

Findings from a pilot teenager/ parent attitudes to drinking programme undertaken Summer 2009

A pilot 'attitudes to drinking' survey was carried out of 100 teenagers attending the same school in Dorset, with an age range from 13 to 19 years old of both sexes. The students attend one of the largest comprehensive schools in the UK with 2,500 pupils. The school operates a non selective entrance scheme, apart from preference to those living in its large catchment area.

The sample consisted of a selection of 40 13, 14 and 15 year olds, and 60 16 and 17 year old male and females. The author, a pupil, took care to include pupils of different socio-economic and friendship groups and of varying academic achievement, to ensure a balanced representation of pupils.

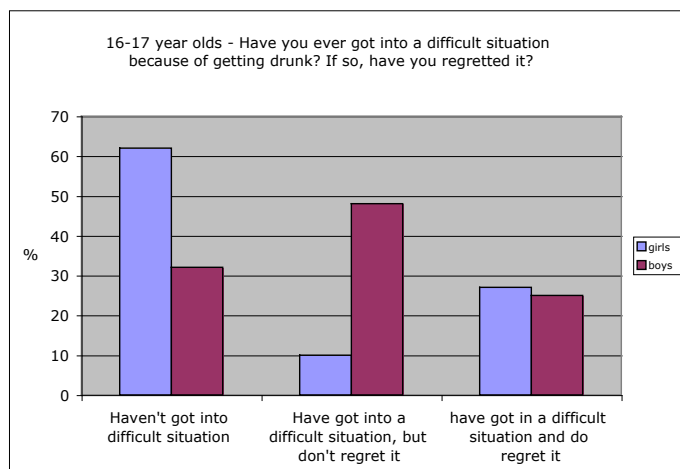
The author comments "After talking to people and friends I feel I have built up a good picture of the extent people drink, which I can back up from my own experiences. I also have a 14 year old brother, who, with his year group was able to give me a good understanding of the extent that younger children drink, and their thoughts on the subject".

Survey Findings (as reported by the 17 year old author)

Difficult situations

17% of 13-17 year old girls and 28% of boys have got into a difficult situation because of being drunk. More males have got into difficult situations than females, and 75% of these males didn't regret it, perhaps conveys a feeling amongst young males, that it is funny to do stupid things when you're drunk.

In contrast 75% of girls who have got into a difficult situation did regret it. This shows that girls are generally more careful when getting drunk, and if they get into a difficult situation, they are more likely to be sorry/regret it and to learn from it!



People were reluctant to admit to their difficult situations (even those who didn't regret it), but awkward situations included:

- Getting left in town after missing their taxi back to a friend's house they were staying at (they then had to call their parents at about 2 am)
- Getting into an argument at a party, occasionally resulting in being thrown out of the venue.
- Being sick at a friend's party, with parents present
- Generally saying stupid things and voicing opinions that should be kept to yourself.

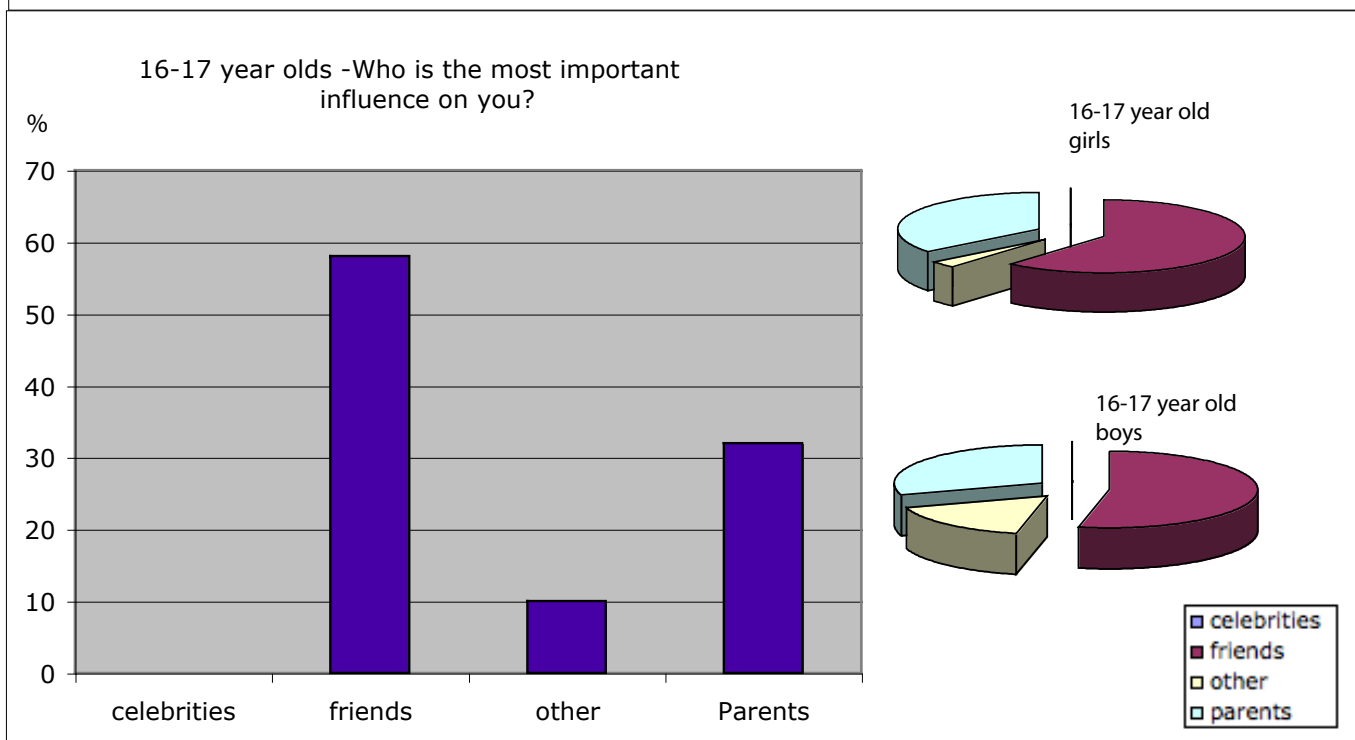
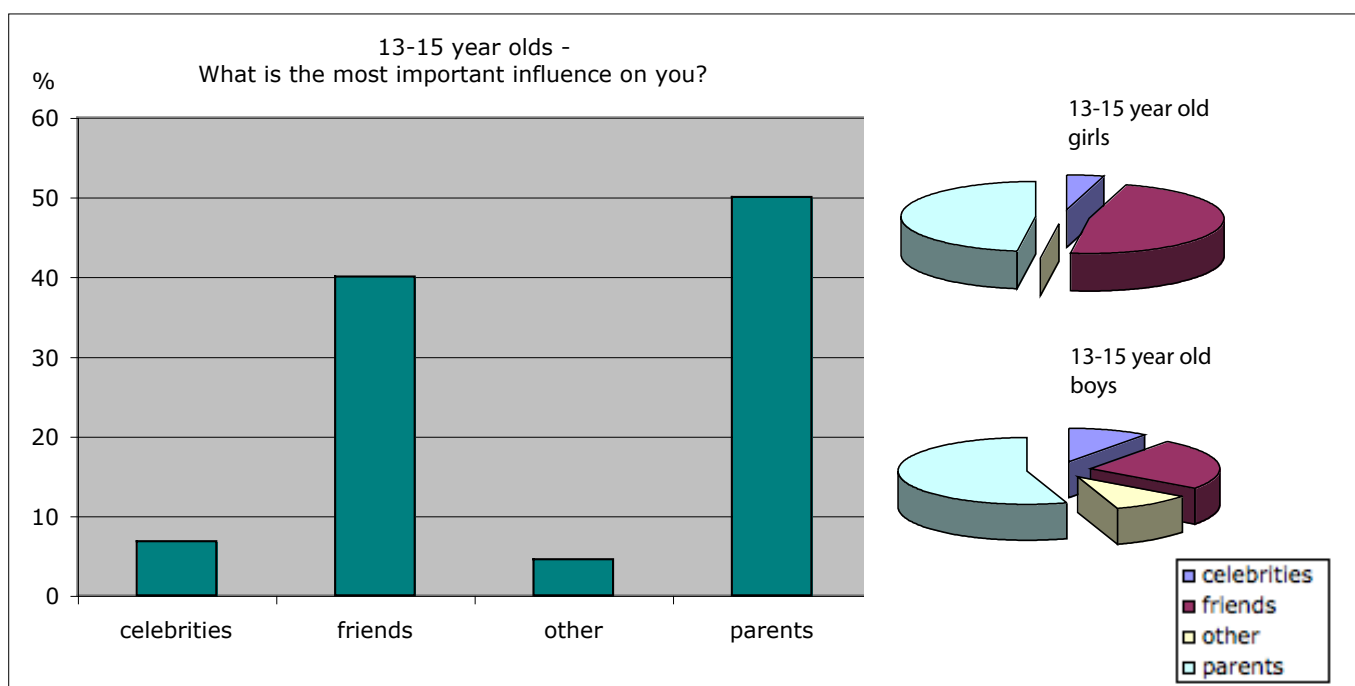
It should be noted that these behaviours are only applicable to children 16 and over as only 1 out of 45 children who are 15 and under have got into difficult situations through drinking, so the majority of people getting into difficult situations are older, this is probably because they do drink more, and in a larger variety of places, some of which are less secure, like at socials at clubs etc, whereas those under 15 tend to be drinking smaller amounts under parental supervision.

Influences on children

As children got older, (over 15) they were definitely more influenced by friends. For children 15 and under, 50% said that their parents were the most important influence and 40% were most influenced by friends.

For 16 and 17 year olds, 58% were mostly influenced by friends, which is higher than the half of 15 and under's, who are influenced by parents, the change was around the age of 15.

This perhaps shows that, bearing in mind younger children don't drink as much as older children, there is less scope for younger children to be influenced by their friends, so they are instead influenced by their parents and celebrities. Just 5 people were influenced by celebrities - 4 of these 5 children were 14 and under. This suggests that they haven't yet built up an opinion on what is ok, and what isn't on drinking, and their friends haven't either, so they are mainly influenced by their parents, and then media and celebrities.

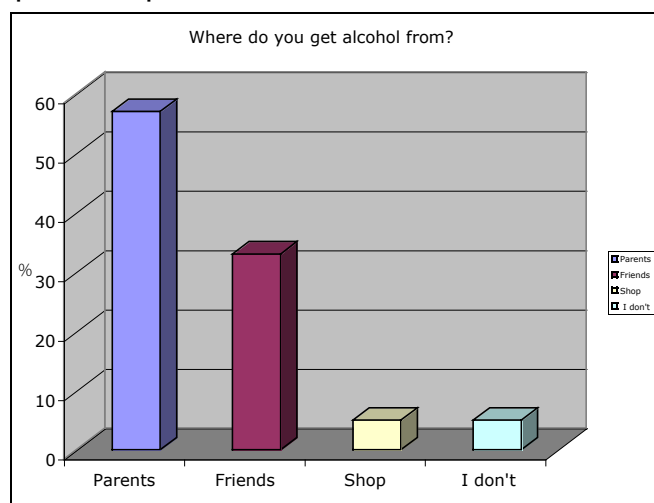


Sources of alcohol

- 57% of children got alcohol from their parents, the vast majority of parents knew this, and were giving the teenager alcohol.
- 33% of children source alcohol from friends (who are either old enough to buy alcohol or have parents who get it for them) and 5% of people managed to be served at shops (they are all over 16.)

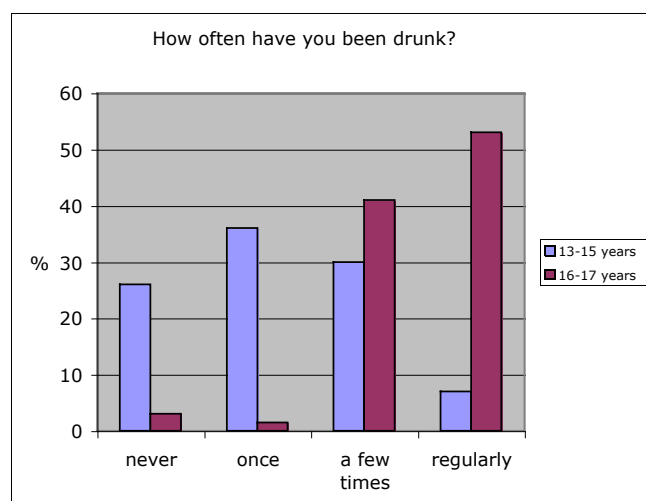
Quite a lot of children's parents are willing to give them alcohol, obviously the percentage of parents supplying alcohol grew as the child's age increased slightly (half of children who are 15 and under are supplied with alcohol by their parents.) However, when younger children are 'supplied with alcohol' it is mainly to be drunk at home, under supervision. Parents of older teenagers (16+) buy their children alcohol to take out with them.

Whether parents supply alcohol or not, makes no difference on the frequency of getting drunk by children. People whose parents won't supply alcohol simply get it off friends, whose parents will supply alcohol, or friends who can buy it - in the second case a larger amount of alcohol can be brought, as it is not under parent supervision.

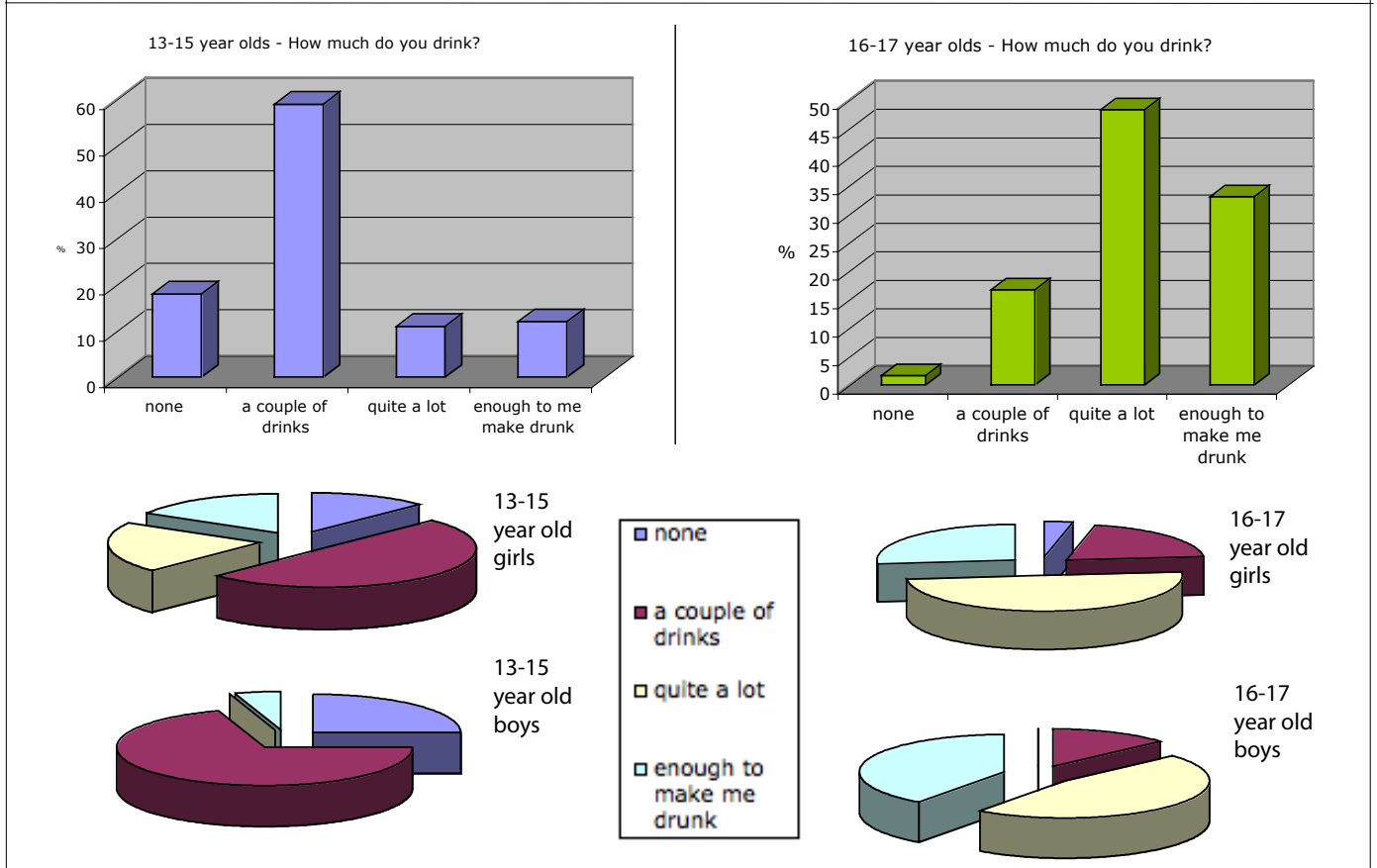
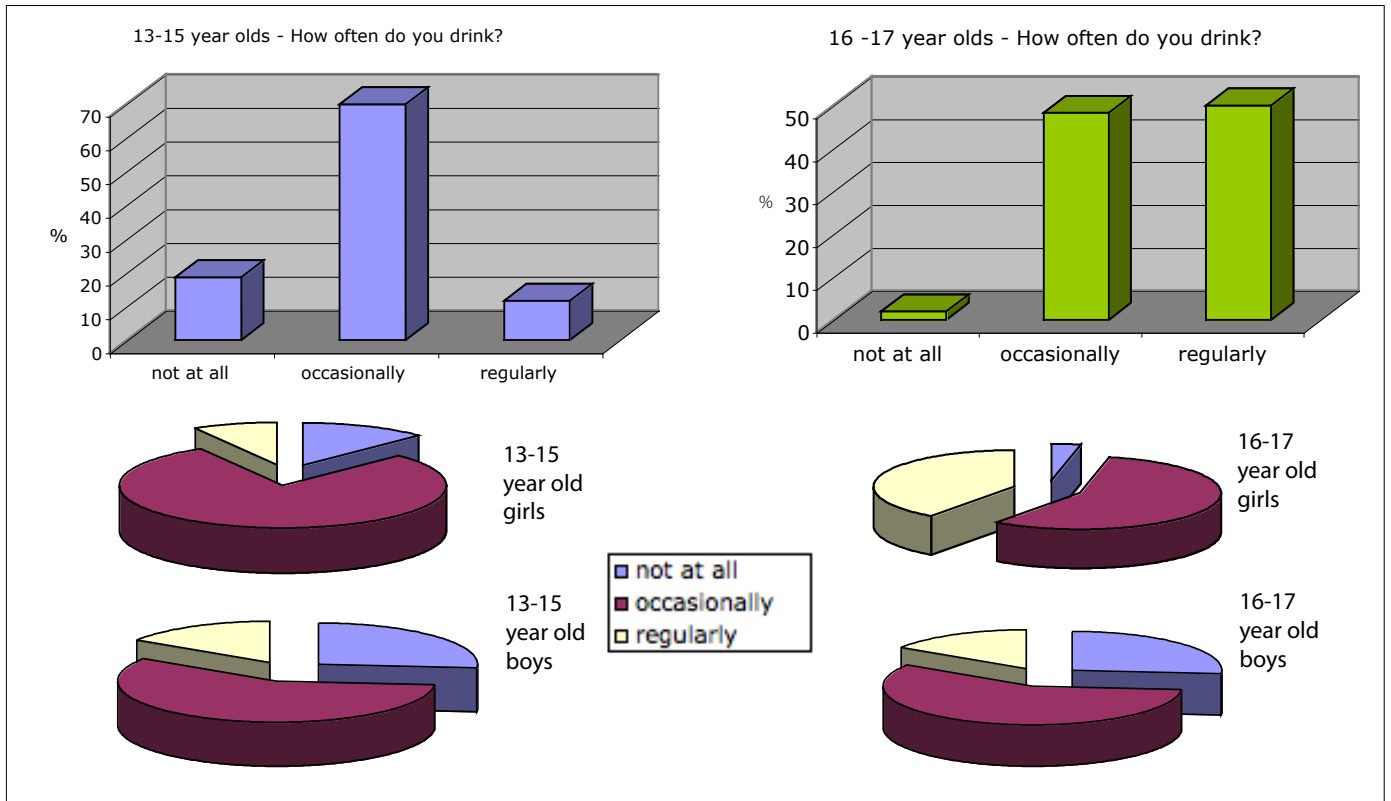


Frequency and locations of getting drunk

- Only 3% of those surveyed had never tasted alcohol due to religious reasons.
- Results show that almost every 16 year old and over has tried being drunk at least once.
- The vast majority of 13 year olds have only been drunk once (and many of them said 'only slightly'-perhaps they don't really understand what getting drunk is yet, and where just slightly tipsy?).
- Out of children who are 15 and under, 12 had been drunk once, 15 had been drunk a couple of times, 3 frequently and 10 children had never been drunk. This shows the average age for getting drunk is about 14/15. This shows that younger ages haven't all started getting drunk yet.



- The average age of children's first try of alcohol is 12.45, however the average age of children 15 and under's first try of alcohol is 11.64, showing that children are trying alcohol at younger ages now, and the average age of drinking could be coming down.
- Out of children who are 16 and over, about half drink frequently, from small amounts to enough to make them drunk.
- 44% of children had their first try of alcohol at home; the other 66% had their first try at friend's houses, on family holidays and at parties or in public places such as the park.
- 58% of children 15 and under had their first try of alcohol at home, showing that more parents are letting their children try alcohol at home now, instead of at parties etc.



Views on drinking

45% of teenagers have not changed their view on getting drunk as they've got older. 60% of 15 and under children haven't changed their view on getting drunk; younger children have obviously had less time to form their opinion, so it's largely stayed the same.

Respondents had to really think before expressing 'an opinion' on alcohol as such, when asked what their opinion was to begin with, no one really seemed to know, then answers included :

- 'it's perfectly fine as long as you treat it with caution and know your limits'*
- 'it's wrong and not allowed'*
- 'you should be prepared to admit if there is a problem-not that that will be an issue yet!'*
- 'it's harmless fun'*

Of the older teenagers, comments included :

- 'it's less exciting now'*
- 'you don't have to get entirely drunk and be sick etc. to have fun'*
- 'it's embarrassing for drunken people'*
- 'I don't really like it anymore - bad incidents.'*
- 'you should be more sensible otherwise it's embarrassing.'*
- 'It's got better!'*
- 'It's not as cool'*
- 'It's not such a big deal anymore'*
- 'It's less of a novelty'*
- 'It's not always worth the money'*
- 'It's not as cool anymore; you have to be more sensible.'*
- 'Make sure you're with people you can trust in a safe environment.'*
- 'Drink less'*
- 'I am beginning to understand the consequences of drinking heavily (on school work the next day and on the night)'*
- 'Know your limits and stick to them.'*
- 'It's more for social reasons now.'*

Why do children drink?

56% of drunk alcohol for the effect at least once, 33% of 15 and under's have drunk for effect, as opposed to 70% of over 15s. This shows that under 15s are mainly drinking for the taste and the novelty/practice, rather than to get themselves drunk. When I say drinking 'for effect,' the effects include relaxation, and confidence, as well as possibly being a bit wobbly on your feet! They don't include being sick, as that only occurs through really heavy drinking, not social drinking etc. When someone drinks for effect they try to drink enough to get to a happy, relaxed and confident stage, most manage this as only 2% of people get drunk without meaning to.

72% of children drink for 'other reasons' including

- to celebrate
- to have fun
- to make me laugh
- to socialise
- it's funny

9% of children admitted to drinking for the escapism, 15% did for confidence, 2% didn't mean to get drunk, and 2% got drunk to fit in.

As far as I can see, there is no difference to why people get drunk in the age range.

Are parents there when children get drunk?

65% of children who get drunk say parents are there at least sometimes. 78% of children 15 and under say their parents are there when they get drunk, showing that parents largely keep an eye on younger children, and as they gain trust in their children, they feel they can leave them to drink at parties with less supervision, or with just a bit of supervision. Most people said they had to earn their parents trust first though.

Teenagers attitudes to parents

25% of children get on with their parents just 'ok' or less (2 people admitted to hating their parents). Of this 25%

- ◇ 80% don't take any notice of their parents advice on drinking, and
- ◇ 60% of them didn't feel they could talk to their parents if things got out of hand.

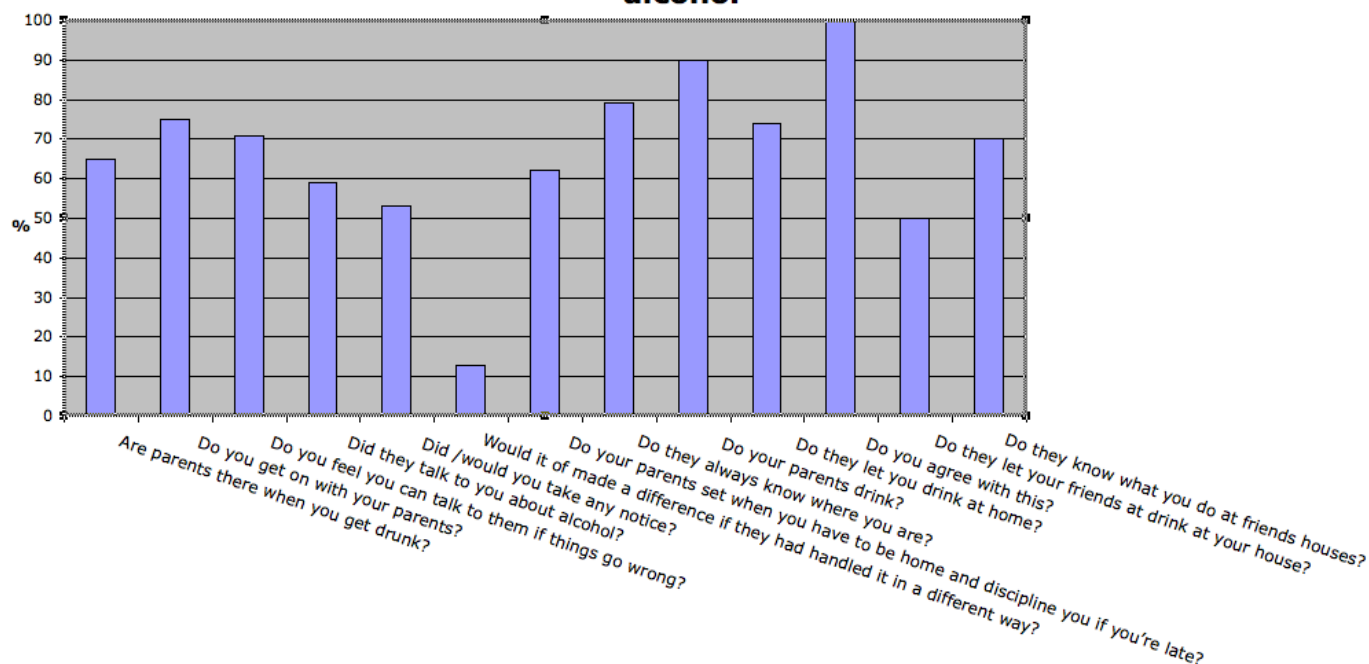
This shows very clearly teenagers with difficult parental relationships are not going to take any notice of their parents in respect to drinking, if they don't like or trust their parents, and will be less willing to come to them if they feel things are getting out of hand.

Over all, however, 71% of children feel they can talk to their parents if things get out of hand, or if things go wrong.

When asked to rate their parents on how good role models they are when it comes to drinking, 76% of children rated their parents as a 7 or over, the average score was 7.6. This is quite a good score! This shows;

- children's parents aren't all alcoholics, and it also shows that children notice their parents drinking habits, and unconsciously rate them, perhaps even being influenced by them, even if they don't think they are.
- Parents should definitely watch their drinking habits when around children, as it will (like anything else a parent does) rub off on the children.
- Most children who say their parents will come home drunk, say they then feel it is acceptable to come home drunk as well, however a few recognise that this is not acceptable behaviour, find it embarrassing and veer towards hardly drinking at all in reaction.
- 10% of children's parents don't drink at all, but 50% of these let their children drink at home anyway, which the children all thought was a good thing.

Percentage of 'yes' responses to questions about how participant's parents address alcohol



Letting children's friends drink at home

This is age dependent - For children 15 years and under, 84% of parents do not let their child's friends drink in their home, whereas for children of 16 and over only 14% of parents allow their child's friends to drink in their home.

This shows that as children get older, parents feel it is acceptable to offer friends alcohol, assuming that the friend's parents won't mind. This is perhaps a correct assumption, as older children are allowed to drink more regularly at home.

Of the 50% of children's parents who don't let their child's friends drink at home, only 50% of these know what their child gets up to at friends houses and parties etc. This shows that stricter parents perhaps get told less of what happens than more lenient parents, who may be more approachable. I think this data seems about right, my friends definitely tell their parents more about night outs if the parents are more relaxed, than if they are strict, people who do have stricter parents, who they perhaps don't get on with very well definitely feel less inclined to say what they get up to at parties and friends houses, and would be less confident in telling them if something went wrong. I also think that people are definitely more influenced by their parents than they think, a lot of my friends like the same drinks as their parents etc.

Parental discipline

38% of parents don't set rules on when their child has to be home, or discipline them if they're late. 48% of children who are over 15s parents don't really discipline them, as opposed to just 79% of those under 15s' parents do discipline them. This shows that as children get older, they are allowed more freedom, which I feel will prepare them for later life. Most of the children who have a lot of freedom had to earn their parents trust first however.

Over all, 21% of people's parents don't always know where their child is (79% of children's parents always know where their child is), 11% of children 15 and under's parents don't always know where they are as opposed to 27% of over 15s' parents. This mirrors the above point. Comments on this include:

- 'I like to know where I am and when I'm getting home anyway'
- 'How relaxed they are depends on where I'm going'
- 'By earning their trust my parents are more relaxed now.'

Parent/child alcohol discussions

59% of people's parents talked to them about alcohol and 10% of these said it would have made a difference if they'd done it differently, comments included:

- 'If they'd had said something I probably would have listened.'
- 'If they had done it any differently than they did, I wouldn't have listened.'
- 'They should have made me more aware on being safe if you're drunk.'
- 'If they drink more, I might actually trust their opinion.'
- 'If they didn't just say it was wrong, and were honest about it, I might trust their opinion more.'
- 'If they didn't take it so seriously, I might listen more, but its also to do with the way they've brought me up.'
- 'They should make it less exciting/such a big deal, so I wouldn't want to try it so much!'
- 'They shouldn't have made it such a 'sin''
- 'They should have gradually introduced the concept of alcohol, so its not such a big deal!'
- 'Don't just say its 'silly''
- 'They should give me more freedom to understand it-you never really want to take someone else's word for it.'

These comments show parents should perhaps accept that children will drink, and tell them how to be safe about it, rather than just saying how awful it is to drink.

In conclusion,

I feel that most children drink sensibly, it would perhaps be preferable if less people let themselves get into difficult situations from drinking, this occurrence could be reduced if parents spoke to their children on the subject of drinking, telling them how to be safe with it, and not just saying its 'silly.' Another major point from this survey is the amount of people who are influenced by their parents, whether they know it or not. I have definitely realised after doing this survey that people are very aware of their parent's habits. Parents should be less strict, and more approachable when it comes to drinking, as this means children will in fact take more notice of them, and be more likely to come to parents if they feel their drinking is getting out of hand. Also if parents supply drink, they can be sure(ish) how much their child is drinking.

I feel looking at the figures that too many under 15s have been drunk, but I think in real life, they don't really get drunk, they maybe get a bit tipsy and don't want to feel 'a loser' by not having been drunk, this desire to get drunk to be cool lessens significantly as children get older, they drink more for social reasons, such as confidence, and to have fun.

If parents let their children drink at home, so they can get used to it, it will become less of a novelty, and children will be less likely to get too drunk when away from the home, reducing difficult situations maybe? I don't feel there is much you can do about parents who don't set ground rules, or who don't know where their child is, the amount of freedom should be built on trust.

It is a good thing that more children are getting drunk for the first time, say at home, instead of 'in town,' this again will reduce the incidence of difficult situations hopefully, and the fact parents are generally there when younger age groups get drunk is also positive. I haven't really changed my view on drinking, I still feel it is an enjoyable experience, but should be controlled so that you know your limits, and stay safe.