

Alcohol and Young Women Peer Research Project



leading improvements
in health and wellbeing across
cheshire and merseyside

Purpose of the project

To find out what young women decide would be the most effective ways to...

- Increase their resilience against serious alcohol misuse
- Provide protective influences
- Be disincentivised against serious alcohol misuse

The policy and research context

- Reducing alcohol misuse amongst young people remains a key public health priority
- The Government's approach to "localism", "asset-based" planning, and community development, means that our plans must be informed by the views of communities
- Research indicates that strategies to improve the lives of families must have a focus around the health and education of young women

Governance and scope

Scope

- Sefton, Knowsley, Western Cheshire and Central & Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust areas participated on behalf of Cheshire and Merseyside PCTs.

Steering group

- ChaMPs – commissioner
- Child Health Development Programme – project supervisor
- North West Regional Youth Work unit - Peer Research Fieldwork
- Primary Care Trusts

The project design

- Listening to the voices of young women, unfiltered by the professional view
- Employing the principles and techniques of peer research to give the project legitimacy
- The peer researchers raising hypotheses, and testing these out through peer-led discussions and interviews
- Producing a report, and disseminating the key messages to people who can make changes

Research Participants

- Young Women aged between 12 and 19 years
- Identified by services for young people as within the target group
- Group workshops and discussions held in varied settings including schools, youth centres and detached sessions
- Groups of between 5 and 20 – covering at least 160 young women

Summary of the findings (1)

The most influential factors...

1. Increasing consumption

- Influence of peers/"the norm for teenagers"
- Ease of access to alcohol

2. Reducing consumption

- Building up the confidence and independence of young women
- Reducing young women's access to alcohol

Summary of the findings (2)

Less influential factors included those with...

1. Some impact

- Access to leisure facilities specifically suited to them
- Receiving information that engages, and is focussed on their concerns e.g. weight and image

2. No impact

- Increasing the price of alcohol
- Receiving information focussed on long-term or medical risks

I want to experience it for myself that's why I drink, I see other people trying it so I want to try it

Without alcohol there's nothing to do

There should be an increase in PSHE lessons to tell young women like us about opportunities, and that could give us some motivation or something to get better jobs and stuff for the future.

The information I receive is too extreme, it's not like we're alcoholics

We wait outside off licenses, and get people to go in for us

I would always get alcohol, if I need it I will find a way to get it, like with weed if I want to smoke it I will find the money to afford it

I know loads of people that have their stomach pumped, but I still drink

Recommendations with high impact

- Increase the role of education programmes that promote independence and strengthen resistance to peer influences
- Provide better access to specialised staff within schools and colleges: one-to-one guidance on health and wellbeing
- Discourage members of the public from purchasing alcohol on behalf of young women under 18
- Discourage off licences from selling directly to young women and people purchasing on their behalf

Recommendations with more limited impact

- Reduce the use of fake IDs
- Provide more leisure facilities that are geared to the needs of young women
- Change the focus of educational programmes from long-term risks to immediate risks and consequences
- Change the methods for delivering these programmes to more participatory and engaging approaches

Responses from the project steering group (1)

Public Health strategies

- Giving information to young women which is tailored to them and their specific needs, delivered in person by teachers and other skilled professionals
- Using a combination of initiatives to tackle alcohol harm, as one strategy alone (e.g. pricing) is unlikely to have an impact
- Highlighting immediate risks which are relevant to young women, rather than longer term implications

Responses from the project steering group (2)

Supply side strategies

- Raising the priority of supply side interventions to reduce the availability of alcohol to young women
- Strengthening disincentives for adult proxy purchasers and for off licences
- Reducing the use of fake IDs

Responses from the project steering group (3)

Whole system strategies

- Providing young women with access to support and personal development opportunities to gain greater self confidence, through teachers and more specialist staff
- Providing access to sporting and other leisure activities with particular attention to avoid these activities becoming dominated by young men
- Providing alternatives to alcohol related activity at key times, such as weekend evenings, in facilities such as youth clubs

Next Steps

- Disseminating the report widely
- Influencing key decision makers and informing strategy across Cheshire and Merseyside, and the North West
- Integrating key messages with existing and emerging evidence base
- Building on the peer research to provide a “life story” perspective from young people in the North West as part of Large Scale Change work on alcohol – Autumn 2011
- Promoting and making available the methodology to support future initiatives

ChAMPs

public health network

