

Binge Drinking and Young People: Social Identity, Habit and Theory of Planned Behaviour

Introduction

The aim of the study was to examine a range of social and individual factors that contribute to young people's decisions to binge drink using a well established social-psychological decision-making model: the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

Attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control (PBC), descriptive norms, habit, impulsivity and Social Identity constructs were investigated to determine their predictive utility for binge drinking intentions and self-reported behaviour.

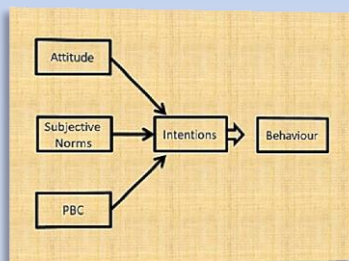
There were 2 online questionnaires available containing measures for each construct at Time 1 and a behavioural measure at Time 2 one week after the first questionnaire was completed. Participants were free to fill out the questionnaires wherever they had access to a computer from February to April 2013.

Young People

229 students at the University of East Anglia were recruited using flyers, email and social media. The group consisted of 68 male and 161 female undergraduates across a wide range of faculties at the university.



Findings



The TPB measures were significantly correlated ($p < 0.01$) with binge drinking behaviour as were measures for habit, and social identity. Attitudes, habit strength, group identity and self identity were significant predictors of intentions to binge drink. Intentions, habit and lack of premeditation (impulsivity) were significant predictors of actual binge drinking behaviour.

Many of the results support previous research in the area and elements of the TPB, subjective norms and PBC, did not appear to predict intentions. TPB measures, specifically subjective norms, have been scrutinised as inadequate hence the addition of alternative normative measures that do appear to contribute to the prediction model.

Future

Future research can build on these findings and consider variables such as past behaviours and wider social norms. Taking into account intentions are important, one way to look at behavioural changes as a way to reduce drinking is through self-regulatory strategies. Also, norms could be a focus of effective ways to change behaviours. Norms marketing uses social norm campaigns to portray safer and healthier norms in the environment and Identity Signalling can be used to encourage avoidance of unwanted and unhealthy behaviours.

These methods could have an impact in real world situations if brought in and implemented on university campuses. Equipping students with tools to change binge-drinking behaviours by offering an altered perception of the social norms could be an effective way of reducing the amount of risky drinking. This could lead to an improvement to the overall health and safety of the students.