An investigation into alcohol consumption among first year Social Care Students at A.I.T

Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies in Social care

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Submitted to Athlone Institute of Technology 25/11/10
DECLARATION

I declare that this project is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies in Social Care. It is entirely the work of the author and has not been submitted to any other university or higher education institution, or for any other academic award in this institute. Where work of other people has been used, it has been fully acknowledged and referenced.

Signature_________________  Date___________________________

Cyril Reilly     25th November 2010
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The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the prevalence of alcohol consumption amongst first year Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology. The objectives are to gauge levels of consumption and to identify factors that contribute to and consequences resulting from alcohol usage. A quantitative research method is adopted incorporating the administration of specifically designed questionnaires to a representative group of first year Social Care Students. High levels of consumption were found. Few students are aware of the potential dangers which could be caused by over-consumption. Significant results were found in the relationship between consumption and academic performance.
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INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is widely used and enjoyed in Irish society. It is associated with many aspects of Irish social and cultural life and its use has become deeply woven into our national identity. Alcohol use is synonymous with many life events and rites of passage such as weddings, funerals and sporting occasions. As well as having the highest rate of alcohol consumption in Europe, people in Ireland engage in drinking patterns that are excessive and problematic, with heavy and binge drinking now the norm for a substantial number of people. A 2003 report of school-goers in 35 European countries found that 15-16-year-old students in Ireland had the highest frequency of binge drinking (Mongan, Reynolds, Fanagan and Long 2007).

Alcohol is easily available, accessible and affordable for young people. The rate of alcohol consumption has increased in the Irish population in recent years. This may be linked with economic growth, greater access to alcohol through longer pub opening hours, a greater number of young people starting to drink at a younger age and a higher percentage starting to drink by the age of 18 years (O’Brien, O’Dowd, Sinclair, Soni and Thomas, 1999).

This thesis examines the results of recent research by the author into alcohol consumption amongst students in AIT to findings from a comparative study conducted by Jackson and Johnston at the same college in 2000. It investigates how trends of alcohol consumption have developed throughout the last ten years.

The aim of this research study is to investigate the prevalence of alcohol consumption among first year Social Care Students at A.I.T.

The objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the reasons for alcohol consumption among Year 1 Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology.
2. To identify the consequences of alcohol consumption among Year 1 Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology.
LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction
This review investigates the prevalence of alcohol consumption among third level undergraduate students. The author will explore the phenomenon of binge drinking and examines the causes for and consequences associated with student drinking.

1.2 Alcohol Consumption
Alcohol consumption is a feature often associated with student life. It is socially acceptable and is seen as characteristic of students to indulge in frequent and often heavy drinking (O’Brien, O’Dowd, Sinclair, Soni and Thomas, 1999). Irish students spend €80 million on alcohol each college year which averages at €110 per student monthly (Irish Examiner, April 26, 2005). Many college students are at a special period in their life, a time of adolescence where both physical and emotional changes occur. During this period they are subject to conform with peers, which is where drinking alcohol takes place (Kinney and Leaton, 1982). O’Brien et al. (1999) carried out a study among undergraduate students in a main Irish University to investigate alcohol use. The study found that 92% of the respondents considered themselves to be ‘normal drinkers’ and consumed alcohol on a regular basis. The CLAN Survey (2002) was established to identify a national student profile of lifestyle habits and to monitor trends and changes. It was undertaken by the Department of Health and Children along with 21 third level colleges in Ireland and was a national lifestyle survey among undergraduate full-time students during the year 2002/2003. The survey discovered the average age when students started to drink was 15 years. A higher proportion of third year students (36%) started drinking when they were 17 years or older in comparison to first years (31%) and second year (32%) students. The total volume of alcohol consumed per head of student was 18.3 litres of pure alcohol for males and 10.8 litres for females. Beer was the preferred drink among 87% of male students. Female students were more divided between beer (47%) and spirits (36%). Wine was more popular among female students (17%) than male students (4%).

Jackson and Johnston (2000) carried out a lifestyle survey within Athlone Institute of Technology in order to assess the health behaviours of AIT students. Students were questioned regarding their drinking to investigate the prevalence of alcohol consumption. The
proportion of students that drink was high across all academic years with the average being 92.1%. The highest level of drinking seems to be amongst 1st year students (94.2%). Although the level of drinking falls gradually through 2nd and 3rd year, it seems that 4th year students have an increased level of intake, though not to the level of 1st years (Jackson and Johnston, 2000).

1.3 Alcohol Related Problems

The adverse effects of alcohol can extend beyond physical health issues to mental, social and financial problems. There is a range of problems, which can affect everyone across the community. These problems range from a once off problem (fall, accident, fight, unprotected sex) to a recurring problem (poor work performance, financial hardship, relationship difficulties), chronic illness (cancer, liver damage) and to a sustained dependence (alcoholic disorder) (Strategic Taskforce on Alcohol Interim Report, 2002). According to research conducted by Edwards, Marshall and Cook (1997) the alcohol related problems associated with student drinking can be gauged by the extent of physical and social consequences;

- Drunkenness
- Hangover
- Vomiting
- Missing college lectures
- Poor academic performance
- Mental health problems
- Doing things they regret e.g. unprotected sex
- Family/relationship problems

In relation to the CLAN Survey (2002) the following figures illustrate the high incidence of adverse consequences among students in relation to their drinking;

- (62%) “regretted things said or done after drinking”
- (50%) “felt effects of alcohol while at class”
- (44%) “missed school days”
- (44%) “harmed studies”

First and second year students were more likely than third year students to have been in an accident or fight, experienced financial problems and thought they should cut down on their
drinking. However it is important to note harmful consequences are also experienced as a result of someone else’s drinking. The most often cited consequences include; verbal abuse (37%), passenger with a driver who had taken alcohol (22%), arguments with friends and family (20%), property vandalised (19%), physically assaulted (18%) and relationship difficulties (13%).

Jackson and Johnston (2000) state that it is worrying to note that the most common problem reported by students in AIT was ‘being sexually assaulted’ (36.1%), whilst 25.3% said they had a car accident, 15.3% reported being hit/assaulted, 12.9% reported family/relationship difficulties, and only 2.5% reported financial difficulties.

According to the Strategic Taskforce on Alcohol, (Second Report of 2004) High risk drinking is the type of drinking that is likely to increase the risk of harm for the drinker or for others, i.e. binge drinking. Binge drinking is a term used to describe a single occasion of excessive drinking, defined by the World Health Organisation as six or more standard drinks (60 grams of pure alcohol). The Department of Health and Children conducted the Irish SLAN Report (2007) which was a national survey of the lifestyle, attitudes and nutrition of people living in Ireland and highlighted that over 50% of young people aged 12-24 years were more likely to engage in binge drinking than older age groups. According to the CLAN Survey (2003), binge drinking at least once a week was reported by 61% of male students and 44% of female students. Among males, first year students had the highest proportion of weekly binge drinkers (64%). Among females, second year students (49%) were the most frequent binge drinkers. When the rates of incidence of binge drinking occasions were related to the overall number of drinking occasions, the results showed that out of every 100 drinking occasions 76 ended up in binge drinking for male students and 60 for female students.

Regular binge drinkers – who binged at least twice a week – were twice as likely to have missed classes, believed their studies were affected and considered the effects of alcohol at class. Such effects include tiredness, nausea and lack of concentration. They were three times as likely to have money concerns, twice as likely to have used cannabis, three times as likely to have unprotected sex and were less likely to have positive coping strategies to deal with anxiety and depression (The Irish Times, Tuesday, April 26, 2005).
1.4 Reasons for Student Drinking

According to the CLAN Survey (2002) the reasons why most students consumed alcohol were for sociability, enjoyment and relaxation. A higher proportion of male students chose ‘sociability’ and ‘relaxation’ while a higher proportion of female students chose ‘enjoyment’. It also found that one in ten students used alcohol ‘to forget worries’ and one in twenty used alcohol ‘for relief when anxious or depressed’. Alcohol may be a means of fitting in with peers, to seem more attractive to the opposite sex, fulfil expectations and experiment with the unknown (Lalor, DeRóiste and Devlin 2007). According to Beck, Thombs and Summons (1993) the five main reasons for adolescent/student drinking include; stress control, school defiance, peer acceptance, parental control and social facilitation. Social facilitation proved to be a major contributor in that it involves drinking in a convivial environment with friends at parties, in friends’ homes and away from parents. This can be identified throughout the students’ environment in that they are amongst friends, living independently and away from parental control which proves to be an ideal setting for alcohol consumption (Becks et al 1993).

According to Jackson and Johnston (2000) the reasons as to why students in A.I.T drink were documented as follows;

- 31.6% said that they did so ‘to have a good time when they are out’
- 29.9% said that they drink as they ‘like the taste’
- 17% said that they drink because it ‘makes them feel good’
- 14.6% said it ‘helps them to relax’,
- 6% reported drinking because their ‘friends drink’ (Jackson and Johnston 2000).

McMurran (1994) illustrates that a student’s family, social, environmental and physical factors along with the country’s legal position can influence their level of consumption. Also student income, whether from family or grants, is a key factor for influencing alcohol consumption. According to the CLAN Survey (2002) regular binge drinkers spend less on accommodation, spend a similar amount on food, but spend twice as much on alcohol per month than other drinkers, €148 in comparison to €69.

1.5 Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate the prevalence of alcohol consumption among first year Social Care students at Athlone Institute of Technology, the reasons for and the consequences
of such behaviour. The author feels there is a need to conduct this study in that there have been many studies undertaken in relation to alcohol consumption but none specifically targeting first year college students. Thus there is a hiatus in the research regarding the topic. In addition, the author feels there is a necessity for the study based on the prevalence and extent of poor academic performance due to alcohol consumption. Finally the author feels the prevalence of the problem among the sample group may be a representation of a larger proportion of the student population.
2.1 Introduction
Six parts are included in this section: rationale and justification underpinning the research instrument, the sample group, and the procedure used to complete the investigation. It also discusses relevant ethical considerations, limitations and the method of analysis.

2.2 Research Method
Research methods can be separated into two categories; one of which is quantitative, the other being qualitative. Qualitative research ‘aims to study the relationship of one set of facts to another using scientific methods’ (Donohoe & Gaynor 2003:281). The author conducted the research methodology through a quantitative approach which ‘provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population’ (Creswell, 2003:153). The author felt this method best suited the investigation in terms of comparing facts of alcohol related affects with other national and international studies. Also it proved most appropriate for gaining the required information relevant to the issues outlined in the research objectives. According to McDonald (2006) quantitative research seeks to gain understanding through the study of individuals, thus the author incorporated the use of questionnaires as the quantitative tool for investigating the study. Questionnaires are a list of questions that tell you what people say, think and do regarding a specific topic, in which the respondent writes the replies on the form (Kane, 1983).

Based on the nature of the subject, the author felt the use of questionnaires was most appropriate in terms of honesty and confidentiality in that students were enabled to respond openly and truthfully and remain anonymous. Consequently the participants felt more relaxed which in turn produced the most relevant and accurate information regarding the study. Each question was phrased the same for each respondent making the investigation more quantifiable. In drafting the questions the author refrained from asking any biased questions as it would impede the results of the research and each question was phrased clearly to avoid any misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Furthermore each question had a specific purpose in order to gather the specific information required. The advantages of using the questionnaire is that it is a simple, cheap and familiar method for gathering information, less time consuming and allows greater access to information from a large number of respondents.
2.3 Sample Group
The sample group consisted of a representative sample of twenty first year Social Care Students in Athlone Institute of Technology. ‘A sample group is a portion of the population and, ideally, reflects with reasonable accuracy the opinions, attitudes or behaviour of the entire group’ (Kane, 1983:90). A non-probability sample was chosen due to the necessity to access the information from the specific population. This is a sample of the population chosen on the basis of convenience and availability to the study.

2.4 Procedure
Before distributing the questionnaires the author conducted a pilot questionnaire, through informal gatekeepers ‘to anticipate any problems with comprehension or any other sources of confusion’ (Walliman, 2008:282). Consequently some alterations were made to the layout and wording of the questionnaire. In order to conduct the study the author sought permission from a lecturer to distribute the questionnaires among the sample group during her lecture. The author spoke to the group and explained the purpose of the study and discussed the issues in the cover note and requested an equal gender balance among the respondents if possible.

2.5 Ethical Considerations
Throughout the questionnaire the author endeavoured to present the questions in a sensitive manner. In addition, the participants were informed of their rights prior to completing the questionnaire in the form of a cover note. These included the right to; participate voluntarily, remain anonymous, obtain confidentiality, know the purpose and procedure of the study and skip any question they feel sensitive about.

2.6 Limitations
The sample group in the research study was limited to twenty students therefore the findings may be an unrealistic representation of the entire student population. Other factors that affect the results include participants misreading and/or misinterpretation of the questions as well as their willingness to engage honestly with the process.

2.7 Method of Analysis
The results of this quantitative research are illustrated graphically to facilitate comprehension. Results were used to find a correlation with similar studies and presented in the form of graphs and charts in the results section of this research project.
RESULTS

3.0 Introduction

The results section illustrates the findings derived from twenty questionnaires which were distributed within a lecture theatre. The findings are illustrated in narrative and graphical form and will be presented under the two main objectives of the study.

All participants consumed alcohol (100%) with the majority 65% being female and 35% male. A greater number of participants (35%) were aged 17-20 years, 30% were aged 26-30 years, 20% were aged 31+ years and 15% were aged 21-25 years old.

3.1 Objective 1: To identify the reasons for alcohol consumption among Year 1 Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology.

Q.4 What age were you when you first consumed alcohol?

The majority of participants began consuming alcohol below the age of 18 years as 75% of participants first consumed alcohol between the ages 13-16 years, 15% were 12 years or under, while a mere 10% delayed the onset to 17-21 years.
Q.5 Which of the following factors contribute to your drinking?

Figure 3.1.1

From the sample group 85% of participants said they drink for sociability, 80% said for enjoyment, 25% drink to relieve stress, 10% drink to forget worries, 10% drink when depressed and one participant chose ‘other’ meaning that he drank when celebrating sporting occasions.

Q.6 Which of the following statements would you agree with?

Figure 3.1.2

As the chart shows, 45% of participants said alcohol was a means of fitting in with peers, 30% said feeling more attractive, 20% said fulfilling expectations and just 5% felt said experimenting. Fitting in with peers is the most prevalent reason as outlined by almost half of the sample group (45%).
Q.7 Do you think the lack of parental control influences your level of drinking at college? The results revealed that 16 participants (80%) said ‘Yes’ while a mere 4 participants (20%) said ‘No’.

Q.8 Do you agree with the following statement? ‘The students’ environment proves to be an ideal setting for alcohol consumption in that they are amongst friends, living independently and away from parental control’.

Figure 3.1.3

The majority of respondents agree with the above statement as 90% of the participants strongly agree and 10% just agree with the statement.

Q.9 Do you think that ‘peer acceptance’ may be a reason for consuming alcohol? From the sample group 85% said “Yes” and the minority (15%) said “No”, indicating peer pressure to be a major contributor.
Q.10 Which of the following reasons explains why you choose to drink alcohol?

Figure 3.1.4

The results found that the majority of participants (40%) said they drink to ‘have a good time’, 25% drink ‘because their friends drink’, 20% said it makes them feel good and 15% drink alcohol ‘because their friends drink’.

3.2 **Objective 2: To identify the consequences of alcohol consumption among Year 1 Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology.**

Q.11 On a weekly basis how often do you consume alcohol?

The results found 50% of participants consume alcohol ‘2-4 times a week’, with equal levels (20%) consuming alcohol ‘once a week’ and ‘once a month’ and 10% drinking ‘8-10 times a week’.
Q. 13       How many drinks would you consume on an average drinking occasion?

Figure 3.2.1

As the above chart represents 40% consume 6-9 drinks, 40% consume 10 plus drinks and 20% of students consume 2-5 drinks on an average drinking occasion.

Q. 14       How much money would you spend on drink in an average week?

Figure 3.2.2

From the research sample, 25% of participants spent €70+ during the week, equal levels (20%) spend €10 or less and €11-€25, 15% spend €41-€55 while equal levels of participants (10%) spend €26-€40 and €56-€70 per week.
Q.15 Do you experience financial problems as a result of your drinking?
The results found 65% of participants said ‘Yes’ while the minority (35%) said ‘No’. The most common problems experienced were ‘no money for bills and accommodation’ and ‘being broke for the rest of the week’.

Q.16 From a night of drinking, have you ever experienced any of the following?

Figure 3.2.3

Students were asked to choose one (or more if necessary) of the above consequences they experienced from a night of drinking. The most prevalent consequences were ‘Hangover’ (90%), ‘Vomiting’ (75%), ‘Done something they regretted’ (70%), ‘Had an argument with family/friends’ (55%) and ‘Missed college/lectures’ (45%).
Q.18 After a night of drinking how would you rate your concentration level in class?

Figure 3.2.4

Concentration Level After a Night of Drinking

- 1 = 0%
- 2 = 20%
- 3 = 5%
- 4 = 20%
- 5 = 55%

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very high concentration and 5 being very low concentration, the above graph represents that 55% rate their concentration as 5, 20% said 4, 5% said 3, and 20% were rated as 2.

Q.19 Did you ever travel in a car with a driver who was under the influence of alcohol?

Figure 3.2.5

Travel With a Driver Under the Influence

- Yes = 55%
- No = 45%

As the previous chart represents 55% of participants said they have travelled in a car with a driver under the influence of alcohol while 45% said ‘No’.

Q.20 If you did not drink, do you think your academic performance would be better?

The results found that 12 participants (60%) said their academic performance would be better while only 8 (40%) said ‘No’.
DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction
This section compares the information from the research findings with that of similar studies carried out by other researchers discussed in the literature review. The findings are compared and discussed under the two main objectives.

4.1 Objective 1: To identify the reasons for alcohol consumption among Year 1 Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology.

4.1.1 Prevalence of Student Drinking
From the research sample the author found that 75% of students first consumed alcohol between the ages 13-16 years. This reflects the CLAN Survey (2002) which found the age of first consumption was 15 years. It also found that 31% of first year students were 17 years or older when they began drinking. This contrasts to the authors findings as only 10% began drinking at 17-21 years. The author’s results show that only 10% of students began consuming alcohol between the 17-20 year age bracket. Despite all the health risks imposed by underage drinking, young people are inclined to engage in this activity. Even though the law states the national legal age for consuming alcohol is eighteen years, it does not seem to discourage young people to start drinking. This is reflected in the author’s findings in that 90% of students in this study began consuming alcohol under the age of 16 years. The reasons for this are cited by Beck, Thombs and Summons (1993) as a means of stress control, school defiance, peer acceptance, undermining parental control and social facilitation.

The study carried out by Jackson and Johnston (2000) within A.I.T found that the proportion of student drinking was high across all academic years with the average being 92.1%. The highest level of drinking was amongst first year students (94.2%). The author’s findings concurred as it found an extremely high level of student drinking as 100% of the first years surveyed at A.I.T consume alcohol. This coincides with a study by O’Brien et al. (1999) in that 92% of undergraduate students consumed alcohol on a regular basis. Interestingly, ten years on, the rate of student drinking among first year students at A.I.T remains extremely high based on the above studies. Clearly a lot of students are drinkers and some are quite heavy drinkers making the concept of drinking an extremely popular activity. Therefore the
question arises as to why nothing has changed in the last ten years? One reason for this might be that the culture of drinking is really deeply entrenched among students.

4.1.2 Reasons for Student Drinking

According to O’Brien et al (1999) alcohol consumption is an integral part of student life. It is socially acceptable and is seen as characteristic of students to indulge in frequent and often heavy drinking. This is similar to author’s findings as 100% of students agree that ‘the students’ environment proves to be an ideal setting for alcohol consumption in that they are amongst friends, living independently and away from parental control’. According to the CLAN Survey (2002) the reasons why most students consumed alcohol were for sociability, enjoyment and relaxation. The author’s findings support this as 85% of students said they drink for sociability and 80% stated they drink for enjoyment. Furthermore, the author found that 25% drink to relieve stress and 10% to forget worries. This concurs with the findings of the CLAN Survey (2002) in that one in ten students used alcohol to forget worries and one in twenty used alcohol for relief when anxious or depressed.

Becks et al (1993) indicates one of the five main reasons for student drinking as peer acceptance which begs the question do young people feel the need to conform to such high levels of drinking? From the results, the author found that fitting in with peers was the most common reason for student drinking as it was selected by almost half of the sample group (45%). This concurs with Lalor et al (2007) as they suggest that alcohol may be a means of fitting in with peers. The author’s findings show that 85% of students agreed that peer acceptance was a reason for alcohol consumption. The results also found that 20% of students admitted that they drink because ‘their friends drink. Consequently, based on the findings, it is evident that the need to conform to high levels of drinking may be attributed to peer pressure/acceptance.
4.2 **Objective 2: To identify the consequences of alcohol consumption among Year 1 Social Care Students at Athlone Institute of Technology.**

4.2.1 **Consequences of Student Drinking**

Irish students spend €80 million on alcohol per college year. This averages at €110 per month (Irish Examiner, April 26, 2005). Although €110 may seem like a lot of money, in his findings the author found that 25% of the students surveyed spent €70 or more ‘per week’ and in some cases “as much as €100”. This may indicative of a trend towards an increase in money spent on alcohol amongst the student population.

Binge drinking is a term used to describe a single occasion of excessive drinking, defined by the World Health Organisation as six or more standard drinks. From the results, the author found equal levels of students (40%) consume 6-9 and 10 or more drinks on an average drinking occasion. In addition 50% drink 2-4 times a week and 10% drink as much as 8-10 times a week, therefore indicating the majority of students to be binge drinkers. This supports the CLAN Survey (2002) as it found first year students to be among the highest proportion (64%) of weekly binge drinkers. According to The Irish Times (Tuesday, April 26, 2005) regular binge drinkers were twice as likely to have missed classes, felt their studies were affected and felt the effects of alcohol at class such as lack of concentration. This is reflected in the author’s findings as 60% of students feel if they did not drink their academic performance would be better, 45% had missed college/lectures and more than half of the students (55%) rate their level of concentration as very low after a night of drinking.

Interestingly the CLAN found that 44% of students missed school which indicates a mere 1% in the difference to that of the author’s findings. The Irish Times also highlight regular binge drinkers are three times as likely to have money concerns. This was also indicated in the author’s findings as 65% of students experience financial problems with the most common being ‘no money for bills and accommodation’ and ‘being broke for the rest of the week’.

According to the CLAN Survey (2002) first and second year students were more likely to have been in an accident or fight which is evident in the author’s findings as the results show that 20% had been involved in a fight and 55% had an argument with family/friends. The CLAN reveals that 22% of students were a passenger with a driver who had taken alcohol which is much less than the 55% of students in the author’s findings who had travelled with a
driver under the influence. Here we see a connection between the fact that 55% travelled with a driver under the influence and the 25.3% of students who had a car accident in the study carried out by Jackson et al (2000). The author found the most common consequences of drinking among students at A.I.T were ‘Hangover’ (90%) and ‘Vomiting’ (75%). This is similar to research conducted by Edwards, Marshall and Cook (1997) as they found that Drunkenness, Hangover and Vomiting are amongst the alcohol related consequences of student drinking.

4.2.2 Evaluation of Method
The quantitative research method proved successful as it enabled the author to target the specific sample group, and for gaining the required information. The use of questionnaires was most appropriate in terms of honesty and confidentiality in that, students were enabled to respond openly and truthfully and remain anonymous. Consequently the participants felt more relaxed which in turn produced the most relevant and accurate information regarding the study. Finally the questionnaire is a simple, cheap and familiar method for gathering information, less time consuming and allows greater access to information from a large number of respondents.

4.2.3 Limitations of Method
The limitations throughout the questionnaire were the interpretation of the questions and the honesty of the respondents is not always guaranteed which could give rise to insufficient results. The sample group in the research study was limited to twenty students therefore the findings may be an unrealistic representation of the student population. It is inaccurate to assume from this study that the entire student population are drinkers. For example, the author found that out of the twenty respondents surveyed 100% were drinkers, but this does not mean that 100% of the student population drink. In other words, if more than 90% do drink, then it is quite likely if one chose twenty students randomly then the likelihood is that one would find twenty students who do drink, and just happen to miss out on the odd one or two who don’t drink. The author suggests that future researchers should incorporate all A.I.T students, drinkers and non-drinkers alike in order to get a true representation of the target group.
CONCLUSION

Overall the results found that not a lot has changed in A.I.T since the study conducted by Jackson and Johnston in 2000. All of the respondents (100%) who took part in the survey consume alcohol. Although they indicated that they were cognisant of the effects and consequences of their drinking, yet they continue to participate in this student drinking culture. Participants had difficulty defining what was meant by the term binge drinking. This lack of knowledge may contribute to the fact that most respondents were found to be binge drinkers. The students described alcohol consumption as an integral part of college life. It is seen as both socially acceptable and a characteristic of students to indulge in frequent and often heavy drinking. As with the study conducted in 2000 it was found that the majority of respondents drink alcohol for sociability and enjoyment.

This study also highlights the effects of alcohol consumption on the students’ academic performance with some missing college/lectures and experiencing very low concentration levels in class. The results found the majority of the students (60%) believe if they did not drink, their academic performance would be better. A worrying feature of the authors study and one which was not highlighted in any previous research into the area suggested that there may be a statistical correlation between the prevalence of alcohol consumption, driving whilst under the influence and road traffic accidents. Based on this, the author recommends a further study be carried out specifically focusing on students at A.I.T to investigate the phenomenon of drink driving among college students.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results from the dissertation there is a need to promote moderation of alcohol consumption with specific focus on young people i.e. the student population.

- There is a need for students to receive adequate education and information on the effects and consequences of alcohol on individuals.
- There is a need for the provision of social/recreational activities to be implemented in the college environment to defer students away from drinking.
- The college needs to ensure that The College Alcohol Policy is adhered to and implemented. For example, College Tutors should be encouraged to refer to alcohol-problems during their initial meetings with first-year students.
- Services such as counselling and AA should be promoted and available within the college for students.
- Alcohol promotions should be reduced and regulated within the college campus and opening hours of the student bar be reduced significantly.


Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health & Children., (2002). *Strategic Taskforce on Alcohol-Interim Report*. Dublin: Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health & Children.


Holland.K., (Tuesday, April 26, 2005). *High levels of binge drinking by students highlighted*. The Irish Times.


Cover Letter

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the prevalence of alcohol consumption among first year Social Care students at AIT. All respondents completing the questionnaire are doing so on a voluntary basis and are not obliged to answer any question they feel too uncomfortable to answer. Respondents will remain anonymous and the information will be utilised for the sole purpose of the investigation and remain confidential.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Cyril Reilly.
QUESTIONNAIRE

Q.1 What gender are you?
   Male □
   Female □

Q.2 What age bracket are you in?
   17-20 years □
   21-25 years □
   26-30 years □
   31+ years □

Q.3 Do you consume alcohol?
   Yes □
   No □

Q.4 What age were you when you first consumed alcohol?
   12 years or under □
   13-16 years □
   17-21 years □
   22+ years □

Q.5 Which of the following factors contribute to your drinking?
   (Tick one)
   For sociability □
   To be polite □
   For enjoyment □
   Loneliness □
   To relieve stress □
   When depressed □
   To forget worries □
   Other □

If other, please specify.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

25
Q.6 Which of the following statements would you agree with?
Alcohol is a means of

(Tick one)
- Fitting in with peers
- Fulfilling expectations
- Feeling more attractive
- Experimenting

Q. 7 Do you think the lack of parental control influences your level of drinking at college?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Q.8 Do you agree with the following statement?
‘The students’ environment proves to be an ideal setting for alcohol consumption in that they are amongst friends, living independently and away from parental control’.

Strongly agree ☐
Agree ☐
Disagree ☐
Strongly disagree ☐

Q.9 Do you think that ‘peer acceptance’ may be a reason for alcohol consumption?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Q.10 Which of the following reasons explain why you drink alcohol?

(Tick one)
- Have a good time
- Like the taste
- Makes you feel good
- Because your friends drink
Q.11 On a weekly basis how often do you consume alcohol?

(Tick one)

- Once a week
- 2-4 times a week
- 5-7 times a week
- 8-10 times a week
- Once a month

Q.12 When would you be most likely you drink?

(Tick more than one if necessary)

- Weekends
- Everyday
- Most days
- Special occasions
- Other

If other, please specify.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
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Q.13 How many drinks would you consume on an average drinking occasion?

(Tick one)

- 1 alcoholic drink
- 2-5 alcoholic drinks
- 6-9 alcoholic drinks
- 10 plus alcoholic drinks

If more than 10, please specify.

___________________________________________________________________________
Q.14  How much money would you spend on drink during an average week?

(Tick one)

- €10 or less
- €11- €25
- €26- €40
- €41- €55
- €56- €70
- €70+

If other, please specify amount.

Q.15  Do you experience financial problems as a result of your drinking?

Yes  □
No   □

If yes, please explain.

Q.16  From a night of drinking, have you ever experienced any of the following?

(Tick more than one if necessary)

- Hangover
- Vomiting
- Missed college/lectures
- Been verbally abused
- Other

- Done something which you later regretted
- Been involved in a fight/assault
- Had an argument with family/friend/partner
- Failed to use contraception
- Driven when over the limit

If other, please specify.
Q.17 On an average day how would you rate your concentration level in class?
*On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very high concentration and 5 being very low concentration.*

1 2 3 4 5

Q.18 After a night of drinking how would you rate your concentration level in class?
*On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very high concentration and 5 being very low concentration.*

1 2 3 4 5

Q.19 Did you ever travel in a car with a driver who was under the influence of alcohol?
Yes □
No □

Q.20 If you did not drink, do you think your academic performance would be better?
Yes □
No □

*If yes, please explain.*
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Q.21 How would you define ‘binge drinking’?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________