

Non-drinkers seen as more socially competent in study

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Soft option? Non-drinking students are seen as more socially competent than their drinking peers

Students who avoid alcohol in social situations are perceived by their peers to be more socially competent than those who drink, according to new University of Sussex research.

The findings, published in the *Journal of Health Psychology*, could have implications for health campaigners in identifying ways to promote a more positive view of non-drinking as a [lifestyle choice](#) or a situation-specific behaviour among students.

Psychology doctoral researcher Dominic Conroy carried out detailed interviews with 12 students aged 20 to 29 about their drinking habits and their perception of the drinking habits of others.

In response to discussions about non-drinkers, the participants revealed that they considered non-drinkers as "something strange, requiring explanation". They also viewed non-drinkers as "simultaneously unsociable, yet reflecting greater sociability". And they felt that non-drinking held greater negative consequences for men than for women.

Dominic Conroy said: "Drinking in social contexts is considered to be a key feature of British culture. However, heavy episodic drinking is more common among university students than the general population of 16 to 24-year-olds and is consequently linked to poor health outcomes and anti-social behaviour.

"While non-drinkers are sometimes regarded as boring and anti-social, the study revealed an alternative view. Non-drinkers are also be seen to be more socially competent than drinkers – or 'the lucky ones' - because they can enjoy social experiences without needing alcohol."

He added: "What makes non-drinking less appealing to male students is the fear of losing friends: it appears to carry significant social costs. Casting non-drinking individuals as more social than drinkers suggests one route that [health](#) promotion campaigns could take to encourage a more positive view of non-[drinking](#) among men."

More information: "'Man up!': Discursive constructions of non-drinkers among UK undergraduates," Dominic Conroy and Dr Richard de Visser, is published in the *Journal of Health Psychology* (November 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23188922)

Provided by University of Sussex

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