



Alcohol fuels youth crime: report

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Up to 50% of youth crime in Ireland is committed in situations where alcohol has been consumed. This is according to Youth Justice Service (YJS) report of the country's Garda Youth Diversion Projects, which also said that the overwhelming picture was one of easy access to alcohol.

"The reduction of alcohol related youth crime is therefore key to reducing anti-social and criminal behaviour amongst young people in our communities," said Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews TD.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) are community based multi-agency crime prevention initiatives. The first two GYDPS were set up in 1991 and there are currently around 100. They seek to challenge anti-social and criminal behaviour amongst young people by providing activities which facilitate personal development, encourage civic responsibility and work towards improving long-term employability prospects of participants.

The report found that 85% of GYDPs name alcohol related crime as the first on the list of crimes in their area. There are peaks at weekends, during the summer months and during calendar events like Halloween, St Patrick's Day and school exam result nights.

Other risks for offending include: individual risks; family risks; school performance; and the neighbourhood where the young person resides.

The report also suggested that there is a strong pattern of young people getting alcohol from parents or older siblings, and some alcohol is purchased from off-licenses with home delivery services from the latter also problematic.

Staged fights and neighbourhood conflicts are often initiated by girls who have been engaged in a long campaign of bullying (often in school) followed by a contrived fight and possible further bullying. The report also highlighted the problem of arranged fights being disseminated by mobile phones and computers.

Ireland is not alone: in Australia police crime statistics from four states show that alcohol and social networking websites such as Facebook and YouTube have generated behavioural changes leading to a marked increase in youth offences, especially girls and children of both sexes under 14.

In Australia one expert says that websites had fundamentally changed the way young people related to each other, and this could be linked to the increase in youth crime.

The web generated competition and encouraged them to look at ways of gaining status, and demonstrating superiority and toughness. That is why there is a proliferation of things like the videotaping of violent confrontations. Education and justice systems need to adjust to the changing youth culture.

In the UK last year one initiative showed that anti-social behaviour in North Cumbria fell 14% over the half-term after police confiscated alcohol from under 18-year-olds.

Next November a conference is to be held in Bristol on Youth, Alcohol & Crime. Publicity for the event says that there has been an enormous recent increase in alcohol consumption amongst young people in the UK.

Teenagers are drinking twice as much as they did in 1990, and this includes young women, who are increasingly becoming involved in alcohol-related disorder.

Many people now avoid their town and city centres due to the late night noise and aggression associated with youthful heavy drinking. It has been estimated that there are more than one million alcohol-related violent crimes annually in the UK.

For copies of the Irish report *Designing Effective Local Responses to Youth Crime: A baseline analysis of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects* see www.iyjs.ie