

ISPCC
ALWAYS HERE FOR CHILDREN

“IF THEY’RE GETTING LOADED, WHY CAN’T I?”

A large-scale exploratory survey examining the behaviour and attitudes of young people in Ireland towards teen and parental alcohol use, and the effects of parental alcohol use on young people’s lives



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SUMMARY



1. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

This National Children's Consultation represents a rare and diverse attempt to study a large population of young people's alcohol use, their attitudes to alcohol, and their individual experience of their parent/guardians alcohol use within an Irish context. Overall 70 Secondary schools, 8 Primary schools and 6 Youthreaches took part across the Republic of Ireland yielding 9,746 questionnaires.

Our study shows that young people between the ages of 12–18 are drinking, and that they appear to have a common acceptability of their own drinking. In addition this study shows that many young people are negatively affected by, and concerned about, their parents drinking and the effects this has on their own lives.

This study gives voice to the untold damage on young people who are impacted by emotional distress, neglect, increased responsibilities and risk of physical abuse and violence as a consequence of some parents drinking. This report reveals, in their own words, the stark reality of the effects of alcohol mis-use in the home.

1.2 Young people's attitudes and beliefs about their own alcohol use

"We are Irish, we see drinking as part of our culture"

The findings of our report show that a large number of young people drink alcohol (45%) – and a concerning number have engaged in binge-drinking (25%) – highlighting that Irish youth drinking habits have not changed but remain established and problematic. Among the young people who state that they have drunk alcohol at least once a month in the past year (30%) the majority reported being drunk at least once a month also (63%). Young people in Ireland are drinking and they are drinking to excess.

In understanding young people's alcohol use, it is important to relate this to their attitudes towards teen alcohol use. The findings outlined in this report show that young people have socially accepted and normalised views regarding drinking alcohol with 30% of those surveyed believing that it is okay for teenagers to drink, and 19% had been drunk in the past month. However, the majority of young people appear in favour of teen (66%) and adult (73%) alcohol consumption in moderation. But the question remains; do young people know what healthy drinking limits are, and what does drinking in moderation mean to young people?

Our survey highlights that there are a significant number of young people (25%) who reported having 5+ drinks, or binge-drinking, in the two weeks prior to this consultation. This is higher than the number who agreed that 5+ drinks are acceptable in one sitting (20%) which implies that a number of young people may be unaware of what their limits are, or able to stop when they are drinking. Another interesting point to note was that overall 30% of young people surveyed agreed that it is okay for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk, and 20% of young people believe that 5+ drinks are okay to have in one sitting. This indicates that a large number of young people appear to have an unhealthy attitude towards alcohol use as indicated by the 25% of young people who reported binge-drinking in the past two weeks.

The findings also examine the differences between girls and boys. Where girls were more likely than boys to report that they drink, boys were more likely than girls to report that they engage in binge-drinking, and also seem more likely to report that they had been drunk. More girls also reported that it is okay to drink in moderation. However, a higher proportion of boys than girls agree with young people drinking alcohol to get drunk and that it is okay to drink 5+ drinks in one sitting. A higher proportion of boys than girls also agree that it is okay for parents to drink alcohol and become drunk in the presence of their children, and 16% of boys, as opposed to only 2% of girls, believed that it was okay for parents to drink 5+ drinks in one sitting.

1.3 Young people's attitudes and beliefs about their parents alcohol use

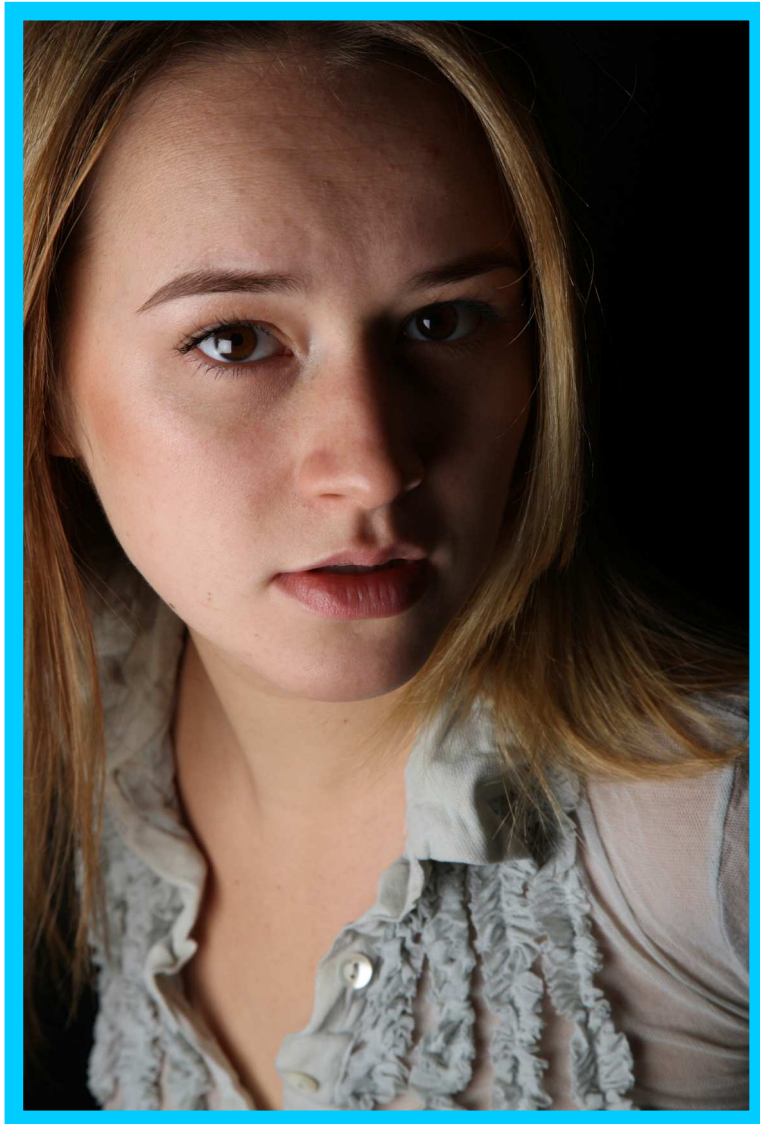
"If they're getting loaded, why can't I?"

The findings indicate that young people present as being more accepting of excessive alcohol use for teenagers themselves than for parents; only 9% agreed with adults having 5+ drinks in one sitting, whereas 20% thought it was okay for young people to drink the same amount. A large majority of young people (79%) thought that parents should not drink alcohol and become drunk in front of their children. Furthermore a substantial 90% stated that their parental alcohol use does not affect them. This is a positive finding which implies responsible drinking by parents indicating moderate alcohol use or abstinence.

It is important however to note that 9% of young people surveyed feel that their parents alcohol use affects them hugely in a negative way. The quotes published in this survey bring to life the perceptions and experiences of young people who partook in this study and show the serious and hidden consequences (ie: physical and emotional abuse) of excessive parental drinking on families, in particular on young people. Some of the quotes reveal that young people feel that their childhood was shortened as a result of trying to cope with their parents alcohol mis-use.

What is also clear from the study is the impact that parental alcohol use has on young people's own alcohol use. The general consensus is that it would be far more beneficial for them to be shown how to drink responsibly, or showing them that it's okay to drink in moderation. This survey highlights that parents own behaviour regarding alcohol use affects many young people either emotionally, physically and in terms of young people's own alcohol use. It is evident in this report that parents need to recognise that their own drinking patterns are a signpost for their children regarding alcohol use in general. Examining teen alcohol use on its own, without reflecting on the influence of the home environment, disregards the importance of adults own alcohol use and the message that this sends. As pointed out by one respondent, *If they're getting loaded, why can't I?*

FINDINGS

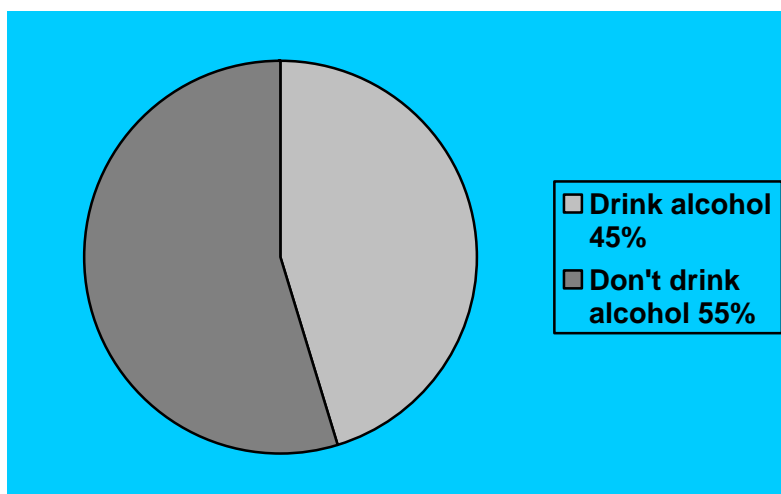


2. FINDINGS

2.1. Young people's alcohol use: frequency and quantity

Alcohol use:

45% of young people reported that they drink alcohol (4,401 out of a total of 9,746 young people surveyed).



A higher proportion of girls reported that they drink alcohol – of those surveyed 43% of teenage boys, and 47% of teenage girls, stated they drink alcohol.

Binge-drinking¹:

1 out of 4 (25%) young people recently engaged in binge-drinking in the two weeks prior to the survey.

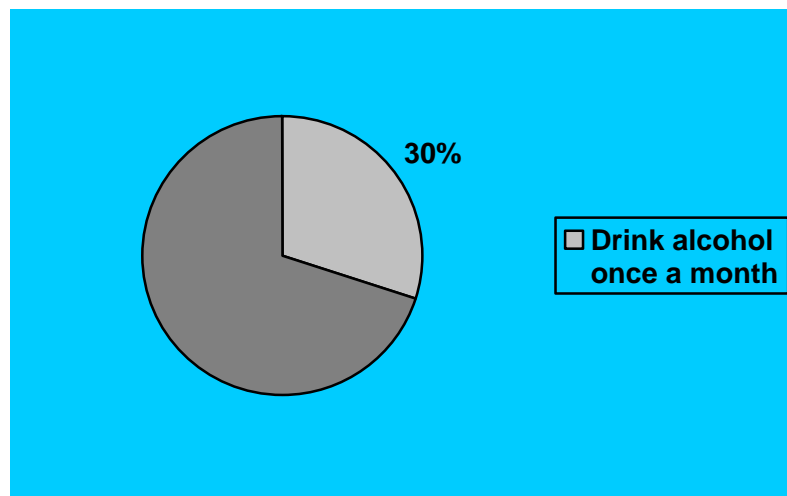


¹ 5 or more standard drinks in one sitting according to the WHO

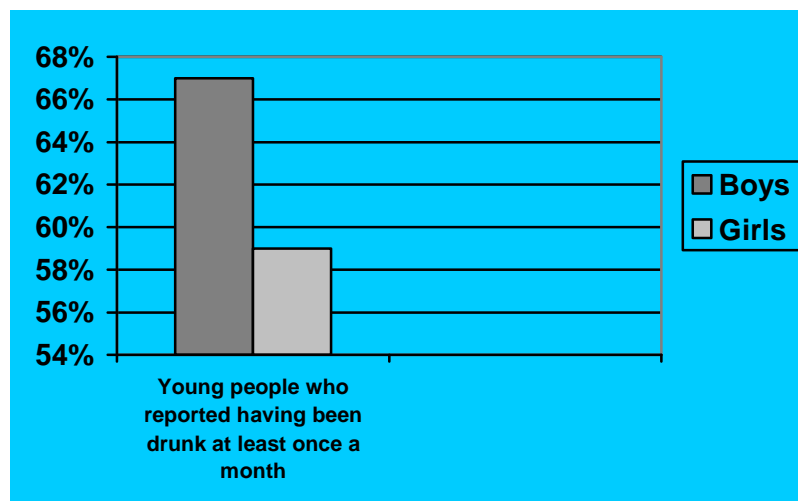
In contrast to the higher proportion of girls who stated that they drink alcohol, we found that a higher proportion of boys reported that they engaged in binge-drinking. Of those surveyed 27% of boys, as opposed to 23% of girls, stated that they had 5+ drinks in the previous two weeks.

Drunkenness:

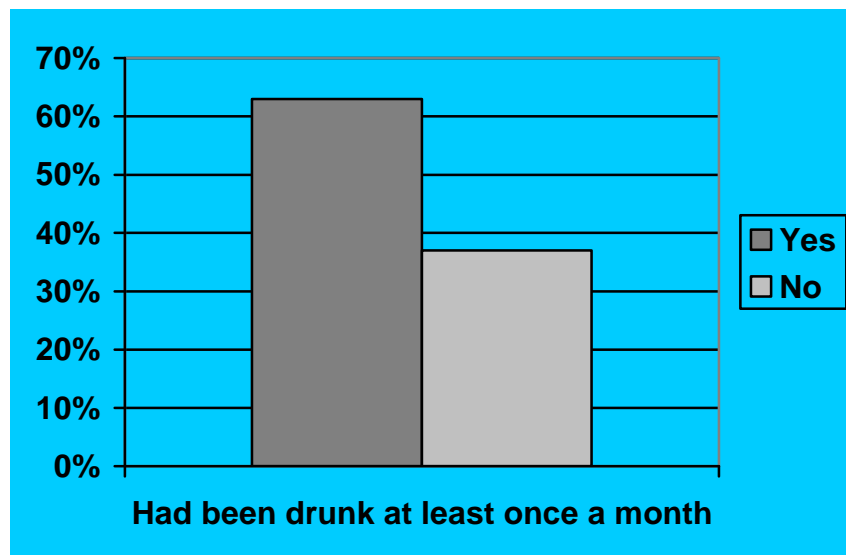
30% of young people reported that they drank alcohol once a month in the past year (2,967 of 9,746 of young people surveyed).



Of boys who stated they drank alcohol at least once a month, 67% stated that they had been drunk at least once a month. Of girls who stated they drank alcohol at least once a month, 59% stated that they had been drunk at least once a month.

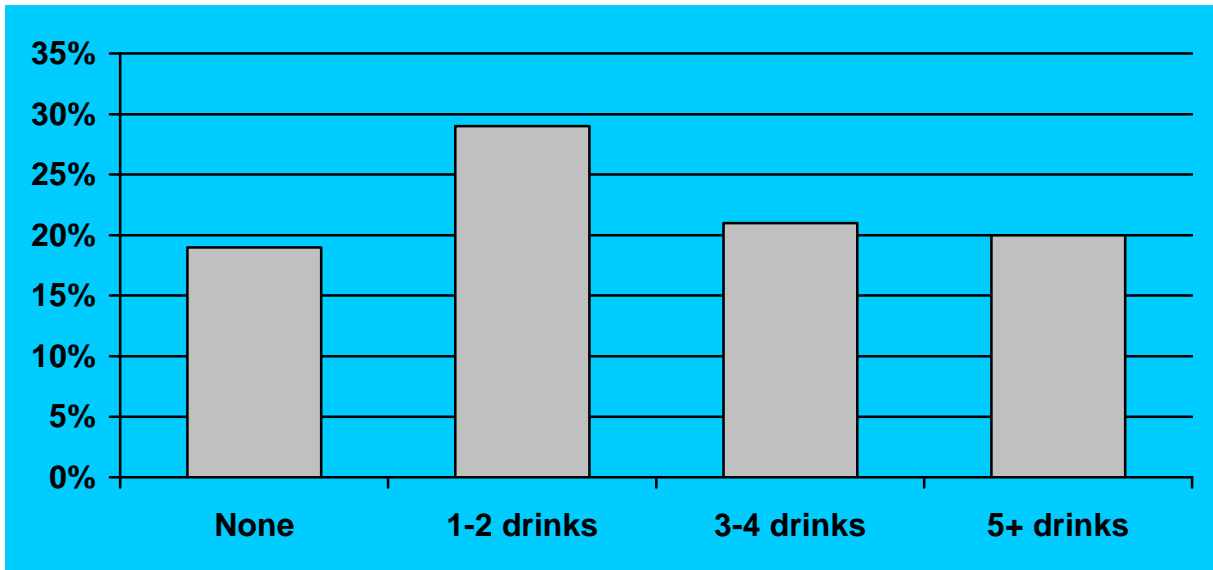


Of the young people who reported drinking once a month in the past year, 63% of these stated that they had been drunk at least once a month in the past year (1,874 young people out of 2,967 young people).

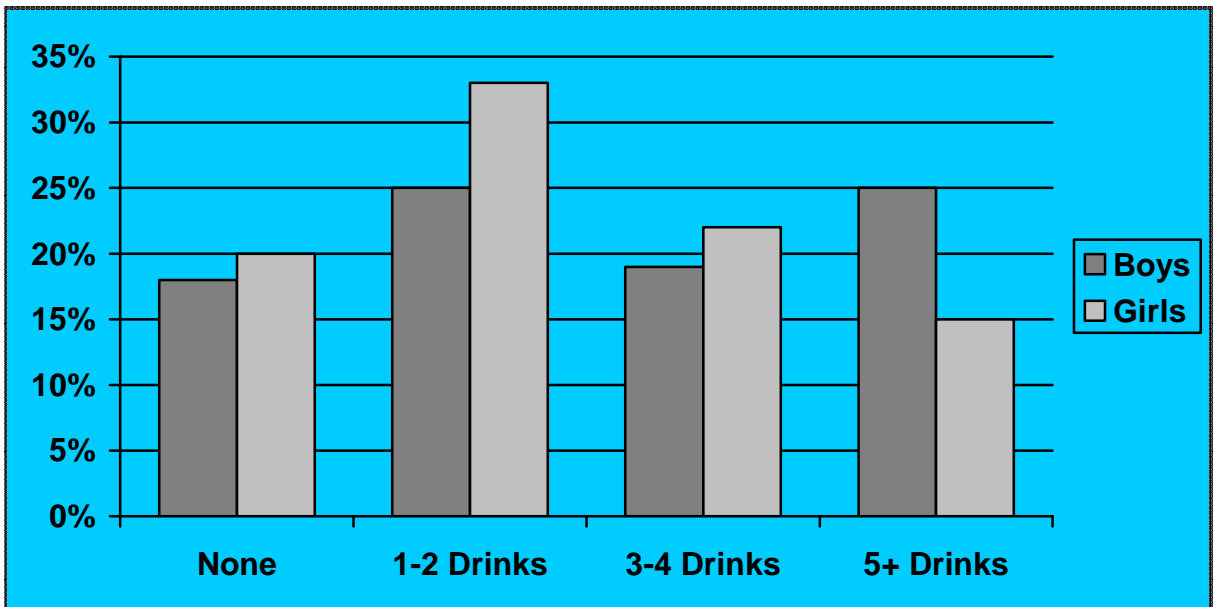


Almost 1/5 of young people reported that they had been drunk at least once a month in the past year (1,874 of 9,746: 19% of young people surveyed).

Q. What do you think is an acceptable level of alcohol to drink in one sitting?



Gender Analysis

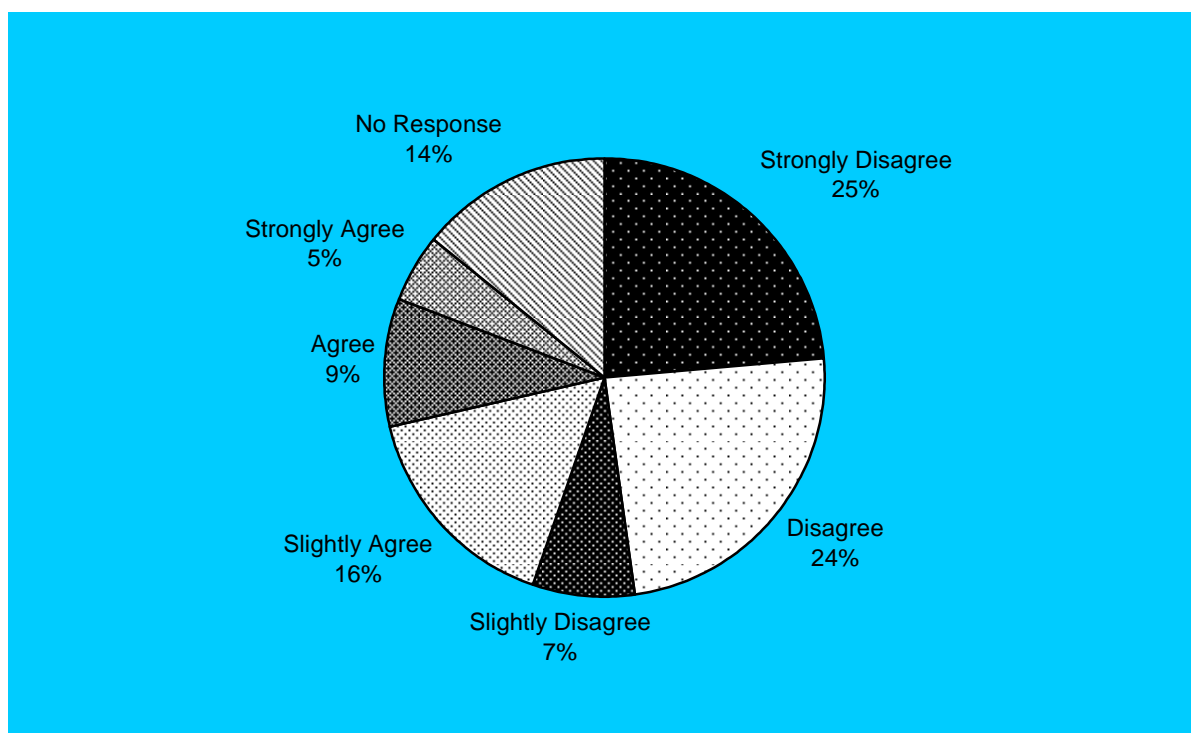


2.2 Young people's attitudes and beliefs about their own alcohol use

It is okay for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk

It is okay for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	2298	2371	724	1554	919	508

(1372 no response)

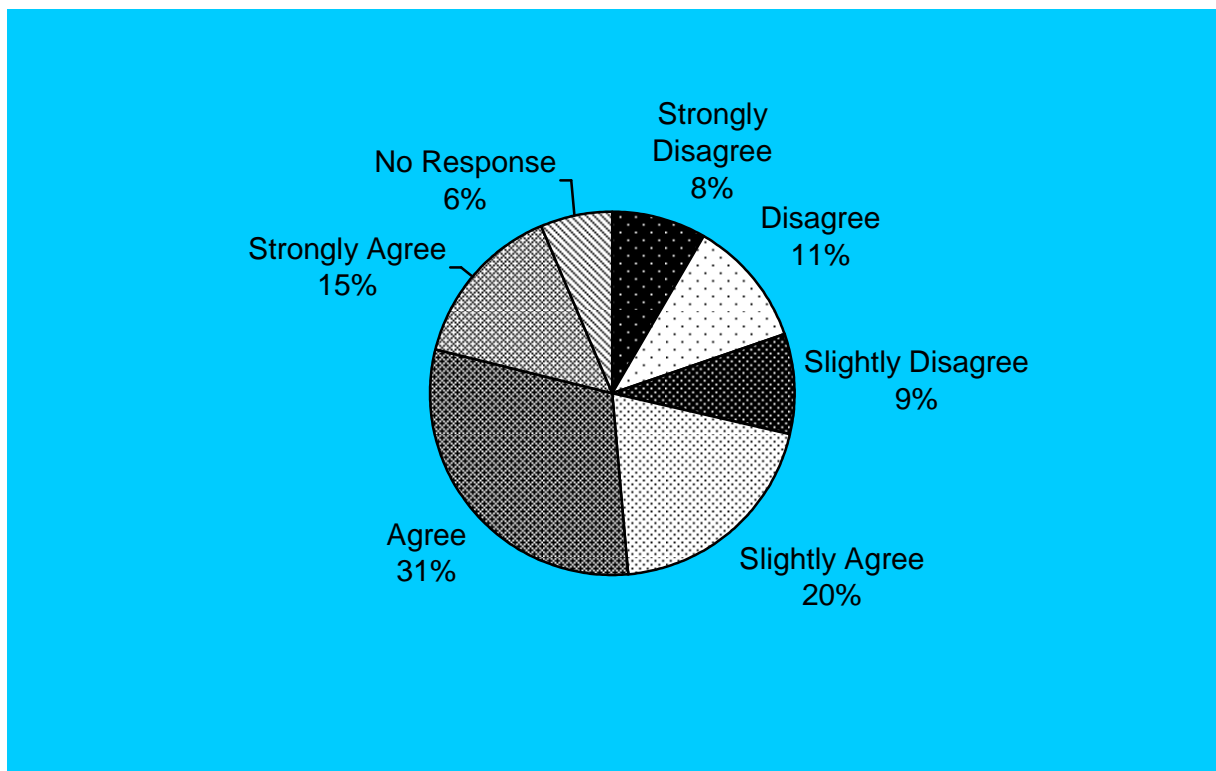


- A large percentage of young people (56%) do not believe that it is okay for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk.
- However, approximately 30% of young people surveyed agree that it is okay for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk.
- 35% of boys agreed that it is okay for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk as opposed to 27% of girls.

It is okay for teenagers to drink in moderation

It is okay for teenagers to drink in moderation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	810	1116	865	1957	2933	1440

(625 no response)

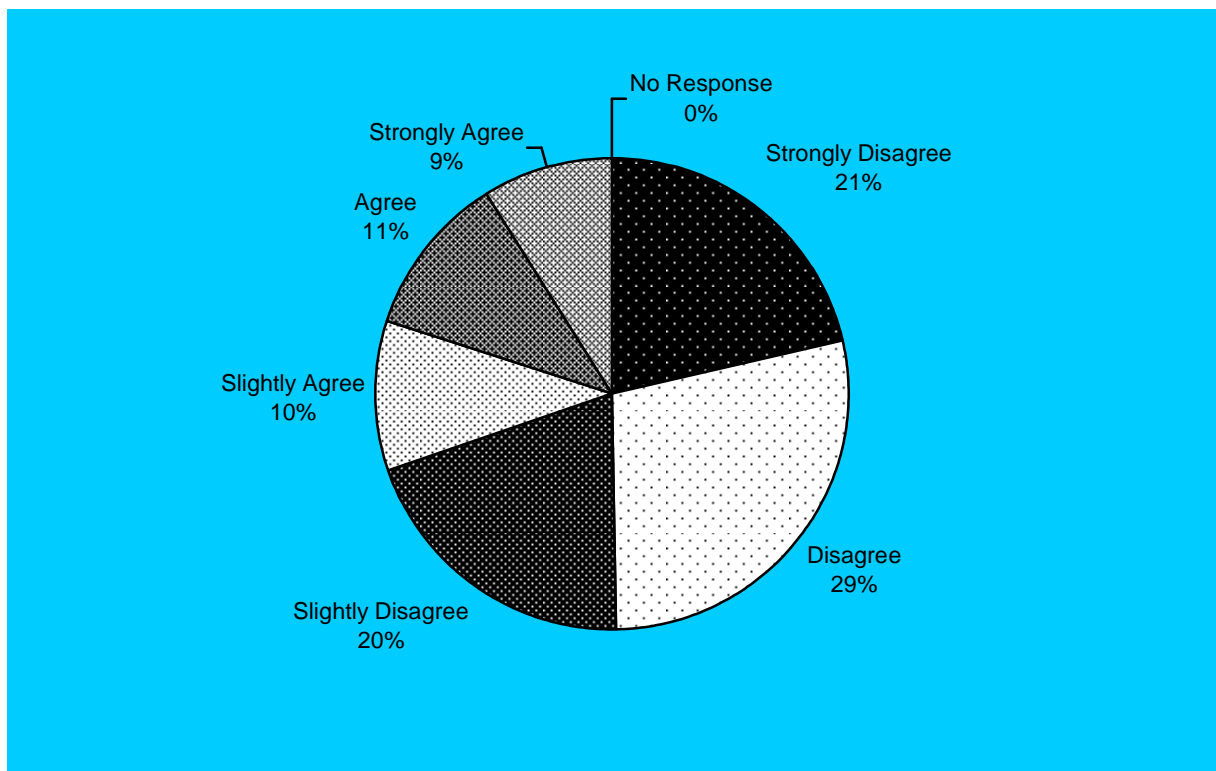


- The majority of young people appear to be in favour of drinking in moderation; with 66% of young people surveyed agreeing that it is okay for teenagers to drink in moderation.
- 64% of boys, and 66% of girls, agreed with young people drinking in moderation.

Teenagers should not drink alcohol at all

Teenagers should not drink alcohol at all	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1953	2590	1844	941	1005	822

(591 no response)



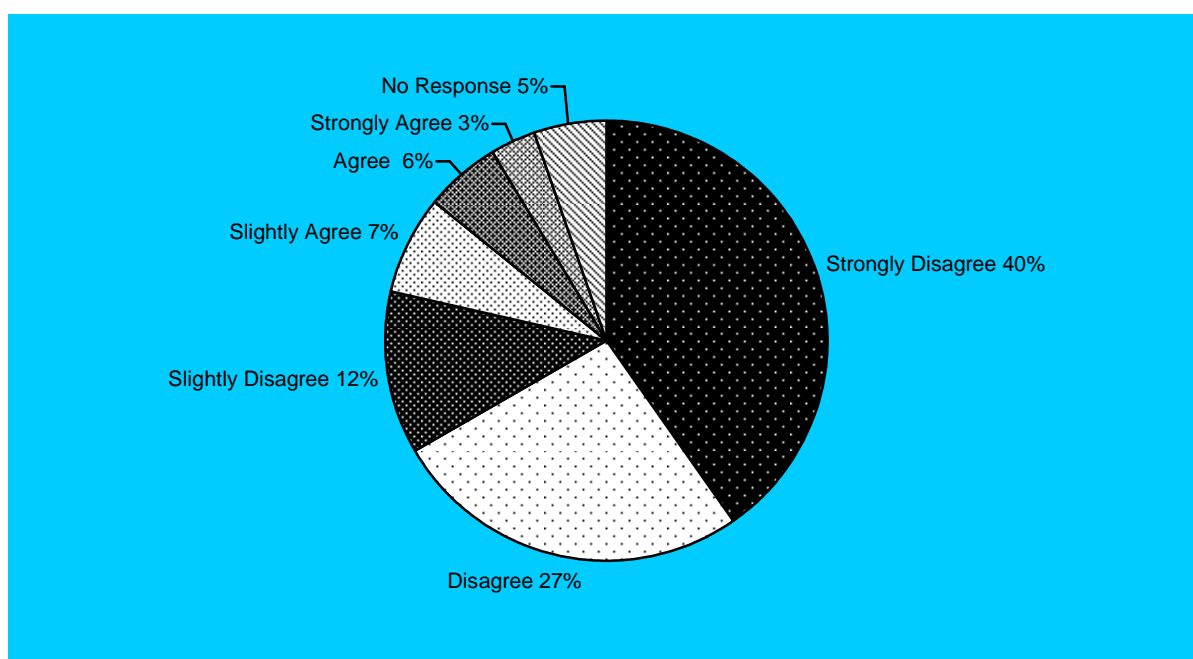
- Only 28% of young people surveyed agreed that teenagers should not drink alcohol at all.
- 66% of young people disagreed with the statement that teenagers should not drink alcohol at all. It is interesting to highlight that this percentage (66%) is the same as the percentage of young people who agree that it is okay for teenagers to drink in moderation.
- 27% of boys, and 30% of girls, agreed that teenagers should not drink alcohol at all.

2.3 Young people's attitudes and beliefs about their parents drinking in the presence of their children

It is okay for parents to drink alcohol and become drunk around their children

It is okay for parents to drink alcohol and become drunk around their children	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	3915	2591	1159	697	539	341

(504 no response)

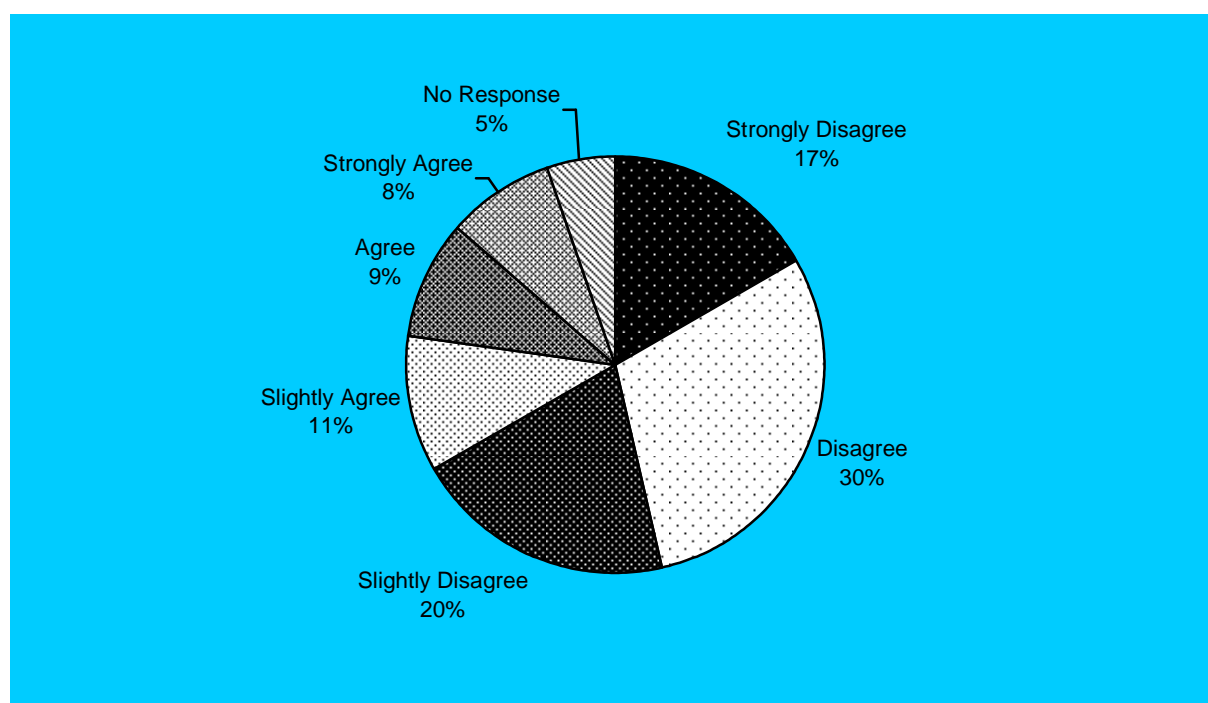


- 79% disagreed with parents drinking alcohol and becoming drunk in front of their children.
- 16% of young people agreed that it is okay for parents to drink alcohol and become drunk around their children.
- 19% of boys, and 14% of girls, believed that it was okay for parents to drink alcohol and become drunk in the presence of their children.

Parents should not drink alcohol at all in the presence of their children

Parents should not drink alcohol at all in the presence of their children	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1615	2898	1980	1025	897	804

(527 no response)

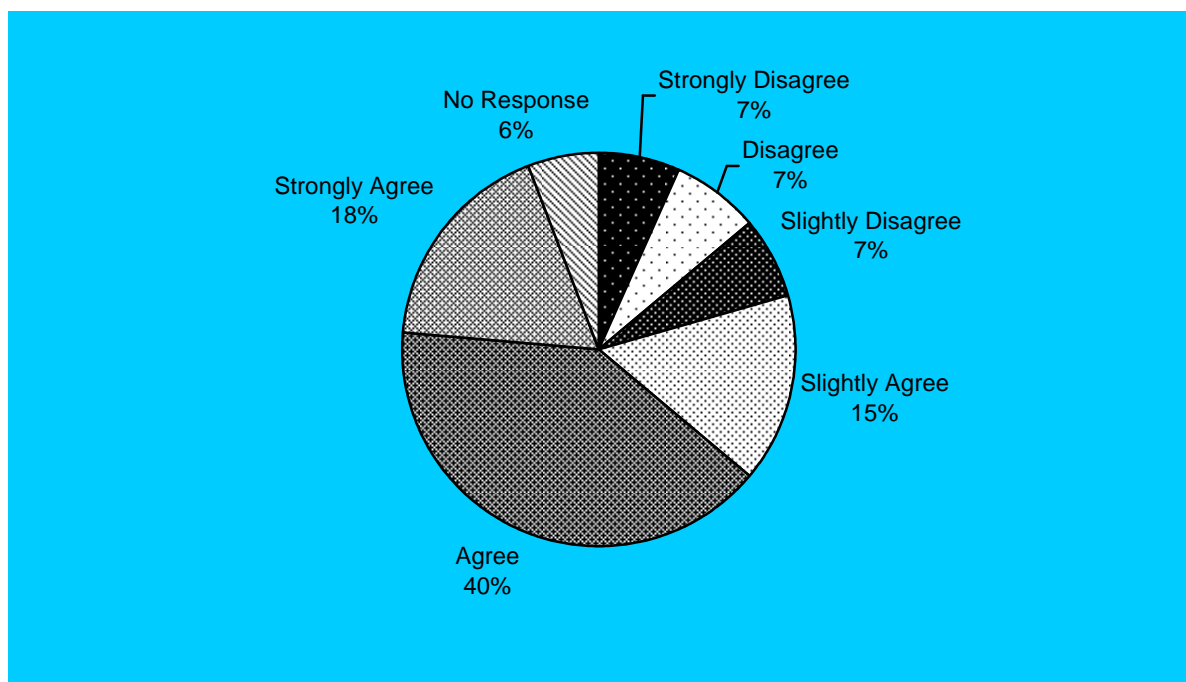


- Only 28% of young people agreed that parents should not drink alcohol at all in the presence of their children.
- 67% of young people disagreed with this statement.
- A higher proportion of girls (30%) than boys (26%) believed that parents should not drink alcohol at all in the presence of their children.

It is okay for parents to drink in moderation in the presence of their children

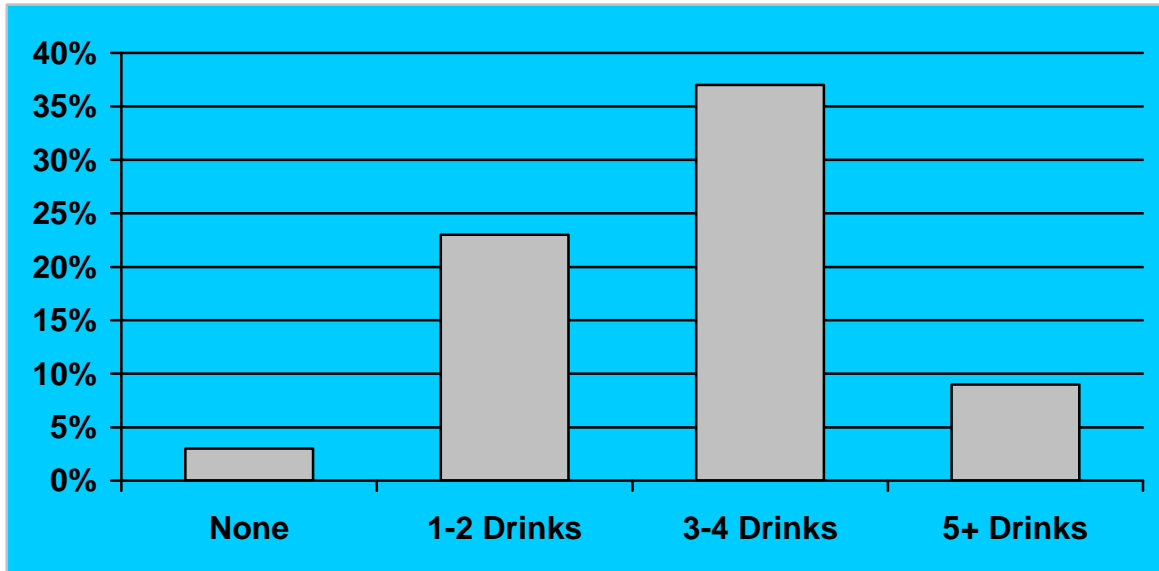
It is okay for parents to drink in moderation in the presence of their children	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	650	705	656	1499	3944	1726

(566 no response)

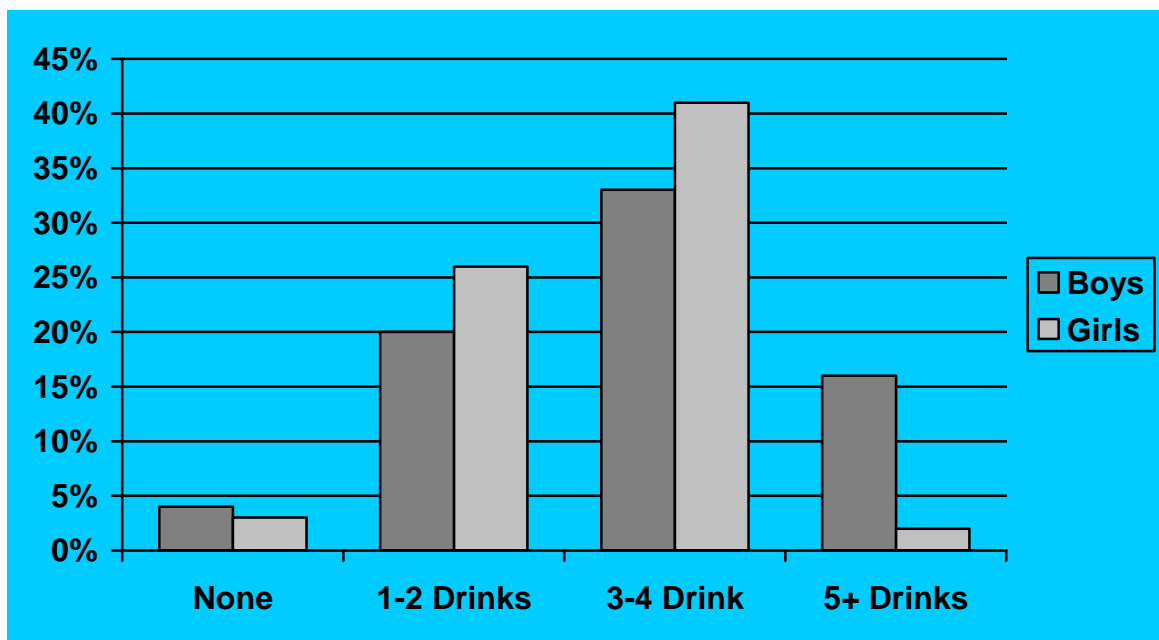


- A strong majority of young people (73%) agreed with the statement that it's okay for parents to drink in moderation in the presence of their children, while 21% disagreed with this.
- A higher proportion of girls (76%) than boys (71%) believed that it was okay for parents to drink in moderation in the presence of their children.

Q. What do you think is an acceptable level of alcohol for parents to drink in one sitting?

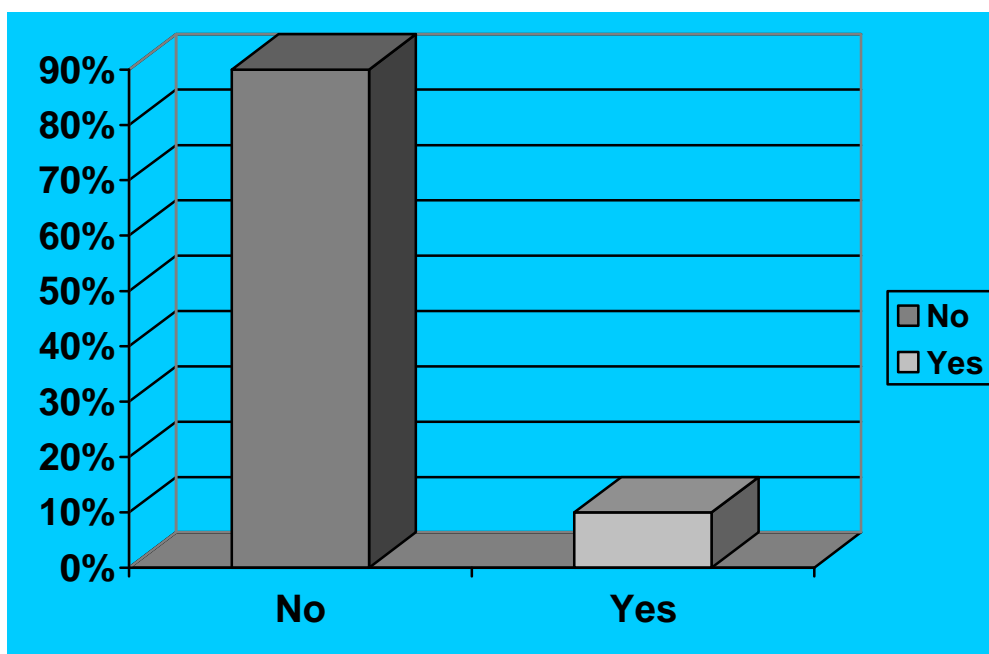


Gender Analysis



2.4 The effect of parents alcohol use on young people's lives

Q. Does your parent/guardian's alcohol use affect your life?



- 10% of young people stated that their parent/guardian's alcohol use affects their lives. While it implies that a large number of young people are not affected by parent/guardian's alcohol use, for the 10% who are affected the effects can be significant.
- We asked young people to comment further on how their parent/guardian's alcohol use affects their lives. A number of broad themes emerged from the comments highlighting both the positive and negative effects of parents alcohol use.
- The majority of comments related to the effect/influence that their parents alcohol use has had on them in terms of their own drinking.
- Young people also spoke about the emotional effects of their parent/guardian's drinking, abuse or violence they experienced, changes in terms of parents behaviour and effects on their lives in general. Examples of these have been included on the following pages.

Emotional impact

The emotional effect of parents drinking was a dominant theme throughout the young people's comments. They expressed a range of feelings demonstrating this:

- Worry:

"It worries me; I can't get on with my life as I am taking care of my mum"

- Stress:

"My mum was an alcoholic, fights and drunkenness at home scared me. She has been sober for 10 years but it was a stressful time"

- Embarrassment:

"When they get drunk, they don't know what they are doing. It's embarrassing. I hate it"

- Upset:

"It's upsetting to see your parents out of control like that"

"Roars at me and calls me scumbag and other bad words which hurt my feelings"

- Emotional effects such as feeling depressed, alone and developing mental health issues:

"You feel invisible"

- Bereavement:

"Mother and father were alcoholics, both dead. I hate drink, it ruins lives"

Family Relationships

Parents drinking also has a noticeable effect on relationships within the family:

- Relationships with parents:
"Sometimes my dad doesn't come home until very late and I don't get to see him that much, but I don't really care"
- Parental separation:
"My dad is an alcoholic and broke up my family"
- The effects of witnessing parents drinking and being drunk:
"I'd rather them do it on their own rather than around me"
- Feelings that parents cared more about alcohol, or spent too much money on alcohol:
"They just chose alcohol over children"
- The negative impact that parental alcohol use can have (and their failure to recognise the impact this has on them):
"It makes a bad influence on children's lives"

Abuse and Violence

The potential for fights to happen and parents becoming aggressive towards their children was also highlighted:

- Towards children:
"Well my mother is an alcoholic and it caused a lot of problems like physical abuse now I hate her and she's out of my life"
- Towards each other:
"Dad comes home drunk some nights and because he is drunk he starts fights in the family"

Parent behaviour changes

Many of the young people surveyed wrote about the changes they witnessed in their parents behaviour as a result of alcohol:

- Parents personalities changing in a negative way:
"They become a different person and have no control over what they do"
- Being tired or not able to have conversations:
"Parents won't be able to have a proper conversation because they are too drunk to even remember what you've said"
- There were some positive changes:
"When my parents are drunk, that is when I like to be around them the most because they are kind of loving"

Effects on young people's lives in general

Another common theme was the effect that parental alcohol use had on their everyday lives in general:

- Being unable to go places:
"I can't get lifts and shit"
- Looking after siblings:
"I have to mind my sister while my mother looks for my father in the pub"
- Affecting friendships and school work:
"You can't bring friends around"

- Some young people referred to the emotional effects on their lives in general:
“It does my head in and I hate it so much, it affects me even now and affects people’s opinion of me because they know of my stupid drunken parent”

The effects of parental alcohol use on young people’s own alcohol use

The comments from young people on the effects of their parents drinking ranged from having a significant effect to none at all:

- This was the most dominant theme from young people’s comments on how their parents alcohol use affected them showing a direct influence on their own alcohol use:
“My parents are hypocrites. They tell us not to drink. They get drunk every night”
- Some young people referred directly to their parents being a positive example to them in terms of drinking moderately:
“You don’t have to be a pig to enjoy alcohol”
- Some parents who don’t drink affects young people in a positive way:
“They fact they don’t drink makes me not want to”
- The importance of being able to confide in parents which may be more difficult if their parents don’t drink:
“They don’t drink so they don’t understand, so they are strict”
- For some young people, they felt that their parents use of alcohol would actually stop them from using alcohol:
“I don’t want to end up like him so I don’t drink”

- On the other hand, alcohol use by a parent was also seen in a positive light by some young people in terms of bonding with a parent:

“Yes I go drinking with my dad. It’s a good fatherly/son thing to do”

- Increased access to alcohol in the home due to parental alcohol use; either that there was more drink available in the house or that young people would be given alcohol by their parents:

“There is more drink in the house – whoop whoop!”

- Normalising alcohol use:

“In my eyes, it seems normal – part of life”

- Drinking under the supervision of their parents:

“They let me try small bits so I’m not mad for it when I’m older”

- Parental alcohol use being seen as sending a negative message regarding alcohol use:

“If they’re getting loaded, why can’t I?”

No effect

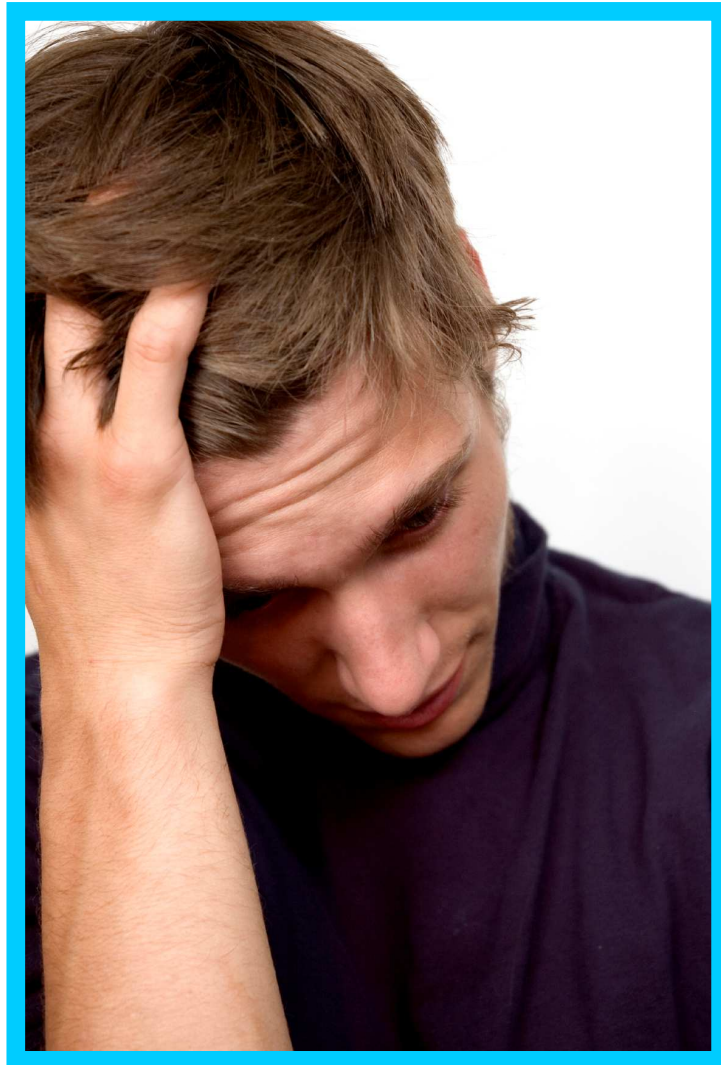
As is evident in the findings, 90% of young people stated that their parents drinking does not have an effect on them:

- Parents moderate alcohol use appears not to affect them as much:

“It doesn’t matter that my parents drink in front of me. It’s up to me if I want to drink”

“It doesn’t affect me; it’s their decision, not mine”

METHODOLOGY



METHODOLOGY

Survey Design

This survey explored young people's alcohol use, their attitudes to teenage and parents alcohol use, and how their parent/guardians alcohol use affects them.

A self-report questionnaire was utilised which young people completed individually. The survey design entailed ascertaining quantitative information using a structured questionnaire with mainly closed questions i.e. questions with set responses. Respondent's attitudes towards alcohol use were ascertained using a 6-point likert scale, whereby respondents were asked to choose one option that best described their view. One open-ended question was included to ascertain qualitative information under the topic of how parent/guardians alcohol use affects the respondent. The questionnaire was piloted with the ISPCJ Junior Advisory Board, which consisted of young people ranging in age from 10-18 from across Ireland.

Sample Size and Data Collection

Questionnaires were collected from 9,746 young people aged 12-18 years. 4,589 respondents were males and 5,157 were females. The method of collection was through Secondary schools selected across Ireland and who consented to take part in the survey. A range of Secondary schools were requested to take part, including a sample of urban/rural schools, mixed/single-sex schools and community/private schools. Schools were very co-operative in taking part in the survey. Overall 70 Secondary schools, 8 Primary schools and 6 Youthreaches took part across the Republic of Ireland. Out of the 84 educational institutions; 63 were mixed schools, 12 all boys and 9 all girls. 48 were urban based, 36 rural.

Questionnaires were administered by ISPCJ staff and were anonymous. Schools were offered an outreach on services from the ISPCJ following participation in the survey.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaires was stored in a secure location and analysed under the following parameters:

- Young people's alcohol use i.e. frequency and quantity of alcohol taken in the past year
- Attitudes to teenage alcohol use i.e. extent to which respondents agree/disagree with teenagers drinking alcohol at all, in moderation or to become drunk
- Attitudes to parental alcohol use i.e. extent to which respondents agree/disagree with parents drinking alcohol in front of their children at all, in moderation or to become drunk
- Effects of parent/guardian alcohol use on respondent i.e. does their parent/guardians alcohol use affect them, how does it affect them and to what extent

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

- National Schools Consultation 2009 -

Please complete the sections below as honestly as you can. We are interested in what you think about young people and adult's alcohol use, and how this affects you. We will not be identifying any person or school that took part in the survey. Please do not write your name.

Section 1: Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate box:

1) What age are you? _____

2) Do you drink alcohol? Yes No

3) Are you male or female? Male Female

If you are male please go to question **A**. If you are female please go to question **B**.

A. If you are male, have you had 5 or more drinks in a row in the past two weeks?

(1 drink is a long neck bottle of alcopops, or half a can of beer or cider, or a half pint/glass of beer or cider, or a pub measure of spirits or a small glass of wine)

Yes No

B. If you are female, have you had 5 or more drinks in a row in past two weeks?

(1 drink is a long neck bottle of alcopops, or half a can of beer or cider, or a half pint/glass of beer or cider, or a pub measure of spirits or a small glass of wine)

Yes No

4) In the past year, have you drunk alcohol at least once a month? Yes No

If you answered "yes" please go to **question 5**. If you answered no please go to **Section 2**.

5) In the past year, have you been drunk at least once a month? Please tick yes or no. Yes

No

Section 2: Please tick appropriate box in relation to the statements below:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It's ok for teenagers to drink alcohol to get drunk						
It's ok for teenagers to drink in moderation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Teenagers should not drink alcohol at all						

It's ok for parents to drink alcohol and become drunk around their children						
Parents should not drink alcohol at all in the presence of their children						
It's ok for parents to drink in moderation around their children						

Section 3: Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate box:

1. Does your parent/guardian's alcohol use affect your life? (Please tick appropriate box)

Yes No Don't Know Not relevant (e.g. parents/guardians don't drink)

2.If yes, how does it affect your life? (Please tick appropriate box)

Not sure Slight positive effect Positive effect

Slight negative effect Negative effect

3. Do you have any additional comments on how your parent/guardian's alcohol use affects your life?

4. What do you think is an acceptable level of alcohol to drink in one sitting?

(Please tick appropriate box)

For Parents: None 1-2 drinks 3-4 drinks 5+ drinks

For Young People: None 1-2 drinks 3-4 drinks 5+ drinks

Thank you for your participation

QUOTATIONS



QUOTATIONS

Emotional effects:

- *My parents split up because of drink*
- *Sometimes when my dad gets drunk it's scary*
- *When they get drunk, they don't know what they are doing. It's embarrassing. I hate it*
- *It pisses me off*
- *Distracting*
- *It's annoying and they come back home and start saying hurtful things*
- *They argue*
- *They make me mad at them*
- *Fighting upsets me*
- *It affected my childhood and now I only have one parent because of it*
- *It's not nice to see your parents drunk but it doesn't happen often*
- *It's annoying*
- *Makes one parent quite upset sometimes*
- *It makes life harder for me*
- *My dad is an alcoholic and broke up my family*
- *My dad doesn't live with me because of it*
- *They are always like that and annoys me*
- *It affects me a lot. It affects my life a lot*
- *Sometimes one of my parents come home late at night and I get afraid about what might happen to them*
- *Makes me upset because he takes stupid risks*
- *Distracting*
- *If they drink too much it can be hard*
- *Fights, cannot drive/offer lifts/collect, embarrassing*
- *It makes me extremely angry*
- *It's not good*
- *We argue*
- *I sometimes row with my father when he drinks and it upsets me. It is twice as bad because my parents are separated and they don't like each other.*
- *Pisses me off*
- *His drinking doesn't bother me, but when he was drunk it did.*
- *They get annoying when they are drunk*
- *Roars at me and calls me scumbag and other bad words which hurt my feelings*
- *It could make you feel down and to come home to your parents in that way would be disappointing*
- *It annoys the crap out of me*
- *Parents separation due to alcohol abuse*
- *You can't really talk to them, they don't listen to you*
- *They get very annoying and scream at you*
- *Well they only do it sometimes but it's kind of annoying*

- *My dad used to drink and my mom was an alcoholic and died*
- *Caused family separation but I try help the parent through their problem*
- *They should think of their children and how it would effect them*
- *Sometimes gets annoying, too emotional, more lovey-dovey, funny*
- *It does my head in and I hate it so much, it affects me even now and affects people's opinion of me because they know of my stupid drunken parent*
- *It upsets me sometimes. I'm scared at times as well*
- *I'm kinda scared of my Dad when he drinks*
- *My mum is an alcoholic, she went in to recovery and is drinking again so yeah it affects me*
- *My dad can't go a day without drink. He's always angry when he comes in from the pub and pisses everyone in the house off*
- *We can't be close if they drink all the time*
- *It had a great effect before it was given up. Happier house now no alcoholic parent*
- *Mad*
- *They get loud and sometimes scary*
- *Sometimes I get a bit embarrassed when they drink because they act stupid and get sippy around drink*
- *You don't want to be around them*
- *I don't like when adults get drunk as I feel I have to look after them*
- *Caused separation/divorce*
- *It's upsetting to see your parents out of control like that*
- *You feel invisible*
- *My dad is an alcoholic and this really affects me whether I know it or not*
- *They embarrass you and say things they shouldn't*
- *It's bad to see*
- *When they don't know what they are doing and saying I feel sorry for them*
- *It's so awkward when your parent's are drunk and there are people around*
- *It makes you worried about them*
- *Leave you with problems, gives you the wrong ideas in life*
- *It can seriously harm your relationship with your parents if a bad situation occurs*
- *You feel upset that they're shortening their lives and damaging their liver*
- *If they get drunk and row that upsets me*
- *It embarrasses me and other personal stuff*
- *Not caring a lot*
- *Makes me embarrassed when they're drunk*
- *You feel like you don't want them to get too much alcohol*
- *I don't like it*
- *It makes me upset if I see them drinking*
- *I get annoyed sometimes*
- *I think it makes me depressed to see my parents drinking*
- *It can affect your life by knowing what they drink at night*
- *Mother and father were alcoholics, both dead. I hate drink, it ruins lives*
- *It wrecks my life*
- *Parents separation due to alcohol abuse*
- *My mum does embarrassing impressions when drunk*

- *Single parent drinks for comfort, hard on me and siblings*
- *Just the fact that I don't like seeing them drunk*
- *Makes me argue with my dad*
- *A recovering alcoholic as a parent makes me angry towards alcohol but I don't let their problem get the better of me*
- *They talk shit! And it wrecks my head!*
- *Sometimes brings up things I don't want to talk about*
- *Mean to me*
- *Alcohol has a very negative effect on child's family life*
- *Parents got divorced because of alcohol*
- *Wish they would stop*
- *When they embarrass you*
- *I get annoyed with them*
- *They sometimes annoy me when they have drink in them*
- *It makes me angry and it is upsetting. I can't lived a normal life because of the alcohol abuse in my home*
- *It makes a bad influence on children's lives*
- *I hate it, they make me cry*
- *It worries me, I can't get on with my life as I am taking care of mum*
- *It annoys me*
- *It's terrible to see your parents fall in the door pissed and hours ago were in total control. You'd think I would be off drink but fuck that*
- *Parents annoy me when they're drunk*
- *It destroys your life to see your parent's drink, you lose all sense of yourself and develop problems, a lot of them*
- *Worried they will get drunk while I have friends over, its really embarrassing*
- *Can row resulting from drink, then it effects me*
- *It affected me a lot a the start but now she's getting help now (my mam)*
- *It makes me feel embarrassed*
- *It can ruin your life*
- *Very hard to cope with*
- *Worried they will get drunk while I have friends over, it's really embarrassing*
- *Causes heated arguments and stress*
- *It feels like they don't care sometimes*
- *When they are drunk they always get aggressive and annoy me*
- *It makes me feel very unsafe around them*
- *When they drink sometimes they fight when makes me really annoyed*
- *Well my mother is an alcoholic and it caused a lot of problems like physical abuse now I hate her and she's out of my life*
- *Alcoholism causes suffering and abuse. Not worth the effort in my view*
- *It's annoying and they come back home and start saying hurtful things*

Neglect:

- *They care more about drink than their children*

- *They just chose alcohol over children*
- *They drink too much; they care about their drinking more than anything else. No one should have to live like that*
- *It feels like they don't care sometimes*
- *They waste the money that is needed for essentials on drink sometimes*

Abuse and Violence:

- *Fights happen*
- *Can get aggressive when drunk*
- *Gets mad*
- *Used start a lot of fights with us*
- *When they are drunk they always get aggressive and annoy me*
- *They beat me up when they're drunk*
- *They hit me*
- *They start fighting*
- *Yes because there's fights*
- *Dad comes home drunk some nights and because he is drunk he starts fights in the family*
- *They become drunk and could become violent and angry in your presence*
- *Fight a lot*
- *They say they are going to kill themselves or threaten to hit me*
- *My da sometimes throws his weight around and once hit me, I know he didn't know what he's doing while he's drunk, he can't even handle a few pints*
- *Puts you in risk of danger*
- *It makes me feel very unsafe around them*
- *Parents who know they are aggressive drunks should arrange not to be around their children at all*
- *He hits me in my sleep when he drinks*
- *He drinks and I get mad and he doesn't come home until all hours of the night and when he does, he uses abusive language*
- *When they drink sometimes they fight when makes me really annoyed*
- *A lot of fighting and giving out sometimes*
- *My dad has a temper problem after a few drinks, but usually not physical aggression*
- *They have very bad mood swings. One time when drinking they could be happy, another time they could be very sad or aggressive*
- *When my dad was drunk he gave me death threats!*
- *My mum was an alcoholic, fights and drunkenness at home scared me. She has been sober for 10 years but it was a stressful time*
- *Fighting*
- *Abuses me*
- *The odd beating occurs*
- *The last time my dad got drunk and I was there he threatened me with an iron bar*
- *Makes them angry*
- *When I lived with my dad he drank a lot and was loud and abusive, no longer applies*

- *They will fight*
- *They always used to fight*
- *When they are drunk they are in a fighting mood*
- *They always fight*
- *They get abusive and angry*
- *Well my mother is an alcoholic and it caused a lot of problems like physical abuse now I hate her and she's out of my life*
- *Alcoholism causes suffering and abuse. Not worth the effort in my view*
- *Causes parent's to fight*

Parent behaviour change/effects on parents:

- *They should not drink – not healthy*
- *They should be allowed to drink but not go mad on it i.e. getting drunk in front of their kids is really wrong*
- *It makes them funny and good fun*
- *I just have fun when them when they are drunk*
- *I don't like when my dad comes home and he is drunk and does not know what he is doing or saying*
- *When they are drinking, they become more nervous, they have fights, nothing really big but sometimes it's hard to stand*
- *Money wise, he goes mad if there are no cans left*
- *It is not fair when your parent is an alcoholic because their personality is completely different when drunk*
- *Sometimes they are angry when they are drunk and sometimes they tell their life story*
- *They are annoying when they're drunk and they act stupid*
- *If they were drunk, they'd act really stupid*
- *When my parents are drunk, that is when I like to be around them the most because they are kind of loving*
- *Can be more irritable if they drink*
- *We have great craic when they're full*
- *They become a different person and have no control over what they do*
- *Dad gets angry, mum giddy and loving*
- *Makes one parent quite upset sometimes*
- *It's annoying and they come back home and start saying hurtful things*
- *It's funny when they get locked but not often happens*
- *Creates rows between parents*
- *They get pissed and it's funny sometimes*
- *Fun*
- *It's funny when they're drunk as if they are idiots*
- *Sometimes when they drink they get argumentative*
- *Sometimes parents/friends say things they don't mean*
- *It's funny*
- *They act like fools*

- *Go out of control*
- *Can lead to family disputes*
- *More tired at night/morning even though they don't drink much*
- *Parents won't be able to have a proper conversation because they are too drunk to even remember what you've even said*
- *My father only tells me he loves me when he's drunk*
- *They become totally different people*
- *They come back a different person, they do things you wouldn't expect them to do*
- *My dad always comes back from the pub on Saturday nights drunk, and sometimes he wakes me up he is that loud*
- *It always causes arguments even though she only drinks rarely*
- *I think it's okay because when their stressed out and have a few drinks it calms them down*
- *Well if my dad is not drunk, he is fine, but if he is drunk he will shout*
- *We fight a lot when my parents drink*
- *They are in a better humour that's all*
- *Sometimes they can't handle it*
- *They do be talking bullshit when they're drunk*
- *Mam's annoying when she drinks, dad drinks too much*
- *They enjoy it – it makes them happy*
- *Only when they shout at each other when they get drunk but they barely drink*
- *sometimes they cant handle it*
- *I get whatever I want off my father*
- *I can win money off my dad in stupid bets*
- *I think it's funny when parents get drunk and pissed*

Effects on young people's behaviour/lives in general:

- *Can't get a lift to places the next day*
- *Can't drive me anywhere after 6pm or 5pm because they drink a little*
- *If you see your parents get drunk whether you like it or not it will have an affect on your life*
- *Sometimes it's good fun and sometimes it's not fun*
- *Get allowed to do stuff when they are pissed*
- *I'd rather them do it on their own rather than around me*
- *When they go out, I'm left to mind the rest of the kids*
- *Alcohol changed my life*
- *They make me look stupid*
- *It's not nice to see your parents drunk but it doesn't happen often*
- *I look after my siblings*
- *They agree easier to let me drink and smoke and they are easier to buy things for me*
- *You can't bring friends around*
- *I'm left baby sitting and they shout a lot when they're drunk*
- *Less time with them, they do stupid things*

- *I don't get to go anywhere or have fun the next day because I'm minding my brothers*
- *I have to go to bed early*
- *Family disputes arise causing me to come involved*
- *Leaves us with a lot less money to spend on things for school, groceries etc.*
- *Sometimes my dad doesn't come home until very late and I don't get to see him that much, but I don't really care*
- *I can't get lifts and shit*
- *Stupid decisions are nearly always made with alcohol. Stupid decisions that can change everyone's life or circumstances*
- *They can't drop me or collect me from places if they had a drink*
- *It affects the relationship I have with that parent*
- *Can't collect me from anywhere because too drunk*
- *Won't give me a lift anywhere when he is drunk*
- *I have to mind my sister while my mother looks for my father in the pub*
- *It puts you off your work in school as you are thinking about it in school*
- *Coming home when I'm minding the kids*
- *Having more fun and being taken out to matches more*
- *I have to babysit and it affects the way I live my life a lot*
- *When they have hangovers and they tell you what to do*

Parents as role models – effects on young people's drinking:

- *They drink in moderation usually one bottle. It shows me how to drink responsibly*
- *You could be more prone to alcoholism*
- *If you see your parents drinking in moderation, then you are likely to copy them*
- *I believe that teenagers should drink in a house with parents in their presence because if a parent tells them not to do it the teenager will. It's just the novelty.*
- *Yes I go drinking with my dad. It's a good fatherly/son thing to do.*
- *Get the impression that if he drinks, I can drink. If he stops, I will*
- *They should allow us to have a drink at the dinner table so they can teach us to drink carefully*
- *It might encourage children to drink which is dangerous*
- *My parents drink in moderation and from this I have learned to do the same*
- *Some people shouldn't drink alcohol. It just doesn't agree with some people*
- *My parent drinking shows me that alcohol can be enjoyed reasonably. You don't have to be a pig to enjoy alcohol*
- *Your drinking habit can depend on how your parent's drink alcohol*
- *If they teach you to respect alcohol then there is no problem*
- *They taught me to respect myself and when I do drink to know when to stop*
- *They taught me to respect alcohol*
- *If at 15 or 16 they let kids try drink under supervision, they won't get drunk every weekend*
- *Seeing my father drunk has put me off abusing alcohol*

- *They drink in moderation and so I feel as if they have shown me a responsible attitude to alcohol*
- *Parents set a good example by drinking in moderation around their children*
- *It doesn't matter that my parent's drink in front of me. It's up to me if I want to drink.*
- *There is more drink in the house – whoop whoop!*
- *Only my parent drinks in moderation but makes me want some at times*
- *It doesn't I'm influenced by myself and my peers in this situation*
- *My parents drink but do not get drunk. I think this has a positive effect on me as it shows that people can drink and not get drunk*
- *But not forbidding alcohol it takes away the temptation and I am able to discuss openly if I wanted to*
- *Teenagers should be allowed to drink in front of their parent's as they are less likely to get drunk*
- *My mom only has one glass of wine to relax and it shows me that you can drink responsibly*
- *Looks like a good laugh, enjoyable, looks nice*
- *Stops me from wanting to be like them, so I don't drink*
- *They try to set examples of drinking in moderation*
- *Well my dad is an alcoholic so I might be too, therefore I do not drink a lot*
- *My parents don't drink their weight in alcohol which helps me drink sensibly which I only do occasionally*
- *It's seen as normal to drink regularly, they don't notice us drinking*
- *Always bottles and stuff in the house*
- *If your parents drink it is easier for teenagers to get drink as you can sneak it out of the house*
- *If they're getting loaded, why can't I?*
- *It doesn't really affect my life. I know they drink and see them doing it, but it never really made a difference*
- *My parents only drink sometimes. I think it is okay because it shows me that it is okay to drink in moderation when I am older*
- *My parents only have the odd drink which makes it okay to drink but not all the time*
- *Because my parents don't drink, I feel that if I do decide to drink then it will be in moderation*
- *Alcohol is more available because my parents drink*
- *My parents drinking does not affect me in any way*
- *They teach me that drinking is bad for your kidney's and yourself*
- *It makes me to like drink when I am older and to drink small amounts*
- *They do show that it is okay to drink in moderation*
- *Sometimes it makes me want to drink as well*
- *It just shows you the effect of alcohol and it makes me not want to drink*
- *It's easier to get off them cosy a can nick theirs*
- *When they drink, they give me whatever they have*
- *It shows that they drink too*
- *I think that it's good for your parents to drink around you in moderation to show what is acceptable and so that you don't go doing it behind their backs*

- *They set a bad example and make it seem acceptable*
- *In my eyes, it seems normal – part of life. And they become different people. But you can't change their influence on you*
- *I think it's good that my parents drink a small amount around me to teach responsible drinking*
- *I don't like people drinking beer around children because it's a bad example*
- *It shows that alcohol can be enjoyed without negative effects if not abused*
- *It makes you want to drink*
- *You might think it's okay to drink too*
- *I drink sometimes when my dad has alcohol in the fridge*
- *It has made me not want to drink*
- *I probably wouldn't drink as much if my parents didn't drink because I wouldn't have access to it*
- *Teenagers should be allowed drink in moderation under adult supervision so they would be used of it when their 18*
- *It shows that its okay to drink once you're the right age but in moderation*
- *If you think it's okay for them to do it, you'll think it's okay too*
- *My father is a pioneer and my mother rarely drinks...good effects on me I think*
- *It sets a bad example*
- *They set a good example by drinking responsibly and having small amounts*
- *I can get drink off them*
- *My parents never forbade me to drink and allowed me to sip once. I think that's better than not being allowed*
- *I think seeing your parents drink makes teenagers think it's okay and it won't do any harm*
- *My father doesn't drink so I would be sensible when drinking*
- *Makes you want to drink because your ma and da have it and you can easily get alcohol from them*
- *My parents drink in moderation around me so I see no problem with it*
- *When they have a drink they would let me have some*
- *When my dad drinks I feel like drinking but I don't because it's bad for my health*
- *If they drink in moderation it gives an example to the children*
- *Parents can be role models, their child will want drink if their parents have it*
- *You can learn how drinking can affect a person so I learn to drink moderately*
- *Drinking is the way to go but parents have no effect on if you drink of not*
- *I chose myself when to drink and I know I have my limits*
- *We teenagers have to have a life, we drink 2–3 times a week as there is nothing else to do*
- *Dad doesn't drink and mum only socially so it has taught me I don't to get drunk or anything*
- *It makes you respect drink more and to know when you have enough*
- *My parents are responsible with alcohol and it was a good example for me*
- *Not a good role model towards a child*
- *My parents are responsible with their drinking and especially my mother, never really go out to get drunk. I think this has set a good example for me*

- *My mother rarely drinks and is so in moderation – good example. My stepdad drinks regularly but not very much – it makes me see how I don't want to be, he gets stupid*
- *Parents should drink moderately in front of their children to show how to enjoy alcohol sensibly*
- *The fact they don't drink makes me not want to*
- *Both my parents are pioneers and I do not have a desire to get drunk every week*
- *Puts me off drinking*
- *By my parents not drinking it shows me I don't need to have a dependence on it when I'm older*
- *It makes me want to do it because he seems to be having a great time*
- *If they drink too much it can have a negative effect, they will see this and mimic it*
- *I only drink when my parents allow me, at meal etc. This way they trust me totally*
- *I think if your parents drink around you then you won't think it's bad getting drunk*
- *Makes me want to drink*
- *In the future I think I can drink as much as them if they're alright*
- *Shows you how to drink responsibly when older*
- *You can see the affects on them so they're an example*
- *It shows that it can be drunk moderately and then as a child you don't see it as such a want as it is the norm*
- *They have shown me it's okay and alcohol is to be enjoyed in moderation*
- *My parents drink in moderation so it's a good example for me*
- *I have a good time with my parent's when we have a few drinks!*
- *It allows us to drink with them!*
- *Growing up having to mind your parents puts you off drink*
- *They drink in moderation and they set a good example*
- *I'm glad they don't. I hope I can be the same.*
- *They don't drink so they don't understand, so they are strict*
- *My parents teach me I don't have to get drunk when I drink*
- *It's okay for them to you a taste – then you won't be curious*
- *Makes you wanna drink*
- *They drink but not in front of you. And for teenagers a small amount occasionally is okay but the parents should supervise and teach them not to get carried away*
- *Maybe if alcohol wasn't around me I wouldn't drink today*
- *Puts me off!*
- *Shows me how to have a laugh*
- *I think its okay for them to drink just not in front of younger children. It affects me because that's where I get the drink*
- *Well if you see your parents getting drunk you probably will copy them*
- *They leave drink in the house and then I steal it*
- *I get drink from them*
- *It doesn't because I'm not allowed drink unless they are around and I have a limit when drinking*
- *No alcohol sets a good example, no way to steal alcohol from the house*
- *My mom drinking encourages me not to drink as I see the negative effects*
- *Gives me an aspiration of how I want to drink when I'm older*

- *It gives me experience of alcohol without getting drunk and I learn how to respect alcohol*
- *They have shown that it's okay to drink a good bit of alcohol a day and still remain sober*
- *It's easier to get alcohol if your parents drink*
- *Free alcohol*
- *It gives me access to drink*
- *I think parents being comfortable with their children drinking in moderation and being open and trustworthy with them controls teen drinking*
- *My parents would offer me a drink if they were having one. That means if I drink, I drink with them*
- *It makes me feel like if they can do it so can I*
- *The way my parents spend money on alcohol it makes you not want to drink*
- *They don't drink excessively in front of me but show that it's not bad to drink at all*
- *My mom doesn't drink so I don't*
- *I believe adults that drink in the home give their teens more access to drink*
- *I think it's okay for parents to drink in front of their children, it is legal, but it's no okay to get drunk*
- *They show me how to drink responsibly and in moderation and also you can have fun without alcohol*
- *Instead of saying its bad and should stay away from it, they let me try small bits so I'm not mad for it when I'm older*
- *My parents have given me a healthy attitude towards alcohol I don't abuse it and I know my limits*
- *They don't drink that much, it teaches me to respect alcohol*
- *My parents drink in moderation but I have realised you don't need alcohol*
- *If parents drink and get drunk, kids will either be afraid or want to start drinking*
- *If your parents are completely against alcohol, you cannot confide in them if you drink*
- *They share it with me*
- *Because they don't drink it means they're stricter*
- *If parents binge drink then their kids are going to think that that is okay, where as if they drink in moderation then their kids are more likely to do this too.*
- *Makes me not want to be like them*
- *Makes me want to do what they're doing*
- *When parents drink in front of their children, they're giving them the idea of alcohol so I think parents should not drink at all in the presence of their kids*
- *I think parents shouldn't drink as much if they have children of any age*
- *Adults are too hypocritical when it comes to drink as they will often disown a teenager for drinking and then go out to get drunk*
- *It shows me that having a few beers sensibly around mature adults can do no harm. And it teaches us what drinks to drink and how many to have*
- *They drink responsibly but still enjoy it so that's a positive effect on me*
- *I think it shows people how to drink in moderation and how to be sensible when drinking*
- *If they are drinking you could rob some drink off them*

- *Parents should show their teenagers that you can drink without being around corners*
- *She teaches me not to drink or not to drink shorts*
- *Parents are there to be mentors and set an example*
- *They drink responsibly and I've learned to do the same*
- *Their use is a good influence on me. They enjoy wine and collect it but don't get drunk and are sensible about it*
- *It makes me aware of how drinking alcohol can damage your life and stop growth in your life*
- *It shows that alcohol can be drunk sociably and for enjoyment rather than just to get drunk and irresponsible*
- *Parent's alcohol use taught me to drink responsibly*
- *It makes us want to drink*
- *My parents are hypocrites. They tell us not to drink. They get drunk every night*
- *My grandfather is an alcoholic so it made me think about my future. I don't want to end up like him so I don't drink*
- *Its grand like they buy me fags and drink*
- *It is terrible to see your parents fall in the door pissed and hours ago were in total control. You'd think I would be off drink but fuck that*
- *my dad and grandad are both pioneers and I think that has had a positive effect on my attitude towards alcohol*

General:

- *Drink is wild easy to get*
- *Do not drink at all because it's bad*
- *Some people shouldn't drink alcohol. It just doesn't agree with some people*
- *They should not drink - not healthy*
- *They should be allowed to drink but not go mad on it, i.e. getting drunk in front of their kids is really wrong*
- *I think they should not drink*
- *It doesn't really because they don't drink just to get drunk, they drink to enjoy it in moderation*
- *Don't drink too much. If you have problems, don't use alcohol to solve it/them*
- *My cousin who is 30 forgets what he does on a night out drinking; this has made me come to the conclusion that I don't want to drink for another while*
- *They don't drink much. But when they do it's in moderation which I think should be the same for teens above 16*
- *My father doesn't drink, my mam drinks in moderation so it doesn't affect me at all. Put legal drinking age to 16*
- *Drink makes young kids go crazy*
- *It doesn't - I make my own decisions without the influence of other people*
- *When a teenager wants to drink they're either under pressure or want to act cool*
- *My aunty became an alcoholic, now she keeps going missing; it's splitting up my family. They all keep arguing*

- *Alcohol shows me that I can have fun*
- *I think 17+ should be allowed to drink because they're the main age that drinks so I think if they have access to it they won't want it. They want it because they can't have it*
- *Not parents but I've lost a lot a number of friends to alcohol and drugs*
- *As long as parents drink in moderation I don't see a problem with it, they are entitled to drink*
- *We are Irish, we see drinking as part of our culture. Under age drinking is not going to stop so try and meet us halfway. Parents influence is not strong*
- *Parents don't affect teen drinking*
- *It does not affect my life because I'm not near them so much when they drink.*
- *They don't really drink so it doesn't affect me*
- *No because they don't drink at home*
- *Nope I just like to drink myself*
- *I think if ye let teenagers drink at least once a month then they wont drink as much*
- *It doesn't affect me; it's their decision, not mine.*
- *It doesn't because they don't drink much only on celebrations*
- *Yhey have a life of their own and if they decide to drink when they're out its grand*
- *They don't really drink so it doesn't affect me*

LITERATURE REVIEW



LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last 10 years there has been a significant increase in both the awareness of, and the need for, meaningful consultation with children and young people in Ireland. This is reflected in the Irish Government's National Children's Strategy (2000), whose fundamental rationale is to build: *'An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential'*.

The ISPCC has a long and proud tradition of consulting with children and young people on issues that concern them. As a child-centered agency we are working towards ensuring that all children and young people are central to the decision making process throughout all aspects of the Society primarily through our Children's Advisory Committees and Junior Advisory Board². We believe that consultation with those we advocate for will help to ensure that all children and young people are given the chance to feel love and happiness, to stop discrimination and exclusion, and to end cruelty and injustice towards children. Consultation is vital to the successful application of these aims; it drives our service provision and advocacy efforts, it reminds us why we work with children and young people, and why we endeavour to make life better for them.

2009 was a significant milestone toward this not only for the agency but also in empowering young people to have their voices heard. Through the ISPCC's Schools Outreach programme we were in a unique and unprecedented position to be able to access a large proportion of the second level student population. We are delighted to report that 9,746 children and young people were consulted with during this process. With only 9 offices around the country to say that this was a huge achievement is undisputable. This is not just another survey based on a sample of young people from Ireland. What sets this research apart is the

² Children's Advisory Committee is local committee made up of young people who meet once a month to discuss issues of concern to them locally and also to discuss and inform the policies of the ISPCC. The Junior Advisory Board is made up of 2 members of each committee which meets twice a year and acts as a link the Board of the ISPCC.

sheer volume of young people consulted with. It gives true meaning to the vision postulated by the National Children's Strategy.

The media tells us on a daily basis that teenagers in Ireland are consuming large amounts of alcohol regularly. According to Alcohol Action Ireland, Irish people continue to be amongst the highest consumers of alcohol in the world (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2010). There is no shortage of literature and research addressing the prevalence of young people's drinking habits and recent studies have highlighted the fact that teenagers in Ireland exhibit the highest rates of drunkenness in Europe (ESPAD, 2010). As a result of the ISPC's tradition of consultation we wanted to find out from as many young people as possible if in fact our teenagers drink as much, or more than, their European counterparts. We were also curious to ascertain what influence parents have on this as we do a lot of work with parents through our ChildFocus and TeenFocus services. To date there has been some research on the effects of parental alcohol use on young people in Europe but this has not been examined in an Irish context. This survey aims to address this gap.

How will this research add to the plethora of publications already on shelves in libraries across the country? This survey provides practitioners and policy makers with further information on young people's alcohol use – in terms of frequency and quantity of drinking. More importantly it tells us about attitudes towards acceptable levels of drinking which, given the prevalence of alcohol use amongst both teenagers and adults in Ireland, it is critical to examine.

Young people represent a high proportion of the population of Ireland and their well-being is crucial, both in their own right and as the adults of tomorrow³. Alcohol use is an important issue to consider in terms of their well-being as alcohol abusive, and alcohol dependent drinking patterns, often begin in adolescence (Alters and Shiff, 2010). It is believed that the average age of those taking their first drink is 13 (Palmer and O' Reilly, 2008). Research to date has tended to focus on 'rates of drunkenness' among young people

³ According to the Central statistics office (www.cso.ie), young people (0-19 years of age) represent 29% of the population, numbering 1,140,616. From the CSO 2006 census, the population of 12-18 year olds was 395,503.

and the effects of alcohol on them, without addressing the wider familial contexts in which young people are living. As a rule it is important to acknowledge that young people are impacted by drink in two main ways; by presenting as drinkers themselves at a young age and by growing up in an environment where alcohol is misused by parents and care givers (Wales, Gillian, Hill and Robertson, 2009). Therefore it is crucial that we address the significant role that parents alcohol use has to play in influencing the drinking habits of young people.

This report documents our findings on three key areas:

- i. Young people's alcohol use – in terms of frequency and quantity
- ii. Young people's attitudes towards their own, and their parents/guardians, alcohol use
- iii. The effects of parental alcohol use on children and young people

To date, little research or consultation has been conducted in Ireland with young people themselves that directly focuses on how alcohol use affects them, until now that is. This report gives voice to the impact that their parents alcohol use has on them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Young people's alcohol use: frequency and quantity

In recent years the issue of young people drinking has come to the fore through the media and general discourse. Although authors, researchers and experts from a diverse range of fields have examined alcohol use among young people youth alcohol consumption remains poorly understood, and has become a pervasive social and welfare problem which commands immediate action (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2010). Currently we know that alcohol is the first substance misused in adolescence, and that the frequency and level at which young people drink is both a serious and complex concern (Scheier and Botvin, 1998).

Teenage drinking statistics show that underage drinking is regular in Ireland as one in four 16 – 17 year olds claim to drink alcohol at least once a week. The locations for underage drinking for this age group tend to be at a friend's house (31%), at home (30%) or outdoors (22%) (Youth ID, 2009). A Large scale study conducted by the HSBC Ireland (2006) surveyed 10,334 school children throughout Ireland, they found that 32.4 % of children reported having been drunk. Their findings highlighted that the percentage rates of drunkenness among school children had remained stable since 2002.

Alarming Irish youth demonstrate the third highest rate of drunkenness in Europe (ESPAD 2007) and a concerning trend shows that there has been a significant drop in the age on onset-drinking over the past two decades (O'Connor, O'Connor and Bradley, 2008). The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD, 2007) presented several alarming statistics regarding young people aged 15 and 16 years of age;

- Irish young people reported being drunk more often than those in most other European countries, with 26% of young Irish people reporting being drunk in the past month compared to the European average of 18%
- 44% of girls and 42% of boys reported binge drinking (having 5 or more drinks on one occasion) during the previous month

- More than half (56%) reported being drunk on at least one occasion by the time they reached 16 years of age

Previous research trends highlighted 'gender' as an influential marker in youth drinking habits; suggesting that males are more at risk of becoming heavy drinkers (Shiner and Newman, 2001) and are at a greater risk of developing problematic drinking habits. However, more recent evidence suggests the gender gap may be narrowing (Higuchi, Suzuki, Matsushita & Osahi, 2004; McPherson, Casswell & Pledger, 2004; Office for National Statistics, 2004). A recent study among college students in UCC found that females are drinking equal measures and binge drinking similarly to their male counterparts (www.irishtimes.com 2/09/2010). Recent European research has indicated that more males use alcohol than females; there has been an increase in the number of teenage girls engaging in binge-drinking across 15 European countries between 2003 and 2007 (Hibell, Guttormsson, Ahlstrom, Balakireva, Bjarnsan, & Kokaykevi (2009).

While the scope of this survey does not examine health and safety concerns, it is crucial to mention this in the context of any study of alcohol use and young people. Research has demonstrated the negative effects that early alcohol use has on young people, both in terms of physical safety and emotional well-being. It has been reported that young people who drink alcohol before the age of 15 years are 'four times more likely to develop alcohol dependency than those who wait until they are 21' (www.knowyourdrinking.ie). There are also strong links between alcohol and accidents, injury, mental health and suicide (Shiner and Newman, 2001). Young people are most likely to drink in dangerous settings and to drink large amounts of cheap alcohol.

In the UK, 40% of the 13 year olds and 58% of the 15 year olds who had drunk alcohol reported that after drinking they had experienced at least one of the following negative consequences: had an argument or fight; visited an A&E department; been admitted to hospital overnight or had an injury that needed to be seen by a doctor; been taken home by the police or been in trouble with them; stayed off school; been sick (vomited); or tried an illegal drug (Consultation on Young people and Alcohol, 2009). A HSE survey of teenage

girls focusing on sexual education found that alcohol emerged as a key indicator of early sexual activity; of those students who reported having sex, all had drunk alcohol at some point. None of those who abstained from alcohol tried to have sexual intercourse (Cullen, 2010, www.drugs.ie).

The number of alcohol related discharges from Irish hospitals of under 18's was over 670 in 2001 (Cullen 2010). Between 1995 and 2004 there was an increase of 29% in the proportion of teenage girls discharged from hospital for alcohol related conditions compared to an increase of 9% for males under 18 (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2010). It is interesting to note the greater increase in the proportion of teenage girls discharged from hospital due to alcohol related conditions, which implies that gender is still an important issue to consider in terms of teen alcohol use.

2. Attitudes towards alcohol use

2.1 Young people's attitudes and beliefs about their own alcohol use

According to the website www.drugs.ie by the time a child reaches the age of five they have developed an awareness of alcohol, and formed a basic opinion and attitude about alcohol. A study examining alcohol specific messages on 18th birthday cards in Ireland showed tolerant attitudes to alcohol use and humour about incidents of excessive alcohol consumption. Excessive drinking was portrayed as an acceptable norm for celebrating your 18th birthday (Loughran, 2010).

To date little large-scale research has been carried out in Ireland regarding young people's attitudes towards teen alcohol use. One recent report in 2007 by the Office for the Minister of Children consulted a representative group of 257 teenagers regarding their opinions of teen alcohol use and solutions regarding youth alcohol misuse. According to this report teenagers want to drink, but they agree on the importance of rules and schemes that would limit what, where and how much they can consume. From the report it was highlighted that teenagers felt they should be able to drink while appreciating the necessity of drinking in a

safe and moderate way. A limit of 2–3 alcoholic drinks was suggested as allowable for 16+ year olds. The majority of teenagers consulted felt that the legal age should be lowered to 16, and felt that if young people were drinking safely in pubs there would be less likelihood of drunkenness and binge drinking (Office for Minister for children, 2008).

It seems that young people believe that sticking to a certain type of drink is safe and that it is important to know your own limits (Graham, Ward, Munro, Snow, Ellis, 2009). A consultation with young people and parents in the UK found that most young people believe they can manage alcohol quite well (Consultation on Children, Young People and Alcohol, 2009). However, as teenage drinking statistics have shown, many young people in Ireland are binge-drinking which implies that they don't know what healthy drinking limits are.

It appears that 'alcohol' is poorly understood and misconceptions exist about its label as a 'drug'. Young people hold the assumption that alcohol is one of the least dangerous drugs compared to other drugs, and do not fully appreciate the harmful effects of alcohol (Graham et al, 2009). Alcohol does not seem to be associated with the worrying effects of other drugs such as cannabis as it appears that the effects of alcohol are observed as ending with a hangover. There is an expectancy of a pleasurable experience, which is reinforced by the socially acceptable view that alcohol makes a person feel good. Yet the devastating effects that alcohol abuse has on many young people, their families and communities at large cannot be ignored.

Perceptions that young people have about alcohol are shaped by a number of influences; a recent review concluded that alcohol advertising increases the likelihood that young people will begin to drink, or will increase their drinking if they are already drinking (European Alcohol and Youth Forum, 2009). Attitudes and behaviours of peers and family, influences from advertisements of popular drinks, music events, and sporting events all impact on young people's attitudes towards alcohol use. Television programs, advertisements and films generally portray drinking as relaxing, fun and entertaining yet these mediums rarely highlight the negative emotional effects of regular, or long term, use of alcohol. While advertising is an important factor in presenting social norms, research suggests that young

people are influenced even more strongly by their peers, parent's and other adults to whom they are close (Martino, Collins, Ellickson, Schell and McCaffrey, 2006).

2.2 Young people's attitudes and beliefs about their parents drinking

While peers, advertising, TV etc. influence young people's attitudes towards alcohol, parents own social modeling of drinking is an important factor to consider. The influence that parents have on the development of their children, in particular through modeling of behaviour, is demonstrated through Bandura's Social Learning Theory which proposes the acquisition of behaviour through observation and imitation (Bandura, 1977). Learning through observing behaviour takes places as early as the first year of life. A plethora of research has demonstrated the reliability of social learning theory; indicating that children of parents with alcohol problems are predisposed to early alcohol use and alcohol associated difficulties in adolescence (Smyth, B.P, Darker, C. D., Donnell-Swift, E., Barry, J. M., and Allwright, S, PA. (2010). However, while research has been carried out regarding the influence of parents drinking on young people's behaviour, little research has been carried out regarding how young people actually perceive their parents drinking, what young people's attitudes are towards their parents alcohol use, and how this affects them.

One recent study which examined young people's attitudes towards their parents alcohol use showed some interesting results. The study, conducted by Childwise for CBBC Newsround in 2010, surveyed 1,234 young people aged 10-14 from across the UK about their views on their parents alcohol use and how it affected them;

- 72% of those questioned said their parents drank alcohol
- Of those 70% said they thought they had seen their parent's drunk
- 64% said that they thought that between three and six glasses of alcohol was too much to drink
- 46% of the children surveyed thought that adults should not drink in front of children whilst just under a third (32%) thought that it was okay. The remainder, 22% were unsure

- 60% of all children surveyed said they will drink when they are older

This survey demonstrates both that a significant number of children have seen their parents drunk, but that a large number of young people believe that adults should not drink in front of them. It is also worth pointing out that a very large number of young people said both that their parents drank alcohol and that they too will drink alcohol when they are older.

[3. Effect of parents alcohol use on young people's lives](#)

Research has demonstrated the effects that parental alcohol use can have on young people, and much of the research has focused on the negative effects of excessive alcohol use. There are complex issues that surround parental drug and alcohol abuse, which may worsen at times of stress or be more manageable with flexible supports and interventions (Children's Voices, 2010). It is important to acknowledge that parents responsible alcohol use can have a beneficial influence on young people through modeling appropriate behaviours regarding safe alcohol use. However, the negative effects of parental alcohol use can have a very large impact on young people's lives.

According to Alcohol Action Ireland (2010) there are an estimated 61,000 to 104,000 children in Ireland under the age of 15 living with at least one binge or problem drinking parent. The emotional and physical effects of parental alcohol abuse on young people have been examined in studies with young people and through retrospective studies. These have highlighted the very powerful impact that alcohol misuse has on parenting of children and relationships within families. A report – 'Children's Voices' – examined previous research in terms of children's direct experiences of living with parents with drug and alcohol problems (Children's Voices, 2010). This study found that children reported experiencing neglect, violence and abuse, feelings of stigma and shame, coping difficulties and effects on their behaviour such as having to take on more adult roles in the home. Embarrassment and shame at parents behaviour was a common theme, and social isolation also often resulted from parent's drug and alcohol problems. Yet to date, little large-scale research has been done in Ireland with children and young people themselves on this topic.

3.1 Emotional Effects

A study on the effect of parental substance abuse on young people was carried out in Scotland by Bancroft, Wilson, Cunningham–Burley, Backett–Milburn & Masters (2004) with 37 young people ranging in age from 15 to 27 years. The findings show the considerable damage caused by parental substance abuse. Many of the young people felt their homes became an unpredictable and unsafe environment for them. Many children felt that their parents were unable to care for them emotionally. School attendance and performance suffered as a result. Some children retreated and withdrew from their peers for fear of inviting them over to an unpredictable home environment. The children in question felt their childhood was cut short as they had to take on a greater role of responsibility within the family home with some children taking on the role of the parent, caring for the family's needs and thus neglecting their own needs.

The effect of parental alcohol use in general on young people is also important to acknowledge, aside from problem drinking. Effects of parental alcohol use can be more subtle. Research has demonstrated that children who have seen their parents drinking have noticed changes in their parents behaviour. The survey conducted by Childwise (2010) regarding the effects parental alcohol use in general has on young people aged 10–14 found that:

- 81% (who had seen adults drinking) said they noticed one or more changes in the way their parents behaved

Of those;

- 24% said it made adults act stupid or silly
- 20% said they became angry or aggressive
- Another 20% said they became happy and funny
- 19% said they acted strange or different
- 18% said they became loud and swore
- 17% said they became dizzy or fell over

An interesting and alarming finding from this study was that 30% of young people said that it made them feel scared when they saw adults drinking (Childwise, 2010).

3.2 Violence and Abuse

A recent survey conducted by Alcohol Action Ireland in 2009, with adults aged between 18 and 40 entitled "Keeping It in the Family", found that 71,000 adults reported that they felt afraid or unsafe as a result of parental alcohol consumption during childhood. 90,000 adults said that they had witnessed drink related parental conflict (Alcohol Action Ireland 2009). The National Study of Domestic Abuse reported in 2005 that alcohol was identified as a potential trigger for abusive behaviour in 1/3 of cases, and in 1/4 of the most severe cases alcohol was always involved. It is clear from these findings that parental alcohol misuse affects the child (Watson and Parsons, 2005).

A UK Childline report found that children as young as five reported stories of parents drinking; the children revealed that they were being sexually abused, bullied or neglected and were being put in a position of minding siblings and parents (Wales et al, 2009).

3.3 Parents influence through modeling behaviour

Some evidence makes claim that the majority of youths grow out of their harmful and reckless drinking patterns over time (Chassin, Pitts and Prost, 2002; Johnston, O' Malley, Bachman & Schulenburg 2004; O'Neill, Parra and Sher, 2001). This would suggest that youths may require guidance from adults through behaviour modeling, supervision and communication. A parent or guardian acting as a role model may be an important element in keeping children safe during the difficult times of adolescence when new experiences such as alcohol use are explored.

A recent study found that only some parents were aware that their own behaviours sent a message regarding what is considered socially appropriate, while many parents did not

acknowledge that their own regular use of alcohol sent a message of normality to their children (Van Hout, 2009). While peer influence has been shown to be a factor, certainly parents play an important role in how young people learn to drink and how their drinking patterns evolve. Having a parent who abuses alcohol is the biggest early risk factor for alcohol abuse and dependence in adolescence (Alters and Shiff, 2010).

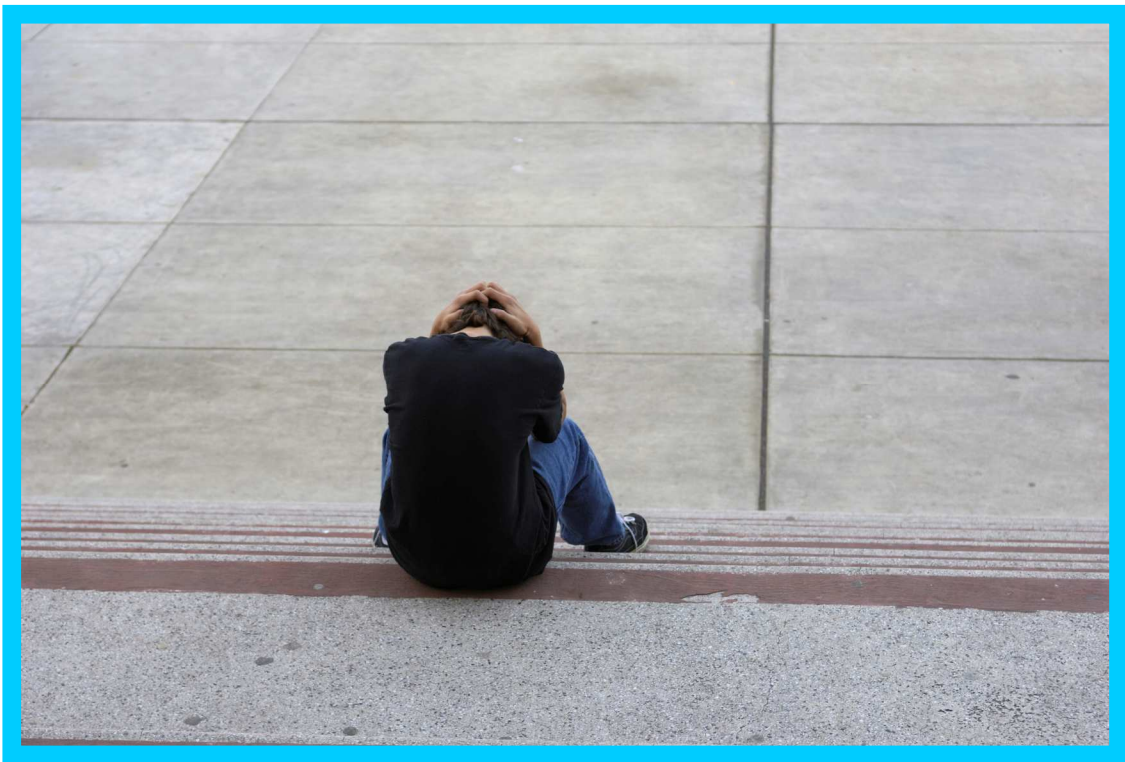
A consultation with parents and young people carried out in the UK recently found that parents and young people are operating under a series of myths regarding exposure to alcohol (Consultation on Children, Young People and Alcohol, 2009). There was widespread belief among parents that young people would rebel and drink anyway and that there is little they can do about this. With parents the consultation found that underage drinking was recognised as a problem, but not their problem. Many parents believed that young people would learn through experimentation with alcohol and making their own mistakes. Some parents provided alcohol and even encouraged drinking. While most parents and young people believe they personally can manage alcohol themselves quite well, the majority of parents and young people also believed risks of using alcohol are mild, and also that drinking only one type of alcohol is “safe” (Consultation on Young People and Alcohol, 2009). The Children’s Voices report highlighted the influence parents own drinking may have on their children and that parents can underestimate this (Williams, Davies and Wright 2010). The report stated that parents with alcohol problems may serve as a deterrent which prevents their children following the same path. Teenagers in Austria also questioned why it is teenage alcohol use which is seen as a problem without adults looking at their own alcohol use (Children’s Voices, 2010).

Researchers appear to have conflicting ideas on what parents should do to prevent early adolescent alcohol use (Abar, Abar, Turrisi, 2009). Some parents may adopt a ‘continental model’ of drinking alcohol, which aims to introduce children to alcohol in the home at an early age. The continental model suggests that alcohol use is natural and manageable and that introducing it to children will inevitably ensure that children will experience less alcohol related harm in the interim (Bellis, Philips–Howard, Hughes, Hughes, Cookay, Morleo, Hannon, Smallthwaite and Jones, 2009). The Continental Model adopts the ‘we all did it’

attitude and suggests that to become competent drinkers, young people guided by their parents, must engage in experimental drinking habits. Yet there is some evidence which suggests that parents who supply and buy teenagers alcohol are contributing to an increased risk of adolescent binge drinking (Van der Vorst, 2010). According to Alcohol Action Ireland, 75% of young people said that they found it easy to obtain alcohol, and there is a concern that some of this may be easily accessible in their own homes. According to Berridge et al (EMCDDA 2008), areas of increased alcohol consumption by young people, such as in the family and at home, is given less prominence than public binge drinking.

Only a quarter of parents surveyed by Smyth et al (2010) thought it was a good idea to introduce alcohol into their child's life. They also found that parents were not complacent about teenage drinking but were quite concerned. Smyth et al pointed out that using Irish parents more effectively in interventions may assist in reversing the escalation of this problem among Irish youth.

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