

yes, i am a teenager. no, i don't need alcohol to have fun.

I don't even drink! I can't stand the taste of alcohol. Every New Year's Eve I try one drink and every time it makes me feel sick. So I don't touch booze - I'm always the designated driver.
(Kim Kardashian)

IT'S OK NOT TO DRINK

No Thank you

Supporting a young person in their decision not to use alcohol or other drugs
Presentation to Generation Next 2017

Paul Dillon
Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia

What do these people have in common?

None of them drink alcohol – some due to religious reasons, others due to prior problems with the drug and others ... just because ...

Other famous teetotalers through history

As you can see – just because you don't drink, it doesn't mean you're going to be a better person ...

Increasingly seeing people talk about their 'non-drinking'

Usually people who have had problems with alcohol in the past ... what about those who choose not to drink in the first place?

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Outline of presentation

- Australian culture and alcohol – 'it's tough to be a non-drinker'
- how many young Australians choose not to drink alcohol? How many choose not to use other drugs? Are things changing? If so, why?
- why do some young people choose not to drink alcohol?
- what are the challenges they face?
- what should parents do to support their children in this area?
- how can those who work with young people support those who choose not to drink?

Alcohol

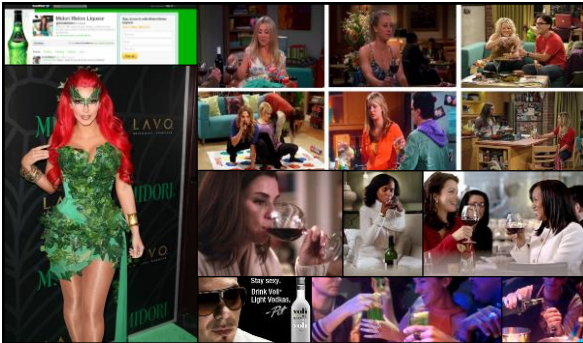
Do we really have a chance?



Alcohol | Do we really have a chance?



Alcohol | Do we really have a chance?



Alcohol | Do we really have a chance?




So how do those who don't drink alcohol feel?

In a culture where alcohol is not just socially accepted but increasingly 'socially expected' – how do non-drinkers feel?




Australian alcohol and other drug use

How many Australians choose not to drink alcohol or other drugs?



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**I SAY
NO**

How many Australians choose not to drink alcohol or illicit drugs?

AHW (2014) 2013 National Drug Household Survey

More than one in five (14 years and over) choose to abstain from alcohol

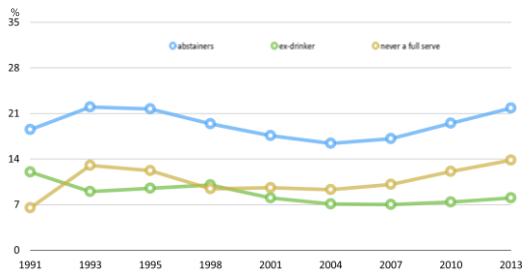
- increasing from 18.5% in 1991 to 21.8% in 2013
- **those who had never had a full serve of alcohol rose from 6.5% to 13.8%**
- number of ex-drinkers dropped from 12% to 8%

Most Australians (14 years and over) report never using illicit drugs

- relatively stable – decreased from 60.7% in 1991 to 58.2% in 2013
- recent ecstasy use (0.9%-2.5%) and cocaine use (1%-2.1%) increased
- methamphetamine was stable and recent cannabis had decreased (13.1%-10.2%)

Alcohol drinking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, 1991-2013

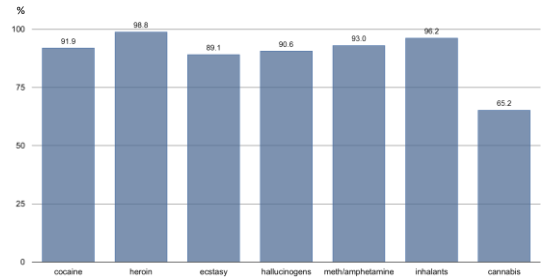
AIHW (2014) 2013 National Drug Household Survey



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Never used illicit drugs (%) - 14 years and over

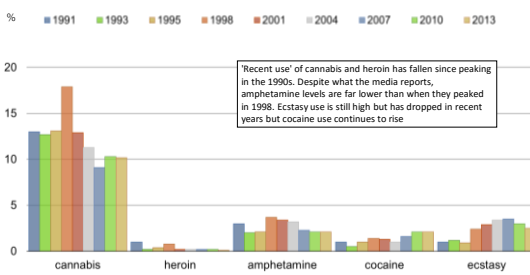
AIHW (2014) 2013 National Drug Household Survey



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1991-2013: Changes in 'recent use' (%)

AIHW (2014) 2013 National Drug Household Survey



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How many school-based young people drink and/or use other drugs?

Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014

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How many young Australians choose not to drink alcohol or illicit drugs?

White & Williams (2016) Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014

Growing numbers of school-based young people are choosing not to drink

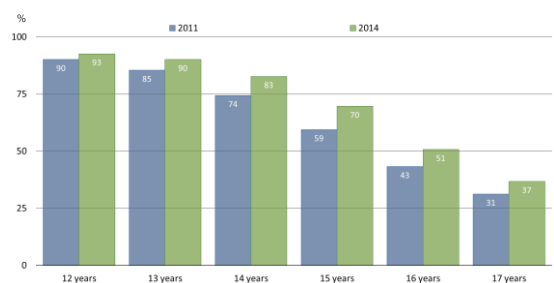
- proportion of 12-17-year-olds who reported never consuming alcohol has risen from 11% in 1999 to 32% in 2014
- number of 'non-drinkers' increased across all ages between 2011 and 2014 - amongst 15-year-olds, 70% reported being a 'non-drinker' in 2014, 59% in the previous survey
- number of 12-15-year-olds drinking has been decreasing since hitting a peak in 2002 and in 2014 was at its lowest point since the survey began

Use of illicit drugs, other than cannabis, continues to be uncommon, with 'recent use' rates much lower than in the 90s



Students who describe themselves as a 'non-drinker', Australian secondary school students (%), 2011-2014

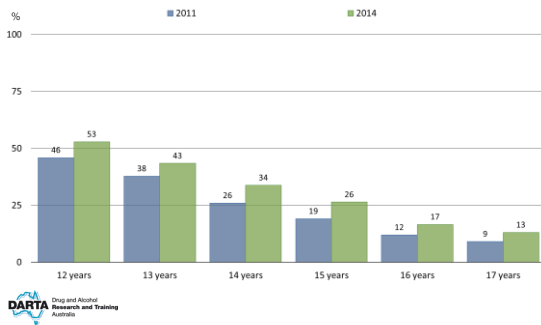
White & Williams (2016) Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014



DARTA Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia

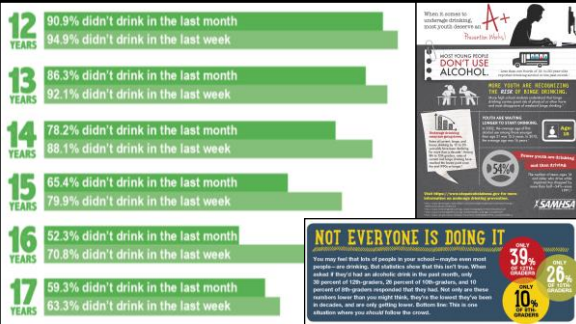
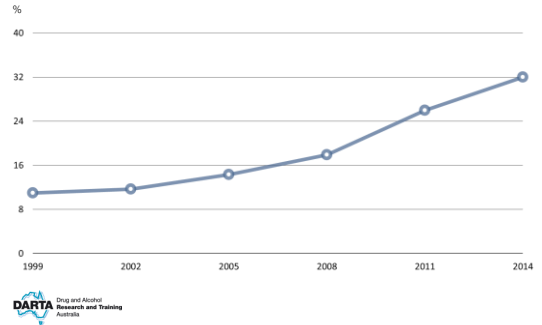
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 2011-2014

White & Williams (2016) Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014



Never used alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 1999-2014

White & Williams (2016) Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014

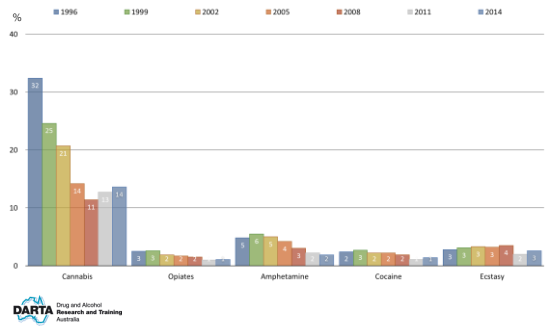


Young people and alcohol

"When it comes to underage drinking, most youth deserve an A+"

Prevalence (%) of last year drug use among 12-17 year old students, 1996-2014

White & Williams (2016) Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014



I DO NOT DRINK
I DO NOT SMOKE
I DO NOT DO DRUGS
I AM STRAIGHT EDGE

STRAIGHT
X X X
EDGE

Straight Edge For Life
S X E

STRAIGHT
EDGE
STEREOTYPES

'Straight edge' – 'sXe' or 'X1'

A youth sub-culture promoting a 'clean living' lifestyle – no sex, no alcohol or other drugs

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It's tough to be a non drinker, particularly for a young person

Nairn et al (2009) 'It's Just Like the Teenage Stereotype, You Go Out and Drink and Stuff': Hearing from Young People Who Don't Drink', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9, 287-304

Great social pressure – not just 'socially acceptable' but 'socially expected' – underage drinking portrayed as the 'norm' and teens want to be seen as adults

"... caught up in the constitution of teenagers' identities in two ways in that it is understood as part of what teenagers 'normally do' and also as what adults 'normally do'"

- choice between being 'normal' or 'weird' – not surprising many conform to the norm of drinking alcohol
- in fact, it's surprising that many don't and growing numbers are choosing not to
- a group "rendered invisible" – most health promotion and educational strategies focusing only on the drinkers

CELEBRATIONS KICK OFF WITH A BANG
SCHOOL'S OUT

"I'd say that it's an important part of who I am because it's always something that I would say I feel slightly, it may be an arrogant thing to say, but I feel slightly proud of not drinking in the face of the fact that I've always been pressured to drink by other people"

(Young man – non-drinker)

It's illegal

"They're (her parents) arguing and screaming at each other upstairs ... they're just miserable with each other. But then the next day they're fine and they're happy and I just don't, I don't want to do that with my boyfriend, I don't want to fall into that trap, so I generally just kind of stay away from it (alcohol)"

(Young woman – light drinker)

TASTE

COST "I really didn't get much from it, I just felt I was intoxicated, I didn't know where I was, I didn't know what I was doing, I couldn't control my actions"

(Young man – former drinker)

"I've got studies and I know how much a hangover affects me and I don't enjoy it for one and I know I'm not going to get any work done the next day"

(Young man – light drinker)

"But people will keep on arguing like, like if you have control on your drinking then it is okay. But I think once you have started there is no control ... Once you start drinking then eventually you will start losing your control"

(Young man – non-drinker)

Religious Beliefs

Why do young people choose not to drink?

Some comments from interviewees from Herring et al's study (2014)

Why do young people choose not to drink alcohol?

Herring et al (2012) A positive choice: Young people who drink little or no alcohol

Traditionally, strongest messages/influences from real life observations

- good parental models
- seeing negative effects of alcohol on others
- not liking the taste
- high cost
- drinking not fitting in with other commitments (e.g., sporting, academic)
- negative past experiences of drinking

"For some ... the decision not to drink is central to their identity, for others it is 'no big deal'"

Now, some new reasons are appearing ...

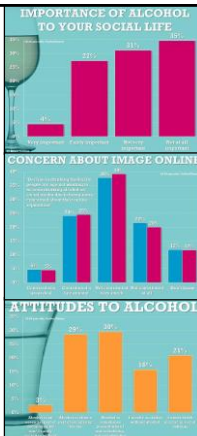


Why do young people choose not to drink alcohol?

White, J (2016) Generation Clean: Why many young adults choose to stay sober, New Scientist

Other reasons – modern issues faced by young people could be affecting their decision

- financial pressures – student debt, greater job insecurity, rising housing costs
- socializing no longer requires meeting in a pub or bar – online communication does involve drinking
- cameras everywhere – concern about online image
- increasingly diverse populations – newcomers from cultures where drinking is less common
- possible 'backlash' to the excess of their elders – the 'Ab Fab' theory – bucking trends of parents
- public health messages being more effective
- better policing of underage sale of alcohol
- attitudes of parents have shifted

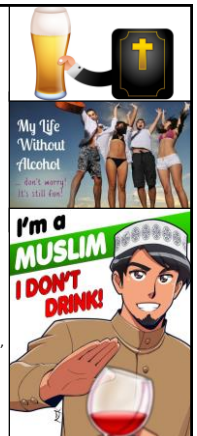


How do young non-drinkers 'survive' in a world of teen drinking?

Nairn et al (2006) 'It's Just Like the Teenage Stereotype, You Go Out and Drink and Stuff': Hearing from Young People who Don't Drink', Journal of Youth Studies, 9, 287-304

NZ study identified 4 alternative discourses non drinkers use to battle drinking norms

- have legitimate alternative subject positions
 - 'sporty' and 'healthy' lifestyles
 - religious and/or cultural reasons
- construct oppositional leisure identities
 - rejecting association between 'having fun' and drinking alcohol finding alternative activities
- reconstitute alcohol consumption as abject
 - view alcohol in 'loathsome' terms, thus validating their decision not to drink
- 'pass as a drinker'
 - while others hold visible or overt positions as non-drinkers, some attempt to 'pass' as a 'drinker' by holding a bottle or glass and/or act intoxicated



"I am very skilled at hiding the fact that I don't drink, I know sleight of hand, or if other people are playing a drinking game I'll, whenever it gets to my turn I'll leave the table or just having a half full glass of Coke, that everyone assumes is Coke and Jack Daniels"

(Paul)

"I say, 'no, I don't drink, I never have drunk, I don't see the reason in drinking, I am not going to drink now.' They say, 'just smell it, you'll like it.' 'It's like, 'it doesn't matter if I like it or not, I don't want to drink.' I repeat that for a bit and they tend to give up and go away"

(Dawn)

"People don't understand why you don't drink. At my age it's expected. If you don't you're a black sheep, kind of thing. I couldn't care less. I really don't care about what people think about me. At the end of the day, I have my group of friends, so, you know, I really couldn't care about what other people think"

(Katie)

"My closest friends respect my choice because they care, other people probably don't, they try and coax you to have a drink ... if they cared they wouldn't do it would they? If they cared enough, I've got my close friends and the people who matter around me"

(Michelle)

"At my friend's 17th birthday I was meeting quite a lot of new people who were doing a drinking game. I didn't feel comfortable with being the party pooper ... I was getting on with them really well and didn't want to kind of ruin that ... I said, 'I can't drink because I'm taking antibiotics' ... that felt like um, a more socially acceptable reason to not drink than because I didn't want to drink"

(Andy)

How do they 'survive' in a world of teen drinking?

Some comments from interviewees from Conroy and Visser's study (2014)



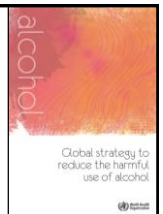
How do we effectively support those teens who choose not to drink?

Herring et al (2014) "But no one told me it's okay to not drink": A qualitative study of young people who drink little or no alcohol. Journal of Substance Use 19, 95-102

A guiding principle of WHO's Global Alcohol Strategy (2010):

"Children, teenagers and adults who choose not to drink alcohol beverages have the right to be supported in their non-drinking behaviour and protected from pressures to drink"

- focus on teen 'binge drinking' reinforces belief that all young people do this
- important to 'redress the imbalance' - represent and promote diversity of young people choosing not to drink to help address existing stereotypes
- across all levels of policy making and areas of practice (health, education, etc) and within the family



How can parents support teens who choose not to drink?

Do not worry that they're not going to 'fit in' – it is possible to not drink and have a social life!
From an early age parents should

- **acknowledge all types of drinking** – 'risky', 'moderate' and 'non-drinking' – it is an option!
- **if you know a non-drinker** – talk about them
- **discuss reasons people choose not to drink**
- **promote positive norms** – most 15 year-olds classify themselves as non-drinkers, most don't use illicit drugs
- **challenge misconceptions and avoid generalizations** – alcohol is a drug, 'not everyone does it' and it is possible to celebrate without it, drugs aren't 'everywhere'
- **be a positive role-model**



His most important role model is You

Kids form their attitudes to alcohol long before they ever have a drink themselves. They learn it from you. It's never too early to start modelling healthy your child's future drinking behaviour.

IS YOUR DRINKING AFFECTING THEIR THINKING?

MEAS

Role-modelling

A child learns so much, both positive and negative, from watching their parents and their drinking behaviour

What simple things can we do to be positive role models?

Parents - powerful influence, even on teens ...

- **don't be frightened to talk about your alcohol use** – how do you try to drink safely?
- **limit your alcohol use**, especially in front of your children
- **provide food and non-alcoholic beverages** if making alcohol available to guests
- **organise events with families and friends that don't involve alcohol**
- **don't portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress**, e.g., "I've had a bad day, I need a drink!"
- sometimes **decline the offer of alcohol**



"All teachers were telling us okay so don't drink this much because this and this happens, but **no one told me that it's okay to not drink**. So I think that could be a very important part for example in high school and at that age to hear that it's okay not be part of the rest of ..."

(Young woman – non-drinker)



How can those who work with young people support non-drinkers?

We put so much energy into working with those who do drink, particularly those who get into trouble with their drinking, we forget the non-drinkers

As someone who works with young people, what can you do?

How can workers 'redress the imbalance'? Some simple tips that can make a difference and support non-drinkers:

- **ensure conversations around alcohol begins with "if you choose to drink alcohol ..."** and not **"When you drink ..."**
 - changing those few words can make so much difference
 - non-drinkers feel included, validated and builds resilience
- **promote positive norms**
 - even where teen drinking is the norm, let them know that non-drinking is an option
- **avoid perpetuation of stereotypes and challenge misconceptions**
 - be mindful of language – don't let inaccurate statements pass
- **examine your school's/agency's/organisation's practices around alcohol and drinking**
 - what is being communicated? Is non-drinking acknowledged?



For further information or you are interested in more of what I have to say ...

For a PDF copy of this presentation or a list of references and supporting information, please go to my website - www.darta.net.au

Please feel free to contact me by email - p.dillon@darta.net.au or follow me on Facebook or Twitter (**Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia**) or go to my blogs – 'Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon' or 'The Real Deal on Drugs'



TEENAGERS, ALCOHOL and DRUGS

What your kids really want and need to know about alcohol and drugs

PAUL DILLON