

**IS PEER
CONNECTEDNESS
ENCOURAGING
EARLIER INITIATION
OF ALCOHOL
USE AMONG IRISH
CHILDREN?**

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1.0 ABSTRACT

Introduction

Childhood initiation with alcohol is persistently at unsustainably high levels in Ireland, with alcohol use among young people increasing by 79% from the ages of 12 to 18.¹ In light of this, the paper will examine how peer connectedness influences childhood drinking and becomes the third pillar of an alcogenic environment that children must navigate every day, uniting with other omnipresent motivational factors of invasive marketing and ubiquitous alcohol use within family settings.

Methods

Drawing on previous research, this paper will explore in depth the link between peer connectedness and alcohol, as well as how this connection affects and encourages alcohol use among children. The Irish findings will then be related to European School Research on Alcohol and Other Drugs² to be analysed in contrast to other European countries.

Results

The analysis of available data reveals a significant association between lifetime alcohol consumption and peer drunkenness. Furthermore, peers serve as a source of alcohol for 30% of young people, as well as prompt their drinking motivation. This has only increased with the rise of social media and its persuasive nature. Compared to other European countries from the ESPAD research,³ Ireland is found as an outlier with a pronounced characteristic within this realm.

Conclusion

With these results, the research will aim to establish the impact of peer connectedness, its dominant role in sustaining early initiation of alcohol use and the need to fashion specific interventions to address its efficacy.

¹ Dooley et al. (2019) My World Survey 2. [Online] Available at: http://www.myworldsurvey.ie/content/docs/My_World_Survey_2.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

^{2,3} Espad.org. 2020. ESPAD Report 2019 Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. [Online] Available at: http://www.espad.org/sites/espad.org/files/2020.3878_EN_04.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In Ireland, alcohol use per adult in 2019 was 10.8 litres which corresponds to 40 (700 ml) bottles of vodka, 113 (750 ml) bottles of wine or 436 pints of beer.⁴ My World Survey 2, the National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland,⁵ found that in the first year of secondary school, 8% of 12-year-olds had drunk alcohol in their lifetime. By sixth year, this percentage grew to 87% of 17-18-year-olds drinking alcohol. This dramatic increase in alcohol use is stimulated by an alcocentric environment that dominates a child's life during those crucial years of development. This alcocentric environment is fuelled by intense alcohol marketing and hazardous alcohol use in the family surroundings, as well as harmful levels of alcohol use among children themselves.⁶

Research suggests that such early initiation with alcohol increases the risk of negative changes in the cognitive function of the child's brain,^{7,8} as well as increases the possibility of alcohol dependence.⁹ Furthermore, problem alcohol use among children and young people has been identified as a global health priority by the WHO.¹⁰ Alcohol use contributes to the three leading causes of death among adolescents which are unintentional injury, homicide and suicide;¹¹ approximately 50% of young people who died by suicide in Ireland (2007-12) had alcohol present in their system, while more than 70% had a history of alcohol abuse and/or drugs.¹² This is an indication of undoubted evidence that childhood alcohol use has negative consequences for children's present and future.

- ⁴ Hrb.ie. 2021. Alcohol consumption, alcohol-related harm and alcohol policy in Ireland. [Online] Available at: https://www.hrb.ie/fileadmin/2_Plugin_related_files/Publications/2021_publications/2021_HIE/Evidence_Centre/HRB_Alcohol_Overview_Series_11.pdf (Accessed 19 April 2021)
- ⁵ Dooley et al. (2019) My World Survey 2. [Online] Available at: http://www.myworldsurvey.ie/content/docs/My_World_Survey_2.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)
- ⁶ Fox, K., Kelly, C. and Molcho, M., 2015. Alcohol Marketing and Young People's Drinking Behaviour in Ireland. [Online] Drugsandalcohol.ie. Available at: https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/24854/1/AlcoholMarketingStudy_2015.pdf (Accessed: 23 April 2021)
- ⁷ Witt, E., 2010. Research on alcohol and adolescent brain development: opportunities and future directions. *Alcohol*, 44(1), pp.119-124.
- ⁸ Silveri, M., 2012. Adolescent Brain Development and Underage Drinking in the United States: Identifying Risks of Alcohol Use in College Populations. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 20(4), pp.189-200.
- ⁹ Grant BF and Dawson DA (1997) Age of onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 9: 103-110
- ¹⁰ Drugsandalcohol.ie. 2010. Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. [Online] Available at: https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/14845/1/WHO_Global_strategy_reduce_alcohol.pdf (Accessed: 19 April 2021)
- ¹¹ VicHealth. 2021. Harmful industries' digital marketing to Australian children. [Online] Available at: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResearchandEvidence/Under-the-radar--Harmful-industries-digital-marketing-to-Australian-children.pdf?la=en&hash=960D0ED61D543DE331A5C8306EC87E95422FADC2> (Accessed: 19 March 2021).
- ¹² Arensman, E., Bennardi, M., Larkin, C., Wall, A., McAuliffe, C., McCarthy, J., Williamson, E. and Perry, I., 2016. Suicide among Young People and Adults in Ireland: Method Characteristics, Toxicological Analysis and Substance Abuse Histories Compared. *PLoS One*, 11(11), p.e0166881.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

It is imperative that there is a societal change in the way alcohol use among young people is perceived and persistently encouraged. Two influential factors for early initiation of alcohol use among children have already been identified and established. First is the powerful and effective alcohol advertising, exposure to which increases the chances of earlier initiation of alcohol use among children and is associated with riskier drinking patterns.^{13,14} Alcohol advertisements often appeal to children and can increase susceptibility of never drinkers by 1.5 times.¹⁵ The second factor is normalisation of alcohol use within the family, for which research indicates that increased parental alcohol use is positively associated with their children's own alcohol use.^{16,17}

This paper proposes to explore the presence of a third, allied pillar of influence on the childhood experience in Ireland: peer connectedness, which together with pernicious alcohol marketing and the prevalence of domestic alcohol use within the family, generates a powerful dynamic that motivates and stimulates alcohol use among children in a self-perpetuating, never-ending cycle.

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- ¹³ Sargent, J. and Babor, T., 2020. The Relationship Between Exposure to Alcohol Marketing and Underage Drinking Is Causal. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Supplement*, (s19), pp.113-124.
- ¹⁴ Jernigan, D., Noel, J., Landon, J., Thornton, N. and Lobstein, T., 2016. Alcohol marketing and youth alcohol consumption: a systematic review of longitudinal studies published since 2008. *Addiction*, 112(S1), pp.7-20.
- ¹⁵ Boniface, S., Critchlow, N., Severi, K., MacKintosh, A., Hooper, L., Thomas, C. and Vohra, J., 2021. Underage Adolescents' Reactions to Adverts for Beer and Spirit Brands and Associations with Higher Risk Drinking and Susceptibility to Drink: A Cross-Sectional Study in the UK. *Alcohol And Alcoholism*.
- ¹⁶ Mares, S., van der Vorst, H., Engels, R. and Lichtwarck-Aschoff, A., 2011. Parental alcohol use, alcohol-related problems, and alcohol-specific attitudes, alcohol-specific communication, and adolescent excessive alcohol use and alcohol-related problems: An indirect path model. *Addictive Behaviors*, 36(3), pp.209-216.
- ¹⁷ Tildesley, E. and Andrews, J., 2008. The development of children's intentions to use alcohol: Direct and indirect effects of parent alcohol use and parenting behaviors. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 22(3), pp.326-339.

3.0 METHODS

Data was amalgamated from a range of reports:

- The Irish data for European School Research on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD)¹⁸ was conducted in 2019 from 50 randomised post-primary schools around Ireland. 1949 students took part in the survey and were 15 to 16 years old at the time of the data collection.

ESPAD Ireland¹⁹ found a significant association between lifetime, and current, alcohol use and missing school because of illness, skipping school and other reasons. As the surveys were gathered in schools, some students who are current drinkers might not have been included in the sample which potentially abates the given results.

- The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study²⁰ was conducted in 2018 with 15,557 participants aged 8 to 18 from 255 primary and post-primary schools around Ireland.
- My World Survey 2, the National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland,²¹ was conducted in 2019 and involved 10,459 children aged between 12 to 19 from 83 randomly selected second-level schools in Ireland.
- Growing Up in Ireland, a national longitudinal study of children since 1998,²² was last released in 2020. This paper focuses on the Child Cohort '98 with 6,039 participants, more specifically its Wave 3 when the study participants were 17 to 18 years old.

The published data from these surveys was then reviewed to make connections between peer connectedness and childhood alcohol use. Further analysis was conducted of the publicly accessible ESPAD²³ data to obtain new, unpublished data of some crucial European comparisons. Visualisation of this data is included in the paper.

^{18,19} Sunday, S. Keogan, S. Hanafin, J. and Clancy, L. (2020). ESPAD 2019 Ireland: Results from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Ireland. Dublin: TFRI

²⁰ Költő, A., Gavin, A., Molcho, M., Kelly, C., Walker, L. and Nic Gabhainn, S., 2020. The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study 2018. [Online] nuigalway.ie. Available at: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/media/healthpromotionresearchcentre/hbscdocs/nationalreports/2018-report---online-version-interactive---updated.pdf> (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

²¹ Dooley et al. (2019) My World Survey 2. [Online] Available at: http://www.myworldsurvey.ie/content/docs/My_World_Survey_2.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

²² McNamara, E., Murphy, D., Murray, A., Smyth, E. and Watson, D., 2020. Growing Up in Ireland: The Lives of 17/18-Year-Olds. [Online] Growingup.ie. Available at: <https://www.growingup.ie/pubs/GUI-lives-of-17-18-year-olds-web-ready.pdf> (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

²³ Espad.org. 2020. ESPAD Report 2019 Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. [Online] Available at: http://www.espad.org/sites/espad.org/files/2020.3878_EN_04.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

4.0 RESULTS

Peer connectedness can be defined as “perceptions of support, genuine caring, and trust in one’s peer group”.²⁴ As a consequence of this, peers often influence young people’s behaviour. This influence can be both negative and positive. Children who affiliate with peers that participate in irresponsible behaviour are more likely to partake in such behaviour themselves.²⁵

Over half (56%) of participants in My World Survey²⁶ reported friends as their most endorsed coping strategy when faced with struggles. Furthermore, 17-18-year-olds from Growing Up in Ireland²⁷ rated friendships as the third most important aspect of their lives. Around a quarter of those participants claimed they would “very often” or “always” go to their friends to “help them feel better” (27%) or to “ask for advice” (26%). Peer connectedness, as a way of relying on peers for support and as a means to manage or cope with problems, is a cherished and crucial element of children’s lives.

Peers’ action often presents the encouragement young people need to join in on risky behaviour. Research has shown that witnessing peers smoking after watching a cigarette advertisement caused young people to decrease their negative attitudes toward this behaviour and increase their intentions to smoke. At the same time, seeing peers who did not smoke did not change their opinions.²⁸

To understand how peer influence impacts children’s initiation with alcohol use, ESPAD Ireland,²⁹ which produced the most detailed data regarding alcohol use, offered insight into alcohol habits of children. In brief, 72.6% of 15-16-year-olds who completed the survey had used alcohol in their lifetime. 65.2% had had alcohol in the past 12 months, with the majority of them (52.6%), consuming alcohol between one and five times during those 12 months, while 6.3% reported that they had used alcohol over 40 times in the past year. 40.8% of participants reported that they had used alcohol in the last 30 days and were considered current drinkers.

²⁴ Bernat & Resnick as cited in Foster, C., Horwitz, A., Thomas, A., Opperman, K., Gipson, P., Burnside, A., Stone, D. and King, C., 2017. Connectedness to family, school, peers, and community in socially vulnerable adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, pp.321-331.

²⁵ Foster, C., Horwitz, A., Thomas, A., Opperman, K., Gipson, P., Burnside, A., Stone, D. and King, C., 2017. Connectedness to family, school, peers, and community in socially vulnerable adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, pp.321-331.

²⁶ Dooley et al. (2019) My World Survey 2. [Online] Available at: http://www.myworldsurvey.ie/content/docs/My_World_Survey_2.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

²⁷ McNamara, E., Murphy, D., Murray, A., Smyth, E. and Watson, D., 2020. Growing Up in Ireland: The Lives of 17/18-Year-Olds. [Online] Growingup.ie. Available at: <https://www.growingup.ie/pubs/GUI-lives-of-17-18-year-olds-web-ready.pdf> (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

²⁸ Pechmann, C. and Knight, S., 2002. An Experimental Investigation of the Joint Effects of Advertising and Peers on Adolescents’ Beliefs and Intentions about Cigarette Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1), pp.5-19.

²⁹ Sunday, S. Keogan, S. Hanafin, J. and Clancy, L. (2020). ESPAD 2019 Ireland: Results from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Ireland. Dublin: TFRI

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The most common age for trying alcohol for the first time was 15 (32.4%), closely followed by 14 (29.4%). However, a quarter (25.5%) of male students who had tried alcohol reported doing so for the first time at age 12 years or less, 20% overall. This data demonstrates that alcohol use is significant among children in Ireland, with less than 3 in 10 of 15-16-year-olds never having had alcohol and 4 in 10 being current drinkers.

In terms of drunkenness among young people, ESPAD Ireland³⁰ reported that 64.3% of 15-16-year-olds had never been drunk in their lifetime compared to more than a third (35.7%) who had. 69.8% of them had been drunk between one and five times, while 17.4% of students had been drunk more than 10 times, with 4.5% of them reporting being drunk more than 40 times. The majority of students who had been drunk in their lifetime reported being drunk for the first time at the age of 15 (51.6%), while 4.1% of them had been drunk before they were 12 years old. 16.1% of students reported being drunk in the past 30 days.

Through their research, ESPAD Ireland³¹ discovered that there was a significant association between lifetime drinking and peer drunkenness among participants. 71.9% of students who answered that “all their friends get drunk” had tried alcohol in their lifetime, while only two-thirds (66.2%) who said that “none of their friends get drunk” reported having tried alcohol. Similarly, half of 15-16-year-olds (50.4%) who said that “all of their friends get drunk” reported that they were current drinkers, compared to a third (33.2%) who said that “none of their friends get drunk”.

These figures indicate that children who associate with peers, and their drinking habits, are likely to adopt those behaviours too. As more children drink to the point of drunkenness, more of their friends are influenced to use alcohol. This creates a perpetuating cycle that is difficult to break as children tend to want to please their peers. This is indicated by ESPAD Ireland's³² breakdown of drinking motivation among 15-16-year-olds. 21.4% of students claimed they drank to “fit in with a group”, 20.2% said they drank to “not feel left out” and 12.8% did so to “be liked”. Other choices available for selection by the interviewees, among others, were “to enjoy parties”, “like the feeling”, and “to make social gatherings more fun”.

79% of students reported alcohol as “very easy” or “fairly easy” to obtain.³³ Such alarming ease of access further determines the scale of the problem and the lack of adequate action taken to prevent this early initiation of alcohol use among Irish children. Not only are they motivated by numerous environmental sources – marketing, family environment, and peer

^{30,31,32} Sunday, S. Keogan, S. Hanafin, J. and Clancy, L. (2020). ESPAD 2019 Ireland: Results from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Ireland. Dublin: TFRI

³³ Espad.org. 2020. ESPAD Report 2019 Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. [Online] Available at: http://www.espad.org/sites/espad.org/files/2020.3878_EN_04.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

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connectedness, it is also “very easy” or “fairly easy” for the vast majority of Irish children to access it.

In Ireland, a person must be 18 years of age to buy alcohol, unless they are accompanied by a parent in an off-licence premise. A person must be 18 years old to drink alcohol, unless they are in a private residence and have parental consent. It is an offence to offer minors alcohol without consent from their parents. It is also an offence to buy alcohol on behalf of someone who is under 18.³⁴

Nevertheless, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study³⁵ has found that almost a third (30%) of children between the ages of 12 and 17 source their alcohol from peers. 21% give money to someone else, most likely an older peer or even an adult, to buy the alcohol for them, while 30% of participants also reported someone else’s home as the location where they consume alcohol. In at least a third of all cases of alcohol use among children, peers are an active tie between children and alcohol.

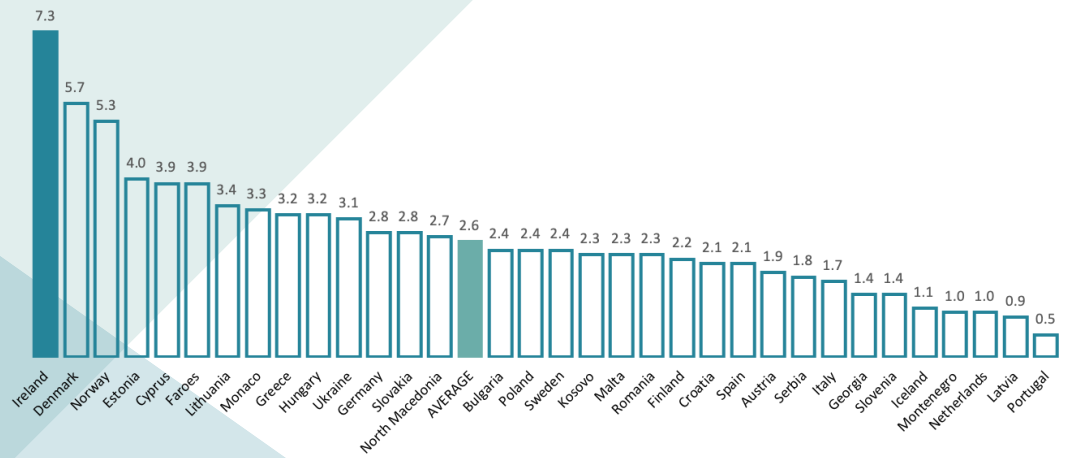
4.1 European Comparison

In comparison to other European countries,³⁶ drinking motivation among 15-16-year-olds in Ireland is a particular outlier. Girls in Ireland are the most likely in Europe to mostly or always drink to “not feel left out” (*Graph 1*) or to “be liked” (*Graph 2*). What is more, the percentage of Irish girls who do this is more than twice as that of the European average in both cases.

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- ³⁴ Citizensinformation.ie. 2021. Alcohol and the law. [Online] Available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/justice/criminal_law/criminal_offences/alcohol_and_the_law.html#1a1c7b (Accessed: 29 March 2021)
- Költő, A., Gavin, A., Molcho, M., Kelly, C., Walker, L. and Nic Gabhainn, S., 2020. The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study 2018. [Online] nuigalway.ie. Available at: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/media/healthpromotionresearchcentre/hbscdocs/nationalreports/2018-report---online-version-interactive---updated.pdf> (Accessed: 19 March 2021)
- ³⁶ Espad.org. 2020. ESPAD Report 2019 Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. [Online] Available at: http://www.espad.org/sites/espad.org/files/2020.3878_EN_04.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

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Graph 1: Percentage of girls who mostly or always drink to "not feel left out"



Graph 2: Percentage of girls who mostly or always drink to "be liked"



From the 33 European countries in this analysis, Irish boys are not far behind Irish girls with being in 9th place for mostly or always drinking to “not feel left out” and also in 9th place for mostly or always drinking to “be liked” among peers. However, this characteristic is more prominent in 15-16-year-old girls.

In ESPAD Ireland’s³⁷ research, of the 16.1% of students who reported being drunk in the past 30 days, 54.4% of them were female and 45.6% were male. This signifies a significant difference between genders for alcohol use in the past 30 days.

³⁷ Sunday, S. Keogan, S. Hanafin, J. and Clancy, L. (2020). ESPAD 2019 Ireland: Results from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Ireland. Dublin: TFRI

5.0 DISCUSSION

The ESPAD data³⁸ shows that Ireland experienced a 6% increase in the use of alcohol during the past 30 days among 15-16-year-olds from the year 2015 to 2019 which, alongside Hungary, is the largest change in Europe.

It is difficult to identify a defining reason for this significant increase. The sustained economic recovery that Ireland experienced up to 2018, after exiting the Economic Adjustment Programme (the European Troika “bailout” funded by the ECB, EU Commission and the IMF) in late 2013 is significant.³⁹ Consumer Sentiment, measured within the ESRI/KBC Index, demonstrates a notable shift in consumers’ perception of theirs, and the state’s economic situation, rising more than 30% between January 2014 (CSI=84.6) and January 2018 (CSI=110.4).⁴⁰

Ireland’s recovering economy allowed for a slow improvement in the ‘quality of life’ factors for Irish people. This brought some modest levels of renewed disposal income and with it, personal expenditure on luxury items such as alcohol. This led to increased alcohol use among parental alcohol use and within the family environment as consumption per capita (> 15 years) in Ireland between 2013 (10.53 litres) and 2018 (11.01 litres) rose by 4.6%.⁴¹

The economic recovery saw renewed alcohol marketing investment as direct alcohol advertising expenditure also increased by 30% from €37.25 million in 2014 to €48.28 million in 2018.⁴²

5.1 Influence of social media to shape peer narrative

A prominent tool that links peer connectedness and alcohol use among young people is social media, as it plays an influential role in the encouragement of underage drinking through drinking practices that frequently appear on different social media platforms.

An especially popular challenge that has been captured and spread across several platforms involves finishing a whole drink on video without putting it down and afterwards challenging friends to do the same. As the challenge gained more and more participants across networks, people began

³⁸ Espad.org. 2020. ESPAD Report 2019 Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. [Online] Available at: http://www.espad.org/sites/espad.org/files/2020.3878_EN_04.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

³⁹ The Irish Times. 2021. Ireland’s bailout exit of huge significance for Europe. [Online] Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/ireland-s-bailout-exit-of-huge-significance-for-europe-1.1594773> (Accessed: 28 March 2021)

⁴⁰ Esri.ie. 2021. Consumer Sentiment Index, January 2018. [Online] Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/media/file-uploads/2018-02/CSI2018JAN.pdf> (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

⁴¹ Alcohol Action Ireland. 2021. How much do we drink?. [Online] Available at: <https://alcoholireland.ie/facts/how-much-do-we-drink/> (Accessed: 29 March 2021)

⁴² Nielsen Media Research - AdDynamix, 2018. Advertising Expenditure Overview. [Online] Medialive.ie. Available at: <https://www.medialive.ie> (Accessed: 12 March 2021)

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consuming larger and stronger drinks which resulted in a number of tragic incidences, including in Ireland.⁴³

Such challenges are sustained by the interactive dynamics within peer connectedness as they involve 'tagging' friends to perform the same stunt. Children value their friendships and seek to impress their peers which makes these challenges more corrosive.

Research has shown that heavier social media use (more than an hour of daily activity) was associated with greater likelihood of more frequent drinking among 10-15-year-olds compared to non-users or non-daily users. Similar was shown for 16-19-year-olds whose binge drinking patterns increased with their social media use.⁴⁴

My World Survey 2's⁴⁵ discovered that over 96% of Irish 12-19-year-olds reported having a social media account, 34% of whom reported spending more than three hours online every day. A large cohort of young people spends a significant part of their day on social media which, increasingly, is a platform for such reckless challenges and promotions that support early initiation of alcohol use and stage use of alcohol as a popularity and relatability contest among young people and children. Because young people seek approval and fame among their peers, the social media environment is a volatile setting that encourages harmful alcohol use.

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- ⁴³ Masterson, E., 2021. Gardai warn new Tik Tok challenge is like 'playing Russian roulette' after woman is hospitalised. [Online] SundayWorld. Available at: <https://www.sundayworld.com/news/irish-news/gardai-warn-new-tik-tok-challenge-is-like-playing-russian-roulette-after-woman-is-hospitalised-40002935.html> (Accessed: 19 March 2021)
- ⁴⁴ Ng Fat, L., Cable, N. and Kelly, Y., 2021. Associations between social media usage and alcohol use among youths and young adults: findings from Understanding Society. *Addiction Journal*.
- ⁴⁵ Dooley et al. (2019) My World Survey 2. [Online] Available at: http://www.myworldsurvey.ie/content/docs/My_World_Survey_2.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2021)

6.0 CONCLUSION

Peer connectedness is a proven factor in how young people act and adopt new, positive or negative, behaviours. Alcohol use is no exception, as demonstrated by ESPAD Ireland.⁴⁶ With the help of social media, children spread their influential attitudes towards alcohol to their peers, which influences a possible change in their opinion or simply affirms their own positive attitude toward the use of alcohol. Combining the power of peer connectedness with consistent, pervasive alcohol marketing and an alcohol-positive family environment, Irish children find themselves embraced by a compelling alcohol narrative at a very early age.

This unfettered market access also ensures that 40% of all 15-year-olds are already drinking, and by the time they enter early adulthood, 93% are recruited to supporting the alcohol industry with a 'lifetime of income' and are committed members of the EU's No. 1 binge drinkers.⁴⁷

Firm statutory controls must be established to protect children from the embrace of a pernicious economic actor who takes no responsibility for their future welfare.

⁴⁶ Sunday, S. Keogan, S. Hanafin, J. and Clancy, L. (2020). ESPAD 2019 Ireland: Results from the European Schools Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs in Ireland. Dublin: TFR

Cso.ie. 2021. Women and Men in Ireland 2016. [online] Available at:

⁴⁷ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2016/health/#d.en.142589> (Accessed: 29 March 2021)