

Alcohol in the Life of Young People



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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

IRELAND HAS a problem with alcohol. The consumption rates are high and there is a prevalence of binge drinking compared with other countries, except the U.K. where rates are similar. This has obvious results, not only directly for the health of the imbibers themselves, but indirectly for the wider community in terms of accidents, unwanted pregnancies, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and social and domestic violence. The number of admissions to A&E (Accident and Emergency) wards where alcohol is a contributing factor has a serious impact on hospital resources.

The laws on drinking, and particularly underage drinking, have been tightened and made more easily enforceable; there would probably be little scope for improvement in this area, and it would seem more relevant to look at social aspects. We must realise that although drinking among the young causes particular disquiet, the problem is not confined to them; they reflect a general social malaise and could perhaps be seen as the weak point at which it becomes visible.

The biblical and theological findings as well as church tradition, however, make it clear that alcohol, and particularly wine, should not be totally condemned; it can be a source of conviviality and social relaxation. What we must encourage is temperance in the sense of restraint and self-control to avoid over-indulgence. Here the example of other, especially southern European, countries might be relevant. Alcohol consumption is not seen as an arcane adult ritual and thus to be a sign of one's (wo)manliness but as a normal part of family life.

It would seem important therefore to change social attitudes among the young themselves. While the Church can show a clear moral stance on this, many of the young not only ignore

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the Church, they even seem unaware of its existence. Advertising and propaganda in the case of drug abuse seem to have been double-edged, sometimes apparently increasing use. More fruitful might be restraints on advertising of alcohol, although this might be difficult in the area of satellite television. Probably the best hope lies in the family where adults can give a positive example to children. It has been commented that western culture seems to encourage teenagers to find their own amusements with comparatively little adult involvement; perhaps a diminution of this trend would be helpful.

CHAPTER 2 Health

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION rates in Ireland have risen by more than 40% in the last decade and all the indices of harm have experienced similar increases. We are paying a severe price for our misuse of alcohol at societal levels where A&E departments are creaking, absenteeism is increasing and the health of the general population is suffering.

Young people are to the forefront of alcohol abuse in Irish society. The problems are, in most cases, peer driven, media driven by advertising and also influenced by bad examples from parents who often use alcohol excessively in front of their children. It is unfortunate that moderation is not more prominent in people's minds.

FACTS

- 41% increase in consumption in ten years
- Various studies have indicated that alcohol consumption per capita in Ireland is the highest in the E.U. with a consumption of 11.4 litres per week per capita compared with 9.1 litres. Interestingly, the northern European countries, i.e. the U.K. and Scandinavia, also have high levels of consumption, but less than ours, while the southern Mediterranean countries, i.e. France & Italy, have much lower levels.
- Irish teenage binge drinking in 15 to 16-year-olds ranks as the highest in the E.U. Surprisingly, 15-year-old girls in Ireland binge drink more than any of their counterparts in Europe. Research from the U.S. indicates that young people who start to drink before the age of 14 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence later in life than those who start drinking at the age of 20.

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- 40% of Irish males binge drink once a week compared to 16% of Finnish males, 8% of Swedish males, 8% of French males and 38% of U.K. males.
- 16% of Irish women binge drink once a week compared with 3% of Finnish women, 1% of Swedish women, 2% of French women and 12% of U.K. women.

SOCIETAL EFFECTS

Findings based on A&E consultations in October 2003 show that:

- One in five cases are alcohol related.
- One in eight present drunk.
- Three out of four admissions from A&E departments are alcohol related.

Mater Hospital Survey Findings – 2001/2002 show that:

- 31% of all male and 9% of all female patients admitted are alcohol related.
- The cost to the Irish taxpayer is €2m to €2.5m per year

SUICIDE ASSOCIATION

There is a definite association between alcohol abuse and suicide. Alcohol, particularly at abusive levels, is a depressant, and autopsies of suicide victims more often than not reveal high levels of alcohol in the bloodstream. It has to be emphasised that the suicide rate of young Irish males is among the highest in Europe.

STANDARD DRINKS MEASURED IN UNITS

1 unit = A standard glass of wine (quarter bottle = 3 units)
or
A half pint of regular beer
or
A single measure of spirits (35 ml)

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For a male, the World Health Organisation recognises that males drinking more than 21 units over a week are entering harmful levels of drinking, while the figure for females is 14 units a week. There is a myth at large that moderate drinkers are healthier than teetotallers. The only research available to us shows that people who drink a glass of red wine every second day (i.e. 3 units a week) are more healthy than non-drinkers.

It has to be emphasised that the stronger beers, alcopops and other more recent alcohol products (for example shots and aftershock) are to be deplored. The profit motive is opposed to social welfare.

SYMPTOMS OF EXCESS

- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Non-specific symptoms
- Recurrent infections
- Sexual problems
- Sleep increase or decrease
- Weight loss or gain
- Stomach complaints
- Absenteeism
- Deteriorating academic performance

EFFECTS OF EXCESS

- All forms of cancer are increased in alcohol abuse, particularly cancers related to the gastrointestinal tract and the liver.
- Coronary artery disease is accelerated by excessive use of alcohol, particularly in vulnerable people who have a family history of this disease.
- Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a consistent feature of alcohol abuse.
- The incidence of stroke (cerebro vascular accident) is markedly increased as a result of alcohol abuse.

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- Cirrhosis of the liver is a long-standing associate of alcohol abuse in certain vulnerable people, particularly females.
- Obviously, social problems involving marital breakdown and violence are associated with alcohol excesses.
- Brain damage: There is no doubt but that persisting alcohol abuse can cause irreversible brain damage.

ALCOHOL AUDIT

An alcohol audit was carried out as a pilot scheme in ten practices throughout Ireland from September 2002 to March 2003, under the auspices of the Irish College of General Practitioners (I.C.G.P.). The practices represented every Health Board area, urban and rural divides, and also one practice that was within a third level institution.

The patients were selected randomly in relation to their alcohol habits. One in eight patients were interviewed by one participating practice in Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow on the basis of their alcohol consumption and pattern of drinking.

They were graded into three categories; low risk, hazardous or harmful. The latter two categories were dealt with and followed up.

The results indicate that:

- 68% were in the low risk category (male: female ratio 1:2)
- 13% were teetotal and/or in recovery (male: female ratio 1:2)
- 6% were hazardous category (male: female ratio 2:1)
- 3% were harmful/dependent category (male: female ratio 3:1)

SALIENT POINTS

- General practice can be an important forum for dealing with alcohol abuse.

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- Brief intervention in the form of concerned but firm advice can be effective in improving the health of people in the hazardous group.
- It was confirmed that there are huge gaps in the health services in relation to dealing with alcohol abuse. Workloads prevent GPs from having time to deal with alcohol as part of their care.
- There is a glaring need for alcohol counsellors within the community to deal with people with alcohol problems. Currently the counsellors are based in the psychiatric system and quite often difficult to access. A counsellor in the community or directly associated with GPs would be more effective and less stigmatising for the victim. Self-help groups such as Al-Anon for adult members and Al-Ateen for teenage members can be very beneficial in supporting family victims in an alcohol abuse situation.
- Apart from the one particular practice in the pilot scheme, attached to a Regional Technical College, the numbers of teenagers who presented were smaller than would be desirable. However, the indications are that if a practice takes a particular interest in alcohol abuse, this situation would improve.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion there is a need for greater awareness of alcohol problems among young people and more counselling services to help them. Society patently does not deal with alcohol abuse. Moderation appears to be anathema to it. The culture of being able to drink a lot and 'hold your drink' is very much part of our society. Alcohol advertising, the sale of alcopops to youngsters and the stronger beers and other products specifically produced to cause inebriation have to be stopped. Parents have to be more aware of the influence that they have on their children in the early years if these same children are not to copy their fathers and mothers later on as teenage abusers of alcohol.¹

CHAPTER 3 Law

THERE WAS NO change in underage drinking legislation from 1924 until 1988 and the legislation that was operative during that period was ineffective. This was because of the need to prove knowledge of the person's age on behalf of the person selling the intoxicating liquor to the underage person. The 1988 Act marked a major change in that it introduced more effective legislation and greatly strengthened the hand of the Gardaí in dealing with underage drinking. The two subsequent acts dealing with the area have continued to make convictions for underage drinking easier to obtain and have introduced much more severe penalties.

There have been three acts dealing with underage drinking (among other things) in the past fifteen years, and this is an indication of how seriously the problem is now viewed by the legislature.

The law requires that public houses display their price list in a prominent place for patrons to see. Weights and measures are regularly checked by government agents, glasses must be stamped with an official government measure and optics tagged to prevent tampering. Patrons know that drinks obtained in one pub, should contain the exact same measure as in every other pub in Ireland. However the price of drinks is not regulated. Fairly standard prices are bottled Guinness or ale: €3.60 a pint: bottled lager: €4.10 a pint. Mixers, minerals (eg. coke etc.) while bought in bottles, translate to €4.40 a pint and carbonated beverages (water) €4.80 a pint.

Full details of the legal situation and its historic basis are provided in the Appendix (see page 41).

CHAPTER 4 Church Tradition

THE CHRISTIAN attitude to wine and all that goes with it is essentially positive. Wine is a sign of peace and plenty, an idea inherited from the biblical world. The Church of Ireland Eucharistic prayers say: 'May this bread and wine be to us the body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. As we eat and drink these holy gifts make us, who know our need of grace, one in Christ, our risen Lord'.² To both Jew and Christian the banquet of heaven is absolutely central and in that banquet wine plays a vital part.

Nevertheless there is a tension below the surface. In the Church of Ireland there is a history of social concern in relation to the misuse of alcohol. The long story of the Church of Ireland Temperance Society is enough to prove the point. Generation after generation has fought against the abuse of alcohol.

Wine plays a large part in the history of this land. Time and time again we find wine listed among the most valuable imports. Not for nothing were the great Norman family of Walter the 'hereditary butlers' of Ireland. This royal office, as in bible times, conferred great dignity on its holder. To be butler was to be a great officer of state, as well as to enjoy the import duty on all wines. The Butlers prospered, indicated by the wealth and splendour of their seat at Kilkenny Castle. In a lesser way, was not the butler the chief servant in a great Victorian house?

Reactions to alcohol abuse have varied from fierce abstinence to comfortable moderation. Nowhere are the issues better illustrated than in the history of the Guinness family. Philanthropic zeal with true evangelistic piety is found hand in hand with the founding and growth of one of the greatest

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breweries ever known. For example, Arthur Guinness the younger wrote about 150 years ago that:

'the continued good account of our business calls for much thankfulness to Almighty God while we humbly ask for the infinitely higher blessings of his grace in the Lord Jesus Christ'.³

The black porter of Guinness's brewery was much better for the poor than either raw spirits or contaminated water, yet the risks were there. 'Liquid food' the product may have been described, but it retains the power to intoxicate and to form addiction.

We have a great inheritance of concern behind us, yet in two ways the current situation is new. It arises as a problem of affluence, not of poverty. In the past all, young and old alike, were dragged down by the evil of alcohol abuse. Now we are dealing with the dark underside of something that is essentially good, the huge empowerment and enrichment of life that young people enjoy in ways undreamed of by their predecessors. This is something to be celebrated and applauded, but at the same time special care is needed. The needs and vulnerabilities of young people have not gone away.

Many great churches are a parable of all this, none more so than St Patrick's Cathedral itself. Made beautiful and secure in the Victorian era by means of brewery profits, St Patrick's, a national cathedral of the Church of Ireland, is a place of constant prayer and intercession for those in need of every kind.

CHAPTER 5

Biblical Basis

‘**N**oah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard’ (Genesis 9:20). And so, after God establishes a covenant with Noah and with every living thing, alcohol makes its first appearance in the biblical texts. After the new community of creation emerges from the Ark, God promises that humankind will never again provoke God to curse the earth. God pronounces the blessing:

‘As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease’ (Genesis 8:22).

Wine, therefore, is presented as one of the fruits of God’s blessed creation, which we are invited to enjoy, and, indeed, to offer back to God (see, for instance, the sacrificial laws in Numbers 28:1-8) requiring the Israelites to ‘pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the Lord.’

Some of the Bible’s best-known texts include wine among the many blessings that God has bestowed on creation. Psalm 23 addresses God thus:

‘You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows’ (Psalms 23:5)

Or again, God is thanked for the gift of wine in Psalm 104:

‘You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart’ (Psalms 104:14-15)

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The Bible makes no attempt to conceal the role of alcohol in human society: Joseph is imprisoned along with Pharaoh's cup-bearer and baker, and it is to the cup-bearer's poor memory that Joseph owes his release (Genesis 40:1-41:13). It is worth noting too that when Joseph frames his younger brother Benjamin for theft, he has his silver cup planted in Benjamin's sack. Nehemiah was cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes, before he was granted permission to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-6).

Some are called to abstain from alcohol. One thinks here of the Nazirites, whose infidelity to their calling is condemned in Amos 2:11-12.

Notably in the wisdom literature, with its emphasis on the cultivation of the intellect, we find a heightened awareness of alcohol's capacity to be abused, leading to dire and worldly consequences:

'Do not be among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe them with rags' (Proverbs 23:20-21).

The accusation of being a 'winebibber and glutton', it will be remembered, was made against Jesus, whose mission anticipated God's reign in feasts, to which the wicked were invited. The gospels abound in images relating to the production and enjoyment of wine: new wineskins for new wines; James and John believe themselves capable of drinking from the 'same cup' as Jesus; Christ the true vine and the Father the vine-grower in John 15; and especially the institution of the eucharist, where in Luke's account, Jesus shares bread and wine with his disciples, telling them that 'from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes' (Luke 22:18).

The emerging early churches as we glimpse them in the New Testament continue to see alcohol as one of God's many bless-

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ings, but a blessing that can be horribly abused. Paul, in particular, insists that since the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, God is honoured in the body, and the body should not be mistreated (see for example 1 Corinthians 6:12, 15, 19-20). In his letter to the Roman church, Paul reminds his readers that, although they are free either to drink alcohol or to abstain, they should, as members of the one body, be attentive to those whose faith is less secure, and who may be easily scandalised:

'It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that makes your brother or sister stumble' (Romans 14:21).



CHAPTER 6

Reasons For Church Involvement

A KEY RELIGIOUS innovation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition was the linking of religious faith and ethical behaviour. Initially this was understood in community terms, rather than in terms of personal morality. We are called to accountability before God for how we live, how we relate, how we treat the rights of others. In other words, a key dimension of our faith is the call to personal and communal responsibility. The creation narratives speak of accountability before God and reveal the human propensity for shifting that responsibility onto others. Jesus called for an internalisation and personal embodiment of ethical norms.

At the heart of a consideration of a theological response to the culture of alcohol consumption among young people lies this issue of responsibility. The religious impulse of the call to responsibility lies outside the determinism and passivity of the behavioural sciences – that one's freedom is utterly dependent upon heredity, behavioural or environmental factors. It is rooted upon the conviction that God has created us to be free, responsible and good. The manner in which we exercise our freedom, assume or deny our responsibility for ourselves and for others has not just ethical but also religious significance. This has bearing on every aspect of our lives, decisions, relationships, use of resources and lifestyle.

If at the heart of God's self-revelation to us in Christ is the call to right relations with God, with others – and ultimately with ourselves – there is also the conviction that God is with us in this endeavour. However, the call to an ethical life can be reduced to dutiful moralism. Christ revealed God's belief in the human project, that despite the wretchedness of the manner in which we behave, treat each other and fail, God is love with whom there is life, hope and forgiveness. The call to

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responsibility is in effect the very path of faith; it is the bringing of all that makes up our day within the ambit of our relationship with God. Thus there are tremendous spiritual resources available to those who are open to the Holy Spirit, not just the challenge to live justly but the strength that encourages us, the promise of God's forgiveness when we get things dreadfully wrong, the hope of the resurrection beyond failure, the vision of right relations in Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.

CHAPTER 7 Social Considerations

7.1 YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL IN IRELAND

This section examines the following:

1. Recent efforts to discourage teenage drinking
2. Current marketing practice
3. Reasons for teenage drinking
4. Current approaches

It will be evident that recent efforts to discourage teenage drinking have failed to be relevant to the majority of adolescents. This is compounded by current drinks advertising campaigns and by a lack of suitable alternative venues and pastimes for teenagers. It will be argued that while alcohol should not be 'demonised', neither should its abuse be condoned. Education regarding the proper use of alcohol should involve all levels of society.

1. RECENT EFFORTS TO DISCOURAGE TEENAGE DRINKING

Adolescents have a sense of invulnerability that means that much of the present publicity relating to alcohol-related health concerns are seldom felt to be relevant to them.

Recent approaches designed to discourage teenage drinking have had a negligible effect. A research report conducted by the Mid-Western Health Board, *Teenage smoking, alcohol, and drug use in the Mid-Western region (2002)*⁴ found that 43% of the 2,300 students in some 23 secondary schools had engaged in binge drinking, some 42% of 14 year olds had consumed alcohol in the previous 30 days. 44% of 16 year olds had been drunk in the same time period and the survey found that alcohol consumption was higher among girls than boys and that beer and cider were the preferred drinks for boys, while

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girls preferred 'alcopops' and spirits. In spite of various government initiatives to eliminate underage drinking, the survey found that the number of adolescents who have consumed alcohol at least once in their lifetime had increased by 9% since the previous survey in 1998 to 90% in 2003.

Even if it is accepted that the results may be prone to some exaggeration, they illustrate that adolescent drinking is prevalent and new approaches in education need to be adapted.

2. CURRENT MARKETING PRACTICE

Teenagers are a vulnerable market. Many would argue that drinks companies deliberately market their product to teenagers albeit in a closet fashion. The key to this concept is the idea that it is cool to drink and the myth is perpetuated that drinking is an activity that places the individual on the way to adulthood.

During the period of adolescence an individual has to establish autonomy from parents, cope with physical changes, psychological changes in terms of how they think and feel, determine career possibilities and become involved in relationships with members of the opposite sex. Current drinking advertising, which depicts beautiful men and women conversing and meeting with each other over their preferred alcoholic beverage, is a clear play to adolescent vulnerabilities.

The sale of 'alcopops' is undoubtedly aimed at younger people and Dr Colman O'Leary, consultant at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital in Limerick, has particularly criticised designer spirits.⁵ Increasingly there are calls for the government to ban the sweet-tasting 'alcopops' as they seem to be the preferred drink of teenagers.

3. REASONS FOR TEENAGE DRINKING

It has long been recognised that the greatest risk for initiation

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to abuse of any substance is the late teens and early twenties. Adolescence in itself is a particularly traumatic time in an individual's life. Often the marketing of alcohol suggests that it will have a relaxing effect. In 2003, a survey was carried out in 13 Kerry post-primary schools by Dr Anne Hill, a clinical psychologist; Dr Gearoid O Donnchadha, Tralee Institute of Technology; and Dan O'Connor, Kerry Mental Health Association.⁶ It found that stress levels were higher among girls than boys, particularly in co-educational schools. Many of them, aged 12-13, used alcohol or drugs as 'strategies' to block out their problems.

Some qualitative research was conducted with a group of 15 teenagers. All of them had taken alcohol at some stage, many of them to excess. The reasons they gave for drinking tended to suggest that they were searching for a different type of experience. The most common answer was that they drank both to 'have a good time' and to be 'cool'. It was also noted that a majority of social centres are licensed and that there is a deplorable lack of specific venues and activities for teenagers.

The issue of pricing is also important. The reality is that soft drinks can cost as much if not more than alcoholic drinks. If soft drinks were cheaper more young people might avail of them.

4. CURRENT APPROACHES

Young adults should be helped to explore safe ways of letting off steam and encouraged to look at situations from different viewpoints. Education regarding the proper use of alcohol should involve all levels of society. There is a wider response required which involves families, communities, schools, churches and further educational establishments, which would enable the individual to develop life skills and build a healthy self-esteem.

Churches are well placed as centres of the community to offer such an approach. Rather than ignore alcohol-related issues, church organisations can provide forums where issues in rela-

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tion to alcohol use can be freely articulated and openly discussed. Part of this may well be introducing young adults to alcohol in a controlled way. For instance, in the Republic of Ireland, many of the youth councils hold over-18s discos and events where alcohol is available, but it is made clear that it is only something one can attend when one is over 18. Other initiatives that have been tried with limited success have been alcohol-free bars, discos for 15-18 year olds and also junior discos for the younger age range.

7.2 THE ATTITUDE OF YOUNG IRISH PEOPLE

Many young people in Ireland grow up experiencing pub culture as part of their normal life. The pub is often part of their parents' social life. In Ireland the pub was and is the traditional local social centre, often possessing the only dance hall or large meeting area. Pubs provide entertainment, T.V. sports and a warm welcoming atmosphere. Snooker tables and dartboards are available, as are meals, the daily newspaper and a social venue. Parishes may choose this location for their annual dance. It is the preferred way for adults in Ireland to relax in a social setting.

Young people see alcohol as a stepping stone to adulthood. Most adults that they know consume it at one time or another. It is the nature of youth to push the boundaries and alcohol, being a legal boundary, is seen as a rite of passage. How many fathers take their sons to the pub and buy them their first pint when they come of age?

How far are young people enslaved by the custom of 'rounds'? In years past, an evening out with friends has meant each member of the group taking turns to buy a drink for everyone with them. Today this is not only an expensive venture but also a test of one's ability to hold drink as you would have to have a drink for every friend, fine if it is two or three but worrying if there are eight or ten or possibly more. In addition it seems to be necessary to keep up with everyone else's intake,

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and drinks such as 'alcopops' are drunk much faster than the traditional pint.

There are many programmes for young people addressing the use of alcohol. In primary schools the programme is called 'Walk tall'.⁷ This aims to give appropriate knowledge about the prevention of substance misuse including alcohol, within the context of social, personal and health and education. In second level the SPHE (social, personal health education) is in use. Programmes such as these address the whole person, seeking to raise awareness while reinforcing positive self-esteem and confidence. However, Damian Byrne, in his article 'Battle of the bottle'⁸ notes that media campaigns aimed at young people to curb drinking in the USA, have consistently shown that they don't work and can actually be counter-productive. There is also a double edged sword where on the one hand, the Government make vast amounts of money by taxes from alcohol consumption and large corporations aim their products at youth, while on the other hand berating people for doing the very thing the one hand condones.

Organisations such as the Community Based Drugs Initiative (CBDI) address alcohol use in youth culture at the community level. The Enniscorthy branch, for example, has launched a survey entitled 'High awareness'⁹ which summarises second level students' attitude towards alcohol. It notes that young people usually first obtain alcohol in their own homes with or without parental permission, and it is quite legal for them to drink at home at any age.

It is not enough to tell young people not to drink. In all surveys on this subject, young people have made it very clear that what is needed are alternative places to spend their leisure hours such as bowling alleys, drop-in centres, affordable sports and health centres, youth clubs and access to safe environments where they can meet their friends. Youth could be facilitated to own the problem and implement their own solutions. It is well documented that when people have input into solving

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their own problems, they are resourceful and innovative, and stand by whatever decisions are ultimately made.

In many instances, young people do take responsibility for themselves. They appoint designated drivers, who consume only minerals for the night, while many adults still consider it safe to drive home after a few drinks. Alcohol is seen as part of a passage through youth. Many will not abuse alcohol. Most will marry and raise families and alcohol will not be a priority in their lives. However, for those at risk, the community as a whole must take responsibility for ensuring that awareness, education, counselling, and alternative leisure activities are available, and that conflicting government and big corporation interests are addressed.

CONCLUSION TO THIS SECTION

Alcohol itself should not be demonized, but neither should its misuse be condoned. The current marketing and branding of alcohol products, particularly alcopops, needs to be constantly monitored in light of current research. Education regarding the proper use of alcohol should involve all levels of society and encourage an individual's development of life skills and the building of a healthy self-esteem. Issues of stress amongst adolescents need to be effectively engaged and alternative venues and activities for teenagers should be initiated which will encourage relevant common sense discussion of alcohol-related issues.

7.3 INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

The following section is comprised of personal perspectives:

1 is compiled from the panel-members' own observations and experiences of socialising in Europe and with acquaintances of European origin.

2 & 3 are written by students currently living in France and the United States respectively:

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1. THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN ATTITUDE

Ireland's alcohol intake as a nation is not dramatically greater than that of France, Spain and other southern European countries. However, it is our attitude towards alcohol and our drinking practices that differ from those of our neighbours in the southern continental mainland.

In the wine-producing and wine-drinking countries of southern Europe, a different approach to social interaction also translates into a different attitude to wine and alcohol consumption.

A more formal emphasis on social interaction within the family extends into a more formal approach to social engagement beyond it. Added to this is a conscious desire in upcoming generations to continue with these social customs.

The following excerpt is taken from an article by Mairead Robinson printed in the *Irish Times*:

'The whole idea of socializing around a few bars with a few friends prior to lunch or dinner, or even taking the place of that meal, is central to Spanish culture. It has been so for generations, and it continues for young Spanish people as it was for their grandparents. I have always been impressed with how people can go out and drink and have fun for hours on end, without falling down drunk, as we often do in Ireland!...The secret is tapas. A little to eat to soak up the wine or beer is enough to keep you going for as long as the occasion merits. The Spanish have little time for the type of drinking that renders one unable to converse with friends and remember anything of it the next morning. They have far too much dignity for that type of behaviour and could teach the rest of the world a thing or two about sociable drinking.'¹⁰

Perhaps it is this greater degree of formality governing social

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interaction that also helps to explain how the southern European attitude of teenagers differs from that of our own. They find the behaviour of a peer who is drunk, far from being cool, to be antisocial and immature. In this country, the life of a teenager almost always includes an initiation rite whereby they are expected to get drunk to impress their peers. Far from being a once-off proof of 'coolness', the teen is then expected to exceed their intake and level of intoxication on each successive social occasion.

Most people's introduction to alcohol begins in the home. It is often how we perceive our parents behaving in company which influences how we ourselves will later behave. If our parents, when in company or at home with the family, have shown a level of restraint and a respect for alcohol, we will hopefully realise that an evening is far more enjoyable if we can remember it afterwards without embarrassment! Some however will observe a lack of responsibility or indeed a complete disregard for alcohol's effects. These children are at an obvious disadvantage from the start.

Looking again to the approach to alcohol in the family in the southern European context, there seems to be a more inclusive approach to drinking. Tasting (albeit with water added) is not necessarily encouraged, but not banned either. However, for adults, there will almost always be water on the table as well as wine, and in some areas, where it is more common to have a beer in the bar with some acquaintances prior to dinner, wine may not be served every evening.

Another factor of significant difference between Ireland and southern Europe could be the drinking hours. An evening at the pub in Ireland usually begins between eight or nine thirty and concludes at eleven thirty when the bar stops serving. This is a relatively short space of time and many pubs do not serve snacks. This would help to account for the level of intoxication at closing-time. A smaller alcohol intake might be encouraged by lengthening the social time and by provid-

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ing food for the customers to dilute the effects. Our European counterparts see food and alcohol as a combination of social pleasures.

Another idea that has been shown to reduce the amount of anti-social behaviour on the streets after hours is to introduce staggered closing time for public houses and nightclubs.

2. A FRENCH PERSPECTIVE

Unlike the Italians, who drink comparatively less, the French enjoy a drink, a good drink. The splendour and variety of wine and champagne make them hard to resist. It is a traditional mark of French culture to pay attention to the quality of food and wine. It would be impossible to be in France and not join in the celebrations of the new Beaujolais wine.

However, this is as far as the French embrace alcohol. The French drink one, two or three glasses of wine, beer or one cocktail. Then they go home to eat. To get totally drunk is exceptional and is regarded as distasteful. To fall around or drink until one gets sick would be considered ridiculous .

The cost of alcohol varies greatly between Ireland and France, but also in France between the supermarkets and bars. In a French supermarket an identical quantity of alcohol would be 50-70% cheaper than in Ireland. However outside of the home prices could be up to double what you would pay in a bar in Ireland (a pint between €7.00 and €9.00, a gin and tonic approx. €10.00). Obviously this leads young people to drink at home (over dinner – always over dinner) and then have a few drinks in a nightclub.

The French will have a few vodkas or whiskeys, or the highly fashionable Mojitos (mint crushed in vodka), or Campaninjas (lime crushed in vodka), spaced over a number of hours. Alcohol is not an issue in the French home. The social restraints are such that it need not be. Within a culture of

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moderation, children are permitted to taste though never encouraged.

3. AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

American states make their own liquor laws, but all legislate so that under-21s may not buy alcohol or possess it with intent to consume, nor may anyone give it to them (with exception of parents in a private home etc.). These laws are rigorously enforced, even (or especially) in college towns; under-21s are not allowed to enter bars, and anyone who appears under 30 must provide a passport or driver's licence to prove their age. Many perceive the laws as a hangover of prohibition, but this is not entirely true. Until 1984 state drinking ages varied, which gave rise to many road accidents; 18-20 year olds from state A (drinking age 21) would drive long distances to the border with state B (drinking age 18), drink, then drive back again. The federal government duly compelled heterodox states to adjust their drinking ages to 21 by a threat to withhold highway funding. However, it is true that the higher drinking age reflects a more puritan societal attitude to alcohol than is current in Ireland. The threshold for perceived problem drinking is set much lower, bars are for the young or irresponsible or tragic alcoholics (e.g. Moe's Tavern in *The Simpsons*), medical advice tends to advocate minimal or no consumption. In New York State there are further laws that reflect this attitude. No store may sell both beer and liquor (wine or spirits), someone over 21 may not buy alcohol if accompanied in the store by someone under 21, purchasers at a liquor store must sign a register, etc.

Most undergraduates are 18-22 years old, so these facts dominate their relationship with drink. The ban on purchase of alcohol seems to be effective for highschoolers, and the average freshman will have had much less experience with drink than his Irish peer, often none. But once at college, it becomes easy to obtain it because there are plenty of older students who are happy to flout the law and provide. A majority of undergrad-

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uates take advantage of this, though probably a smaller majority than drink in Ireland. A typical drinking environment would be a large party on a Friday or Saturday night, thrown in a fraternity house, at which drink is plentiful and free and there is pressure to drink it. That is, the typical undergraduate will (illegally) drink to excess once or twice a week, often in a wild environment, and otherwise not drink at all. Meanwhile, those old enough to get into bars will usually translate these habits to the new location, though for them the realities of graduation are closing in and they will usually go a little easier.

Drink is much less all-pervasive in universities in New York State than it is in the British Isles. Undergraduates share the wider assumption that drink is potentially a problem, and a drug to be taken seriously. It is rare to see a drunk from Sunday through Thursday. The relentless belief of British & Irish undergraduates that one must be drunk to enjoy oneself is absent. These things are a relief, and exhibit the positive side of residual Puritanism. However, the laws and atmosphere around drink are unhelpful in other ways. Delaying the drinking age seems merely to delay the same mistakes by three years, and the law forces these mistakes to happen outside any controlled environment – there is no student union or college bar. A university in New York State has developed an elaborate ‘medical amnesty policy’ to allow severely drunk under-21s to get medical help without the threat of punishment. Advice to students about alcohol often has a tone of moral panic, which leads many not to take it seriously.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

Based on these discussions and findings, the conclusions of the panel are as follows:

1. The nation is moving from denial to concern.
2. The problem of alcohol and young people is an integral part of a much wider social ill and cannot be considered alone. Older generations are just as much involved.
3. Family structures may well be stronger in Ireland than in many other places but we have had a breakdown in social codes of behaviour which is worrying.
4. The wine-based culture of southern Europe is better at dealing with the situation than the beer-and-spirits culture of northern Europe. It is good that European travel and integration can to some extent overcome this.
5. How can communication between the generations, of a positive kind, be improved? How can youthful zest and joie-de-vivre be better directed without repression?
6. How can communication between the generations, of a negative kind, be reduced? The older generation needs to be educated about their example and their influence. It is a pity that important family occasions are often celebrated in licensed premises and not at home.
7. Current direction of legislative change is welcomed. The panel urges Government to ensure all appropriate measures are put in place to ensure compliance.
8. It is no use age preaching to youth about the virtues of risk avoidance and prudence. Rather, it needs to be seen by all that a fuller and more exciting life is lived when drunkenness is avoided.

CHAPTER 9 Recommendations

On the basis of this report, the Social Justice and Theology Group of the Church of Ireland Church in Society Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. While accepting the need for enforcement of the present legislation we note with approval current proposals for changes in legislation.
2. We feel that the responsibility of society as a whole should be recognised to discourage attitudes that glamorise drinking.
3. Parents could assist by inculcating a responsible attitude to alcohol in the home as something to be enjoyed but not abused. They could also show greater interest in what children are doing outside the home.
4. The drink manufacturers and the hospitality industry should be responsible about monitoring what as well as how much is given to younger people.
5. Advertising should not be aimed irresponsibly at the young; the advertising of alcopops should be prohibited.
6. In specific terms we suggest that there should be counsellors with training in dealing with alcohol problems, particularly in young people, attached to GP practices.
7. The church is well placed to work at the local level. There is already a strong trend towards mixed networks of concern and action on social problems in particular localities. These networks involve the statutory agencies and also voluntary bodies such as the churches. It is possible to combine voluntarism with a professional approach to the troubles of society. This trend should be encouraged and the church needs to be at the forefront of it.

REFERENCES

1. The principle source for this section was the *Alcohol aware practice pilot study* (September 2002 - June 2003), compiled by R. Anderson, Y. Dalton, A. Elebert and M. Boland. *Alcohol aware practice* was a pilot study that began in September 2002. The scheme was organised by the Irish College of General Practitioners (GP's), with funding from the Eastern Regional Health Authority. The overall ICGP alcohol programme, 'Helping patients with alcohol problems' is led by Rolande Anderson and supported by the Department of Health and Children. The aims of the pilot study were to improve the detection rate and treatment of alcohol problems by family doctors (GP's) in general practice. One participating practice was directly represented on our panel by Dr Brendan Coffey, of Bagnelstown, County Carlow. For further information and background about the pilot study, see the Irish College of General Practitioners website: www.icgp.ie under 'Projects and programmes' and then select 'Current projects'. A larger study is planned for 2005 that will involve 24 GPs and 8 counsellors in the eastern region.
2. See *The Book of Common Prayer*, (Dublin, 2004), p. 217.
3. Quoted in P. Lynch and J. Vaizey, *The Guinness brewery in the Irish economy 1775-1876* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 108.
4. Dr Kevin Kelleher, Hilary Cowley & Dr Frank Houghton, *Teenage smoking, alcohol and drug use in the Mid-Western Health Board region 2002* (Department of Public Health, Mid-Western Health Board, 2003).
5. Dr Colman O'Leary's article was published in the *Irish Independent*, 21 March 2003.
6. Kerry Mental Health Association, *A survey of perceived stress levels and coping responses in 1st year post-primary school students* (Killarney, 2003). This report is available on the Association's website: www.kerrymentalhealth.com/research/school-survey.htm
7. Materials from the 'Walk tall' substance misuse prevention programme for primary school students are available free to all primary schools from the 'Walk tall' Office, Dublin West Education Centre, Old Blessington Road, Tallaght Village, Tallaght, Dublin 24 (Tel: 01-4528001).
8. Damian Byrne, 'Battle of the bottle', in *Spiked Life*, 17 April 2003, see www.spiked-online.com/Articles/
9. 'High awareness' is the survey of the CBDI in Enniscorthy, county Wexford, compiled by Susan McMahon B.Soc.Sc.
10. Mairead Robinson's article was published in the Travel, Food and Wine Supplement of The *Irish Times*, 22 July 2004.

APPENDIX

The Legal Context

This appendix provides a review of the legal context. The panel has considered the historical development of legislation regulating the availability and use of intoxicating liquor, and has made the following comments:

1. THE INTOXICATING LIQUOR (GENERAL) ACT, 1924

The original piece of legislation enacted after the foundation of the State relating to underage drinking was the Intoxicating Liquor (General) Act, 1924. This act dealt with several aspects of liquor licensing but the main sections, which related to underage drinking, were as follows:

Section 10 – Every licence holder who shall **knowingly** supply or allow any person to supply any intoxicating liquor to a person under the age of eighteen years for consumption by that person on such premises shall be guilty of an offence.

Penalty –

First offence £5.00 fine.

Second or subsequent offence £10.00 fine.

Section 11(1) – Every holder of a licence of any description authorising the sale of intoxicating liquor by retail for consumption off the premises who **knowingly** sells or delivers or allows any person to sell or deliver any description of intoxicating liquor, to any person under the age of eighteen years for consumption off the premises of the licence holder shall be guilty of an offence.

Penalty –

£5.00 fine

Section 11(2) – Every person who sends any person under the age of eighteen years to any place where intoxicating liquors are sold, delivered, or distributed for the purpose of obtaining intoxicating liquor, is guilty of an offence.

Penalty –

£5.00 fine

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DIFFICULTIES WITH THIS LEGISLATION

The main difficulty with the above legislation was the inclusion of the word 'knowingly' in both section 10 and section 11(1). This placed an onus on the prosecution to prove that the licence holder knew that the purchaser of the intoxicating liquor was under the age of eighteen years. It was not sufficient just to prove that the purchaser was under that age. This made the conviction of licence holders difficult as a licence holder merely had to plead that he didn't know that the person was under eighteen years and he couldn't be convicted. These provisions have now been repealed – see section 31 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1988 & section 14 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 2000.

2. THE INTOXICATING LIQUOR ACT, 1988

This act marked a major and long overdue change in the liquor licensing legislation in this jurisdiction. This is particularly true in the area of underage drinking where it created new offences, conferred strong new powers on the Gardaí, and put in place new measures to prevent the sale and consumption of alcohol by persons under eighteen years.

PERTINENT SECTIONS

Section 31 (Sale of intoxicating liquor to persons under the age of eighteen years):

- (1) The holder of any licence shall not
- (a) sell or deliver or permit any person to sell or deliver intoxicating liquor to a person under the age of eighteen years
 - (b) sell or deliver or permit any person to sell or deliver intoxicating liquor to any person for consumption on his licensed premises by a person under the age of eighteen years,
 - (c) permit a person under the age of eighteen years to consume intoxicating liquor on his licensed premises, or
 - (d) permit any person to supply a person under the age of eighteen years with intoxicating liquor on his licensed premises.

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(2) The holder of a licence of any licensed premises shall not sell or deliver or permit any person to sell or deliver intoxicating liquor to any person for consumption off his licensed premises by a person under the age of eighteen years in any place other than a private residence.

(3) Penalty –

First offence - £300.00 fine.

Second or subsequent offence - £500.00 fine.

Licence liable to be endorsed.

(4) In any proceedings against a person for a contravention of subsection (1) or (2) of this section, it shall be a defence for such person to prove that the person in respect of whom the charge is brought produced to him an age card relating to such person **or** that he had other '**reasonable grounds**' for believing that such person was over the age of eighteen years, or, if the person is charged with permitting another person to sell or deliver intoxicating liquor contrary to the said subsection (1) or (2), to prove that an age card was produced by the person concerned to that other person or that that other person had other '**reasonable grounds**' for believing as aforesaid.

Section 32 (Providing intoxicating liquor to persons under the age of eighteen):

(1) A person shall not -

- (a) purchase intoxicating liquor for delivery to, or consumption by, a person under the age of eighteen years in any place other than a private residence,
- (b) deliver intoxicating liquor to a person under the age of eighteen years in any place other than a private residence,
- or
- (c) send a person under the age of eighteen years to any place where intoxicating liquor is sold, delivered or distributed for the purpose of obtaining intoxicating liquor.

(2) Penalty –

First offence - £300.00 fine.

Second or subsequent offence - £500.00 fine.

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Section 33 (Offences by persons under the age of eighteen)

- (1) A person under the age of eighteen years shall not –
- (a) purchase intoxicating liquor,
 - (b) consume intoxicating liquor in any place other than a private residence in which he is present either as of right or by permission, or
 - (c) represent himself for the purpose of obtaining, or being permitted to consume, intoxicating liquor, to be over the age of eighteen years.

(2) Penalty –
£50.00 fine.

DIFFICULTIES OVERCOME

As can be seen from section 31 the difficulty in the previous legislation caused by the word '**knowingly**' has been rectified with a view to making the conviction of publicans for the sale of alcohol to persons under eighteen years easier. The word '**knowingly**' does not appear in section 31, and consequently such knowledge on the part of the licence holder is not a necessary component of the offence. The publican does however have the 'reasonable grounds' defence, as set out in section 31(4) if he/she can prove to the court that he/she had reasonable grounds for believing the person under the age of eighteen years to be over that age or that the person under the age of 18 years produced an age card. An example of the latter would be where a false age card was presented to a publican by an under age person. The onus has therefore been shifted from the prosecution to the defendant (see also section 14 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 2000).

AGE CARDS

One of the most useful provisions of the 1988 act was the introduction of the age card (see section 40). This provision gave the Minister for Justice power to make regulations establishing an age card scheme for persons over the age of eighteen years. Section 41 of the act made it an offence to forge or to alter an age card.

Unfortunately the regulations establishing the age card scheme

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did not come into operation until the 19th of April 1999. The age card scheme, despite the delay in its introduction, has been a success with over 50,000 age cards being issued to date.

OTHER IMPORTANT PROVISIONS

Section 34 of the act made it an offence for the holder of a licence to allow a child (i.e. a person under the age of fifteen years) to be at any time in the bar of a licensed premises unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Children of the licence holder, children residing on the premises or children passing through to gain access to some other part of the premises are exempt. The parent or guardian of a child also commits an offence if their child is in the bar unaccompanied unless exempted as outlined above. Persons aged between fifteen years and eighteen years may be in the bar unaccompanied but may not purchase or consume intoxicating liquor (see section 33).

Section 35 of the act prohibited persons under the age of eighteen years (except employees) being on licensed premises while an exemption order is in force. Both the licensee and the young person commit an offence under this section.

Section 36 of the act relates to off licences. Unlike on licences no person under the age of eighteen years may be present in an off licence unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Both the licensee and person under eighteen years commit an offence.

Section 37 conferred new powers on the Garda Síochána in relation to certain underage drinking offences. Under this section a Garda may seize bottles and containers from persons whom he believes to be under the age of eighteen years if he suspects that the bottles and containers contain intoxicating liquor. It should be noted that this power does not apply if the person believed to be under the age of eighteen years is in a place used as an occupied private residence. A Garda may demand the name, address and age of a person believed to be under the age of eighteen years or may demand such information from a parent or guardian. This section also empowered the Gardaí to enter places which are not public places in order to use the other powers under this section.

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Section 39 of the 1988 act states that where in a prosecution for an underage drinking offence it appears to the court that a person was under the age of eighteen years or was a child (i.e. under fifteen years) it will be presumed that the person was under that age until the contrary is proved.

3. THE INTOXICATING LIQUOR ACT, 2000

The act of 2000 made further major changes in liquor licensing. For example it extended the opening hours of licensed premises and streamlined same to some extent. It extended the hours during which intoxicating liquor could be sold in supermarkets, shops, etc. and it made substantial changes in the area of special exemptions and in relation to the transfer of licences.

CHANGES IN UNDERAGE DRINKING LEGISLATION

In the area of underage drinking the act of 2000 made a number of important changes/improvements. The main changes are as follows:

Section 13 of the act substantially increased the penalties for offences committed by licence holders under section 31 of the 1988 act.

The new penalties are –

First offence - £1000.00 fine & temporary closure order of up to 7 days.

Second or subsequent offence - £1500.00 fine & temporary closure order of between 7 and 30 days.

It should be noted that on conviction the court is obliged to impose the temporary closure order though it has discretion as to the length of same within the limits laid down.

Section 14 amended section 31(4) of the 1988 act and abolished the 'reasonable grounds' defence contained in that subsection. A publican cannot now rely on the defence that he/she had reasonable grounds for believing a person to be over the age of eighteen years. The purpose of this is to make it easier to convict publicans under section 31. The defence in section 31 (4) in relation to age cards remains unchanged.

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4. THE INTOXICATING LIQUOR ACT, 2003

This act deals mainly with disorderly conduct and drunkenness on licensed premises but also deals with the area of underage drinking. It is significant to note that the act has 'rolled back' to some extent the extension of opening hours for licensed premises contained in the 2000 act (section 10 brings closing time on a Thursday night back from 12.30 a.m. to 11.30 p.m.)

UNDERAGE DRINKING

The main provisions relating to underage drinking are as follows:

Section 13 of the act amends section 32 of the 1988 act by substituting the following for section 32 –

- 32 (1) Subject to subsection of this section, a person (other than the holder of a licence of licensed premises) shall not –
- (a) Purchase intoxicating liquor for delivery to, or consumption by, a person under the age eighteen years.
 - or**
 - (b) Deliver intoxicating liquor to such a person.

(2) It shall not be unlawful for a person (other than the holder of a licence of licensed premises) to purchase or deliver intoxicating liquor for consumption by a person under the age of eighteen years in a private residence with the explicit consent of that person's parent or guardian.

- (3) Penalty –
First offence - €1500.00 fine
Second or subsequent offence - €2000.00 fine

If this new section 32 is compared to the old one it can be seen that this section is much tighter in that it now only allows for the delivery of intoxicating liquor to a private residence for consumption by a person under the age of eighteen years with the explicit consent of that person's parent or guardian (see section 16 below).

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Section 14 of the act places further restrictions on the presence of persons under the age of eighteen years in bars by replacing section 34 of the 1988 act. A child (i.e. a person under the age of fifteen years) may now only be present with their parent or guardian until 9.00 p.m. A person aged between fifteen and eighteen years may be present unaccompanied until 9.00 p.m. After that hour no person under eighteen years may be present except on the occasion of a private function at which a substantial meal is served. In such circumstances persons under fifteen years must be accompanied by a parent or guardian while persons aged between fifteen and eighteen years need not. Such persons may not however be on the premises when an exemption order is in force (see section 35 of the 1988 act).

Section 15(1) of the act creates a new provision (by inserting section 34A into the 1988 act) whereby a publican commits an offence if he allows a person aged between eighteen years and 21 years to be in the bar of his licensed premises between the hours of 9.00 p.m. and 10.30 a.m. on the following day if that person does not produce to the publican an age document.

Subsection (2) of the Act defines 'age document' as an age card, passport, identity card of a European communities state, driving licence, or other official identity document.

Section 16 among other things, amends sections 31(2) and 33(1) of the 1988 act to make it clear that the consumption of intoxicating liquor by a person under the age of eighteen years in a private residence is conditional upon the explicit consent of the person's parent or guardian. This would appear to be aimed at situations where persons under the age of eighteen years consume intoxicating liquor in their own homes perhaps when their parents are away, at work etc.