

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: FRIDAY 16 MAY 2008

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Adolescent risk-taking far more complex than cost of alcopops

The Federal Government's move to increase the cost of alcopops is the tip of the iceberg when dealing with adolescent risk-taking behaviour, say two University of Tasmania experts.

Education researchers Professor Joan Abbott-Chapman and Professor Carey Denholm argue the Federal Government's 2008 Budget should have helped parents to better support their children by establishing preventative and intervention programs in the community.

"We have an alcohol culture in Australia and young people think teenage drinking is normal behaviour, but when binge drinking is related to multiple risk-taking, it becomes a real health hazard," Prof. Abbott-Chapman said.

"We found parents need help to understand how they can support their adolescents. They vastly over-estimate how much their teenagers come to them for help on these things."

Profs. Abbott-Chapman and Denholm surveyed around 1000 parents and 1000 Tasmanian high school and college students across five years about their perception of "risky" behaviours, and found that many young people don't regard binge-drinking as high risk.

Of the year 11 and 12 students surveyed, 13 per cent said they got "blind drunk" regularly and 43 per cent did so occasionally. The age of the students made no significant difference to their drinking behaviour.

The researchers describe a "risk-taking syndrome" of young people drinking alcohol, looking at internet pornography and truanting from school as an escape from life pressures, such as exams and finding future work.

"Unfortunately in doing these sorts of things adolescents are damaging their future options even more," Professor Abbott-Chapman said.

In the surveys, young people were asked to rate 26 risk-taking behaviours and placed binge-drinking in the lowest of five risk groups, along with watching X-rated videos, smoking cigarettes, sunbaking, wagging classes and drinking alcohol.

"They rated drug-related activities as the highest risk-taking activities - sharing needles, injecting heroin, snorting cocaine and using speed or ecstasy - but only a tiny

minority of 2-3 per cent of those surveyed had participated in these activities,” Prof. Abbott-Chapman said.

According to the research, factors likely to reduce young people’s risk-taking behaviour include their:

- Ability to talk over personal problems with parents, friends or other family members;
- Religious commitment, or membership of Christian or other religious groups;
- Membership of community groups (other than sport) which encourage voluntary activities.

Young people also rated the advice of teachers and parents higher than health and education programs run in schools and the community.

Profs. Abbott-Chapman and Denholm have recently published their work in the US, including a unique method of rating the personal views of risk-taking behaviour which they hope researchers world-wide will adopt.

Professor Joan Abbott-Chapman will be available for interview between 10am and 12 noon Friday 15 May, at UTAS, Sandy Bay campus, Hobart.

Contact Prof Abbott-Chapman on: 0437 663 773

Information Released by:

Media Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: (03) 63243218 Mobile: 0438 510 616

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au