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Non-consumption of alcohol: the adolescents' point of view

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Summary

The percentage of adolescents who do not drink alcohol seems to have increased in the Western world in the past years. In some contexts, as the norm among young people is to drink alcohol, young non-drinkers may be marginalized and/or stigmatized. Despite the publication of a few studies conducted in other countries on the reasons or experiences of young people who do not drink alcohol, there seems to be a gap in the literature about to what extent these reasons explain why adolescents drink less. Moreover, given that alcohol consumption is cultural, it is important to understand young people's experiences and motivations to abstain from alcohol in a context such as Switzerland.

The objectives of this qualitative research are to explore how young people define the term 'abstinence'; to explore their opinions on the Dry January challenge; to assess the reasons why some young people decide not to drink alcohol; to assess the advantages and disadvantages of non-consumption of alcohol; to understand how young non-drinkers live their choice and how they are perceived/treated by their peers; to identify strategies used by non-drinkers to avoid alcohol use while still socializing with their friends.

Between April and June 2022, we conducted 12 FG with young people aged between 14 and 20 years old for a total of 63 (36 females) participants. The average age of participants was 16.9 years [rank: 14-20 years], with a median of 16 years. Participants were separated by gender (female / male, no one from another gender category contacted us), age (14-15 / 16-17 / 18-20) and alcohol consumption (drinkers / non-drinkers). In order to extract the different themes and dimensions raised by the participants, we carried out a thematic content analysis, a method of extracting subjective interpretations and meanings using a process of classification and categorisation of the data.

Discussions began with a broad question about the term "abstinence" as applied to alcohol use in an adolescent population. In addition to not always understanding the term, participants overall found it to be an inappropriate term for youth not drinking. Sexual or religious connotations, for example, were discussed in this line. This term was more widely accepted when referring to an adult population, especially when someone decides to become abstinent as a result of an alcohol-related problem. Then participants talked about the reasons for non-drinking among youth: religion, legal ages, parents and family rules, bad experiences, fear of losing control (especially among females), distaste, religion, health consciousness. In terms of prevention, the Dry January campaign was not well known by the participants and many wondered what the aim of such a challenge was if no follow-up beyond the month of the challenge was offered. While not demonizing alcohol consumption, youth called for more normalization of non-drinking and inclusion of non-drinkers in prevention to support them and make other youth aware of their presence. Experiences in terms of social life were mixed

among the non-drinkers participants. For some, not drinking did not impact social life, while others reported feeling excluded and out of the norm. Questions and comments about not drinking from young drinkers were reported as particularly annoying. Some participants shared some strategies for hiding their non-drinker status and going unnoticed at parties to avoid remarks. Finally, non-drinkers are often designated as the “lifesavers” during parties to deal with youth who drink. This status can sometimes put them under pressure and lead them to stop attending parties.

Based on these results, some recommendations can be made:

- To use the term non-drinker rather than abstainer
- To normalize non-consumption of alcohol, including within families
- To make other young people, but also adults, aware of the pressure and exclusion that can be felt by non-drinkers
- To make challenges like #DryJanuary more visible and improve communication around them, especially in terms of objectives and follow-up (after January 31, what will happen?) Find something similar but more targeted at young people;
- To raise awareness among young people about their perceptions of non-drinkers and alcohol-free parties as boring;
- To include non-drinkers in prevention, to reinforce their choice and/or as a way to feel support
- To raise awareness on young non-drinkers being often identified as the ones who will help others at a party and may feel too much pressure
- To open the discussion on alcohol use before legal ages

1 Introduction

1.1 Alcohol (non-)consumption among youth

The percentage of adolescents who do not drink alcohol seems to have increased in the Western world in the past years¹⁻⁷. For instance, the European School Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD) showed a decrease of the prevalence of lifetime, as well as past month, alcohol use among 15-16-year-olds between 2003 and 2015⁸. In Switzerland, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study⁹ showed that the prevalence of weekly drinking among 15-year-olds decreased from 21% in 1986 to 11% in 2018 for males, and from 11% to 4% for females.

In the political landscape of Switzerland, trade in and advertising of alcoholic beverages depend on various cantonal and national laws¹⁰. At the federal level, most of the alcoholic beverages such as distilled spirits or brandies are governed by the Alcohol Act which prohibits advertising and sale of spirits to young people under the age of 18. Cider, wine, champagne and beer are subject to other regulations and can be sold to young people above 16 in all cantons except Ticino where the legal age is 18¹¹. Alcohol consumption is part of the Swiss tradition with its wine culture and takes an important place in the social landscape. Despite a decrease in consumption among young adolescents, Addiction Suisse has pointed out in 2017¹² that alcohol consumption and episodes of drunkenness remain high in Switzerland amongst the general population.

Studies^{6, 13-15} revealed some possible explanations for the decrease of alcohol consumption among youth. For example, a better control of legal age for alcohol purchase, stricter parental monitoring and rules, health-consciousness, sports or academic achievements, vulnerability or fear of sexual violence, alcohol use disorder in family or the fear of having a compromising photo/video posted on social networks would lead some youth not drinking alcohol. For instance, some 15-16 years old participants in a Swedish qualitative study¹⁵ reported that they did not drink because their parents did not allow it. The authors suggest that this stricter parenting control could be explained by the fact that parents are nowadays more concerned about their children's drinking behaviour. Moreover, this control is sometimes carried out through social networks. The fear of having unflattering photos or videos while drunk posted on social networks damaging their reputation would lead some young people to refrain from drinking alcohol. Another reason reported in this qualitative study¹⁵ was sexual violence, with females feeling unsafe and more vulnerable when drunk.

In some contexts, as the norm among young people is to drink alcohol, young non-drinkers may be marginalized and/or stigmatized⁶. In this sense, in a qualitative study conducted among 18-29 year-olds in Finland and Australia⁶, some participants reported that their choice not to drink impacted their social life, such as not being invited to parties. Young people can therefore develop strategies to maintain their choice not to drink on the one side, and avoid marginalization on the other⁶. They may decide to stop attending events associated with alcohol use, to get together with non-drinkers friends exclusively, to join groups where the culture is to abstain from all intoxicating substances (e.g. straight edge culture), to hide or deny their non-drinking status⁶.

Regarding terminology, different terms are used in the literature to refer to the absence of alcohol consumption or people who do not consume alcohol, such as non-drinking¹⁵ or non-drinkers¹⁶, alcohol abstainers¹⁷, abstinence from alcohol¹⁸ and abstention¹⁹. While some authors²⁰ use 'lifetime abstainers' to refer to people who have never drunk alcohol, as opposed to 'former drinkers', others²¹ do not make any distinction between never and former drinkers and consider them together in the abstainers or non-drinkers group. In this report, we will interchangeably use the terms 'non-drinking' (or 'non-drinkers') and 'abstainers' (or 'alcohol abstention/abstinence').

Despite the publication of a few studies conducted in other countries on the reasons or experiences of young people who do not drink alcohol, there seems to be a gap in the literature about to what extent these reasons explain why adolescents drink less^{7, 14}. Moreover, given that alcohol consumption is cultural, it is important to understand young people's experiences and motivations to abstain from alcohol in a context such as Switzerland.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To explore how young people define the term 'abstinence';
- To explore their opinions on the Dry January challenge;
- To assess the reasons why some young people decide not to drink alcohol;
- To assess the advantages and disadvantages of non-consumption of alcohol;
- To understand how young non-drinkers live their choice and how they are perceived/treated by their peers;
- To identify strategies used by non-drinkers to avoid alcohol use while still socializing with their friends.

2 Methods

We followed an explanatory design as the qualitative part presented in this report was used to explain and deepen quantitative results found in the quantitative part²². With such a process, we aimed to offer a global interpretation of the topic of alcohol abstinence among youth with further clarifications.

2.1 Focus groups

Focus groups (FG) allow gaining a better understanding of the meaning given to a social phenomenon and to deepen our understanding of it by capturing the general interpretations and perceptions of the participants^{23, 24}. The FG method is particularly recommended to capture the different terms, definitions and vocabulary used by the participants^{25, 26}. The group dynamics and interactivity induced by FG lead to spontaneous discussions and exchanges of convergent or divergent points of view.

Yara Barrense-Dias and Lorraine Chok conducted all FG (n=12) between April 2022 and June 2022 and Joan-Carles Surís (and Lorraine Chok when Yara Barrense-Dias facilitated the discussion) took notes of the participants' interventions to facilitate the transcription, as well as to observe the physical reactions and body language of the participants. The discussions lasted about 1 hour.

The first discussion was conducted in person and the others by video conference using the secure professional version of the Zoom© platform due to the sanitary measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic still in operation in our institute, and because of difficulties in recruiting young people for discussions in person, perhaps due to COVID habits. This approach allowed us to recruit young people from different regions of the French part of Switzerland. Prior to each meeting, the participants received an online self-administered questionnaire on the secure REDCap® application, which also included an information letter explaining the objectives of the study and the rules of confidentiality, as well as an electronic participation consent form to sign. Through the questionnaire, we collected socio-demographic data (gender, age, current main activity). A few hours before the appointment, a link for the discussion was sent. Before starting the interview, we verbally reminded them of the important points included in the information sheet and gave them time to ask us any questions.

The discussions were audio-recorded with an unconnected dictaphone and then transcribed and anonymised (any element that could identify a person was removed in writing: first name, school, place, etc.). All the details of the recording, including the transcription and anonymization, were explained to the participants. At the end of each FG, participants received a 30 Swiss Francs gift card for a large department store in Switzerland as a way to thank them for their time.

An interview grid based on the literature, quantitative results²² and discussions with experts in the field was created. The discussions were initiated with a very broad question about how participants

defined the term ‘abstinence’ regarding alcohol use among adolescents and was also stimulated and facilitated by quotes and vignettes (Annexes).

2.2 Recruitment

The participants were mainly recruited through an advertisement on the website *www.adosjob.ch* dedicated to jobs for 15-25 year-olds and on the social media Instagram®. The initial advertisement called for young people aged between 14 and 20 years old who drank alcohol or not, and were interested in talking about this topic. Unisanté created sponsored ads on Facebook and Instagram and every two weeks, we readjusted the campaign on these social networks in order to reach an audience more according to the responses we had received so far (for example, targeting males or 14-15 year olds). Moreover, other professional partners such as *ciao.ch* shared our ad on their social networks and / or their newsletters. The snowball method was also used in a few cases.

When adolescents contacted us, we checked if they were able to express themselves in French and we asked them their gender, age and drinking status by asking them which of the following groups they belonged to:

- 1) I have never drunk alcohol.
- 2) I used to drink alcohol but I stopped.
- 3) I sometimes drink alcohol but I have never been drunk.
- 4) I sometimes drink alcohol and I have already been drunk.

2.3 Participants

Between April and June 2022, we conducted 12 FG with young people aged between 14 and 20 years old (Table 1). We chose to separate participants by gender as a difference in alcohol consumption is often demonstrated²⁷. Moreover, gender homogeneity is often recommended when FG are conducted with young people, thus avoiding as much as possible an adaptation of their speech or embarrassment about gender differences and encouraging discussion thanks to this common characteristics^{24, 28}. No one from another gender category than females or males contacted us. We also separated into three groups the 14-15, 16-17 and 18-20-year-olds since legal drinking age is 16 for wine and beer and 18 for Spirits in Switzerland. Finally, we separated drinkers (groups 3 and 4, see above) and non-drinkers (groups 1 and 2, see above) participants since their experiences and perceptions of alcohol may be different. Following discussions with the experts, we decided to include the light drinkers (group 3, see above) into the drinkers’ group as the main purpose of this study was to explore alcohol abstinence.

In total, we conducted 12 FG, for a total of 63 (36 females) participants (Table 1). The average age of participants was 16.9 years [rank: 14-20 years], with a median of 16 years.

Table 1 Characteristics of participants (N=63)

N°	Gender	Age	Alcohol use	Activity	Date focus group
Focus Group 1 (N=5)					
Participant 1	Female	16	Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	13.04.22
Participant 2	Female	16	Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	13.04.22
Participant 3	Female	16	Drinker	Vocational track (1 st)	13.04.22
Participant 4	Female	16	Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	13.04.22
Participant 5	Female	17	Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	13.04.22
Focus Group 2 (N=7)					
Participant 6	Female	19	Drinker	University (1 st)	20.04.22
Participant 7	Female	18	Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	20.04.22
Participant 8	Female	20	Drinker	Post-mandatory (4 th)	20.04.22
Participant 9	Female	20	Drinker	University (1 st)	20.04.22
Participant 10	Female	18	Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	20.04.22
Participant 11	Female	20	Drinker	University (2 nd)	20.04.22
Participant 12	Female	19	Drinker	University (1 st)	20.04.22
Focus Group 3 (N=4)					
Participant 13	Male	18	Drinker	Sabbatical year	28.04.22
Participant 14	Male	20	Drinker	University (1 st)	28.04.22
Participant 15	Male	19	Drinker	University (1 st)	28.04.22
Participant 16	Male	20	Drinker	Without activity	28.04.22
Focus Group 4 (N=7)					
Participant 17	Female	20	Non-Drinker	Bridging program ^a	11.05.22
Participant 18	Female	19	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (4 th)	11.05.22
Participant 19	Female	20	Non-Drinker	University (1 st)	11.05.22
Participant 20	Female	19	Non-Drinker	University (1 st)	11.05.22
Participant 21	Female	19	Non-Drinker	Working	11.05.22
Participant 22	Female	18	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	11.05.22
Participant 23	Female	18	Non-Drinker	Transition school ^b	11.05.22
Focus Group 5 (N=4)					
Participant 24	Male	16	Non-Drinker	Vocational track	12.05.22
Participant 25	Male	16	Non-Drinker	Vocational track	12.05.22
Participant 26	Male	16	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (1 st)	12.05.22
Participant 27	Male	17	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	12.05.22
Focus Group 6 (N=4)					
Participant 28	Female	15	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	17.05.22

^a Bridging programs enable a student with a vocational or professional diploma to enter university.

^b Transition school is a structure for young people who have finished mandatory school but have not yet found a training/apprenticeship position.

N°	Gender	Age	Alcohol use	Activity	Date focus group
Participant 29	Female	15	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	17.05.22
Participant 30	Female	15	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	17.05.22
Participant 31	Female	14	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	17.05.22
Focus Group 7 (N=6)					
Participant 32	Female	16	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	18.05.22
Participant 33	Female	17	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	18.05.22
Participant 34	Female	17	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	18.05.22
Participant 35	Female	16	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	18.05.22
Participant 36	Female	16	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	18.05.22
Participant 37	Female	17	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (1 st)	18.05.22
Focus Group 8 (N=5)					
Participant 38	Male	17	Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	25.05.22
Participant 39	Male	17	Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	25.05.22
Participant 40	Male	17	Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	25.05.22
Participant 41	Male	16	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	25.05.22
Participant 42	Male	16	Drinker	Post-mandatory (1 st)	25.05.22
Focus Group 9 (N=4)					
Participant 43	Male	15	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	7.06.22
Participant 44	Male	15	Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	7.06.22
Participant 45	Male	15	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	7.06.22
Participant 46	Male	15	Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	7.06.22
Focus Group 10 (N=7)					
Participant 47	Female	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	20.06.22
Participant 48	Female	14	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	20.06.22
Participant 49	Female	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	20.06.22
Participant 50	Female	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	20.06.22
Participant 51	Female	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (10H)	20.06.22
Participant 52	Female	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	20.06.22
Participant 53	Female	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	20.06.22
Focus Group 11 (N=5)					
Participant 54	Male	18	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	22.06.22
Participant 55	Male	19	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (2 nd)	22.06.22
Participant 56	Male	20	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	22.06.22
Participant 57	Male	20	Non-Drinker	University (1 st)	22.06.22
Participant 58	Male	20	Non-Drinker	Post-mandatory (3 rd)	22.06.22
Focus Group 12 (N=5)					
Participant 59	Male	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	29.06.22
Participant 60	Male	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	29.06.22
Participant 61	Male	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	29.06.22
Participant 62	Male	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	29.06.22

N°	Gender	Age	Alcohol use	Activity	Date focus group
Participant 63	Male	15	Non-Drinker	Mandatory school (11H)	29.06.22

2.4 Analyses

In order to extract the different themes and dimensions raised by the participants, we carried out a thematic content analysis, a method of extracting subjective interpretations and meanings using a process of classification and categorisation of the data²⁹. This method has the advantage of gathering information directly from the participants themselves without theories or preconceptions, which is particularly interesting when the aim of the research is to explore personal experiences or perceptions, as well as definitions. Some themes were developed before the analyses with the interview grid, and others were developed through the analyses. The transcriptions were first read through several times to get a general idea of the data collected, then coded by YBD and LC, and classified according to the themes and sub-themes identified by the analysis. The coded transcripts were then compared for agreement. The final codebook was applied to all the transcripts by YBD and LC and crosschecked by JCS. Each new code or doubt was discussed between the authors. The analyses were carried out by YBD and LC using MAXQDA software (version 20.0.8) and systematically reviewed by JCS to discuss any discrepancies. This process allowed for a form of triangulation at the level of the analysis, thus avoiding the risk of bias as much as possible. Quotes were translated from French into English.

2.5 Ethical considerations

The research protocol was reviewed by the Cantonal Commission for Ethics in Human Research of the Canton of Vaud (project number 2022-00063), which gave a waiver as it did not need to be evaluated according to Swiss laws. According to the law on human research and the corresponding ordonnances, the risks and constraints of this study being minimal, the informed and written consent of the legal representative (parent) was only required for young people under 14 years of age, which was not the case in this study involving 14-20-year-olds.

Contacts for help institutions (ciao.ch, Pro Juventute, Fondation vaudoise contre l'alcoolisme, La main tendue, etc.) or for support and care (Service d'alcoologie du CHUV, Service de médecine des addictions du CHUV, Unité de médecine des violences du CHUV, Division interdisciplinaire de santé des adolescents, etc.) were included in the information letter sent to participants. A young person reporting personal difficulties could have been referred to these institutions. No participant reported any problems during these discussions.

3 Results

3.1 Definitions

3.1.1 Abstinence

Discussions began with a broad question about the term “abstinence” as applied to alcohol use in an adolescent population. Some adolescents did not know this term at all. *“I do not know what (abstinence) means.” (Female, 15, drinker)*. Several participants found odd to use this term to refer to not drinking, especially among young people. *“[...] To abstain from drinking alcohol, it is uh... I do not know, it is really weird to hear that word actually, in that context.” (Female, 16, non-drinker)*. Indeed, for some adolescents, abstinence from alcohol was a term that would apply more to adults than to youth, especially in relation to specific reasons linked to adulthood. *“But I think we would use that term more to refer to [...], for example, our parents or the generation before. [...] (When) we talk about a person who abstains from alcohol [...] I would think more of an older person, like 40 years old, I do not know. [...] Because he or she has developed an addiction or because of health problems [...].” (Female, 17, drinker)*.

For some adolescents, this term had mainly a religious connotation, with the abstinence from all sin. *“It makes me think especially of priests who abstain, but uh I do not really know. It is like abstaining from all sins. That is why it makes me think of priests, but it does not necessarily make me think immediately of alcohol.” (Female, 16, drinker)*. In this line, ‘abstinence’ could specifically refer to people who did not drink alcohol for religious reasons. *“I agree. The word abstinence also makes me think of religion. People who do not drink on principle [...].” (Female, 20, drinker)*.

Some participants directly understood and linked this term with the fact of non-drinking alcohol. *“[...] Abstinent is not drinking alcohol, abstaining from drinking alcohol.” (Female, 16, non-drinker)*. Nevertheless, for some, this term would apply only to very specific reasons for not drinking alcohol or, more specifically, for quitting alcohol. Therefore, this term could not be used for all non-drinkers of alcohol. Someone would become abstinent because of a problematic consumption. *“For me, when we talk about the term ‘abstinent’, it is more negative or [...] connected with the idea of Alcoholics Anonymous [...]. The person stopped drinking completely, because it became vital to stop.” (Male, 16, non-drinker)*. In this line, an abstinent would be a person who wants to drink alcohol and has to force him/herself to resist the temptation. *“I also think there is this notion of desire in the word ‘abstinence’. I think that to be able to say “I am abstinent”, you have to wish to drink and refuse it.” (Female, 17, non-drinker)*. Therefore, some did not think that this term was appropriate for young people who do not drink alcohol, as most would do so by choice and not in response to excessive consumption. *“I do not think it is necessarily appropriate, because we are pretty young, so I would say that you cannot necessarily have a huge drinking period before (as younger people). So abstinence, it is like you have to stop drinking and I think it is complicated that this happens at our age [...].” (Male, 20, non-drinker)*. On the contrary, some participants found this term appropriate to talk about non-consumption of alcohol among young people because it can refer to not giving in to the temptation to drink despite strong peer pressure. *“For me, the term*

'abstinent' is a good one, because there is a form of not giving in to temptation and [...] I have the impression that it is more complicated to say no to alcohol and to abstain from alcohol for a young person than for an adult because he is attracted by his friends, he is invited to parties, I think that he has a strongest temptation than an adult [...].' (Male, 20, non-drinker). Finally, for some non-drinking participants, designating young people who do not drink alcohol as abstainers would put a negative label on them. Instead, they felt that those who drink alcohol should be given a special term because they are the ones who are out of the norm. *"To me, it should not be those who do not drink alcohol who are (called) abstainers, but those who drink who should be (called) consumers [...]. I think that it (the term abstinent) somehow labels people who do not drink."* (Female, 19, non-drinker).

3.1.2 Non-consumption of alcohol / non-drinking

In addition to the term 'abstinence', participants were asked what does 'not drinking alcohol' mean when referring to youth. Most of them considered that it implied a total absence of alcohol consumption. *"Not drinking alcohol is simply not drinking anything."* (Female, 18, non-drinker). Not drinking, even without specifying alcohol, was understood as being related to alcohol. *"[...] It has become part of everyday language that when we say 'We do not drink', we know we are talking about alcohol, not coffee [...]."* (Female, 19, non-drinker). Others considered that it could include light drinking or non-regular use, but this opinion remained in the minority. *"I think it (abstinence) means having very little alcohol consumption, if any at all."* (Male, 18, drinker).

Some participants used legal age to define alcohol non-use among youth. *"Well, it is not consuming it (alcohol) under the legal age. Normally you cannot drink if you are underage."* (Male, 15, non-drinker).

A large number of participants referred to the context of parties and celebrations to define alcohol non-use among youth. It is essentially during these moments that one would distinguish the drinkers from the non-drinkers. *"I think as a young person, maybe it would be in the context of parties, I think directly of that. [...] Not drinking at parties, something like that, [not] doing drinking games. I think it would be that."* (Female, 18, drinker).

3.1.3 Alcohol misuse

Finally, in terms of definition, participants were asked to define a problematic use when it is related to an adolescent. According to some, problems with alcohol would begin when the person can no longer live or act without it. For example, a young person who would need alcohol to be socially comfortable would have a problem with his or her consumption. *"I think that excessive drinking comes when [...] you need it (alcohol) to be socially comfortable. So that means every time you go out, you are going to drink."* (Female, 18, drinker). Similarly, a problem would exist if the person cannot have fun without alcohol. *"[...] I do not know if you have ever heard 'Having fun is drinking!, If you do not drink, you do not have fun!'. I feel that when you say that, there is a problem."* (Female, 20, non-drinker). In this perspective, alcohol should be considered as any other form of addiction and problematic consumption would be defined as soon as a young person prioritizes alcohol consumption over other activities. *"I believe in the classic definition of addiction which is [...] (when)*

you would rather drink than go see your friends. You would rather drink than do anything else.” (Male, 17, drinker). In line with this, a youth who would go out solely for the purpose of consuming alcohol would have a problem with his or her consumption. “I think it becomes excessive the moment you stop going out to have fun, but you are going out to drink alcohol. This is really where it starts to become a problem.” (Female, 20, drinker).

The social aspect of alcohol consumption being very important among young people, drinking alone was considered problematic. *“I feel like addiction starts when a person no longer needs to be accompanied by other people who drink, to drink.” (Male, 20, non-drinker). Drinking to forget worries was also considered as problematic. “For me, [...] it would become worrisome when some people start to drink alcohol when they are not feeling well, for example when they have just had an argument or when they are angry or when they are depressed or sad and they use alcohol as an escape, a relief [...].” (Male, 19, non-drinker).*

Some participants considered that an excessive alcohol use was defined according to the consequences on the body. *“For me, it is (excessive drinking) as soon as your body gives you signs of refusal, for example, after a while you will vomit or you will not be able to stand up, those kinds of signs, so you have abused, I think you have to stop before that.” (Male, 15, drinker). In this line, alcohol use would also be considered as excessive when physical signs of withdrawal appear. “I think that excessive (alcohol) use is [...] when you have a need that is rather physical I would say. Well, there are the tremors, there are the headaches [...]. I think it is not that different from an alcohol problem that an adult person might have, actually.” (Female, 18, drinker).*

Frequency of use was also highlighted to define a problematic alcohol consumption but opinions were divided on the cut-off. For some, a daily alcohol consumption was considered as excessive even if the amount ingested was low. *“As soon as he (a young person) drinks every day... Even if he only drinks one beer, if he drinks one beer a day, there is an addiction, there is a little problem.” (Male, 16, drinker). One participant disagreed with this opinion and considered that if the person enjoys drinking, while remaining moderate in his or her consumption, drinking alcohol daily was not a problem. “As long as you drink to please yourself, there is no harm. It is clear that if you drink 20 liters of Trojka© (vodka) every night it is no good, but I think that one beer every night is not worrying, at least not addictive.” (Male, 15, drinker). For others, problems appear when drinking becomes a habit or routine. “[...] It becomes an excess or a problem as soon as we start to get used to it [...]. As soon as it becomes part of our routine or a ritual or something like that, I do not think it is normal. I think it should be something that happens occasionally.” (Male, 18, drinker). For others, it is the combination of the frequency, which can be weekly, of consumption and the quantity drunk that defines the excess. “I think it is more like once a week, like every week he (a young person) is at a party where he is drinking really heavily. Well I think it is starting to become problematic for his age.” (Male, 16, drinker).*

For some participants, only a minority of adolescents would be affected by alcohol addiction, especially under the legal age. *“I think if the person in front of me is some kind of addict, I think the person would be rather an adult. I mean I do not see anyone under the age of 16 being really addicted to alcohol. I am not saying there are not any, but at least in my environment I do not see myself in that situation.” (Female, 17, non-drinker). However, problems linked to alcohol consumption would be difficult to detect. “With young people, I find it much harder to detect*

alcohol problems as they can be normalized. Because if someone goes out a lot, then the excuse is to go out drinking every time.” (Female, 20, non-drinker). In this line, a young person with a drinking problem could simply be seen a party animal, while an adult would be considered a person with an addiction problem. “I imagine that, for example, when you are a man with an ordinary job and you go home at night and you drink, I do not know, a shot every night [...], it is going to be perceived much worse and it is going to be more self-pitying than if you are a teenager. If a teenager does that, he will be called a party animal, if it is an adult, we will say it is an alkie.” (Male, 19, drinker).

3.2 Reasons for non-drinking

3.2.1 Age

For some non-drinking participants, the reason for not drinking was simply that they were underage. “For me it is (not to drink) for legal reasons, well I am not allowed [...]” (Female, 15, non-drinker). However, some of them considered that when the legal age will be reached, there will be a form of social injunction that will push them to consume alcohol. “[...] We start drinking at 16 or 18, because we are told to start drinking. [...] If there are young people who start drinking, it is because they are told to try it, but maybe not necessarily for the taste.” (Male, 15, non-drinker).

Underage youth may also simply not be interested in alcohol. “Personally at 14/15 years old it (alcohol) was not that much of a question, because I think I did not know too much what it was, nor the interest [...]” (Male, 16, non-drinker). Because of their young age, some did not feel ready to use them. “We do not feel ready. [...] It (alcohol) puts you in a state... a bit... and I would not necessarily want to drink.” (Female, 15, non-drinker). In this line, some participants would fear the effects of alcohol. “Personally, I think if I were offered that (alcohol) right now, I would refuse it, because alcohol scares me a bit.” (Female, 14, non-drinker). A few participants felt that some people would decrease or stop drinking as they got older because, unlike younger people, they would not need to drink to belong to a group and would be less impressionable. “I also find that, often, strangely [...] it is often among the younger people that there are more people who drink. People who are a little older, in their twenties, stop drinking. Because they stop worrying about how others look at them. When you are that young, you feel left out if you do not do everything that the other people do.” (Female, 20, non-drinker). Some non-drinkers felt that it was easier not to drink as they got older because they were more aware of the dangers of alcohol, making easier for them to refuse a drink of alcohol. “[...] (It) depends on each one, in my case, I would say that it is perhaps easier (not to drink alcohol) at 18 than at 16, because at 16 we are less mature than at 18 in general and we do not necessarily know all the dangers that can arise from alcohol or alcoholism [...]. So we are more easily tempted to drink alcohol [...] whereas at 18, we are more aware in general of all that and we can more easily say no [...]”. (Male, 18, non-drinker)

3.2.2 Parents – Family

According to some participants, parents’ alcohol consumption, and therefore also non-consumption could have an influence on their children. “Normally this is where (in the family) you first see someone drinking [...]. If you do not see someone (drinking) in your family, then you have

no experience. Maybe you do not want to do it.” (Female, 20, drinker). For instance, a non-drinker reported that if his parents drank alcohol, it might have influenced him to drink too. *“I am very lucky, because all the people I have known since I was a kid, well, they do not drink alcohol, like me, so it has indirectly influenced me in a positive way, and in my family, [...] my mother never drank alcohol in her life, so That is also an example.”* (Male, 18, non-drinker). According to some participants, very strict and repeated family rules about not drinking could influence adolescents not to drink. *“It depends on the person, how he/she was educated, (if) his/her parents said ‘You must never drink! You must never drink!’ Well, sometimes there are people [...] who will never drink [...].”* (Female, 15, drinker). Indeed, a non-drinker explained that she did not drink alcohol to avoid problems with her parents who do not want her to drink. *“Well, there are the parents too. My parents do not want me to drink. So I do not want to go against them or I do not want them to know that I have been drinking because that would create problems at home.”* (Female, 18, non-drinker). Similarly, not consuming alcohol would help avoid confrontation with parents when coming home drunk from a party. *“Sometimes some young people have to go home afterwards and then they do not necessarily want to be drunk when they get home. [...] Because coming home drunk at 14 is not fun.”* (Female, 15, drinker).

3.2.3 Bad experiences

A young person may decide to stop drinking because of a bad personal experience with heavy drinking. *“When I was 16 years old, I had my first party and I went too far. [...] That is why I did not drink anymore after that. Because I had an alcoholic coma.”* (Female, 19, non-drinker). One participant reported that she stopped drinking because she felt she had become a burden to those around her when she drank. *“[...] During this phase when I drank a lot, a lot, there were a lot of incidents more or less serious (laughs). [...] I pissed off other people with my drinking and then I noticed that. [...] When you are drunk, you do things that you would never do. Or even do and say things that you would never have thought, and That is really a big point.”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). Bad experiences from family and friends may also influence young people's drink. *“But then it is true that what really made me say to myself ‘No, I do not want to drink’ was the experience of others. For example my sister, she had an alcoholic coma [...] I told myself I do not want to end up like that and the same (thing) when I see my friends drinking and that in the end they feel sick, I tell myself ‘I do not want to’.”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). Addiction problems within families may also lead young people not consuming alcohol. *“They (young non-drinkers) could maybe be shocked by what they have been through, [...] if someone had alcoholic parents for example, that could keep him/her away from alcohol.”* (Male, 15, drinker).

3.2.4 Loss of control

Several non-drinking participants reported not drinking as a way to avoid losing control. *“(One advantage of not drinking is) to be conscious, to be in better shape the next day, to be aware of what you are doing, especially not to have a total loss of control of what you are doing or what you are going to do [...]. [...] Also to be able to remember the evening the next day.”* (Male, 16, non-drinker). In this line, they considered that not drinking helped them to avoid irresponsible behaviour. *“I think it could prevent us from doing things we might regret, under the influence of alcohol we are not really aware of what we are doing.”* (Female, 15, non-drinker). The regret, even

shame, of having been drunk and lost control has been reported by drinking participants and could be amplified by videos and their diffusion on the social networks. *"You can say to yourself, imagine tomorrow 'Well I do not really remember what happened tonight, and then tomorrow I wake up and there are videos of me everywhere and you do not really know what you are doing, because you have lost control. [...] Well, if you start [...] drinking a lot and the next day you regret it, because there are many things that have come out about you [...]. Well, you say to yourself, 'Oh shit, I lost control and I cannot go back'." (Female, 17, drinker).* This loss of control could have a negative impact on self-esteem. *"Or self-image too. If you start drinking too much and you lose control and it is in a place with a lot of people. I mean, personally, I would not really like to go home the next morning and think that everybody saw me in a state of uh..." (Female, 16, drinker).* Some non-drinkers also reported that they did not want to be in situations that they would not remember the next day as a result of heavy drinking. *"Personally, I think self-control and control of your actions are good things. Because personally, when I go to parties, I have friends who are half-drunk, who do not know what they are doing, [...] they do not remember anything the next day [...]. I would not like that at all." (Female, 16, non-drinker).* Some drinkers have reported that not remembering everything in their evening was not a pleasant feeling. *"It is true that for example [...] when I drank a lot, well I did not remember certain moments of the evening, I really forgot everything. And even now I do not remember and it is not necessarily pleasant." (Female, 16, drinker).*

Non-drinkers felt that not drinking alcohol would allow for better emotional management. Indeed, they considered that some people would turn to alcohol when they feel unpleasant emotions, instead of confronting them and trying to control them. *"We will know how to manage our emotions (as non-drinkers). Because I have noticed that a lot of people who drink do not know how to handle their emotions anymore. For example, anger, sadness or stuff like that, because of alcohol, because very quickly they turn to alcohol [...]" (Female, 14, non-drinker).*

Drinking alcohol could also lead to different types of victimization according to the participants. *"[...] A drunk person who is alone, it can be very dangerous for her/him, not only physically, well he/she can get assaulted, they can get raped, they can get beaten." (Female, 17, non-drinker).*

Both drinkers and non-drinkers, females and males, felt that females were at greater risk of sexual violence as a result of drinking. One participant reported not drinking alcohol for this reason because she already felt vulnerable to sexual violence as a girl, and drinking alcohol would reinforce that vulnerability. *"I do not drink, because we hear so many stories about girls being assaulted and so on. Actually, it is really fear because I think that if I suddenly lose control of myself, then when you are a girl, you are basically easy prey for the aggressors. So I say to myself 'If you are drinking on top of that...' ". (Female, 19, non-drinker).* This gender difference in risk would lead some females to be more careful with their alcohol use than males. *"I would say that girls are drinking less. [...] As females, we are afraid that if we are drunk, someone will take advantage of it to do something to us. [...] For example, I have a lot of control when I drink for that. Because I do not want a person to take advantage [...] of me drinking, to do something (to me)." (Female, 20, drinker).*

Several participants felt that males generally did not have this fear of sexual violence that would cause them to control their use for this reason. *"Generally, males do not have that ulterior motive to be careful about their alcohol use to stay safe." (Female, 20, drinker).* There were also discussions about substances that could be put in the glasses without their knowledge. *"However, in relation*

to drinking, I find that being a female is much more risky than being a male. I mean, even drinking for pleasure can become dangerous, [...] substances can be put in her glass [...].” (Female, 17, non-drinker). In this line, some females reported not drinking alcohol in certain contexts such as nightclubs for fear of substances being put in their drinks. “[...] I know I am not going to go get drinks in a club. Because we do not know if someone put inside a pill or something.” (Female, 19, drinker).

3.2.5 Taste

Some non-drinkers reported not drinking alcohol because they did not like the taste. “Personally, my reason (for not drinking alcohol) is rather for the taste of alcohol, that I do not like [...].” (Male, 20, non-drinker). It seems that taste is not a decisive criterion for young people who consume alcohol either, unlike the effects of alcohol. “I do not like the taste of alcohol, I drink, but I do not like the taste (laughs). So sometimes I am like, It is not good, but it is fine.” (Female, 16, drinker). In terms of taste, the availability of non-alcoholic beverages was sometimes discussed by non-drinkers, who reported that they were satisfied overall mainly because they did not have trouble getting a non-alcoholic drink in bars, unlike some alcoholic beverages that might not be available. “There is a choice, there is no place that only sells alcohol. I mean (there is) no bar, no restaurant that only sells alcohol, I think there is always a syrup, cold tea or coke lying around.” (Male, 20, non-drinker)

3.2.6 Religion

Both drinkers and non-drinkers reported religion as one of the main reasons they saw for not drinking alcohol. “[...] Personally there are several factors that tell me not to drink. First of all, there is the religion that tells us not to drink.” (Male, 20, non-drinker). Nevertheless, one participant suggested that it was mainly religions other than Christianity that led to non-consumption. “You cannot generalize, but [...] I am in a amphitheater (lecture hall in University) and [...] I can say that the only people I know who have a different religion, I mean who are not European, drink much less than those who are (European). [...]” (Female, 20, non-drinker). In this line, one participant even gave the example of wine in church to explain the normalization of alcohol consumption even in a religious context. “For example Catholics, the mass wine, I think it is something that is really implanted in our culture, in the European lifestyle, it is something that is quite present, alcohol, compared to other things. So it is something that is less criticized than other substances.” (Male, 16, drinker).

3.2.7 Health

Health was one of the reasons given for not drinking or reducing alcohol consumption among youth. “[...] On the health side, I think it is positive for us not to drink, because we can have so many different problems [...]. Health is very important. Especially because we do not realize when we are young and later on we say ‘Oh yeah, shit, I should not have done that.’ And we do not have the power to change that anymore”. (Female, 20, non-drinker). Some have talked about immediate and short-term health. “[...] Personally, when I was talking about health, I was thinking more in the short

term, like uh, you know when you drink too much, throwing up after every party or having a hangover every morning. I mean, That is not good for your health, (it is) even unpleasant to experience, I guess." (Female, 16, non-drinker). While others have referred to future health effects. "I have always been told that what I eat now is my body later [...]. Like what we do now will affect us later. So I say to myself that I should not do that (drinking alcohol) now [...]." (Male, 15, non-drinker). For the long-term effects, it seems that drinkers have difficulties to consider them, contrary to the immediate dangers. "When we think of the dangers of alcohol, we think of the direct dangers, the direct consequences that there can happen in a car accident and not the health consequences that can occur in the long term due to alcohol use". (Male, 20, drinker). One participant even considered the immediate consequences, such as vomiting due to excessive drinking, to be not so serious. "But I think that [...] right now (as a young person) even if you drink a lot, you will not necessarily have serious effects. Except for vomiting, dizziness, stuff like that." (Female, 16, drinker). (Female, 16, drinker). The actual effects of alcohol use and the negative consequences on a young person's body would not show up until later in life, according to some participants, and alcohol would then be less scary than other substances. "[...] But I think that alcohol is less frightening for your health than, for example, smoking or any other type of substance that is a bit festive. [...] With alcohol you do not necessarily see the [...] side effects of alcohol, apart from the fact that you throw up, you have a hangover, you are not well. All the problems related to the liver, to the calories, [...] to the weight and so on, these are things that come, but they do not come when you are 16/17 years old" (Male, 16, drinker).

In this health context, sport was also reported as a reason not to drink. "[...] I speak as a sportsman [...]. I think the advantages are being in better shape and not wasting your week [...]. I do not drink alcohol and [...] every day of the week I am in shape. [...] By not going to parties and not drinking alcohol, I think you are in much better shape. I think that it can be much more beneficial, especially for people who play sports [...]. And for health in general." (Male, 16, non-drinker). This reason was also mentioned by drinkers when talking about moderate consumption. "Personally, it (a reason for not drinking) is for everything linked to calories, as I do a bit of sport. [...] For example, I drink a beer and you remember the calories in it, [...] you think that it is a lot for a small drink." (Male, 17, drinker).

Others also talked about the brain and the age of alcohol initiation, which, if too early, would affect its proper development. "It depends on how well your brain is developed too. Because if you are drinking at three and a half years old [...], even if it is not regularly, I think it can have an impact on your brain development, for example." (Male, 15, drinker).

Some youth, including non-drinkers, felt that drinking was not necessarily harmful to their health. "I see a lot of people saying, 'Oh yeah, drinking a glass of wine with every meal is good for your skin and it is good for your health', so I do not think that drinking alcohol is really something bad in itself. I mean, I have seen people around me who drank alcohol every day and died very late, like, I do not know, at 100-something, at 90-something, and I have seen people who did not drink at all and died very young due to other problems." (Female, 17, non-drinker). In this idea, it is mainly the addiction and the excess that would affect health. "I think that as long as there is no regular use with dependence, it has an impact on health but in the short term. But as soon as you start to get addicted, you have to worry, I think." (Male, 15, non-drinker).

3.3 Dry January campaign

3.3.1 Knowledge of the concept

Most participants had never heard of the #dryjanuary campaign encouraging people not to drink alcohol during January. *"I do not know (the campaign), but is it aimed at young people or is it aimed at the general population?" (Male, 20, non-drinker).* Some have deduced the concept by the name of the challenge and the topic of the FG. *"We can deduce what it means in context." (Female, 16, drinker).*

The concept of making a challenge to do or stop something was sometimes known but not the one related to alcohol. *"I know the concept of not doing something for a month, but not drinking, no." (Female, 15, non-drinker).* Moreover, when the concept was known, it was essentially described as an adult challenge. *"[...] I feel like it is mostly a thing, I do not know, for adults, I do not know why [...]. I have often heard from people over 25 [...]." (Female, 18, drinker).*

3.3.2 Opinions

Opinions on the challenge were divided. Several participants questioned the usefulness of alcohol abstinence for one month and the after-the-challenge. *"[...] Of course, for a month a person may not drink, but on the first of February he or she will say to himself or herself 'Let's all have a big night of drinking to make up for lost time.'" (Female, 20, drinker).* Discussions were also held on the lack of follow-up. Such a challenge could even be risky for people suffering from an addiction as a cessation must be accompanied. *"But in relation to what you said before, I think that for a person suffering from alcoholism, stopping for a month is not a good idea. Because you need follow-up anyway, you cannot stop like that." (Female, 18, drinker).*

This challenge would not really be taken seriously, especially because alcohol-related problems are not emphasized in the society. *"I also think it is not a huge problem that society puts forward. That is why people might say 'Well, I passed my challenge, now I am coming back.' I do not think it is taken seriously enough." (Male, 19, drinker).* The reason why a person would do this challenge would show if it is done seriously or not. In this line, in relation to young people, there would be the reason to do this challenge just to follow the group, without necessarily thinking about the final goal. *"It depends on the state of mind of the person at the beginning of the challenge. I mean, if the person starts from the principle 'Yeah, I am going to stop this month because everyone else is doing it', 'I want to do what everyone else is doing', or if the state of mind is 'I am going to do this challenge, because I can see if it is necessary for me'. (It depends on whether) the person wants to review his/her situation or if he is just doing it to show off. (Female, 17, non-drinker).* Flyers and posters (7.1 Vignettes used) of the campaign would not help, at first sight, to put this challenge in a health perspective. *"I only saw the flyer as a challenge, so trying to stop drinking for a month, but I did not see anything behind it like it was for your health [...]. I mean I feel like there is not too much follow-up, it is not drinking for a month and then what?" (Female, 20, drinker).*

As a young person, it would be easy and frequent not to drink for a month, since the consumption is mostly done at parties. *"Yeah, you can even do it (a month without alcohol) without realizing it.*

You can just not go to parties for a month because you do not want to or because there are no interesting parties, and then you do not drink.” (Female, 17, drinker). In this line, not being able to go one month without alcohol would mean that there is an addiction or excess problem. “If you consider not drinking for a month a challenge, it means that your alcohol use is too high. [...] When you take on a non-drinking challenge like that, it means that your basic use is excessive. Otherwise, we would be able to stop without any problem [...].” (Male, 16, non-drinker). To go further, for a female participant, not drinking alcohol for a month should not even be considered a challenge because the norm is not to drink alcohol. So there would be nothing extraordinary about not drinking. “I think it is kind of pathetic to get there. It should not even be a challenge not to drink for a month. I mean [...], it almost seems like an incredible challenge. But it is just about not drinking. For me it is a pity to get to that point.” (Female, 19, non-drinker).

Some considered that it would be interesting, in order to encourage young people to do a month without alcohol, to propose, for example, ideas to replace alcohol consumption. *“(One idea) is to offer alternatives, not just the challenge [...]. For example, I have already seen ads for non-alcoholic drinks, there are alcohol brands that make non-alcoholic drinks and it is pretty common with beers, [...] or (to give) ideas maybe for cocktails or things like that without alcohol, but that still taste good.” (Male, 20, non-drinker). Positive opinions were also expressed. Several participants considered this challenge to be useful for people with a problem with alcohol, especially adults. “About the flyer, I do not think it will appeal to young people. [...] I think most of the time young people do not drink like crazy, they drink a lot I think, during parties or occasions, but I do not think these are people who will drink every day.” (Male, 19, non-drinker). One of the main arguments in favor of this challenge was to make people aware of their alcohol consumption. “Personally, I think it can sometimes be helpful to find out that you cannot go more than a week without drinking [...]. It may shock you, and then you decide to put things in place to reduce your alcohol use [...], it can just help you discover an addiction.” (Male, 20, non-drinker). In addition to one’s own consumption, this challenge would demonstrate that alcohol is everywhere and that its consumption is totally normalized. In addition to one’s own consumption, this challenge would allow people to see that alcohol is everywhere and that its consumption has been largely normalized. “In Switzerland, [...] I think we drink a lot of alcohol [...]. Maybe it is a good idea to realize that it (alcohol) is kind of everywhere: ‘Well, we are having a fondue, so we will have a little glass of white wine, or we are with our friends, so we will have a little beer [...]’ and I think That is a good thing. [...] Realizing that Yeah, there was a lot of alcohol, even though it was normal. Well, this (alcohol) is a fairly common thing and at least you have managed to become aware of it.” (Female, 18, drinker). Some participants reported positive points in terms of behaviors, activities or interests. A month without alcohol would be interesting to show young people that it is possible to have fun without alcohol. “[...] If, for example, they are young people who drink alcohol to party, I think it could be cool to show them that for a month even if they do not drink and they go to parties [...], well they can do that all the time, it is not because we drink that we have fun.” (Female, 15, non-drinker). Drinking time could therefore be replaced by other activities. “I think it may be good to try it (the Dry January challenge) with friends and family and maybe it will allow them (the ones who do the challenge) to do (other) things, because when you do not drink alcohol, you necessarily do other things [...].” (Male, 18, non-drinker).*

In relation to a possible group effect if a significant number of young people decide to follow the challenge, opinions were mixed among the non-drinkers who would be surrounded by people who

no longer drink. While for some this would not change anything in their alcohol abstinence experience, for some it would facilitate their social life during parties as everybody would be sober. *"[...] I would feel like knowing people a little bit more deeply. Because it is true that often, during parties, the discussions you have with someone are when they are drunk. So they are not really themselves. And I think there would be [...] deeper exchanges."* (Female, 19, non-drinker). Finally, for drinkers, a group effect could motivate young people to follow and respect the challenge. *"But I think if someone decided to stop, it (the Dry January challenge) would bring support, because everyone would stop at the same time. [...] (The fact) that there is a movement helps a lot of people I think."* (Female, 18, drinker).

3.4 Social life

3.4.1 Friends and relatives

Many young non-drinkers reported that they were in the minority in their peer groups, especially when they reached a legal age. *"We are a minority (as non-drinkers), but I feel like at some parties I was not the only one not drinking, but minority, yes I think at about 17 years old, yes."* (Male, 17, non-drinker). Drinkers reported having very few friends who do not drink. *"I do not know anyone in my entourage who does not drink, only people who drink less than others, let us say [...]."* (Male, 17, drinker).

Some non-drinkers reported having mostly non-drinking friends. *"Well, I am not very alone, there are many people around me who do not drink either."* (Female, 19, non-drinker). For some it could help them not to feel isolated at parties where others were drinking. *"Not necessarily (feeling excluded), I have a friend who does not drink either. So it is fine"*. (Female, 20, non-drinker). While others presented a more mixed environment in terms of consumption. *"For me, in my entourage, it is also a bit of a mix, you have people who drink and others who do not. [...]."* (Female, 17, non-drinker). Still others reported being around more people who drank, including family members, without it impacting their lives. *"[...] Most people I know drink alcohol. It influenced me a bit at the beginning but no longer afterwards, but most people I hang out with drink, starting with my parents, my parents drink regularly [...]."* (Male, 19, non-drinker). Having people around who drink would not be a problem as long as there is no inducement or the main purpose is not to drink at a party, for example. *"On one hand, I have friends with whom I can go to parties without alcohol [...], and on the other hand, I have friends who go to parties to drink. So I go with them, but I get bored, because the party is based on alcohol [...]. I am with my glass of water and honestly I go (to these parties) less and less, because it is less and less fun [...]."* (Female, 16, non-drinker). Females were more negative about being around people who drink. *"I feel like fewer and fewer people are willing to have a quiet party at home. There is always someone who needs to bring his/her beer. Maybe I do not know enough people who do not drink alcohol. I feel like I am surrounded by people who drink. So often, parties, I know it is going to happen like that. So I do not go. And instead I do not do anything [...]."* (Female, 19, non-drinker).

3.4.2 Inclusion and socialization

The feeling of being out of the norm would appear especially after compulsory school, with alcohol and partying becoming more normalized. *“I think, in high school, drinking alcohol is part of the normality. So we are going to feel more excluded (when we go to high school) I think. Because now if we do not drink yet, it is normal, but afterwards, well, it is the normality (to drink).”* (Female, 15, non-drinker). This exclusion would even go as far as not being invited to parties. *“I have already had this feeling where people invited others to a party and there was alcohol. They were not necessarily going to drink, but there was some (alcohol), and I was not invited because I never drank, so yes, I have already felt that exclusion a little bit.”* (Female, 15, non-drinker).

It may sometimes be more difficult for young non-drinkers to socialize than for those disinhibited by alcohol. *“When we do not drink, [...] we do not have this effect of disinhibition that we have when we drink, for example, one or two drinks, and if we are at a party where we do not know a lot of people [...], it can be more stressful or more complicated to go towards others or to have fun, to let go I would say.”* (Male, 20, non-drinker).

For some, there would be a gap between drinkers and non-drinkers at parties. *“When you do not drink alcohol [...] at a party and there is another group of 6 or 7 people dancing, getting drunk, singing, but really drunk, it is more complicated to fit in with this group [...] and to be in the same mood as them. That is why you are a bit isolated I think.”* (Male, 16, non-drinker). In this line, one non-drinker indicated that he sometimes felt he made drinkers feel uncomfortable by not drinking. *“(One of the negative points) is also to make the other group who is drinking feel uncomfortable, so they are drinking and seeing you with a coke , you feel like they are excluding you or I do not know... You allow yourself to set limits and they do not. [...] I think I make the other group who is drinking uncomfortable.”* (Male, 19, non-drinker). Nevertheless, overall, drinkers have not advanced any problems with young people who would not drink as long as there is mutual respect. *“[...] If we are half drinkers and half non-drinkers, as long as everyone is having fun, there is no problem. I mean, as long as those who drink are aware that the others do not drink and those who do not drink are okay with hanging out with people who drink, well, we can have fun, for me there is no problem [...].”* (Female, 16, drinker).

In addition to the potential difficulties encountered at parties, non-drinkers may also encounter difficulties in academic settings. *“[...] For example, at the University, everyone drinks, goes out for beers. So, [...], it is true that it is complicated to blend in with the others. I mean, we only blend in with people like us (who do not drink alcohol). So, it is a bit complicated at that level.”* (Female, 19, non-drinker). Or in the associations of youths in which drinking would be a condition of entry. *“Oh yeah yeah, you get lynched (if you do not drink). [...] I think it is really a code of normality to drink among rural youth. Girls, boys, everyone.”* (Female, 17, drinker).

Some exclusion might also occur after a party because friends would talk about it a lot, leaving the absent person out. *“[...] The discussion after these parties, for example, in class if your group of friends is also in your class, well some of them will start talking about ‘Yeah the party was fun’ and they will show the pictures, talk about how they drank and so on and since you were not invited to these parties, you are just on the side listening to them.”* (Female, 16, non-drinker).

Finally, one youth reported sometimes feeling excluded within his family in which the taste of alcoholic beverages was discussed. *“In my family, [...] my father likes to talk about alcohol with my other siblings because they drink [...]. Sometimes we feel a bit excluded from the discussion.”* (Male, 19, non-drinker).

3.4.3 Comments and pressure

Discussions also focused on the comments that non-drinking youth might sometimes receive about not drinking. As mentioned above, it was mostly legal drinking age youth who receive such comments. *“No (no comment) [...]. Well, people around me do not drink either, so...”* (Male, 15, non-drinker). However, according to some participants, it would seem that the comments decrease with age and maturity, presenting themselves especially towards this end of compulsory school transition. *“I would say that when I was younger, 15 or 16 years old, it was quite frequent (the comments). [...] When I used to go to parties with my friends, yeah, it was quite frequent this kind of comments (pushing a young person to drink alcohol). But today, with the time that has passed, I think we have all matured a little [...].”* (Male, 18, drinker). On the contrary, other participants reported that once they turned 18, not drinking was perceived as even more abnormal by others. *“As soon as we get closer to the age of majority, it is something normal (to drink alcohol) and if we do not, we are kind of weird or we are kind of seen as aliens.”* (Female, 20, non-drinker). They perceived more comments urging them to drink as they reached the legal age. *“And the closer you get to the age of majority, [...] the more people will say ‘No, but drink! No, but why do not you drink?’ and they will force more than before.”* (Female, 18, non-drinker). It would therefore be more difficult for some to assert themselves as non-drinkers when they reached the legal ages because those around them considered that age was no longer a reason to not drink. *“It is easier to say no at 16/17 years old than after. At 16/17 years old you can still play the age card [...] and now they tell me ‘You are of age, it is okay, you can drink. [...] I used to play the age card and that was fine, but now I have no excuse.’”* (Male, 19, non-drinker).

Among the remarks, judgements were reported. These judgements would also take the form of incentives. *“[...] ‘You are a bit uptight. Go ahead, have a drink or two, it will not do anything to you’, even though I did not want to [...].”* (Male, 18, non-drinker).

In addition to comments urging consumption, many non-drinkers also reported questions about why not to drink. *“Every time I go to a party [...], people ask me why I do not drink. But really, it is the question of the century: ‘What? You do not drink? I mean, it is so horrible! How do you do? Why?’ and they expect an answer and a really important reason. Like religion or because I was an alcoholic before. I mean, they really do not understand. I should be the one asking them ‘Why do you need to drink?’”* (Female, 19, non-drinker). Participants reported that when the reason given was driving, then people did not comment. *“I think that when you say ‘I do not drink because I am driving’, people really leave you alone: ‘Okay, so we totally respect the choice’, much more than abstinence.”* (Male, 20, drinker). Non-drinkers would then have to constantly justify not drinking. *“Yeah, the fact that you have to justify the fact that you do not want to drink, [...] you have to justify this and they have to accept the justification too. If you tell them ‘Today I do not feel like drinking’, ‘I mean I am not interested in it’, they're either going to try to force you, or they are going to make comments or they're not going to invite you to other parties [...].”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). These

justifications would be easier to give when growing up. *“I also feel that the pressure fades with age. At the beginning, you have to be like everyone else. [...] Those who do not drink are frowned upon. And, especially, we do not understand why they do not drink. But the more you grow up, the more your reasons are... If you do not drink, it is because you really have reasons for that and so, yeah, I feel like it is much more accepted.”* (Female, 20, drinker).

Some drinkers admitted making this kind of remarks and encouraging non-drinkers to drink without really realizing that it could hurt, but more in the mood of the party and under the influence of alcohol. *“I mean, I have seen people pressuring (non-drinkers), but it was mostly under the influence of alcohol. [...] And afterwards, maybe they do not realize that they put pressure on them, but they didn't really mean it [...].”* (Female, 17, drinker). One former drinker reported that she made such comments when she was drinking and felt guilty about it in retrospect. Drinking should be respected as any other choice, without discussion. *“I have been in situations where people told me: ‘I am not going to drink tonight’, and I wanted to drink so I told them [...] ‘Oh That is too bad’, but now I think That is a really stupid thing to say this, because it is the person's choice [...]. It should be accepted like a hamburger that you do not want to eat [...].”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). These remarks would not be considered serious by the people making them. *“Of course, people want to know the reasons why (someone is not drinking), and it is much more questioned (than drinking) [...]. I mean, a lot of times we can be encouraged to... We are told, ‘Come on, it will relax you’. It is not necessarily pressure, it is not necessarily malicious pressure, but there is a bit of a ‘Do what everyone else does’ thing, like you would not have fun, you would be excluded. I mean, when you do not drink, you feel a bit different.”* (Female, 19, drinker).

For some non-drinkers, these remarks would be difficult to understand, especially if it comes from a known person. *“If it is someone I do not know, or who's just at a party, I can understand because he does not really know me, but if it is a friend who makes that remark when she knows that I do not like alcohol etc., I would take it very badly because I would say to myself, ‘Well you do not respect what I want’.”* (Female, 15, non-drinker). Similarly, it is also the repetitive nature of this type of remark that seems to affect non-drinkers. *“If it is once, twice it is fine, but if it is several times, it starts to bother me [...]. We respect the others' choices.”* (Female, 15, non-drinker).

A form of group pressure could then be felt by the non-drinkers. *“I think there can be some pressure. If you are in a group, there can be pressure from your friends or they will tell you to drink and you do not feel like it [...].”* (Male, 20, non-drinker). This pressure would also come from the fact that alcohol would have an important place in the discussions of young people. *“[...] It is true that when you are invited to parties [...], you feel like you have to drink alcohol, because even in general discussions between friends, they talk a lot about drinking alcohol etc.”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). The pressure could also be indirect, from being around people who drink. *“I think that it is also a pressure (to drink alcohol) put on oneself, maybe because we see a lot of people drinking etc... We can put pressure on ourselves thinking that we are going to be excluded without having experienced a real exclusion.”* (Male, 20, drinker). This group pressure would be exerted and felt regardless of the person's gender. *“I do not think there is any difference between the two (females and males), because I think it is the group effect, [...] no matter the gender you are, the group will not force you but will tell you to drink, whether it is a female or a male. [...]”* (Male, 20, drinker). Finally, this pressure could be reduced by the knowledge of the entourage about the person's non-use. *“My*

relatives know that I do not drink so they have never really insisted. Thus it was fine for me.” (Female, 18, non-drinker).

3.4.4 Non-drinkers strategies

Some youth presented strategies to hide not drinking in order to make others think they were drinking, but the majority considered such strategies unnecessary, especially if the youth had people around them who respected their choice without discussion. *“I think beyond age and personality, it is precisely your group of friends that will determine whether you will have to use strategies or not. [...] If you are with a group of close friends [...] you will have less of a need to use strategies because it is generally accepted that you do not drink [...].” (Female, 18, drinker).*

It is mainly to avoid receiving remarks about not drinking that some young people would put in place strategies or excuses to refuse to drink. *“I have a buddy who used to say ‘No, I am sorry, I cannot drink tonight because I am on antibiotics’ and people would immediately say okay rather than give him a hard time [...].” (Female, 18, drinker).* One non-drinker reported that she sometimes said that she was gluten intolerant to justify her non-drinking rather than saying she did not want to consume gluten. *“I have gluten intolerance and there is quite a few in alcohol, so every time someone says ‘Oh, you do not drink?’ I always say ‘No, I cannot, I have an intolerance’, because it is true that I do not feel like telling them ‘No, I do not like to drink.” (Female, 16, non-drinker).*

One male participant also reported having already pretended to drink and observed that this changed social contacts and his integration into the group. *“[...] What is interesting is to really observe the difference between the... the contacts between the people when you drink and when you do not drink and the relationship they have knowing that the person drank or has not been drinking or did not drink, which is still different. [...] Let us say that the person (who drank) was much more likely to go (to someone who drank), talk and then socialize by thinking ‘Well this person is in the same state as me, so I can interact with him/her freely’.” (Male, 20, drinker).*

Some non-drinkers reported sometimes taking the glass they were handed without drinking. *“[...] If people are too insistent, I will take the drink and later on, when the person is gone, I will just give it to someone else.” (Female, 18, non-drinker).* A non-drinker reported that people did not care whether he drank alcohol or not when he had a glass in his hand, regardless of its contents. *“The parties I went to, well you just need to have something in your glass, then people do not look at what you put in your glass.” (Male, 17, non-drinker).* Other drinkers have considered that a non-alcoholic beverage, with a container that resembles an alcohol bottle, can be substituted for an alcoholic beverage. *“I have a friend who does not drink and when we have parties where we bring beers she takes these small things alcohol free. I mean, they are like beers, they are little drinks like that (shows a size with the fingers) [...]. You know, they look like beers [...]. People do not immediately recognize that it is not alcohol. It is part of the illusion.” (Female, 16, drinker).*

Others would simply say they are not drinking right now, not saying they do not want to drink all night. *“Personally, if I do not want to drink at a party, I do not say it when I get there. If someone asks me, I say ‘No, it is okay. I do not want to’. I do not say ‘I do not drink’. I would say ‘That is okay, I do not want to right now. I mean, like I am going to drink afterwards’. When in reality, I will never drink [...].” (Female, 16, drinker).*

Other strategies were also presented to make it easier to fit in at parties by participating in the same activities as drinkers, still without consuming alcohol. *“[...] I do not mind that people drink at parties [...]. It does not slow down my life because I still go (to parties). Except that I do not drink. But that does not stop me from participating in the beer-pong etc [...], it does not stop me from participating in the party, it does not stop me from dancing with people, it does not stop me from talking with people. I just do not drink!” (Female, 20, non-drinker).* In this line, one drinker proposed to include non-drinkers in drinking games by offering other non-alcoholic beverages. *“If I drink and we play a drinking game, well, again, it depends on the people around me, but sometimes with some friends what we used to do for people who did not drink alcohol were some kind of cocktails with a lot of disgusting stuff, ketchup, a lot of stuff mixed together [...]. Since these are games where you have to take shots, instead of taking a shot of alcohol, they take a shot of something disgusting.” (Male, 18, drinker).*

3.4.5 Perceived profile of non-drinkers

Some drinkers considered youth who did not drink to be the good guys. *“Uh for me they are... Well they are the good students”. (Male, 15, drinker).* Some drinkers considered that a young person who was not a drinker could be marginal because he or she was not part of the norm. *“Not drinking alcohol as a young person is kind of marginal. Because it is true that generally the majority drinks at parties.” (Female, 18, drinker).* Control would also be part of the typical profile of a young non-drinker. *“There are people... A typical profile is the one of people who are reasonable and afraid of losing control [...]. It is a bit of a typical profile of people who do not drink [...].” (Female, 16, drinker).*

One drinker considered that some young people tried so hard to stay away from alcohol that it could prevent them from having fun. *“I think just not drinking alcohol isn't a problem, but some people feel so bad about drinking alcohol, deny that and avoid any connection to alcohol, it keeps them stuck and it keeps them from having fun, disconnecting, when it would be good for them.” (Male, 15, drinker).* In this line, non-drinkers would risk missing out on their adolescence. *“Sometimes I think it (adolescence) is the time when you can let yourself go [...] Because afterwards you have the work life and other stuff and you rarely have the opportunity to party like that. So I say to myself that this is the time to enjoy [...].” (Female, 16, drinker).*

Finally, one young non-drinker considered non-drinkers to be courageous, especially in going against the group effect and pressure. *“I would say it is a kind of courage, I do not want to say that those who drink are not courageous, but when you are young and you do not drink, it means you dare to say ‘No’ to people and that for me is a kind of courage. [...] If someone has the ability to be assertive it is a great thing at our age.” (Male, 18, non-drinker).*

3.4.6 Non-drinkers as resources

Several discussions focused on how a non-drinking youth could help his or her drinking peers, especially during parties, to provide some safety. *“So I think it is important, I would even say that it is really necessary to have someone who does not drink in order to keep an eye on others who are out of control, [...] because I think he is totally aware and fully conscious of what he is doing, so he can help others.” (Male, 20, drinker).*

Non-drinkers would sometimes be automatically designated as resource people in case of problems. “[...] Often they (non-drinkers) are automatically assigned the role of people who have to take care of those who have drunk too much.” (Female, 20, drinker). Non-drinkers reported that this role could be uncomfortable for them. “[...] When you are at a party, half the people are drunk and you cannot even have fun, because you are not drunk with them and you spend more time taking care of them than having fun.” (Female, 16, non-drinker). Too much responsibility would fall on the non-drinkers. For example, a drinker participant told us that when she does not drink and has this role, it stressed her out. “[...] It actually stresses me out, because I am always looking at what other people are doing [...].” (Female, 16, drinker).

Some non-drinkers felt that it was not their place to deal with people who drink alcohol. “It is not up to us to control what people do, it is up to them to take care of themselves/their lives.” (Male, 15, non-drinker). This role may even lead to some conflicts with young drinkers to be monitored. “It is boring as a non-drinker to have to deal with people who drink alcohol. I mean, I spent my New Year's Eve hiding bottles behind locked doors, taking bottles out of the hands, giving people water and in the end I just got yelled at because ‘Oh, you are watching us too much. Ah you weren't drunk.’” (Female, 16, non-drinker). Non-drinkers also reported that they could sometimes be blamed for not preventing certain problems. “Yeah, I think in the long run, the person who did not drink alcohol might become a kind of scapegoat. The person who could not stop the person from doing this or doing that [...].” (Male, 16, non-drinker). Some participants felt that some people might feel guilt if they were unable to help people who were drinking. “As a sober person, if something happens, I would feel really bad [...] just because I was there and I had the capability to react [...].” (Male, 16, non-drinker).

Participants reported that this role would discourage some youth from coming to the parties knowing that they would have to take it on. “I mean, I have friends who have told me that it (watching others) pissed them off. So, sometimes, they do not come when they know it will be a big party or there will be a lot of alcohol. They say ‘Listen, it would have been nice to see you, but I would rather not because I do not want to take care of you tonight.’” (Female, 18, drinker).

Drinkers would sometimes take on this role, if they have the capacity, but it would be more ad hoc. “[...] I have my conscience to help him (a drunk friend). They are my friends, they need to be helped, they will help me too if I am in the same situation, I have no problem with that.” (Male, 17, drinker). According to some participants, a person who uses alcohol may even be more able to help someone who has been drinking than someone who has never used alcohol, because they know the effects of alcohol. “Since they do not drink, they do not necessarily have the point of view of the person who is completely drunk. They cannot necessarily put themselves in his place to help him, so yes, they are sober, they can help him walk, get comfortable and all that, but someone who has never drunk in his/her life and who has to help someone who is completely drunk, well, I think he is going to have a lot more difficulty than a guy who has had three or four beers [...] or just someone who has already drank alcohol and knows what it is like to be tipsy or drunk.” (Male, 16, drinker).

3.5 Prevention

Overall, there were mixed views on whether or not there was enough alcohol prevention for youth. Some rated prevention on this topic as inadequate. *“I never had any real prevention, except, as she said before, the Samaritans (classes), for the theoretical driving license and even that I find that it was not really prevention. It was more a prevention on drinking and driving and not on alcohol per se.”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). While others felt that it was enough. *“We had a lot of prevention at school, in my opinion it is useless to add more because we really had a lot of prevention.”* (Male, 15, drinker). Compared to formal prevention, personal or close experiences would also be a way to prevent abuse. *“I feel like if young people have not had a bad experience with alcohol, it will not prevent them from (drinking), well maybe testimonies or things like that, bad things that happened, but I think that even so, there is nothing that will stop young people.”* (Female, 15, drinker).

In the discussions related to alcohol prevention, participants talked about the content and places of such prevention.

3.5.1 Content

Demonizing alcohol consumption

First, several participants considered that preventing excess by diabolizing alcohol use would not be heard by young people. According to some, an injunction, especially when it comes from adults, not to do something, such as drinking alcohol, would have the opposite effect and would push some adolescents to do it by seeking the forbidden. *“[...] If it was written everywhere ‘It is forbidden to eat oranges’, I do not know, I am using a random example, everybody would say ‘Oh, it is so cool to eat oranges’ because it is forbidden. So everybody would eat oranges and nobody would think about alcohol. But since it is not said that it is forbidden, no one will think about eating oranges [...].”* (Female, 15, drinker).

Explanations of the dangers of alcohol use must be present. *“There are people who tell us, ‘Yes, alcohol is bad. You should not drink’. [...] Just saying ‘It is bad’ is not helpful, because honestly, it is bad, but why would it be bad? [...] If we do not have an answer to that question, it is a bit useless. I think one of the best ways is to explain, really, the consequences of alcohol [...].”* (Male, 20, non-drinker). The effects of alcohol on the body could also be part of such a prevention. *“I think we should also show people what is not visible when they drink, like showing the effect it has on the body or [...] what happens in the brain in relation to the addiction, showing that even if they think they can stop, there is something that is already happened to their body, not how it affects their liver, etc. But how it is affecting them in the moment and showing them they are losing control, but also physically.”* (Female, 16, non-drinker). In this line, one participant mentioned a prevention that he found interesting with glasses that simulate a state of drunkenness allowing the effects of alcohol misuse to be experienced in a real way. *“In prevention, the concrete side of the problem and of the effects and consequences of alcohol are a bit missing and I remember once [...] I was given glasses that reproduced the effects of alcohol and it was really something that made an impression on me, because this time I had a concrete experience, I could feel what alcohol caused and it was really an experience that made an impression on me and even made me afraid of alcohol, because*

I did not want to feel that again, I think it really hurt my head, almost to the point of vomiting.” (Male, 20, non-drinker).

In the line of not demonizing alcohol or simply saying you should not drink, many participants talked about learning how to drink to avoid problems. *“In fact, what would be interesting for prevention [...] is how to manage not to fall into excess. Because there are many little tips. Like eating before (drinking) [...], drinking a lot of water, going to the restroom, spacing out your drinks. These are tips you know, but you do not really know them. [...] Having little cereal bars.” (Female, 16, drinker).* Talking about limits and how not to exceed them, including the fact that some alcohols are stronger than others, were also reported as possible prevention elements. *“I just think that alcohol is quite different for everyone... People just need to learn how to moderate their drinking, but especially to know their limits if they want to drink. So I think it is important that they learn that. And also to do more prevention about that, I think there is not really enough of it (prevention) actually. [...] To drink well and say that beer is softer than Jack Daniel’s (brand of Scotch), I did not necessarily know that at the very beginning when I was young [...]. I think that, a bit of prevention in terms of alcohol, how to drink, how much to drink, all that.” (Male, 20, drinker).*

Inclusion of non-drinkers

There were discussions about the place of non-drinkers in alcohol-related prevention. For some participants, non-drinkers should also be included in the prevention and educated about the dangers of alcohol especially if they decide to drink in the future. *“I think that they (non-drinkers) should be involved, because even if they have said with conviction that they were not going to drink alcohol, I am not sure that they know exactly what is dangerous and maybe I am afraid that their mindset will change over time because they were not informed of certain things [...]. Well for me, [...] you never know enough and I think that even when you know, it is good to know a little more [...].” (Male, 18, non-drinker).*

Although this was sometimes noted in drinker groups as well, several non-drinkers called for the integration of non-consumers into alcohol prevention to include and support them. *“The fact of leaving them (the non-drinkers) in these classes, it could actually get them to... to see prevention as a kind of support for their idea and not to feel isolated [...].” (Male, 20, non-drinker).* In this line, at the end of two non-drinker discussions, expressions of support were given demonstrating this need. One female participant reminded other participants that they were not alone and should not feel embarrassed about not drinking. *“I know that some of you are embarrassed or feel a little left out when you see that your friends are drinking and you are not. Well, you have proof today that you are not alone either. So do not just say to yourselves ‘We are all alone etc.’ Do not feel alone! » (Female, 18, non-drinker).* In addition, one male participant concluded the discussion by asking the others if it was possible to be cool as a youth without drinking. *“Well, I ask you, but anyone can answer, [...] can you be cool without drinking alcohol? The answer is yes or no?” (Male, 18, non-drinker).* The others then nodded in agreement.

Prevention could also make young people aware of the remarks made to those who do not want to drink alcohol. *“Well, young people [...] should not force others (to drink). [...] There is no ‘Go ahead and try’ or anything, I mean, no one should make anyone do anything if he/she does not want to.” (Female, 15, drinker).* Pressure to drink and wanting to belong to a group were also identified as

important elements to address in prevention. *“We have to show that it is not only by drinking alcohol and smoking that we [...] can belong to a group. [...] There is not only alcohol to be part of a group. There is music for example, centers of interest.” (Male, 16, non-drinker).*

Therefore, a participant suggested a prevention in two parts: one on the alcohol use and its dangers and one on the non-consumption including the above element such as support, remarks, pressure, etc. *“There is this pressure (to drink alcohol) and we should talk about it. We know that there is a problem and maybe we should also talk about this problem that could affect more people, and others could feel concerned. Yeah, I would rather say that they should do two parts, prevention of alcohol use and the second part, prevention in relation to not drinking. I do not know, I would see it that way, they should also introduce, if we are talking about people who do not drink alcohol, what they feel and the pressure they have, how they can deal with that, not being part of a group, To be criticized sometimes or to know how to say no when they do not want to [...]. I think they can be integrated quite easily.” (Male, 19, non-drinker).*

Testimonials

Some participants indicated that testimonials from people who had been addicted to alcohol were a good way to raise awareness. *“I was in school, it was a few years ago I remember. They brought in two people who were part of the Alcoholics Anonymous group and they testified about their whole life path, the effects of alcohol, of addiction in everyday life. I found it quite interesting.” (Male, 17, drinker).* Youth could interact with the person and get a real-life perspective on the problems. *“I think a lot of people will be interested, because they will be able to interact with that person, ask her/him questions, stuff like that. I think [...] it would decrease the (alcohol) use a little bit among young people.” (Female, 14, non-drinker).*

It would be necessary for young people to be able to identify with the person in question. *“It would be nice if it wasn't the cliché of a person who is 50 years old who has lived a tragedy [...], more someone who looks like us: at the beginning it started with parties, then it evolved badly, etc.” (Female, 15, non-drinker).* In addition to the person, the situations and issues should also reflect the life of a young person, especially in relation to parties and occasional drinking. *“[...] The extreme case is not at all related to young people [...]. For smoking for example, a burned lung, I would say that the young person is not yet at that stage and he will say to himself ‘I am not in that situation, I will stop smoking in a short time anyway’ [...] it is too extreme or for people who drink, they just say to themselves ‘Oh, to end up like that, it is not for me, I drink occasionally’.” (Female, 17, non-drinker).*

Testimonials from non-drinkers, including a mix of reasons and motivations, could also raise awareness among young people and help non-drinkers not to feel alone or embarrassed. *“[...] To show them that there are people who made this choice and who totally assume not drinking and to show different types of people, people who do not drink for religion, people who do not drink for health, people who do not drink because they just do not like the taste. To show that it is not only one reason, and that people made that choice. To show them that they are not alone and that it is not the choice of the century, but that there are other things to do than drinking alcohol [...].” (Female, 16, non-drinker).*

3.5.2 Parents - Family

In some families, alcohol was a taboo subject for religious reasons according to the participants. *“At home it is also a taboo subject, because we are religious, so alcohol is clearly a ‘No’ for us. .” (Female, 15, non-drinker).* Problematic situations related to alcohol addiction within a family could also lead to a silence around this subject. *“It is quite a difficult subject for me, because my grandmother was an alcoholic and there are other people in my family who are too [...].” (Female, 15, non-drinker).*

Even when alcohol was not a taboo subject, many participants still reported that it was not or hardly discussed in their families. *“[...] For me, it (alcohol) was always a bit... Not taboo, but it is true that we never discussed this [...].” (Female, 18, drinker).* More than discussions on alcohol use, parents would give general warnings about drinking too much alcohol. *“I would say that it is still... not taboo, but it is not necessarily the topics that are often or seriously discussed. [...] They (parents) say to be careful, not to drink too much alcohol or things like that, indeed, but it is not [...]. My parents always told me not to drink in excess and so on. Or not to drink if I am driving or stuff like that, kind of the important rules, a framework [...].” (Male, 20, non-drinker).* One participant reported having a real discussion about alcohol with her parents for the first time after a bad experience. *“My parents, it is the same thing, basically, there was not necessarily a big discussion. [...] Actually I had a bad experience not long ago [...] because I had drunk too much alcohol [...]. That is when I went off the rails that I had to have a discussion.” (Female, 16, drinker).*

This lack of discussion and prevention may stem from the fact that alcohol is a legal substance and is very often consumed by parents. This would make awareness complicated. *“Well, in general, in the family, everyone drinks. At least in my family, most of the adults in my family drink alcohol and have been drinking since they were 16. So in general, they are more tolerant towards alcohol use when we start drinking when we are 16, because we are allowed to drink beer legally, or wine, or things like that, than for example smoking a joint. [...] Again, it is a question of perspective in general, but I think that alcohol is better perceived by family than anything else.” (Male, 16, drinker).* This could mean that alcohol consumption is normalized in some families and not subject to prevention. *“In my family I have the impression that it is also commonplace that at every family dinner there is my aunt who is drunk, followed by my uncle, etc. [...].” (Male, 19, drinker).*

In some families, prevention would start at the legal drinking age and not before. *“At home [...] it was not taboo [...] but we never talked about it and I never had a discussion with them (parents), but I knew that before 18 if I drank, I was not supposed to tell them. So it was a secret, but when I turned 18 I could talk to them about it, I had the impression that it was once I turned 18, it was fine, I was no longer illegal or whatever, so I could talk about it [...].” (Female, 20, drinker).* The legal access to alcohol, especially in stores, made possible with the legal drinking age would explain this beginning of prevention. *“[...] My parents do more prevention for my 18-year-old sister than for me. (However) they know more or less that I drink. They know without really knowing [...]. I think it is more due to the fact that she is 18 and can buy alcohol and they think I cannot.” (Female, 16, drinker).* Beyond prevention, some reported that they had tasted alcohol for the first time with their parents who had naturally offered them alcohol at the legal age when it was forbidden before. *“[...] I find that more than prevention up to a certain age, there is a ban on it, it is not even just ‘You dose (alcohol)’, it is ‘Do not touch’. And what I found funny is that [...] as soon as you reach 18 years*

old or almost, you are immediately allowed to touch it. So obviously we are not going to suggest that you get drunk at a family dinner, but it is the access to alcohol that is even internalized by the parents, 'It is okay, we have access at 18, I can offer her a drink now and there is no problem'. " (Female, 19, drinker).

According to one participant, there would be a gender difference with regard to alcohol in the family. He reported that in his family, while males discussed alcohol in the family, the subject was more discreet among females. *"[...] What I find funny is that my sisters have more difficulties to talk about it (alcohol use) than my brothers. My brothers, they talk about it willingly, but not my sisters, I rarely hear them talking about alcohol with my father or with the other members of the family [...] I think that for females it is a bit taboo, [...], and for males maybe less. They talk about it willingly, but I think in relation to... my sisters I almost never hear them talking about alcohol, although they drink [...]."* (Male, 19, non-drinker).

3.5.3 Normalization

Several discussions focused on the normalization of alcohol use and the fact that prevention should further normalize non-use. *"I think that 15 or 16 years old young people should be reminded that it is normal not to drink and that if you want to, you can drink, but if you do not want to drink, we have to respect each other's choice and I think that is the most important thing to remember."* (Female, 15, non-drinker). In this line, alcohol was often compared to other substances. Some participants, including alcohol drinkers, considered alcohol as a drug like any other which, however, was commonplace. *"So it is true that I think that alcohol has been trivialized, but we mustn't forget that alcohol is considered as a drug. I think that it can quickly become dangerous to drink alcohol, because people, actually, I think that when we drink alcohol, I think that our behaviours change, because we are not necessarily conscious of our actions [...]."* (Male, 20, drinker).

This normalization would have an impact on the reception of alcohol prevention messages among youth. *"Even if in schools there are obviously preventions, [...] people who talk about the effects of alcohol, (who say) that it is not good to drink, [...] it is not taken seriously, I have the impression that when someone goes drinking it is normal, it is festive. But someone who is going to do drugs [...] we are not going to say 'It is normal, he's doing drugs', no, we are going to say 'Wow, this is very serious'. But there are just as many alcohol-related accidents as drug-related ones. So alcohol is very, very commonplace."* (Male, 19, drinker).

One attempt to make drinking less ordinary would be to put warnings on the bottles like on cigarettes. Nevertheless, people would get used to this kind of image. *"It would not be the best solution (to put warnings on the bottles), because most people who smoke, well they are used to these images. I think that we should do real prevention so that it does not become commonplace to see these images on a bottle."* (Male, 15, non-drinker).

This normalization would also be seen in the ease of access to alcohol by young people, particularly in small shops. *"In kiosks, they often ask nothing at all. If anything, they advise you to hide what you have bought."* (Male, 15, non-drinker). Therefore, prevention could also be partly achieved through better control of the legal age. *"I think that if the stores were more careful with the young people to whom they sell alcohol, there would be a lot less young people drinking."* (Male, 15, non-drinker).

Nevertheless, for other participants, the legal ages do not change much and other alternatives, such as resale, can be found. *“I do not feel like everyone really waited for alcohol to become totally legal (to use some). My first party was when I was 14 and I didn't really expect that there would suddenly be bottles of vodka on the table. Then I also have friends who give beers to 13/14 year olds. So I am not sure that putting an age range on it (bottle) really changes anything [...]”* (Male, 16, non-drinker).

Finally, alcohol advertising should be banned even for non-alcoholic beers because the distinction with an alcoholic beer would not be easy for youth. *“I think that in terms of prevention, maybe we should take everything off the street, even if it is alcohol-free. [...] We see a beer on a billboard, we are going to say to ourselves ‘Well, it is not a big deal, I am going to have a beer now’, I think that we should take everything off the street in relation to alcohol.”* (Female, 15, drinker).

3.5.4 Internet

For some, social networks could be a support for prevention, providing an additional channel of information. *“Maybe on social media, since today we are pretty much all on social media. If there is an Instagram account that publishes pictures, things like that and even posters. That would be interesting.”* (Female, 18, non-drinker).

Some participants talked about influencers. Without necessarily calling for the complete cessation of alcohol consumption, which would not work, an influencer could allow young people to question their own consumption as a first step. *“We are not going to drastically change our minds and say ‘Yeah, I will never drink alcohol again’, but we are going to start asking ourselves ‘Why do we drink alcohol?’”* (Male, 15, drinker).

In addition, an influencer could provide support to young people who do not consume alcohol and may feel left out. *“For example, let us take the situation we were talking about earlier if you do not drink alcohol, you can be rejected, if you are rejected because you do not drink alcohol [...] and if he (the influencer) says to us ‘Keep going, do not drink alcohol’, that can really, really motivates us, I think that can help us to hold on but I do not know, I am not in this situation.”* (Male, 15, drinker).

3.5.5 School environment

Prevention in compulsory schools, before the legal drinking age and before being confronted with it, would be beneficial to make children aware of the dangers of alcohol, in particular with regard to the group effect. *“We should really try to do prevention as early as possible, maybe around the age of 10/11, even if it is quite early for them. So that they are not already bathed in this way of belonging, in this way of joyfulness linked with alcohol, but rather that they have from the beginning a rather bad image and the repercussions that it can have on their lives.”* (Male, 16, non-drinker). Nevertheless, in relation to group pressure, it would be difficult to talk about it at an early age when belonging to a group is essential. *“Yeah, but then how do you explain to an 11-year-old, 12-year-old, that it is okay to be alone and that it is better to put alcohol and smoking aside. How do you explain that to an 11-year-old?”* (Male, 16, non-drinker). Prevention in schools could be carried out over several years in order to take into account the different issues according to the development

of young people. *“I think that the idea of doing this in various stages is a good idea because it raises awareness on several levels, because depending on the age we do not always have the same awareness.” (Female, 17, non-drinker).*

According to some, teachers are among the people who influence young people, just like parents or influencers. *“[...] People like teachers, parents too [...], everyone who influences children [...] they should spread the idea that alcohol is not good up to a certain age and that it is okay to use some, but with care. Because the teachers and the parents [...] are the people who influence the most (the children) and the musicians, everyone such as musicians, youtubers, influencers [...].” (Male, 15, non-drinker).* Some reported having discussions about alcohol with teachers, though not necessarily as formal prevention. *“I sometimes talk about it (alcohol) with my teachers and my class [...]. Sometimes there is a discussion about alcohol and it is nice to see the adults' points of view mixed with those of the young teenagers, but it is not in an educational tone, it is more a way of sharing experiences and our points of view on alcohol.” (Male, 16, drinker).*

In this line of school-based prevention, one time when discussion and attention should be particularly present is during study trips. *“Well, I do not have much to say, except that yeah, on a study trip, it is kind of a long-awaited time to get together and drink alcohol. The teachers do not control what is in the suitcases, so the students are clever. They take, for example, bottles of sunscreen and fill them with vodka and it works and unfortunately I think it is a lack of vigilance [...].” (Male, 16, non-drinker).*

4 Conclusion

Discussions began with a broad question about the term “abstinence” as applied to alcohol use in an adolescent population. In addition to not always understanding the term, participants overall found it to be an inappropriate term for youth not drinking. Sexual or religious connotations, for example, were discussed in this line. This term was more widely accepted when referring to an adult population, especially when someone decides to become abstinent as a result of an alcohol-related problem.

Then participants talked about the reasons for non-drinking among youth: religion, legal ages, parents and family rules, bad experiences, distaste, religion, health consciousness and fear of losing control (especially among females). Both drinkers and non-drinkers, females and males, felt that females were at greater risk of sexual violence as a result of drinking.

In terms of prevention, the Dry January campaign was not well known by the participants and many wondered what the aim of such a challenge was if no follow-up beyond the month of the challenge was offered. While not demonizing alcohol consumption, youth called for more normalization of non-drinking and inclusion of non-drinkers in prevention to support them and make other youth aware of their presence.

Experiences in terms of social life were mixed among the non-drinkers participants. For some, not drinking did not impact social life, while others reported feeling excluded and out of the norm. Questions and comments about not drinking from young drinkers were reported as particularly annoying. Some non-drinkers felt that using strategies to hide their non-alcohol use was unnecessary if those around them respected their choice. However, others shared some strategies for hiding their non-drinker status and going unnoticed at parties to avoid remarks.

Finally, in terms of resources, non-drinkers are often designated as the “lifesavers” during parties to deal with youth who drink. This status can sometimes put them under pressure and lead them to stop attending parties. Some non-drinkers also indicated that they can sometimes be blamed for not preventing problems, and might feel guilty if they were not able to help drinking people.

Some limitations need to be highlighted. First, findings are based on self-reported narratives and social desirability bias in responses can be totally excluded. Second, we sometimes used the snowball method to recruit participants and this method could present the risk of having participants with same opinions or experiences and characteristics. We had to use this method when we encountered difficulties in recruiting participants. This was, for example, the case for drinkers under the age of 16 (below the legal drinking age). Third, the scope of our study was restricted to French-speaking Switzerland and our recommendations are not necessarily generalizable to other populations. However, to the best of our knowledge, no previous research has investigated non-consumption of alcohol among youth in Switzerland, a particularly interesting area for this issue because of its wine culture. Moreover, to obtain an overall picture of the non-consumption of alcohol among youth, we included both non-drinkers and drinkers to explore experiences and opinions. This exploratory study could pave the way for more targeted interventions that take into account drinking (or non-drinking) status and include discussion on non-drinking among youth.

5 Recommendations

- To use the term non-drinker rather than abstainer, which has a negative or religious connotation;
- To normalize non-consumption of alcohol, including within families;
- To make other young people, but also adults, aware of the pressure, exclusion that can be felt because of remarks that could seem harmless. Exclusion could be felt in places that are meant to be inclusive like the University (parties with cheap beers for example). These young people are part of a minority, so they encounter the same problems of exclusion than other minorities;
- Although we should not participate in reinforcing the normalization of alcohol use among young people, it can be interesting to prepare them for the possible remarks and comments that others will make to them regarding their non-consumption of alcohol so that they can respond to them and assert themselves;
- To talk about the effects of alcohol on health (what exactly it produces at the very moment someone drinks), including long-term effects but not only. There is a need to explain the short-term elements and possible consequences of alcohol (sugar, headache, vomiting, palpitations, rumors, images on networks, etc.);
- To make challenges like #DryJanuary more visible and improve communication around them, especially in terms of objectives and follow-up (after January 31, what will happen?); To find something similar but more targeted at young people to raise awareness on one's own consumption and eventually lead to a reduction in alcohol use;
- To raise awareness among young people about their perceptions of non-drinkers and alcohol-free parties as boring;
- To include non-drinkers in prevention, to reinforce their choice and/or as a way to feel support and share experiences between non-drinkers; to consider a separation based on drinking status for interventions;
- To normalize not drinking within families as well. However, do not demonize alcohol use and opt for learning how to drink in moderation (e.g., the participant who said she wished she had known to drink water at the same time because it dehydrates, do not drink on an empty stomach, etc.);
- Young non-drinkers are often identified as the ones who will help others at a party. It is important to raise awareness among young people of this as the pressure on non-drinkers can be overwhelming.
- To open the discussion on alcohol use before legal ages

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7 Annexes

7.1 Vignettes used



Fille 16 ans : “Salut, j'ai peur d boire, j'ai surtout peur de vomir et tout ça. J'aimerais m'amuser et avoir l'aire cool comme les autres mais das mon lycéé si on ne boit pas comme les autre on est exclu...Je stresse vraiment ...un tout petit peu mais vraiment type 5 goutte d'alcool me font peur...” (www.ciao.ch, site d'information, d'aide et d'échanges pour les jeunes).

Garçon, 24 ans : “Je ne bois jamais d'alcool d'abord parce que je n'aime pas trop ça et ensuite parce que je n'aime pas ne pas avoir le contrôle sur mon corps. Je suis quelqu'un de plutôt angoissé (comme beaucoup de jeunes de mon âge) et le fait de se trouver dans une situation où je n'arrive pas à avoir le contrôle de mon esprit et de mon corps ne m'intéresse pas. C'est une situation stressante pour moi et je ne profite pas de ma soirée.” (“Ces jeunes qui ne boivent jamais d'alcool”) [https://www.huffpost.com/archive/qc/entry/ces-jeunes-qui-ne-boivent-jamais-dalcool n 4709175](https://www.huffpost.com/archive/qc/entry/ces-jeunes-qui-ne-boivent-jamais-dalcool-n-4709175))

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