30 BINGEING ON THE BEACH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION, KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG BEACHGOERS

doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2012-040580f.30

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Background Alcohol is a known risk factor for drowning and near drowning events in young people. However, very little is known about the alcohol consumption patterns of beachgoers in relation to their beach attendance. Reducing alcohol-related drowning, particularly among 16–35-year-old males, is a priority in both the National Alcohol Strategy 2006–2009 and the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2008–2011.

Aims The purpose of the research was to investigate acute and usual alcohol consumption in young (16–24 years olds) beach goers, in the context of knowledge and attitudes regarding alcohol and water safety.

Method Data were collected via face to face interview from 18–24 years old beachgoers at three beaches in South East Queensland over three consecutive weekends (Thurs–Sunday) between 5 am and 7 pm. QLD residents and tourists were recruited. Alcohol consumption was measured via: (1) breathalyser; (2) self-reported alcohol use in 6 and 24 h prior to beach attendance; (3) usual

alcohol consumption patterns prior to beach attendance. Participants were also asked about water-safety knowledge and attitudes, and frequency of beach attendance.

Results Of the 426 participants, a positive BAL (breath alcohol level) was recorded for 7.3% (n=31); 10% (n=43) reported drinking in the 6 h prior to the interview, and 48% in the 24 h prior. Two-thirds of those with a positive BAL demonstrated a BAL>05 (n=20), and 45% had a BAL>1. Of those with a positive BAL or who self-reported drinking in the last 6 h, 69.7% (*n*=23) reported drinking alcohol within 2 h of swimming at the beach in the last 12 months; this was true for one quarter of the total sample (n=101; 26%). Additional analyses regarding acute and usual alcohol consumption in relation to beach attendance, water-safety attitudes and knowledge were completed.

Significance/Contribution to the Field This is novel research which will be crucial in developing interventions aimed at reducing drowning and near drowning episodes among young beachgoers.