

EPHA Briefing for members

Subject	Alcohol and Young People
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1. What is the issue?

The European countries are the largest consumers of alcohol worldwide ¹ More than 55,000 people aged 15-29 across Europe die each year as a result of alcohol-related road accidents, poisoning, suicide and murders according to the World Health Organisation.

The WHO reports that there is a general European trend toward wider tolerance, and even approval, among young people for intoxication. For example in the UK a large number of young people binge drink, with 37% of men and 23% of women aged 16-24 regularly drinking twice the recommended daily limits. In Germany 10% of 14 – 24 reported alcohol abuse and in Spain 1 in 5 people aged 14-18 stated that they had been drunk in the preceding month.²

Although alcohol consumption and harm is the highest among young men consumption is increasing among women. Over the past 10-15 years advertising has increasingly been aimed at the younger market. Since their introduction, the consumption of 'Alco-pops' (soft drinks mixed with alcohol) has increased annually in most Member States, especially amongst young women. A study found that 48% of children between 14-17 years of age drink 'Alco-pops' at least once a month. 50% of young women claimed never to drink beer but only 20% claimed never to drink 'Alco-pops.'³

2. Effects on Young People.

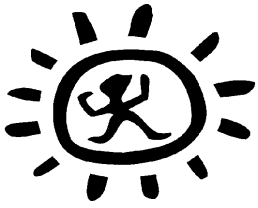
Binge drinking and regular heavy consumption of alcohol are associated with physical problems (liver damage, mouth and throat cancers, and raised blood pressure), antisocial behaviour, violence, accidents, suicide, injuries and road traffic accidents. School performance can be adversely effected as drinking in adolescents can hinder brain development and criminal activity has been shown to increase with consumption of alcohol.

According to recent studies adolescents who start drinking regularly before 15 have four times more the

¹ www.eurocare.org

² Council recommendation 'Drinking Alcohol by Children and adolescents COM 2000.

³ Bundesszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, February 2004.



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risk of developing dependence than those who had their first drink at 20 years of age.

The misuse of alcohol as well as being associated with physical problems is also associated with a range of mental disorders that can exacerbate existing mental health problems.

Adolescents report having more risky sex when they are under the influence of alcohol and may be less likely to use contraception, increasing the likelihood of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. They are also likely to have sex at a younger age, or sex that they later regret. ⁴

3. What is the Alcohol Industry doing?

Currently there exists a fragmented system of regulation within Europe made up of International and European Guidelines, mandatory government regulations, general marketing laws and self-regulation by the Alcohol industry.

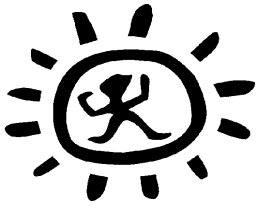
Groups such as the **Amsterdam Group** (an association of European Alcohol Companies) and **The Portman Group** (a body launched by the Alcohol Industry in the UK) have introduced codes of practise regarding naming and packaging of drinks that state that alcoholic drinks should not be marketed to Young people.

However there are numerous examples of the codes being disregarded by the Industry as seen in the document '*Marketing to Young People*' produced by Eurocare.

Alcoholic drinks should not:

- **encourage excessive drinking**, however promotions often encourage the bulk buying of alcohol.
- **be advertised in a medium if more than 25% of its audience is under 18**. 40% of the viewing audience of the music channel MTV is made up of 4 – 18 year olds and yet alcohol products are heavily advertised.
- **Should not feature real or fictitious characters who are likely to appeal to under 18 in a way that would encourage them to drink**. Alcohol companies regularly use animal characters in promotions, such as the Budweiser frogs. An American survey of elementary school children showed they were more familiar with the Budweiser frogs than many characters advertising breakfast cereals.
- **Should not be directed at those under 18 years of age**. Alco-pops are an example of an alcoholic product that has a number of qualities that appeal to the youth culture. These drinks taste sweet, they

⁴Alcohol concern (2002) Alcohol and teenage pregnancy



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use cartoon images, bright colours and use words such as 'lemonade' and 'Cola' whilst having 'rebellious' names. (Eurocare)

4. What works to prevent Young People drinking?

There is evidence that alcohol advertising affects attitudes and behaviour especially in the young.⁵ Likewise hard hitting counter advertising against alcohol has been shown to work.⁶ Other methods to reduce the levels of Young People drinking and the level of harm caused by drinking is to increase the minimum purchasing age. Education can be used to mobilise public support for intervention and prevention policies. The Federal Government in Germany has introduced a special tax on alco-pops (effective from July 1 2004). The law also requires that the bottles are labelled with warnings regarding the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, and minimum legal purchasing age.

According to the Commission there is a need to enforce self-regulatory controls and agree standards for all forms of promotions, marketing and retailing of alcoholic beverages, irrespective of the medium used. Furthermore compared to the sums spent on advertising the industry spends relatively little resources on self regulation.

5. What competence does Europe have to act?

According to article 152 of the existing treaty, the community has the obligation to contribute to the achievements of the Public Health objectives through adopting incentive measures such as recommendations excluding harmonisation of the laws and regulations of member states. The commission in this sense can 'complement' policies of the member states.

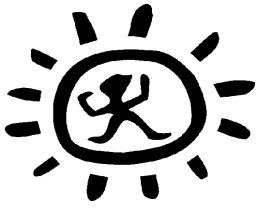
The European Council reached agreement on the new Constitutional Treaty on 18 June 2004 (this has yet to be ratified by all member states and will only come into force once this occurs). The new treaty widens community competence on Public Health in some areas. With regard to alcohol, the new article 179 specifically mentions the 'abuse of alcohol'.

6. What is Europe doing?

At the Health Council in meeting 5 June 2001 the council invited the European Commission to put forward proposals for a "comprehensive Community Strategy aimed at reducing alcohol related harm,

⁵Saffer 2002

⁶Agostinelli&Grube 2002 and 2003



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to respond to present conditions and future threats.” This invitation was repeated in June 2004.

A working paper on a coordinated approach to tackle alcohol-related harm has been drafted. This working paper outlines a number of aims in relation to Young People and Alcohol. These are that, **before the end of 2010;**

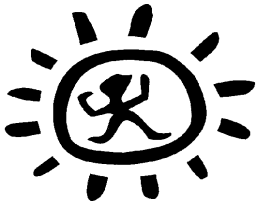
- Postpone the age at which children and adolescents start to drink.
- Reduce under-age drinking, especially binge drinking.
- Stop exposure of commercial communication to young people and promotion that encourages excessive and harmful use of alcohol.

The draft paper states that the Commission will support Member States and the Stakeholders (European institutions, NGO's and the Alcohol Industry) by;

- Inviting all partners to a round table discussion on effective means to combat under-age drinking; for example; minimum alcohol purchasing age, proof of age card; powers to target problem premises and outlets; better training for staff, evidences based prevention and promotion programmes and regulations against alcoholic beverages targeting children and adolescents, for example “Alco-pops”. This is planned to take place in late 2004.
- In cooperation with WHO arrange a Conference on evidenced based interventions to target and involve young people to reduce adolescents and young adult’s alcohol misuse. One of the main topics will be how to involve young people and how to reach and confine parents and other relevant intermediaries to take their responsibility in the work on the awareness campaign. The Conference is planned to take place at the end of 2005 or the beginning of 2006.
- In 2005 present a follow-up and monitoring report on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on alcohol and young people to the Council.

Member States should contribute to the work by;

- Establishing a lowest minimum purchase age of 18 in all Member States.
- Enforce existing minimum purchase age limits and alcohol licensing regulations/rules.
- Involve and provide training for parents, social workers, teachers and young people and make use of evidence based prevention and promotion interventions.
- Mobilise public support for prevention approaches with proven effectiveness
- Better monitor and enforce current national and EU rules and regulations (statutory or self-regulation)



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- Take actions to protect children and adolescents from commercial communication and promotion that encourages alcohol consumption.
- Encourage independent research about the effects of marketing on drinking behaviour

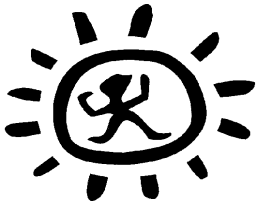
The alcohol industry should contribute by;

- Better enforcement of minimum alcohol purchasing age, by using proof of age card and better training for staff.
- Stop producing and marketing products that are attracting or targeting young people, like “Alcopops”.
- In practise show that they are willing to act responsibly and contribute in the work to get common standards for advertising, marketing and sponsoring.
- Monitoring and enforcing its own code of conduct by an independent body

The Non-Governmental Organisations should contribute by;

- Involve civil society, promote and mobilise support for interventions to reduce excessive and harmful alcohol use.
- Monitor and closely follow the marketing strategies of the alcohol industry.

A consultation process will take place with the new commissioners after they have taken up their positions in November 2004. The draft working paper will be further revised on the basis of further consultations. Depending on the outcome of these discussions a Community comprehensive approach to tackle alcohol related harm will be presented by the end of 2005. The European Commission is next year expected to report to the Council on the progress on the marketing of alcohol to Young People.



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