

Over 21 Category Winner

ALCOHOL – IS COST THE ONLY PRICE?

Three days into Lent: I'm buying ten bottles of M & S non-alcoholic mulled punch and lots of sparkling water. "Must be nice stuff," says the till operator. I tell him it is, and reduced to clear at 79 cent, it's going to get me through six wine free weeks. "I'm off the booze too," he tells me, "Jaysus I don't think I can do it, it's very hard." I want to tell him it's only been three days. I want to encourage him to at least get through the weekend, but he probably went to the pub last night and sat watching his friends get drunk as they told him he was no fun anymore.

We all know Ireland's social activities revolve around the pub, but there is an emerging breed of Irish woman, as sophisticated as her French sisters in her knowledge of wine, but perhaps a little too fond of it. A bottle of Merlot over dinner is innocent enough, though with our local shop making it cheaper to buy two bottles instead of one, it's all too easy to open a second without thinking. What are the other costs of all this casual drinking?

Amy and Julia, two young mothers from Stillorgan, are typical of many Irish women. "A night out means a babysitter and taxis before you even start," says Amy, "so it's easier to meet in each other's houses. Everyone brings a bottle and a packet of tortilla chips or something and there you go – your night out costs less than a tenner." But is it a good night out? "God yeah!" says Julia, "you'd drink at least the bottle you brought, maybe more." Problems arise the next day when the kids are up and looking for breakfast and you can't face the day. "I'm definitely on a shorter fuse with them," says Julia, "and I feel guilty about it later."

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Counselling psychologist Niamh Delmar says more and more people worry about drinking too much. “It bothers them. They’re disappointed in themselves the next day. It also stops people from growing and developing; they might have written a book or done a course; maybe taken up a hobby. It helps to think, ‘what would I be doing now if I wasn’t drinking wine?’”

Jim from Cabinteely is trying to combat a growing beer belly and high cholesterol through diet and exercise. “I run most evenings and try to get a swim in at least twice a week”, he says “but I still like my pint and I don’t want to give it up.” But, Jim may be taking two steps back for every step forward. According to Dr Henry S. Lodge, co-author of the best selling book *Younger Next Year*, “Exercise is the master signaling system that tells our cells to grow instead of fade. When we exercise, that process of growth spreads throughout every cell in our bodies, making us functionally younger – a lot younger.” But exercise is futile if you poison your body with alcohol, which damages our cells in the same way a sedentary lifestyle can. “You can’t poison yourself and expect to remain healthy.” So Jim’s few pints are costing him a lot more than he bargained for, even before taking into consideration the calorific count. A pint of beer has roughly the same calories as a slice of pizza, while for your bottle of wine you’re clocking up the same calories as a bacon cheeseburger. That’s a pretty big price to pay. I mention it to Amy and Julia. There is a moment of silence before Julia jokes that they’ll have to go on gin and diet tonic instead.

Spirits in particular have a drastic effect on the liver and four percent of the world population die because of alcohol every year according to the World

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Health Organisation. Spirits are increasingly becoming the drink of choice for young people according to student Claire from Dundrum. "People my age drink vodka before going out to save money, then you pick where you go to depending on the drink promotions that night. Everywhere you go it's two euro shots, always spirits." Apart from the health implications of this, Claire admits to taking chances too; "You think you're safer than you are. My friends and I would never be stupid, but we would walk further for a taxi rather than pay the money for the whole journey. You trust everyone when you've been drinking."

I can drink my week's quota of fourteen units for less than fifteen euro. But the costs could be much higher if I'm sharing a harmless bottle of Merlot with my husband more than once (or twice) a week.

Winner in 18-20 Category

Alcohol- is cost the only price?

It's said that if alcohol was to be introduced in today's time it would have been an illegal substance; however as the result of a fortuitous accident that occurred at least tens of thousands of years ago, alcohol is very much a legal substance. Historically, since about 4000 B.C alcoholic beverages have served as sources of needed nutrients and have been widely used for their medicinal, antiseptic, and pain-relieving properties. Today it acts as a social lubricant, which facilitates relaxation, provides pharmacological pleasure, or increases the contentment of eating. Whilst alcohol has been used properly by most people, there is a growing concern of misuse by a rising minority of people. The actual price associated with alcohol is not the cost of the bottle/can but it is in reality the associated issues concerning the wellbeing of those who misuse and continue to abuse

alcohol. The price includes alcoholism, rehabilitation, direct and indirect fatalities due to alcohol abuse and also very importantly intervention by the government and non-state organizations to help stop or at the least reduce the rising price of alcohol.

Alcoholism is regarded as a craving for and an over dependence; an urge beyond the capability of a person to control. But there is so much more... it is a disease of the mind, body and spirit. Addiction to alcohol is becoming a bigger problem in Ireland over the past 15 years than ever before, simply because alcoholic beverages are so easily available, socially acceptable and we tolerate those who are under the influence of it even though they are breaking the law. Addiction is anything that causes harm to a person, and today the number of

people physically addicted to alcohol in Ireland is 1 in 8 according to the department of health and children. More than 1 in 4 men and about 1 in 7 women are drinking more than what is medically safe for them. The price associated with it is self harm or even suicide. Most people that are addicted to alcohol can even suffer from dementia or psychosis.

The price of alcohol does not just stop at purchase value, but goes on to loss of life, it is estimated that 40% of people that tried to commit suicide had a long prevailing alcohol problem and 70% of those that succeeded in killing themselves have drunk alcohol before doing so. If those are the stats for direct fatalities, the number of indirect fatalities approximates to 2,462 people between 1990 and 2006 (Campbell.W.A, 2010) that's almost 153 people a year. Today almost one in three crash deaths in Ireland are alcohol-related (Alcohol

action Ireland, 2011). These statistics should be a cause of concern for everyone in society because even though getting addicted to alcohol or trying to commit suicide is not something most of us would ever imagine doing let alone executing, it can be seen however with the way the world has become so cut-throat, people are more likely to be stressed and consequently lead to an overdependence on alcohol.

Due to the fact that there are increasing levels of alcohol abuse in Ireland, it is essential that there are adequate treatment facilities available for people affected by drinking problems. This is probably the most costly part of the price of alcohol. People with this disease (alcoholism) need treatment, counselling, or medical attention to learn how to stop drinking and to live a healthier life. Generally access to the alcohol addiction treatment service is offered by Local Health

Offices set up under the HSE. There it's possible to talk to the GP's and get referred to a clinic which is all usually free of charge. Nevertheless private treatment programmes are not free of charge and prices will vary depending on the programme. The cost of these can be covered through the social insurance scheme or a person's private health insurance. Thus the price of rehabilitation is covered by the state in most cases. That being said last year the government announced cuts in health care to about €746m and said that the pay for all newly-appointed consultants, doctors, nurses and all HSE staff will be reduced by 10% (RTE, 2010). This has caused apprehension among all those that would want to liberate themselves from their problems but cannot afford to do so privately.

In spite of this there is light at the end of the tunnel as with recent change in political handlings and a new government in place, there may

be a greater chance of reducing the numbers of alcohol abusers. However, there are although many non-government organizations that can provide various means to help anyone suffering alcohol dependence such as the GBRD that can, at the least be a guide to someone who wants to reduce the cost and affects of what alcohol has done to them.

By, Sehreen Qureshi.

Winner in 15-17 Category

Alcohol – Is cost the only price?

When most people ask what the price of drinking alcohol is, they instantly think euros... But money isn't the only cost involved in consuming alcohol. A recent report released in 2006 by the *Office of Tobacco Control* revealed that 16 to 17-year-olds in Ireland spend an average of €20.09+ per week on alcohol. If you think hard enough about this fact, think about how this is even possible. It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in an off-licence, unless he/she is with a parent or guardian. Under the *Intoxicating Liquor Act, 2003*, it is an offence to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18. Anyone found guilty of doing so is liable on summary conviction in a District Court to a fine not exceeding €1,500 for a first offence and €2,000 for a second and any subsequent offence. So what business owner in their right mind would serve a minor, just to gain some extra profit when they could end up losing thousands and possibly their licence? But young teenagers still find ways of getting alcohol, just so they can have a good night out.....

Unfortunately, what they don't know WILL hurt them. Most young people would be aware of the short term effects of drinking alcohol which include blackouts, memory loss and sickness. And sure most people will wake up the next morning with a hangover, say the over-used phrase "I'm never drinking again" but one week later they're at it again. What the majority of people might not be aware of, is the long term effects. These include brain damage, liver and heart disease, cancer and of course death. They don't think of the serious health risks involved and the danger to their lives. People who drink alcohol on a regular basis don't realise the effect it has on the people around them. According to *Alcohol Action Ireland* between 61,000 and 104,000 children aged 15 and under, in Ireland are estimated to be living with parents who misuse alcohol. This is an outstanding figure and this is what leads to domestic abuse in the home. A study of women who attended the Coombe Women's Hospital found that almost two-thirds of the 43,318 women surveyed said they drank alcohol during their pregnancy. Alcohol consumption, particularly in the first three months of pregnancy, can lead to disorders in how the brain develops in the womb. This means that some pregnant women would rather sacrifice their unborn baby's chance at life then control themselves from drinking for a mere nine months. And if we're talking cost, which do you think is worth more?

Alcohol can also have profound effects on your mental health. In Irish psychiatric hospitals between 1996 and 2005 alcohol-related disorders was the third most common reason for admission. Alcohol use is also a factor in suicidal behaviour. During 2006 alcohol was a factor in 41% of all cases of deliberate self-harm. But yes, as the country currently has a bad economic climate the question on most people's mind is how much are these problems going to cost me, the tax-payer? And of course, as the saying goes, money makes the world go round. Alcohol-related problems cost Ireland an estimated €3.7 billion in 2007: that's a cost of €3,318 on

each person paying income tax in Ireland. Alcohol-related harms cost the healthcare system €1.2 billion - that's about 12 per cent of our total health budget. Meanwhile, alcohol-related crime cost us €1.18 billion. These massive figures show the public that even if you choose not to drink or waste all your time down at the local bar, it still affects you. So what we're asking is simple. If everyone cuts down on the amount they drink, the country can be a safer and economically better off place to live in. There will be less people dying in alcohol related accidents and more money in our pockets. And honestly who doesn't want that life?

By Rachael O' Brien

5th Year

Notre Dame

12-14 Category Winner

Prescription drugs-problem or solution?

Most people take medicines only for the reasons their doctors prescribe, but some people experiment with prescription drugs because they think they will help them have more fun, lose weight or be smarter in school. Another reason people take prescription drugs is because they want to fit in and everyone else is taking them so they think it will automatically make them cool. They choose prescription drugs because they think they are safer and less addictive than illegal drugs that are sold on the street because children can take them. They are only safe if you take them if you are actually sick though. Doctors give that medication for a reason and will explain about all the side effects. Doctors have told them things not to do while taking the drug, for example, drinking alcohol, smoking or taking other medications. People who don't go to doctors have no idea of any of this. They also think what they are doing is legal but taking prescription drugs without a prescription or sharing them with friends is actually illegal.

Prescription drugs are a lot easier to get than street drugs because they are sold in chemists, friends or family could have some and they are also available on the streets like illegal drugs.

A 2009 U.S.A survey from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention shows that prescription drug abuse is on the rise, with 20% of teens saying they have taken a prescription drug without a doctor's prescription. Teens are not using as much illegal drugs as they were in the 1960's because they find prescription drugs easier to get. This up coming generation of teens have been given the name "Generation Rx."

Another study in Ireland found that the average age of the first illegal drug use is 14. As well as that, believe it or not, females aged between 12 to 17 are more likely to use

prescription drugs for non-medical purposes than males of that same age. Although drug use has lessened slightly in recent years, twice as many teens misuse prescription drugs than adults over 26.

Sometimes a person can become addicted without even knowing. They will have a medical condition and use the drug prescribed by their doctor, however over time, they start increasing the dosage because the drug makes them feel better, and the cycle of dependency begins. The warning signs of drug addiction are, tiredness, personality change, mood swings, depression and a general lack of interest in life.

The most common prescribed medications are tranquilizers. An addict will sometimes attend many different doctors just to keep getting new prescriptions. Prescription drug addiction tends to be the least reported drug problem. According to Dr. Des Corrigan of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, 520 people a year die in Ireland from prescription drug abuse. A study also shows that in 2000, about 43 percent of hospital emergency admissions for drug overdoses (nearly 500,000 people!) happened because of misused prescription drugs. As you can see these are very dangerous drugs even though they are used on children.

Prescription medicines obviously play an important part in the treatment of many conditions, but when used inappropriately they can be as dangerous as heroin or cocaine so they are generally a solution to illness, but have to be taken correctly.

By Gillian Hogan