

Pre-Drinking

According to the Alcohol Impact Survey data (2017) 70% of students regularly start drinking either at home or a friend's house before they go out for the night. 40% say they regularly deliberately get drunk at home before a night out.

Introduction

Pre-drinking (otherwise known as pre-loading) is the practice of drinking prior to going out. It is mainly undertaken by young adults for reasons of cost, to achieve drunkenness quickly and to socialise with friends (Wells et al., 2009). The UK Government Alcohol Strategy (2012) referred to the need to tackle pre-drinking due to the associations with increased consumption and risk of harm.

The Alcohol Education and Research Council and Alcohol Insight conducted a study looking at reasons adults drink at home, and in particular before a night out. Focus group data revealed the main reasons for drinking at home were price, safety, and availability of child care, immediate relief of stress, family occasions, the smoking ban and not wanting to drink and drive. The 'lack of surveillance' and 'freedom to drink as they wished' were also mentioned. Young people in particular also tended to maximize their resources by clubbing together so that they could buy more (usually cheap) alcohol.

A 2013 review discussed how some policies that are designed to reduce alcohol-harm (e.g. increasing the cost of alcohol in pubs and bars) could inadvertently encourage pre-drinking (Forsyth, 2006). Foster & Ferguson (2013) conclude that young people who pre-drink are more likely to become intoxicated and encounter alcohol-related problems than those who do not. Pre-drinking also presents a challenge for policy makers who focus on pricing as socialisation and conversation are equally meaningful motivations. Foster & Ferguson recommend that drinking venues should focus on providing a space for socialising so that they become attractive and safe places for young adults. The idea that socialising and becoming intoxicated are key motivations for pre-drinking is echoed in more recent research conducted in the UK (Atkinson, 2017).

An international comparison of 25 countries levels of pre-drinking was conducted by Labhart, Ferris, Winstock and Kuntsche (2017). Despite pre-drinking being a worldwide phenomenon, the UK were amongst the highest for levels of pre-drinking, with 70.3% of drinkers engaging in this practice compared to 38.2% of Slovenian drinkers. In support of previous research, Labhart et al. reports cost, socialising and getting ready for a night out are key motivations for pre-drinking, and that alcohol is consumed to experience drunkenness prior to going out.

Tackling Pre-Drinking at University

At university, 49% of students report drinking in their houses or accommodation (NUS Alcohol Impact data, 2017). It is within halls of residence that the majority of pre-drinking occurs. There are a number of issues with this: measures of alcohol poured are often higher than standard measures, there is no security or medically trained staff present, and there is no support? if

anything was to go wrong. Therefore, it is desirable to implement strategies to either make pre-drinking safer in halls, or encourage students to attend the university bars.

Below are some examples of initiatives implemented by universities in an attempt to reduce incidences of pre-drinking.

Brighton Student Services & Students' Union: The Brighton partnership were experiencing issues with pre-drinkers in their halls of residence, especially on a Wednesday evening. They decided to implement the 'Pre Drink Pancakes' initiative which involved pancakes, games and music in an alcohol-free social space within their halls. Student volunteers ran the event. This event was very popular with up to 200 students attending each week. Student feedback was positive with students reporting that it made their night better and more enjoyable, and that they drank less than they normally would have.

University of East Anglia (UEA) and Students' Union: The UEA partnership implemented a VIPres initiative with the aim of reducing the damage and noise disturbances that occurred whilst students were pre-drinking. The intervention features early bird drink deals as an incentive for students to socialise in the bars before a night out as opposed to pre-drinking in halls. It is £3 entry to the event and it takes place 9-11pm on Saturday nights before club nights in the Students' Union bars. Approximately 150 students attend each week.

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU): LJMU implemented a [Drink Less, Enjoy More](#) intervention. They had found that 65% of drinkers reported pre-drinking at home before a night out, and 20% engaged in en route pre-drinking. They also report that pre-drinking was significantly more common in younger people and students. The intervention aimed to increase the awareness of legislation prevention sales of alcohol to drunks, support bar staff compliance and promote responsible drinking amongst nightlife users. Following the intervention, 26% of respondents agreed that the intervention would make them drink less before going on a night out.

Pre-Drink Parties: Similar to the UEA VIPres initiative, several universities have implemented a pre-drink party initiative, where students are invited to the event where they can purchase cheaper drinks and food prior to a night out. These events are marketed as ways to meet other students outside of halls and a place where students can meet to arrive at a later event together.