Young people’s motivations to moderate their drinking
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What did we do? Why?
New Zealand’s young people experience disproportionate alcohol-related harm.
The perspective taken by ALAC

Many individuals, organisations and programmes aim to reduce alcohol consumption by young people.

Internationally, previous consideration and research has often focused on a negative perspective:

- Why do young people drink heavily?
- What harms do they experience from alcohol?
- How can we better explain the negative effects of alcohol to them?
- How can we scare young people away from drinking heavily?

ALAC wanted to take a positive perspective:

- Why might young people want to drink less?
- How can we leverage those motivations?
The literature supported that perspective

- Internationally, most programmes focus on the negative effects of alcohol.
- But those programmes show mixed results, many weak or even negative.
- Theoretical support exists for a focus on positive motivations.
- But existing research to identify positive motivations of young people to moderate their drinking is limited.
‘Positive motivations’

We created a model for distinguishing motivations of different types.

**Positive motivations**
- Pulls the person towards moderate drinking.
- Makes moderate drinking a good experience.
  
  *E.g., ‘I like how you can talk to people at a party and still make sense and have good conversations.’*

**Negative motivations**
- Pushes the person away from heavy drinking.
- Makes heavy drinking a bad experience.
  
  *E.g., ‘It sucks when you're too drunk and say stupid stuff to people that sounds dumb and that you'll regret later.’*
We aimed to:

- Uncover the positive motivations of young people to moderate their drinking
- Uncover the barriers that stop young people from moderating their drinking
- Propose evidence-based guidelines that are valuable in designing programmes to achieve sustained moderation
Participants and process

- Involved 59 young people, aged 14 to 20
- Various ‘drinker types’
- From communities of various sizes
- Oversampled ALAC’s other priority populations: Māori and Pacific peoples
What did we learn?
Seven key positive motivations

- Staying safe
- Use of money
- Good health
- Positive image & reputation
- Performance & achievement
- Personal aspirations
- Social interactions & relationships
Positive image and reputation

• E.g., better skin, good photos on Facebook, not being ‘that guy’
• Very important to young people (felt keenly by women in particular)
• Alcohol plays a big role
• But counteracted by a strong barrier

“And everyone was taking photos ‘cause we all still looked normal. So there’s quite a few good photos from that party. Usually the photos that come out of parties are really bad and no one wants to see them.”
Performance and achievement

E.g., on the sports field, at school or uni, on the dance floor

Pretty important to young people

But alcohol is largely only seen to have a short-term impact

“If I didn’t drink as much, I’d probably be an All Black. Or at least playing top rugby.”
Personal aspirations

- E.g., career goals, being a good role model, being ‘a good christian’, being a Hollywood star
- Important for some, not for others
- Heavy drinking is seen as a bad thing for some personal aspirations, not for others

“That’s one of the main reasons that I don’t drink anymore, ‘cause of my mum, ‘cause I don’t want to let her down.”
The positive motivations that we identified were not all equally strong.

- How important the outcome of the positive motivation is to the young person

- The size of the role of drinking moderately in achieving the outcome of the positive motivation.
The strength of positive motivations

1. Positive image & reputation
2. Personal aspirations
3. Social interactions & relationships
4. Performance & achievement
5. Staying safe
6. Use of money
7. Good health
But, some significant barriers to moderation also exist for young people.
Nine barriers to moderation

✦ Feeling confident & able
✦ Positive physiological effects
✦ Having & sharing great experiences
✦ Changing social relationships
✦ Negative image & reputation
✦ Being responsible for others
✦ Social & cultural convention
✦ Justifying & excusing behaviour
✦ Momentum
The strength of barriers to moderation

1. Feeling confident & able
2. Positive physiological effects
3. Having & sharing great experiences
4. Changing social relationships
5. Negative image & reputation
6. Being responsible for others
7. Social & cultural convention
8. Justifying & excusing behaviour
This knowledge provides us with a strong platform to inform behaviour change strategies to support moderation.

However, we found that not all positive motivations lead to the same kind of moderation.
Three types of moderation

**Motivation**
- Desire to maximise next-day activity
- Clear ‘long-term’ goal
- Clear personal identity framework

**Belief**
- Heavy drinking incompatible
- Heavy drinking potentially detrimental
- Heavy drinking incompatible

**Isolated moderation**
Usually drinking heavily, but having the occasional night off

**Punctuated moderation**
Moderation punctuated by occasional heavy drinking

**Sustained moderation**
Long-term moderation, no heavy drinking

NB. The barriers also lead to two types of heavy drinking
How do we achieve sustained moderation?
Some young people are already demonstrating sustained moderation

- Most commonly seen amongst youth with strong religious beliefs
- Seen to a lesser (fewer, weaker) extent in young ‘role models’ and those with strong family identity frameworks
Those not demonstrating sustained moderation mainly fall into two groups

- No clear personal identity framework
- Personal identity framework not aligned with moderate drinking
To achieve sustained moderation, we need to:

- Foster the development of a clear personal identity framework
- Foster the belief that heavy drinking is incompatible
To achieve sustained moderation, we need to:

- Foster a change to the personal identity framework
- Foster the belief that heavy drinking is incompatible
Supporting young people to achieve sustained moderation is ALAC’s next challenge.

- Using the guidelines in our communications and marketing
- Sharing the findings with stakeholders who are working with young people (e.g., parents, educators)
- Also considering how the findings and guidelines could be helpful in combatting other health and social issues
Thank you.

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