme represents advice that participants had heard about alcohol, knowledge (whether accurate or inaccurate) about alcohol, and learning about alcohol at school. Participants were unaware of the CMO advice but had heard a variety of other advice about drinking from parents, friends and school. 'Knowing your limits' was important to older participants but exactly what this meant was unclear. Participants had heard of alcohol units but were not aware of what they meant or current guidelines.

F2: I think that sometimes it has a negative effect, if you say like oh you can't do something.... you're absolutely not allowed alcohol at all until your 15, then it makes like people want to have it more.

F1: You learn your limits like when you're younger and then when you get a bit older you can drink responsibly.

M1: No one looks at units they just look at how much it costs.

F3: yeah if you want to act all cool and that then you'll drink
F4: It just depends what category you want to fall in

M2: Everyone can say that it's a good night if one person has a really bad night as long as it's funny for everyone else

2. Images of drinkers and drinking

This theme describes the images of both drinkers and non drinkers that participants discussed. Participants' stories about drinking from their own experiences as well as stories they had heard about others they knew are included in this theme as they were found to be connected to their representations of prototypes. Older participants were more positive about drinkers and had more experiences with alcohol. Younger participants generated more negative drinker descriptions and talked about parents and older friends or siblings drinking rather than their own. Drinking stories were told in a humorous way by both older and younger participants.

M4: I reckon they're sensible, they're just happy with who they are

F5: It's a bit strange to be honest, people who don't drink

F6: We never really talk about peer pressure that's like on the spot, cos that's more on the spot peer pressure isn't it, to drink or not

F7: Um, I don't know, I think I would probably be pressured into it and I'd probably end up doing it

F8: I think they see their friends having fun when they're drinking so they want to join in

Focus Group Schedule

1. What do you think of the Chief Medical Officer's advice that under 15s should completely avoid alcohol?
2. Describe the typical person your age who drinks or does not drink alcohol?
3. What kinds of situations / places / events would young people your age be offered / have access to alcohol?

Various prompts were used throughout

3. Planned and unplanned drinking

Attitudes towards drinking, willingness, reasons for drinking and drinking places comprise the third theme in this analysis. Between them they represent both planned, intentional drinking and spontaneous drinking. Drinking places are included here because of their relevance to planned and unplanned drinking.

Discussion

This small study provided a set of indicative findings about what young people know and think about alcohol within the framework of the Prototype Willingness Model.

The evidence suggests that adolescents are able to clearly describe characteristics of same aged drinker and non drinker prototypes and they told stories linked to their images of drinkers and drinking. Older participants were more positive about drinkers and drinking was seen as normal. Younger participants thought that people their age drank to be cool and because of pressure which indicates that they may be a more suitable target for this type of intervention.

A number of places and reasons for drinking were identified, some of these related to planned and some to unplanned drinking. Participants' discussion in the focus groups of unplanned drinking and how they might react in certain situations indicated the relevance of the construct of 'willingness' based decision making.

Next steps...

The prototype descriptions and willingness scenarios have been used to generate a questionnaire which also includes a measure of sensation seeking and implicit attitudes.

Once tested, these measures will be used in the Prototype Willingness based intervention which is currently being developed.



These tag clouds represent words that young people used to describe drinkers (above) and non drinkers (below). The larger the word the more frequently it was mentioned in the transcripts. These words informed the development of the prototype section of the questionnaire in the next stage of the project.



References

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