

# Teenage drinking and interethnic friendships

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**This report explores the links between young people's interethnic friendships and their drinking patterns and behaviours.**

Britain is a multicultural society, but little is currently known about if, and how, young people mix with friends from different ethnic backgrounds and the potential impact of this on drinking attitudes and behaviours. Research was undertaken to examine these links using quantitative and qualitative methods among a sample of 14- and 15-year-olds in diverse locations in London and Berkshire.

The report:

- explores the intra- and interethnic mix of young people's friendship groups as described by young people in questionnaires and interviews;
- analyses how drinking patterns vary by ethnicity, religion and gender;
- investigates the links between young people's background characteristics, their friendship groups (including the ethnicity of friends) and their reported drinking rates; and
- looks at the implications of the findings, including recommendations for harm reduction based on education and peer support programmes.



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# Executive summary

## Background to the study

Concerns about young people's drinking habits are growing in the UK, with high alcohol consumption levels in comparison with other European countries, and increases in the number of young people admitted to hospital for alcohol-related harm. During the adolescent years, young people's alcohol consumption is often similar to that of their peers. However, recent studies suggest that having peers or friends from minority ethnic backgrounds is related to lower drinking rates. Little is currently known about how young people in a multicultural society experience interethnic contact within friendship groups, and the potential impact of this on drinking attitudes and behaviours. This is the focus of the current study.

The research entailed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and consisted of three stages: focus groups, questionnaires and interviews. Young people aged 14 and 15 years were recruited through schools in London and Berkshire for all three stages, and hard-to-reach young people were recruited for the questionnaire through a voluntary trust in East London. The sample reflects a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Twenty-seven focus groups were undertaken to involve young people in the design of a questionnaire, by discussing the pertinent issues around alcohol, friendships and culture. Questionnaires gathered information about young people's backgrounds; leisure time; friends and relationships; alcohol, their own use and their friends' use; parental attitudes to alcohol; and tobacco and drug use, resulting in 696 viable surveys. Forty-six interviews were undertaken to explore how individuals perceive and encounter different cultural attitudes to alcohol, particularly within their friendship groups.

## Key findings

### Birds of a feather or opposites attract? Intra- and interethnic friendship groups

Young people were asked to describe the ethnic mix of their friendship groups in a questionnaire and in interviews. Questionnaire data showed that friendship groups were homogeneous by ethnicity insofar as young people reported a higher percentage of friends from their own ethnic background. However, two-thirds of young people from all ethnic groups had at least one friend from a different ethnic background from their own, with boys and girls being equally likely to report having interethnic friendships.

During interviews, the majority of young people reported that they 'don't mind' what background their friends come from. White British young people, in particular, were more likely to say they do not mind and less likely to reflect on the importance of different cultures within friendships. Young people who felt that ethnic and religious diversity is a good thing in friendships tended to speak positively about the opportunities interethnic friendships create for learning about other cultures. Young people who prefer friendships with people from their own ethnic group tended to frame their reasons in terms of solidarity and support rather than actively avoiding contact with other ethnic groups. However, most young people said that background, ethnicity and religion are not primary considerations when forming friendships, as sharing interests and hobbies are more important.

## Drinking patterns among young people

Questionnaire data showed that young people from white backgrounds were the most likely to have consumed alcohol, to drink frequently and to binge drink. There were also relatively high rates of alcohol use among young people of mixed ethnicity compared with non-white ethnic groups, and black young people were most likely to drink heavily. Discussions and interviews revealed that young people associate different drinking norms with different ethnicities and cultures, and many young people perceived drinking to be an inherent part of white British culture. However, differences between ethnic groups were less marked than differences found in previous studies on ethnicity and alcohol, and some minority ethnic young people also described the drinking that takes place in their cultures.

Questionnaire data also showed differences by religion, with very low reported rates of having ever drunk among Muslims. Although differences were not significant, Muslim drinkers had heavier rates of frequent, recent and heavy drinking than other religious groups and their drinking patterns most closely resembled those of young people with no religion. Young people with no religion and Muslim young people were significantly more likely than other religions to binge on a monthly basis. During interviews and discussion very few Muslims reported their own drinking, but some young people reported having Muslim friends, acquaintances and family members who do drink, and at times drink heavily.

Findings on gender suggest that for some ethnic groups the gender gap in drinking rates is converging, with girls as likely, or more likely, to drink and drink heavily as boys. However, gender differences were still apparent for Asian young people, as girls from Asian ethnicities, except Indian girls, had not consumed alcohol.

## Ethnicity, friendships and drinking

Further quantitative analysis was carried out to look at associations between drinking and a range of variables, to see which variables are still related to drinking when other variables are held constant. These variables included background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and religion, and friendship group characteristics and behaviours.

The findings showed that, after controlling for other variables, young people categorised as Asian ethnicity or other ethnicity remained significantly less likely than white young people to report that they have consumed alcohol. Young people who reported that religion is important to them were also significantly less likely to have ever drunk than young people who reported that religion is not important to them. However, some religious young people who do not drink explained in interviews that religion is not their only, or even primary, reason for not drinking. Other reasons included the harmful effects of alcohol use, with knowledge about alcohol effects gained from the media and education.

Friends' drinking and friends' approval of drinking were significantly associated with an increased likelihood of having ever drunk and higher rates of frequent, recent and binge drinking. Friends' approval was also significantly associated with heavier drinking among respondents. These findings support other research which has shown that young people resemble their friends in terms of drinking behaviours. However, the findings do not necessarily point to peer influence as the reason for similarities. Friends' drinking and friends' approval were more likely to be associated with respondents' drinking patterns than being encouraged to drink by friends. In interviews, few young people reported that they were pressured by friends, although encouragement to drink was sometimes reported by young people, mainly drinkers.

Qualitative data suggests that some non-drinkers seek friendships with those who are similar to themselves; prefer the company of other non-drinkers; and may attempt to dissuade drinking friends from consuming alcohol. These factors, rather than influence, may help to explain why non-drinkers are similar to their friends. Furthermore, some young people who drink report that they sometimes attempt to moderate heavier drinking among friends. Influencing friends to *not* drink, or drink *less*, is rarely

considered in discussions of peer influence, where it is assumed that young people are influenced by their friends to consume alcohol.

The quantitative data found that young people with diverse friendship groups were more likely to report that they have drunk alcohol than young people with mostly white friendship groups. Interethnic friendships were not related to frequent, recent, heavy and binge drinking. The finding is unexpected given the higher drinking rates found among white young people in the current and previous studies. However, in this regard the qualitative data did not support the quantitative data, as there was no indication in interviews that young people with white friends were less likely to drink, or alternatively that young people with ethnically diverse friendships were more likely to drink. In fact, young people often indicated that cultural differences in drinking behaviours and attitudes in friendship groups are not problematic as friends respect each other's views. It should also be noted that the link does not indicate causality, and it may be the case that the factors that lead to young people having more homogeneous friendship groups, such as family influences, local area and community, and willingness to mix with others with different beliefs, may also lead to them being less likely to have drunk alcohol.

## Conclusions and policy and practice implications

Findings from the current study show relatively low rates of having ever drunk, and of frequent, heavy and binge drinking among young people compared with other recent surveys with young people in England. Although these low rates are the result of a high proportion of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the sample, they do serve as a reminder of how 'social norms' around alcohol use vary considerably by ethnicity and culture. Although young people from the current study recognised differences in drinking behaviours between ethnic and religious groups, stereotypes were still prevalent for some groups. Education about how norms vary within, as well as between, groups can be useful for young people whose own behaviour goes against the grain; in particular, non-drinkers from drinking cultures and young drinkers from cultures where alcohol use is not seen as acceptable.

Findings also showed that young people from minority ethnic and religious backgrounds frequently cited concerns about health and risks associated with drinking, gained from education and advertising, as important reasons for why they do not drink. These messages reinforce young people's existing attitudes towards alcohol, and may become as important as, or more important than, their traditional views. Consequently, government campaigns and health warnings against alcohol use appear to be effective particularly for young people from backgrounds which discourage alcohol use. Education around alcohol use is also important for minority ethnic and religious young people as the drinking patterns of young Muslims resembled young people with no religion more closely than other religious young people, and there is some indication that drinking may be hidden among Muslims. Teachers and youth workers should be aware that alcohol education is important for young people from religions and cultures in which alcohol use is prohibited as rates may be higher than reported.

Rather than focusing on young people as perpetrators or victims of peer pressure, it is worth considering the different roles that young people attempt to fill within their friendship group around alcohol use. One of these roles is as a moderator of alcohol consumption, or an advocate of abstinence, as reported by some young people in the study. The role that young people may adopt as moderators of consumption among their friends could be fed into peer support programmes, which are popular among young people, but for which there is currently little evidence base around alcohol use. Peer supporters can also offer advice to young people who are not able to discuss their alcohol use with family or people within their community, particularly those from backgrounds where alcohol use is prohibited.

## Background

### Drinking rates

Concerns about young people's drinking habits are growing in the UK and are an increasing focus of media attention. The UK has high alcohol consumption levels in comparison with other European countries, and there have been increases in the number of young people admitted to hospital for alcohol-related harm (Hibell *et al.*, 2004; The Information Centre, 2007). Although excessive drinking is a concern, alcohol use is considered 'normative' in some social contexts, and media attention has focused on young people who drink in excess of government guidelines. However, drinking rates vary by ethnicity, gender and age, and it cannot be assumed that reported changes in drinking rates reflect changes in drinking among all groups. In particular, less is known about if, or why, there is an increase in drinking among communities where alcohol use is not considered normative.

### Drinking and ethnicity

Certain groups have a history of lower drinking rates and/or lower recorded problems with alcohol misuse. Research from studies in the UK reveals that white British young people are more likely to drink than black or Asian young people, with Asian young people least likely to report drinking (Karlsen *et al.*, 1998; Denscombe and Drucquer, 2000; Best *et al.*, 2001; Erens and Laiho, 2001; Purser *et al.*, 2001; Stillwell *et al.*, 2004; Rodham *et al.*, 2005; Goddard, 2006). However, associations between ethnicity and alcohol consumption are often inconsistent, in part a reflection of changes in culture and attitude towards drinking, particularly amongst migrant groups (Pederson and Kolstad, 2000).

Some research has revealed evidence that the drinking patterns of minority ethnic young people in Britain are changing along with their white peers, and that young Asians are now drinking more than previous generations (Newburn and Shiner, 2001). In addition, there is evidence that the gender convergence in drinking rates seen in the general population may also apply to minority ethnic groups (Denscombe, 1995; Stillwell *et al.*, 2004; Rodham *et al.*, 2005; Williams *et al.*, 2007). Research has shown that people from ethnic minorities often change their behaviour over time when they adopt the norms and behaviours of their host country (Asbridge *et al.*, 2005). Ascertaining how young people adopt drinking attitudes and norms is an important aspect of identifying if, and why, young people from different ethnic groups use alcohol.

Recent studies suggest that associating with peers or friends from minority ethnic backgrounds is related to lower drinking rates. One study carried out in schools in Norway found that a high percentage of Muslim students among the student body was associated with lower rates of drinking among majority ethnic students and minority ethnic girls (Amundsen *et al.*, 2005). A study in the Netherlands found that a high percentage of minority ethnic students among the student body was associated with lower drinking rates among minority ethnic students (Monshouwer *et al.*, 2007). Research in the UK suggests that people from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to drink if they have friends from different backgrounds to their own. One study found that minority ethnic young people are more likely to drink if

they have friends outside their ethnic group and/or friends within their ethnic community who drink (Heim *et al.*, 2004). Women from minority ethnic backgrounds have also shown a greater likelihood of drinking if half, or fewer than half, of their friends are from their own ethnic group (Purser *et al.*, 2001).

People from minority ethnic backgrounds who have interethnic relationships are thought to acquire new behaviours more readily than those who associate mainly with people from their traditional culture (Landrine and Klonoff, 2004). However, the findings from Norway suggest that the influence can work both ways; minority ethnic young people may influence the drinking habits of the majority and vice versa (Amundsen *et al.*, 2005).

Increases in drinking among minority ethnic groups may be a cause for concern, as drinking problems amongst the members of the group who do drink tend to be higher (Purser *et al.*, 2001; Heim *et al.*, 2004). This is often a consequence of the fact that young people who are not socialised into drinking through the family or social settings are more likely to hide their drinking, and may face increased difficulty when attempting to access services (Heim *et al.*, 2004). If the drinking habits of minority ethnic young people are changing, the function of the peer group provides an important insight into how and why these changes are taking place.

## Drinking in peer groups

The above findings are consistent with research that points to the importance of peers in influencing young people's drinking habits. It is believed that peer influences on drinking and substance use predominate over other social factors during the adolescent years (Miller and Plant, 2003; Marsden *et al.*, 2005; Nash *et al.*, 2005; Williams *et al.*, 2007). Many studies reveal that peer drinking predicts individual drinking levels (Norton *et al.*, 1998; Boys *et al.*, 1999; Sieving *et al.*, 2000; Parry *et al.*, 2004; Bot *et al.*, 2005; Marsden *et al.*, 2005; Lundborg, 2006).

Similarities between an individual's drinking and his/her peer group are commonly attributed to social learning, in that an individual will develop similar drinking behaviours to the group by modelling behaviours within social contexts, or by adopting the social norms of the group. Studies indicate that young people who perceive that their peers drink a lot, and believe that their peers approve of drinking, are more likely to alter their own habits and attitudes accordingly (Borsari and Carey, 2001; Kawaguchi, 2004; Rodham *et al.*, 2005). When drinking behaviour is rewarded by social acceptance or peer encouragement, this reinforces the inclination to drink (Abrams and Niaura, 1987). One study found that young people placed considerable importance on alcohol use as a means of belonging to a social group, with far less emphasis placed on the effects of alcohol (Pavis *et al.*, 1997).

Although research has demonstrated that alcohol use and peer behaviour are correlated, the nature and direction of the relationship is harder to ascertain and often controversial (Boys *et al.*, 1999). Another explanation for the similarity between young people and their peers is peer selection. Peer selection posits that young people seek out and befriend those who have similar values and behaviours to their own (Lilja *et al.*, 2003). Changes in friendships may occur when attitudes and behaviours become dissimilar, and peer groups may prevent young people with different attitudes and behaviours from joining (Sieving *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore it cannot always be assumed that the subject's drinking is a consequence of social behaviour and not a cause, as there will be cases where the drinking of an individual influences the group (Bullers *et al.*, 2001).

The influence of the peer group has been shown to vary by ethnicity (Kawaguchi, 2004; Lundborg, 2006); gender (Abrams and Niaura, 1987; Norton *et al.*, 1998; Pavis *et al.*, 1998; Lundborg, 2006); and age (Norton *et al.*, 1998; Clark and Loheac, 2007). Although peer influence has been shown to vary according to the sociodemographics of the respondent, little is known about how peer group influence varies according to peer group characteristics, including the ethnicity of peers. In particular, there is a lack of consideration of how young people in a multicultural society experience interethnic contact within friendship groups, and the potential impact of this on drinking attitudes and behaviours. How young

people deal with conflicting social and cultural norms around alcohol use from peers and family requires further research. Borsari and Carey (2001: 418) argue that 'the underrepresentation of minorities is a consistent limitation in the norm literature ... such limited minority representation results in an inadequate understanding of ethnic differences in norm perception.' The behaviour of peers and the adoption of new cultural norms have been helpful in explaining ethnic differences in tobacco use (see Asbridge *et al.*, 2005), and are an important part of understanding changes in drinking behaviour. These theories underpin the focus of this research.

# 1 Research methods and sample

## Research objectives

This report explores associations between interethnic friendship groups and drinking attitudes and behaviours among young people. Specific research questions explore:

- the intra- or interethnic nature of young people's friendship groups, including preferences for friends from similar or different backgrounds;
- how drinking behaviour and attitudes to drinking among young people vary according to ethnicity, religion and gender;
- whether young people are more likely to drink if they have friends from different ethnicities;
- whether minority ethnic young people feel pressured to drink by associating with young people from other cultures, or if they actively seek out young people with attitudes similar to their own;
- how young people from different backgrounds deal with conflicting social norms and pressures.

## Methods and sample

Young people aged 14 and 15 years were recruited for the study, as after the age of 13 years young people are more likely to report that if, or when, they drink, they consume alcohol with friends rather than family (Fuller, 2009). The sampling method chosen was a comparative sample suitable for comparing ethnic groups. The research took place in London and Berkshire. Geographical locations and individual schools were chosen to maximise the numbers of minority ethnic young people in the sample and to ensure diversity.

The research was conducted in three stages over a twelve-month period between summer 2008 and spring 2009. Data was collected from Year 10 students by conducting focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in schools during personal, social and health education (PSHE) classes. Another school assisted with pilot studies. Young people who were no longer in mainstream schooling ('hard-to-reach' young people) were invited to participate in the questionnaires through a voluntary trust in East London. The numbers of young people recruited for each stage of the research process are outlined in Table 1.

## Focus groups

The aim of the focus group stage was to involve young people in the design of the questionnaire, by participating in discussions about alcohol, friendships and culture. The first part of the discussions posed a variety of questions around drinking behaviour and attitudes. The second part of the discussions involved using a diagram that represented possible influences on the formation of drinking cultures,

**Table 1: Total participation by data collection method**

	Location	Focus group participants	Questionnaire participants	Interview participants
School A	London	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 58)	No	No
School B	London	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 28)	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 248)	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 20)
School C	Berkshire	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 67)	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 174)	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 17)
School D	London	No	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 159)	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 9)
School E	London	No	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 107)	No
School F	London	No	Pilot only	No
Group G	London	No	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 2)	No
Group H	London	No	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 6)	No
Total participants		153	696	46

such as community, religion, culture, family and friends. The responses from the friendship groups were content analysed using NVivo.

A total of 27 focus groups with 153 participants took place. Group sessions lasted an average of 15 minutes and the mean number of young people per group was 5.7. Young people from a range of ethnic groups participated, including 53 young people who were white British and 100 young people from other ethnic backgrounds. More boys than girls were interviewed (59 per cent and 41 per cent respectively).

## Questionnaires

The questionnaire gathered information about young people's sociodemographic backgrounds, including ethnicity and religion; leisure time; self-esteem; relationships with parents; friends and relationships; alcohol – their own use and their friends' use; and tobacco and drug use.

All young people in Year 10 in participating schools and in the hard-to-reach groups were invited to complete the surveys. Participation was anonymous, but gave young people the option of providing their name if they wished to be interviewed at a later date. A total of 702 questionnaires were collected, and six of these were removed at the data entry stage because of inconsistencies in responses. The remaining 696 were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The schools selected for the study were all mixed-sex, non-faith schools, to avoid skewing the sample towards a particular gender, ethnic or religious group. However, the sample yielded a larger number of boys than girls (61 per cent and 39 per cent respectively, with 11 missing entries), possibly a consequence of a number of all-girls schools in one of the London boroughs. The majority of the young people were 14 years old (87 per cent), with 13 per cent aged 15 years. One young person reported being 16 years old and there were 62 missing entries on age.

Table 2 provides information on the ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status of respondents from the questionnaire data, including non-responses coded as missing entries.

For the purposes of analysis it was necessary to group some ethnicities together. Table A1 in Appendix 1 shows how ethnic groups were categorised. In some ethnic groups the proportion of males was higher than that of females, particularly in Asian ethnicities (see Table A2 in Appendix 1).

Owing to low numbers, some religious groups also had to be recategorised; Buddhists and Sikhs were recoded as Other religion, and Baptists were recoded as Other Christian. There were gender differences in religious affiliation (see Table A3 in Appendix 1). Girls were almost twice as likely as boys to report no religion, and a higher proportion of boys than girls were Muslim, reflecting the higher proportion of males from Asian ethnicities. Table A4 in Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of religious affiliation by ethnicity.

**Table 2: Profile of questionnaire respondents**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White British	146	21.7
Other white	66	9.8
White and black mixed	25	3.7
Other mixed	27	4.0
Indian	66	9.8
Pakistani	82	12.2
Bangladeshi	77	11.5
Other Asian	29	4.3
Black British	41	6.1
Black Caribbean	26	3.9
Black African	69	10.3
Other ethnicity	18	2.7
Total	672	100.0
Missing entries	24	
Total	696	
<i>Religion</i>		
Church of England	61	9.4
Catholic	59	9.0
Other Christian	110	16.9
Muslim	266	40.8
Hindu	32	4.9
No religion	93	14.3
Other religion	31	4.8
Total	652	100.0
Missing entries	44	
Total	696	
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>		
Working	382	79.4
Unemployed	60	12.5
Retired	23	4.8
Other	16	3.3
Total	481	100.0
Missing entries	215	
Total	696	

Although total percentages are given as 100.0, because of rounding, percentages may not add up to exactly 100.

Socioeconomic status was based on the occupation of the parent(s)/carer(s) of the respondent. A large number of young people (215) didn't answer the question on parent/carers employment, possibly because the question required a written response rather than completion of a tick box, and appeared towards the end of the questionnaire. Owing to the low response rate and the difficulties inherent in determining socioeconomic status from occupation alone, the household status of young people was categorised simply as parent(s)/carer(s) Working, Unemployed, Retired or Other (housewife/husband or student). Socioeconomic status was not found to vary significantly by gender or ethnicity.

## Interviews

A subgroup of interviewees were selected from the questionnaires by the research team to reflect a balance across gender, ethnicity and alcohol consumption. Young people from intra- and interethnic friendship groups were chosen. Research staff interviewed a total of 46 young people and interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. Participants comprised 24 males and 22 females. Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds were over-selected in accordance with the aims of the research, with 34 young people coming from non-white British backgrounds.

Interviews were used to explore how individuals perceive and encounter different cultural attitudes to alcohol, particularly within their friendship groups. The semi-structured interview schedule focused on links between friendship groups and drinking behaviour, and was divided up into open-ended questions and vignettes. The vignettes described hypothetical scenarios which aimed to solicit young people's views and opinions on peer influence and pressure, different cultural attitudes towards drinking, and heavy alcohol use. Content analysis was conducted using NVivo.

Ethical approval for the project and limitations of the data collection process are outlined in more detail in Appendix 1.

### Definition of terms

#### *Friends and peers*

Research studies vary in how they define a young person's 'peers'; studies may cite people from the local neighbourhood, school, class, or named individuals as the peer group (Norton *et al.*, 1998; Lundborg, 2006). Some definitions may reflect young people's close friends, whereas others indicate a wider reference group. Within this study, we asked young people to think about the group of friends they like to spend the most time with, when answering questions on friendships in the questionnaire. This is the definition of 'friends' used in the body of the report. However, it should be noted that, during qualitative data collection, young people did sometimes use the term to refer to their wider group of friends, or described different friendship groups.

#### *Ethnicity*

Data on young people's ethnicity was collected from young people during the focus groups and questionnaire stages. Each young person selected their own ethnicity from a list of 22 ethnic groups. There was also room for adding another ethnic group, so young people were free to describe their own ethnicity if none of the options was suitable.

Where possible, quotations from young people include information on the gender and ethnicity (or religion if applicable) of the respondent, as differences and commonalities between ethnic groups are the focus of the research. However, it was not possible to ascertain the ethnicity

of quoted individuals from the focus groups. If young people identified themselves during focus group discussions in terms of their religion or ethnicity this information has been included with each quotation in the report. Otherwise, only the gender of the young person is noted. Quotations from the interviews include both the gender and the ethnicity of the respondent. At times, quotations from young people have been smoothed out where possible to make them more readable without loss of content or context.

## Structure of the report

Chapters 2–4 outline the findings from the research. Chapter 2 explores interethnic friendships and describes young people’s friendship groups. Chapter 3 looks at whether young people have ever drunk and their drinking patterns, as well as the drinking cultures and attitudes described by young people from different ethnic and religious groups. Chapter 4 examines whether there is any association between drinking patterns and a range of variables, including background and friendship group variables. Chapter 5 brings together these findings to draw conclusions and consider the implications for policy-makers.

## 2 Birds of a feather or opposites attract? Intra- and interethnic friendship groups

This chapter looks at the intra- and interethnic nature of young people's friendship groups. Young people explain the opportunities and limitations placed on them in terms of forming interethnic friendships, and describe the diversity of their friendship groups. Whether young people express preferences for intra- or interethnic friendships is explored, and the perceived advantages of having friends from different, or from similar, cultural backgrounds are discussed. Quantitative and qualitative data are drawn on to look at the ethnic mix of young people's friendship groups.

### Opportunities for interethnic friendship formation

Britain is a multicultural society, with a growing minority ethnic population. From the 2001 Census the size of the minority ethnic population in Britain was estimated at 7.9 per cent or 4.6 million, an increase of 53 per cent since 1991 (Office for National Statistics, 2001).<sup>1</sup> Since 2001, the proportion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds has continued to increase in all regions of England. For example, the minority ethnic population, including white minorities, increased from 40.2 per cent to 42.3 per cent in London in the period 2001–7, and from 9.4 per cent to 12.8 per cent in the South East over the same time period. Some increases in the minority ethnic population are a consequence of migration, with notable increases in people migrating from Accession 8 countries<sup>2</sup> since the expansion of the European Union in 2004. London and the South East receive the highest proportions of migrants to the UK; in 2008, 28 per cent of migrants chose to live in London and 15 per cent chose to live in the South East (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

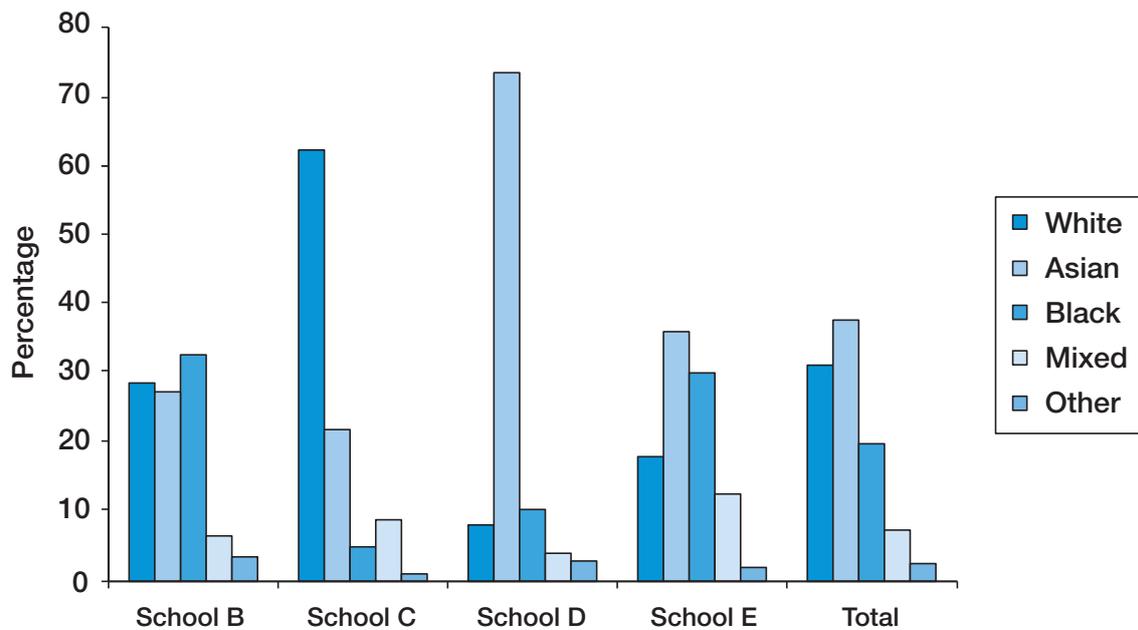
Being able to establish interethnic friendships depends on the availability of potential friends from other ethnic groups. Attending a school with an ethnic mix of students and living in diverse neighbourhoods increases opportunities for mixing with friends from other backgrounds. For example, the questionnaire from the current study showed that 84 per cent of young people report having friends in their class or school year. Over half (57 per cent) of young people say that they have made friends in their neighbourhood, with 48 per cent also having friends from old neighbourhoods.

Consequently, schools with an ethnically diverse student body, situated within ethnically diverse locations, were appropriate sites for the current research. For example, one of the boroughs in London has one of the highest proportions of Asian populations in England and Wales and one of the highest proportions of black Africans in England and Wales.

Owing to schools with high numbers of ethnic minorities being selected, the overall proportion of minority ethnic young people in the sample is in fact greater than the proportion found in the local London and Berkshire populations. However, the composition of the schools varied considerably in terms of the proportions of students from different ethnic groups (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows that School D has a large Asian student population, whereas School C has a relatively large white student population. Ethnic diversity in the school population and local geographical area has implications for the pool of available friends from different ethnic backgrounds for young people to select from. This was reflected in the comments from some young people during interviews and focus groups. A few young people argued that there is a lack of diversity in their local area and school and that this reduces opportunities for forming interethnic friendships. One girl from School D said:

**Figure 1: Ethnic diversity by school**



*I would like to make friends with other people from another background because I'm interested in that kind of thing but the – well, we don't have, it's not very diverse here, it's just mainly Asians and I don't – we don't have any other people from other backgrounds, in our class so that's why I don't really – I don't have any friendships ... In my primary school we had – it was very, very diverse so we had – I did have like white friends and that, and black and stuff like that and ... I think in nursery I had – my best friend was like a – this black boy but then he had to move away, about a year – a year later or something like that.*

Female, Bangladeshi

One boy described how his friends are mostly from the same religion, but this is a consequence of the religious groups in the area rather than a personal choice:

*My close friends are mostly Muslims, but I do not like pick friends from religions or something ... It's mostly because they're, they go around with us like and they live around my area and stuff so I come to school with them.*

Male, Kurdish

Conversely, another boy, also from School D, explained how he was less able to make friends from the same religion as his local area did not provide such opportunities:

*Most of my friends they are mostly Muslims, some are Christians, in this area I'd say there's not that many Hindu people I suppose and in the school as I say it's mostly Muslim or Christian people. There are some Hindu friends, but they live in other areas.*

Male, Hindu

These comments reveal how opportunities for interethnic interaction for some ethnic groups are reduced in schools with less diversity. Research evidence shows that diverse schools are associated with increased odds of interethnic friendships among the student body (Johnson *et al.*, 2001, in Van Houtte and Stevens, 2009; Moody, 2001; Fischer, 2008), and lack of diversity will have the counter effect. Homogeneous friendship groups may actually reflect a lack of availability, or the perception of a lack of availability of friends from other backgrounds, and may not reflect preferences for similar friends. Lack of

contact with people from other ethnicities can also have lasting effects on friendship formation; research has shown that college students with more experience of prior interracial contact form heterogeneous relationships at college more readily (Fischer, 2008).

Despite this, all the young people attended schools with students from a range of backgrounds, and some minority ethnic young people spoke during interviews and discussions about how diversity in the UK contrasts with their own country of origin, offering opportunities for mixing with people from other ethnic groups:

*I think living in this country, it gives us a better view of the world, like different cultures and how they work and I think if I, if I lived in India, then I wouldn't really know about it because like, they've only like, only one religion and one culture, one, one way of living.*

Female, Indian

*Sometimes I go to my country so there aren't that many people there but here all the people are from different cultures so, yeah, they're mixed. Here there's English, there's Black, there's Indians, Romanians, Albanians.*

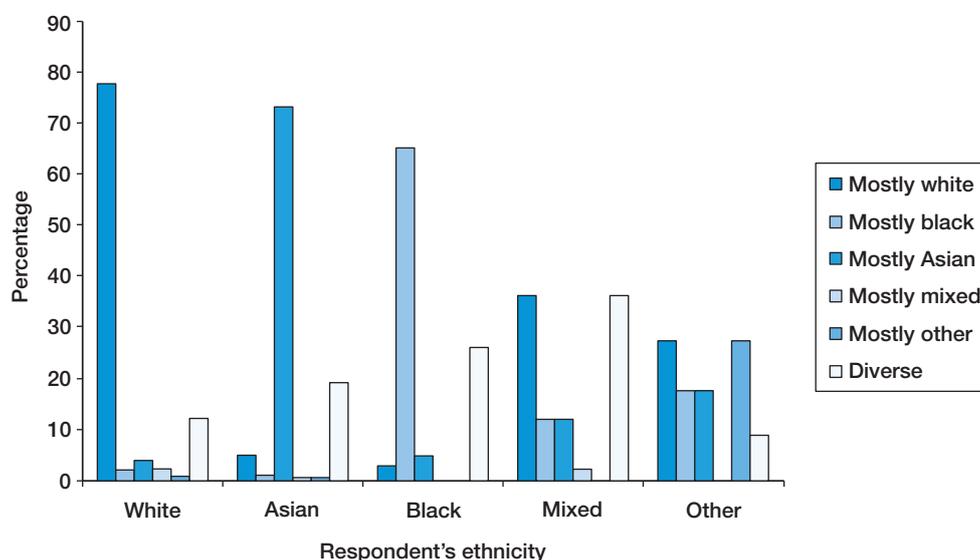
Female, Romanian

## Who has interethnic friendships?

To collect data on the ethnicity of young people's friends, young people were asked in the questionnaire to write down the ethnicity of up to five of their closest friends. When thinking of their friends, young people were asked to think about the friends they spend the most time with. The ethnicity of respondents' friends was categorised broadly into five groups: White, Asian, Black, Mixed ethnicity and Other ethnicity. Friendship groups with more than 50 per cent of friends from a particular ethnicity were then coded as mostly that ethnicity, for example Mostly white or Mostly black. Friendship groups without a majority ethnicity were coded as Diverse. See Appendix 2 for further details on how interethnic friendships were recorded and coded.

Figure 2 shows the different types of friendship groups by ethnicity, from the questionnaire data (also see Table A5 in Appendix 2). Generally, young people are likely to report having a majority of friends from a similar ethnic background to their own. For example, an average of 78 per cent of white young people's friendship groups are mostly white, and 74 per cent of Asian young people's friendship groups

**Figure 2: Ethnic mix of friendship groups by ethnicity**



are mostly Asian. Conversely, young people of mixed ethnicity are equally likely to report having mostly white or diverse friendship groups (although this may be related to the lower prevalence of mixed ethnicity young people in the local area).

Although these results reveal a degree of ethnic homogeneity in friendship groups, most young people do have interethnic friendships. For example, 68 per cent of white young people, 69 per cent of Asian young people, 83 per cent of black young people, 100 per cent of mixed ethnicity young people, and 82 per cent of young people from other ethnic backgrounds have at least one friend from a different ethnic background from their own. As young people chose only up to five friends, their larger friendship groups may be more or less diverse than captured by the data.

Previous research studies also indicate what is called 'homophily bias'; a preference for friends and interactions with those who are similar. Although the numbers of people reporting friendships with people from different ethnic backgrounds has risen as racial integration in multicultural societies has increased (see Smith, 2002), friendships groups still tend to be more homogeneous than the surrounding environment from which they are selected (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001, in Fischer, 2008). Studies from the US have found that, controlling for availability, black students show strong in-group bias (Fischer, 2008), and white boys are likely to have higher numbers of friends from the same ethnicity (Aboud *et al.*, 2003). Research has also shown that minority ethnic young people have more diverse friendship groups, but when availability is controlled for they actually show stronger in-group preferences (Van Houtte and Stevens, 2009; Vermeij *et al.*, 2009). Research is therefore inconclusive in terms of which ethnic groups may express stronger in-group preferences, and preferences are likely to be related to a number of other factors, including socioeconomic status, education and employment opportunities.

Data from the current study showed that higher proportions of young people from the more diverse schools reported having at least one friend from a different ethnic background; 84 per cent and 77 per cent of young people from Schools B and E respectively have at least one friend from a different ethnic background, compared with 70 per cent and 60 per cent respectively from Schools D and C (see Figure 1 for school diversity). Given that many young people make their friends primarily in school this suggests that ethnic diversity in schools increases the chances of having interethnic friendships. Despite this, the current study does not control for the availability of friends from different ethnicities as the project focuses on the friends young people spend the most time with. This could include friends made over the internet, and could therefore even include friends from other countries. Indeed, many young people spoke about interacting with friends through Facebook and MSN, and one girl described how her friends were people she talked to online from Thailand, her place of origin. Consequently, the definition of friendship attempted to capture friendships that may be outside a young person's school or neighbourhood. It is therefore not possible to say from the questionnaire data whether any ethnic groups showed stronger in-group preferences than other groups, as the degree to which young people actively seek friends from outside their immediate environment is not measured. Preferences for intra-ethnic or interethnic friendships are instead explored through the interviews and discussions.

In the interviews young people from both sexes and a range of ethnic groups described how their friendship groups are mixed according to ethnicity: 'Well I have got like, mixed race friends and white friends and Asian friends, everyone, and like, yeah I've got loads, all different ethnicities and stuff' (Female, white British). Young people also spoke about religious diversity in their friendship groups: 'I know people who are Sikhs, Buddhists, Jehovahs, Muslims' (Male, Sri Lankan).

Some young people in the interviews reported spending time mostly with those who are from a similar ethnicity to themselves. These comments came from people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, mostly males. The following quotations are from young people describing the mainly homogeneous nature of their friendship group: 'Mainly white English' (Male, white British); 'We like hang out together because we are Polish and we like – stay together' (Male, Polish); 'Most are, mostly Asian, but I've got a

couple of white friends and black friends' (Male, Pakistani); 'Black Caribbean, Black African. I have some white friends, some' (Male, black Caribbean).

Although these comments came mainly from males, the questionnaire data revealed that boys and girls were equally likely to have interethnic friendships, with 71 per cent of boys and 77 per cent of girls having at least one friend from a different ethnic background. This contrasts with previous studies which have found that females are less likely to report having interethnic friendships than males (Fischer, 2008).

While this report focuses on the ethnic diversity of friendship groups, the authors recognise that for some young people, religious, cultural or familial differences may be more salient. During interviews and discussions, young people spoke about how they saw diversity in their friendship groups. One boy described how his friends were from lots of different countries, but they were mainly Muslim, like him: 'My close friends are mostly Muslims. But not the same country ... [They are from] Asia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, African, Nigeria, Ghana' (Male, Kurdish).

By contrast, a Bangladeshi girl described having friends mostly from the same ethnic background, but from different religions and with different family backgrounds:

*Well, most of us are mainly from Asian backgrounds. Yeah, all of us are from Asian backgrounds, I don't have any black or white friends. There's a mixture of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs among our group, but, even – we have similar, upgrowing [sic] – upbringings, but not the same 'cos it's like some of my friends they'll probably come from more strict background but with me I'm pretty just – my family let me just do whatever I want really.*

Female, Bangladeshi

These quotations show how young people's perceptions of being 'different' from or 'similar' to their friends can vary according to what is important to young people and where they perceive that differences and similarities in cultures arise. These differences include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, religion and family.

## Do young people prefer intra-ethnic or interethnic friendships?

The interethnicity of friendship groups is a consequence of both mixing opportunities and personal preference (Moody, 2001). Research has shown that people who have positive attitudes to other cultures may form interethnic friendships more readily, whereas those with prejudices and biases towards other ethnic groups will avoid interethnic contact (Fischer, 2008). Social researchers have described 'social discrimination' as the tendency to prefer intra-ethnic relationships over interethnic ones given the availability of potential relationships (Vermeij *et al.*, 2009). However, although quantitative data may indicate in- or out-group preferences, there is little available research to tell us how young people perceive diversity, and whether they openly express a preference for friendships with others from similar or different backgrounds. As with quantitative research, qualitative research on interethnic relationships runs the risk of respondents wishing to present themselves in the most favourable and socially acceptable light (Halualani, 2008). This risk is perhaps even more pertinent when data is collected face to face and young people may wish to avoid appearing racist or discriminatory in front of an interviewer.

Bearing in mind these limitations, the current study aimed to gain a sense of the salience of ethnicity in young people's friendship choices. The interviews explored how young people describe and perceive the diversity of their friendship groups, and whether they express a preference for friends who are similar. Over half of young people in interviews argued that it does not matter whether friends are from similar or different backgrounds. For those who did express a preference, roughly the same numbers of young people felt that having friends from different backgrounds is a good thing as that it is better to have friends from similar backgrounds to one's own. Young people from different ethnic backgrounds also differed in how they spoke about diversity. Minority ethnic young people appeared more aware of

differences, and often spoke about the benefits or drawbacks of diversity. White British young people, on the other hand, were more likely to say that they don't mind about the ethnic and religious backgrounds of their friends.

For some young people having friends from different backgrounds gives them insight into different perspectives and opinions, and is a means of learning about other cultures: 'It's always good to have a mix of friends like from different backgrounds, so like, you can like communicate well with other people from other cultures and stuff' (Male, Pakistani). Some young people explained how being friends with young people from different backgrounds and religions enables them to find commonalities and how differences can help connect people:

*If you think about it all religions have some connection in a way, there's something that you learn from a different person that their religion says this, and then you say 'oh, our religion says that', and so, so it's kind of the same. I think that connects us even more and it makes us kind of want to find out more new things, so yes, it's really interesting.*

Female, Bangladeshi

*I think it's quite good 'cos then they have different points of view, because they're from different places they have different views in their head, and differences sometimes they bring people closer together other than just similarities.*

Male, Bangladeshi

One minority ethnic boy explained how having English friends means that they are able to help him with things: 'They're English, you know – they help me and everything and that's how I make my friends' (Male, Sri Lankan).

Some young people spoke about how having friends who think or behave differently helps them to perceive things differently. One girl explained how her white friend approaches problems differently from people from her own culture, and that she benefits from the advice that she is able to offer her:

*I like the way they've got different views about things because like where Asian people, like, arrange marriages and all of that ... stuff, they think differently and like, the white – my white friend would give me advice like 'Oh you could call Childline', like, I wouldn't even think of like stuff like that, like, to call Childline or whatever. I like the advice that she gives because ... our family I'm not saying they're not educated but they don't think properly ... and I don't like the way they think to be honest with you.*

Female, Indian

The perceived benefits of interethnic friendships here echo findings from other research studies that draw on contact theory (see Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Contact theory argues that contact with members of other ethnic groups will lead to a reduction in prejudice, a more positive attitude towards other groups, and an increased willingness to establish friendships with members of other ethnic groups (Vermeij *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, research has shown that having a close interethnic friend is associated with a reduction in bias (Aboud *et al.*, 2003).

Some young people felt that having similar backgrounds to their friends is a good thing. For example, sharing similar religious beliefs can mean that friends will be able to help and advise. One boy said that sharing a religious background with his friends was important to him: 'I mean, like if I'm struggling like spiritually kind of thing, 'cos obviously my friends can help or you can just go to your pastor and stuff' (Male, Black British). Other young people felt that similar backgrounds helped friends to understand them and be there for them: 'Because they are from the same country as me, I can talk to

them about anything, 'cos like we've both got the same situation' (Female, white and Asian). Another boy explained how sharing a similar background with his friends offers protection:

*If you have friends that are black but the same background as you, it's more likely that they will protect you if there's a fight or some things that happen. That's why I wouldn't want to be with people who aren't from my background. But I do have like white friends, Asian friends, but mostly my friends are black.*

Male, Black Caribbean

Similarities were sometimes seen as a means of avoiding arguments and disagreements arising from having different views. One girl described having different views from those of her Muslim friends:

*You kind of argue a lot about religion and stuff but that's the downfall of having friends with different religion. [Interviewer: Does that put you off?] Sometimes but I don't mind because, you know, she's her, I'm me, we have different beliefs.*

Female, Romanian

Similarly a boy explained why it was important to him to have similar religious views to his friends:

*Because then you can also see the same views, like there might be conflict between you as friends because one person can say one thing and then the next person can say 'no I don't believe in that, what you're saying is wrong' and then you tend to have arguments about the whole situation and then the friendship will just break down just because of the fact we've had arguments. So therefore I think it's best if we stick to the same views and have the same opinions.*

Male, Black Caribbean

Overall, however, the consensus among young people tended to be that the ethnic and religious backgrounds of friends are not the most important considerations when forming friendships. Even young people who said that they enjoy having friends from different ethnicities felt that, at the end of the day, it is personality and character that matter, not a person's background. One boy summed up many young people's views by saying: 'To me, culture, race doesn't matter about friendship, friends are just friends' (Male, Bangladeshi). Similarly, a girl explained:

*I have loads of like Christian friends, Hindu friends, Islamic friends, there are loads of different friends. We just enjoy, I guess it's just the company we enjoy, we don't judge anyone for who they are, or what they believe in, it's just enjoy you know, if your personality's nice, then we get along with you, so it's great.*

Female, Bangladeshi

More generally, young people from the interviews and focus groups spoke about the importance of enjoying similar activities with friends even though friends may have different backgrounds and cultures: 'I think somehow friends are friends because they, well most friends are friends because they do like the same things' (Male, White British). This includes being able to spend time with others who like what they like: 'They enjoy the same things as me so like you can do it together and just that basically, that they're not the same, because you can't be the same, but they like what I like doing' (Male, white and black Caribbean); and 'I like the fact that everyone's different in their own way but we can relate to the same things' (Female, Indian).

For some young people, culture and religion are not something that they reflect on, as spending time together is more important. One young person explained: 'We don't really talk about each other's

cultures that much, we just go out and have fun and play football and that' (Male, Pakistani). These comments point to the importance of sharing interests when establishing and maintaining friendships. Other research on interethnic friendships has also shown the importance of sharing interests; one study found that young people were much more likely to nominate a same-race friend than a cross-race friend, but, when factors such as belonging to the same clubs and having similar behaviours were controlled for, the odds decreased (Moody, 2001).

## Summary

Being able to form interethnic friendships depends on both availability and personal preference. Young people were asked to describe the ethnic mix of their friendship groups in a questionnaire and in interviews. Questionnaire data showed that friendship groups were homogeneous by ethnicity insofar as young people reported a higher percentage of friends from their own ethnic background; however, two-thirds of young people have at least one friend from a different ethnic background from their own. Young people from more diverse schools were more likely to report having an interethnic friendship.

In interviews, the majority of young people reported that they 'don't mind' what background their friends come from. White British young people in particular were less likely to reflect on the importance of culture within friendships and were more likely to say that they do not mind about the ethnic and religious backgrounds of their friends. Young people who felt that diversity is a good thing in friendships tended to speak positively about the opportunities interethnic friendships create for improving communication between ethnic groups and learning about other cultures. Young people who prefer friendships with people from their own ethnic group tended to frame their reasons in terms of solidarity and support rather than actively avoiding contact with other ethnic groups. However, most young people said that background, ethnicity and religion are not primary considerations when forming friendships, as sharing interests and hobbies are more important.

### 3 Drinking patterns among young people

This chapter is concerned with how alcohol consumption varies by ethnicity, religion and gender among the young people in our sample. Quantitative data from the questionnaire sample explores the numbers of young people who have ever drunk, and investigates the drinking patterns of drinkers in terms of frequent, recent, heavy and binge drinking. Qualitative data is drawn on to shed light on responses from the questionnaire, and to look at how young people perceive cultural differences in drinking habits and attitudes.

#### Measuring alcohol use

The questionnaire examined whether young people have ever had an alcoholic drink,<sup>3</sup> and if so, what their drinking patterns were. Table 3 shows how variables from the questionnaire were measured and coded.

These questions were answered using simple cross-tabulations that look at whether two variables (e.g. ethnicity and having ever drunk) are related to one another. We conclude that variables are significantly related if there is a probability of 5 per cent or less that the observed relationship has occurred by chance (see Methods in Appendix 3).

Analysis of questionnaire data on drinking behaviours was confined to the young people in the sample who have consumed alcohol and who currently drink. Having five or more drinks in one session exceeds government guidelines for safe consumption for both adult males and females, and how often young people do this was used as an indication of heavy/binge drinking for the current study. This

**Table 3: How drinking behaviour was measured and coded**

Question	Response	Description
Ever drunk – Have you ever had an alcoholic drink?	No	
	Yes	
<i>Frequent</i> – How often do you have an alcoholic drink?	Weekly	Drinks at least once a week
	Monthly	Drinks at least once a month
	Occasionally	Drinks only on special occasions/only had 1 or 2 drinks in lifetime
<i>Recent</i> – When was the last time you had an alcoholic drink?	Last week	Drank in last week
	Last month	Drank in last month
	Month+ ago	Last drank more than a month ago
<i>Heavy</i> – On a day when you are drinking alcohol, on average how many drinks do you have?	Light	Consumes 1 or 2 drinks on average
	Moderate	Consumes 3 or 4 drinks on average
	Heavy	Consumes 5 or more drinks on average
<i>Binge</i> – How often would you have more than five drinks on one occasion?	Monthly	Binges at least once a month
	Occasionally	Binges on special occasions/a few times a year
	Never	Never binge drinks

definition has been used in other pieces of research, including the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) surveys (Hibell *et al.*, 2004).

## The whole sample

Figure 3 shows the proportions of young people who have ever had a drink, and drinking patterns among those who have consumed alcohol.

Compared with recent research among secondary school pupils in England (see Fuller, 2009), recent drinking rates from our questionnaire are similar, but rates of having ever drunk, frequent and heavy drinking are lower than those found in the English survey. Differences are particularly noticeable for the numbers of young people in the current study who have never consumed alcohol. Fuller found that 70 per cent of young people aged 14 years have had an alcoholic drink, rising to 81 per cent of 15-year-olds, compared with 48 per cent of the 14- and 15-year-olds in our questionnaire.

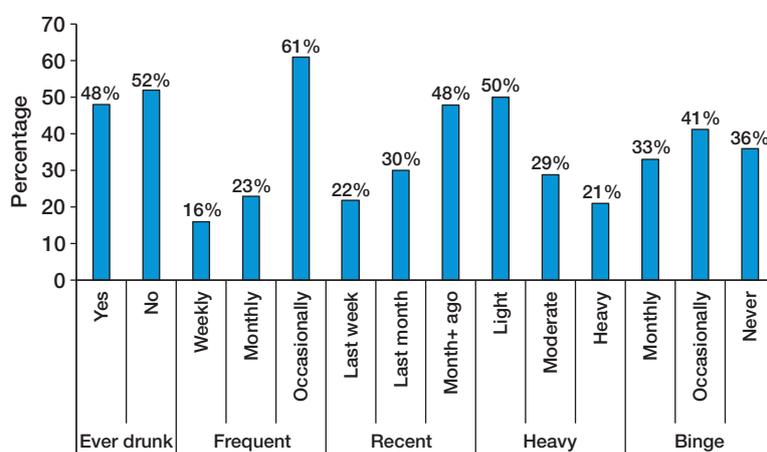
The relatively high abstinence rates are largely a consequence of the high numbers of minority ethnic young people in the sample, with low rates of reported alcohol use amongst some ethnic and religious groups.

## Drinking by ethnicity

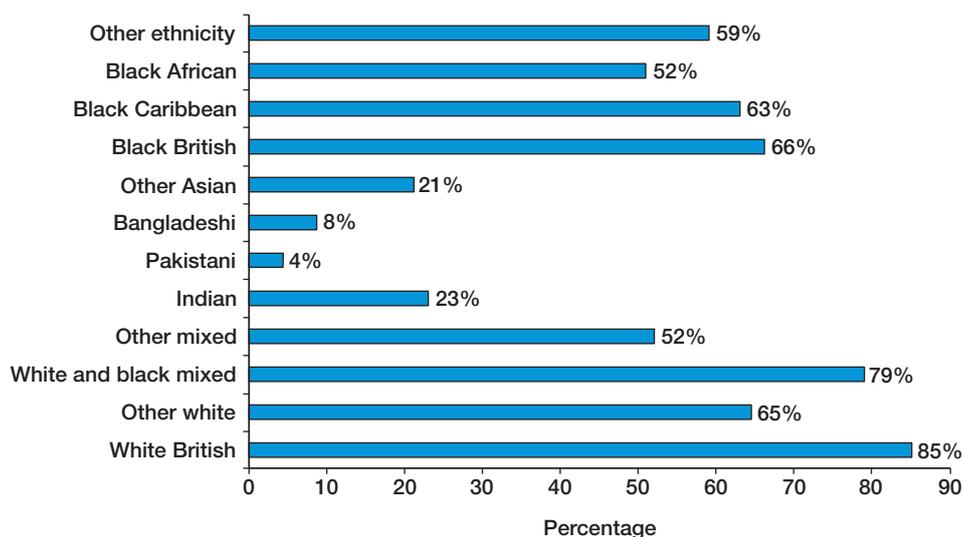
Figure 4 shows the proportions of young people who have drunk alcohol broken down by ethnicity (also see Table A6 in Appendix 3). Analysis showed that differences were statistically significant, with white British young people most likely to report drinking, followed by white and black mixed ethnicity young people. Young people from Asian backgrounds were least likely to have consumed alcohol, with the lowest rates found among Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people. These results are consistent with findings from other research, with low rates among those from Asian ethnic groups and higher rates among people from white ethnicities (Karlsen *et al.*, 1998; Denscombe and Drucquer, 2000; Best *et al.*, 2001; Erens and Laiho, 2001; Rodham *et al.*, 2005; Goddard, 2006).

Owing to low numbers of young people who report drinking from some ethnic groups, ethnicity was recategorised into broader ethnic categories in order to look at drinking patterns. This is because low numbers can make the results of statistical tests unreliable. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other Asian participants have the lowest drinking rates and were combined into an 'Asian' category. White and black mixed ethnicity and other mixed were combined to create the category 'Mixed ethnicity'. Black British, black Caribbean and black African young people were categorised as 'Black', and white British and other white young people were combined into a 'White' category.

**Figure 3: Drinking among young people**



**Figure 4: Having ever drunk alcohol, by ethnicity**



For full results see Table A7 in Appendix 3. Analysis showed the following:

- *Frequent drinking*: Differences were significant, with white young people more likely to drink weekly than other ethnic groups, and black and other ethnicity young people less likely to drink on a weekly basis.
- *Recent drinking*: Differences were not significant, though white and mixed ethnicity young people were more likely than other ethnic groups to have had a drink in the last week.
- *Heavy drinking*: Differences were not significant, though Asian young people were most likely to be light drinkers, with black young people most likely to be heavy drinkers.
- *Binge drinking*: Differences were significant, with black young people more likely than other ethnic groups to say they never binge drink, and mixed ethnicity young people least likely to never binge. White and mixed ethnicity young people were more likely to binge on a monthly basis.

Overall, white young people were most likely to drink frequently and binge drink on a monthly basis. However, high rates of recent, heavy and binge drinking were also found among young people from mixed ethnic backgrounds, and black young people were most likely to drink heavily. Although findings are similar to those found in other research, differences between the ethnic groups are not as marked as some studies where white people tend to drink significantly more than other ethnic groups (see Karlsen *et al.*, 1998; Best *et al.*, 2001; Rodham *et al.*, 2005; The Information Centre, 2007).

### Qualitative findings on ethnicity and drinking

Differences in drinking patterns between ethnic groups were also reflected in comments from the focus group discussions and interviews. Comments revealed that young people perceive different norms around alcohol use for different ethnic groups. One norm described by young people was the white British drinking culture. A black boy from the focus groups described his impression of drinking in Britain:

*People in Britain are like, I don't know who, but somehow in Britain there's like a culture of drinking, like if you come to Britain you can just assume to walk around finding crushed bottles of alcohol or ... walking around, it's just, you expect it.*

Male, black

An Indian boy told his interviewer:

*It's mostly Asian people that are actually against alcohol, most of the Asian people because of their beliefs and morals, but I think mainly from this country, mainly white people drink alcohol and it's their culture, and in the pub, they go every Saturday, I know.*

Male, Indian

Another boy claimed: 'How can I put it, white people, they do drink a lot' (Male).

Sometimes stereotypes were also applied to other white ethnic groups, such as Russian people: 'Like, I know a lot of Russians that – well, d'you know a Russian that don't drink?' (Male).

Drinking and drinking to excess was not viewed as something only white people do, however. Some minority ethnic young people described the role of alcohol in their culture. One girl who described herself as African in the focus groups said that alcohol is very much part of social life in her culture, and therefore difficult to avoid:

*Like, at a party there's always alcohol, like where I'm African, like every African party I go to there's always alcohol and that, 'cos my mum's not there, 'cos my mum don't like parties and that, when I go with my friends and my aunties, I do, I drink 'cos it's there.*

Female, black African

Similarly, an Indian girl described how alcohol is part of social life among adults in her home country. She reported that her relatives occasionally consume large amounts of alcohol as part of how they celebrate when they see their family:

*Particularly where I come from people get drunk. They will go out and get drunk and that's, that's their way of having fun ... But it's not something that they always do, it's just like, once in a while, cause obviously when they go to India, and they will see each other and like, because they've got family there they will celebrate that way when they're with them, because they hardly see them, that's why.*

Female, Indian

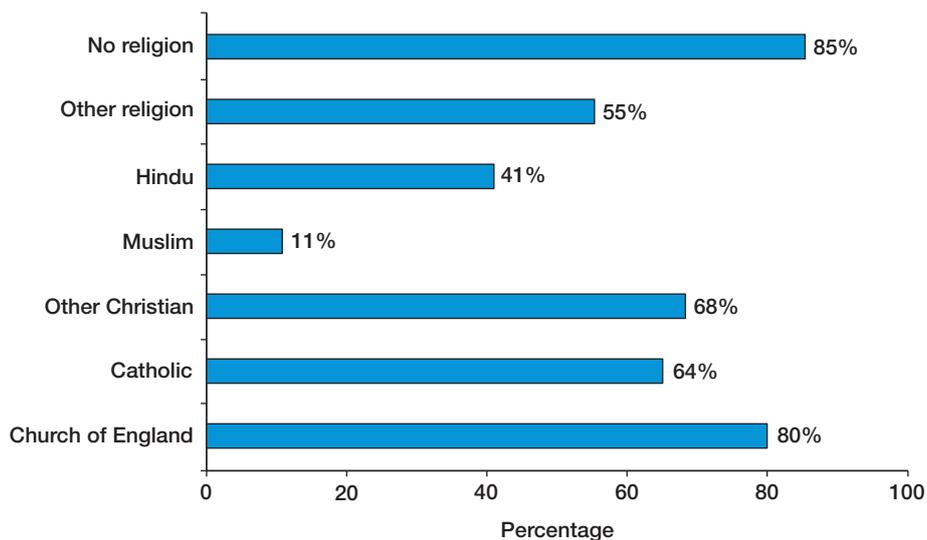
## Drinking by religion

Figure 5 shows differences in having ever drunk by religion (also see Table A8 in Appendix 3). Analysis showed that differences were statistically significant, with people with no religion most likely to report drinking, followed by Church of England young people. Muslim young people were least likely to drink. The findings in our study are consistent with other research which finds high rates of abstinence among young people from Asian religions, particularly Islam (Denscombe and Drucquer, 2000; Heim *et al.*, 2004; Bradby and Williams, 2006).

Owing to low numbers of young people from the Hindu religion who have drunk, they were combined with 'Other religions' in order to explore drinking patterns. Differences in drinking behaviour by religion were not significant except for binge drinking (see Table A7 in Appendix 3). Analysis showed that among drinkers:

- *Frequent drinking*: Differences were not significant, though Muslim young people and those with no religion were most likely to drink weekly.
- *Recent drinking*: Differences were not significant, though Muslim young people were the group most likely to have drunk in the last week.

**Figure 5: Having ever drunk alcohol, by religion**



- *Heavy drinking*: Differences were not significant, though Muslim respondents were most likely to report heavy drinking.
- *Binge drinking*: Differences were significant, with young people with no religion and Muslim young people more likely to binge on a monthly basis.

Results therefore show very low rates of Muslims reporting that they have ever drunk, though with comparatively higher rates of use among those Muslims who do drink alcohol than in other religious groups. The questionnaire findings support previous research which has also found that Muslim drinkers tend to drink more heavily than other religious groups (Cochrane and Bal, 1990; Heim *et al.*, 2004). Overall, the drinking habits of Muslim drinkers in our survey resembled those of young drinkers with no religion more closely than those of other religious young people.

### Qualitative findings on religion and drinking

Young people who were interviewed commonly considered people with no religion to be most at risk of drinking: 'I think it's people who are more, they're more atheist then they'll drink more than people with religion' (Female, white British). Among religious groups there was a general perception that people from Asian religions, particularly Muslims, don't drink, in contrast with other religions. One girl said:

*I think Muslims and – is it Hindus? – well like the kind of Asian religions, they're like, they're like – the kids do stick to their religion, even the parents, whereas like ... all the kids from Christianity, like me, everyone smokes, drinks, and does bad stuff.*

Female, Christian

Many of the comments from young people during interviews and focus groups focused on the links between Islam and alcohol use. This is perhaps a consequence of both the number of Muslim respondents in the sample and the fact that young people were aware of the prohibition of alcohol use in Islam, with non-Muslim young people also talking about attitudes to alcohol among their Muslim friends. Links between other Asian religions and alcohol use were rarely mentioned, although drinking was described among people of Sikh origin: 'Sikh people go to pubs and everything, socialise' (Female, Indian). Christian young people were also less likely than Muslims to talk about how religion has influenced their views on alcohol. The following comments explore the links that young people made between being of Muslim and Christian faith and drinking.

## Muslims

For many Muslim young people religion was an important influence on their decision to not drink alcohol at all. One boy said: 'It's against religion because we can't drink alcohol and smoke, 'cos we are Muslim' (Male, Muslim). A Muslim girl explained her religion's views on alcohol:

*Well it's against my religion to have alcohol, 'cos it tends to make you something you are not, and then we kind of believe that if that's against my religion, I won't want to do it. So that's why I don't have it.*

Female, Bangladeshi

Very few young Muslims in the interviews and focus groups reported drinking alcohol. A black British girl explained how being Muslim meant that her family would drink lightly, but would still consume alcohol. She revealed: 'Because we're Muslims like we don't drink often, we only drink ... only a tiny bit in a cup like that [indicates a small amount], but we don't drink like every occasion' (Female, black British). Ethnic differences in the practice of religion are apparent: young Asian Muslims always spoke of drinking being strictly against their religion, and only 4 per cent of Asian Muslims in the questionnaire reported that they have drunk alcohol compared with 35 per cent of black Muslims.

One boy during the focus groups said that he and his friends drink, but this is not something that is discussed: 'Yeah, my friends drink, but it's not really something you talk about privately, but we all know we drink, but we don't need to talk about it. It's not part of our religion' (Male, Muslim). This suggests that some young Muslims may not talk about their alcohol use, or in some cases they may even hide it. One minority ethnic girl admitted to being unsure about whether people from her culture and religion drink, because if they do, then it is not discussed. Such uncertainty can lead to confusion about alcohol and whether its use is permitted:

*Well, I don't know if anyone drinks, well, I don't know if they drink, but they don't actually show that. I think they're embarrassed, they say that you're not meant to drink, but I don't know really if they believe that, so to be honest there's two sides, they do drink and they say they don't drink, so, you're really confused.*

Female, Muslim

In some cases underreporting can happen when certain behaviours are prohibited, and, in communities where alcohol is forbidden, drinking may remain hidden. Findings from previous research exploring drug and alcohol issues among different ethnic groups have revealed the importance of religion acting as a barrier both to actual use and also to disclosure of use among Pakistani people and those of Muslim faith (Patel and Wibberley, 2002; Wanigaratne *et al.*, 2003; Ross *et al.*, 2004). Although as much care as possible was taken to ensure young people knew that the questionnaire and interviews were confidential, there is a chance that the data may not reflect true rates among some ethnic and religious groups.

Although not many Muslim young people reported their own drinking, some young people (Muslim and non-Muslim) described the drinking behaviour of Muslims they know. One boy reported that his father and uncle drink because of depression:

*In my religion, you are not supposed to drink, but my dad used to drink, but he stopped, but my uncle still drinks ... it's for depression. You are not supposed to, but at the end of the day ... at the end of the day [you] could get depressed, and you don't know what you are doing sometimes.*

Male, Muslim

Although many young people said that they had Muslim friends who did not drink, some young people reported drinking among their Muslim friends. One girl said that her friend was originally against alcohol, but after trying it she began to drink in greater amounts:

*Even though they're like Muslims they say that they – they're not allowed to drink, they usually drink too ... Yeah. My friend she tried wine for the first time just to see how it is and then she just kept on drinking and the next time she wanted more and, yeah. She didn't really – but at the beginning she was like I'm not allowed to drink because it's – it's in my religion but then once she had it she didn't really mind any more.*

Female, Romanian

Another girl claimed: 'I've got one friend who's a Muslim. She's half American, half Egyptian. She's a Muslim and she shouldn't be drinking but she drinks ... yeah, there's a lot of Muslim girls in my friends ... they drink more than I do' (Female, black African, Christian). On other occasions young people talked about Muslim people they know who drink, although these people did not seem to be relatives or friends. It must be noted that these comments did not come from Muslims themselves. However, the comments do support the questionnaire findings that showed that Muslim drinkers in the sample consume as much as, or more than, other religious groups.

It should also be noted that experimentation with drinking during the teenage years may not represent lasting changes in attitudes towards alcohol consumption among Muslim young people. A Muslim girl, who had never drunk alcohol, described how, for some young people, experimenting with alcohol is part of identity formation. For minority ethnic young people in particular, determining whether or not to drink is part of discovering the sort of person that they want to be:

*I think because of, because we're kids, teenagers, we're kind of, like we're going through the same, like we want to know where we stand, we want to know whether the religion we follow is right for us, whether ... or we think what careers I'll take, and what sort of person are we supposed to be? So I think like, some Muslims may not kind of follow their religion so much when they're a child or some Hindus, well, any, any religion, they kind of go through a phase where they want, they want to find themselves and I think that has something to do with the drinking, whether it's right for them.*

Female, Muslim

Other research has also indicated that changes in alcohol consumption can be linked to life changes for some ethnic and religious groups. One study showed that some young Muslim men drink during their teenage and early adult years, but will abstain from drink when they get married and take their family and community obligations more seriously (Valentine *et al.*, 2007). Young people may move back and forth between experimentation with alcohol use and adherence to their religion.

## Christianity

In contrast to the Muslim faith, many Christian young people reported that they were unsure about, or could not remember, what their faith teaches about alcohol. Young people who had identified what their faith says about alcohol tended to associate Christianity with alcohol use, but also believed that their religion has a moderating influence on consumption. Some Christians viewed drinking as part of their culture because Jesus drank wine, and wine is consumed in church. One Catholic girl described how she would drink wine in church: 'Yeah, every Sunday. 'Cos I'm a Catholic so, it's part of my religion, taking the wine' (Female, Catholic). One girl even went so far as to say that drinking is a must for Christians:

*Most religions don't accept it but if you're say, like me a Catholic, or a Christian, you will be sort of forced to take it – not forced! But you have to – it's your choice but then you have to start drinking.*  
Female, Catholic

The tendency to consume alcohol as part of one's religion can help explain its ubiquity in Christian societies, as one boy pointed out: 'Religion and culture go hand in hand ... if it's part of your religion to drink, it then becomes part of your culture' (Male, white British, Christian).

Although Christianity was linked with drinking, it was still perceived as having a moderating influence. Some Christians argued that the Church advocates drinking in moderation: 'I'm not sure – I know that Jesus drunk wine but I think it says something about all things in moderation, something like that' (Male, white British); and 'It doesn't say that you can't drink but the Bible says you have to like treat your body as a living sacrifice to God so, yeah, that – that's why I think you can't be a drunk Christian' (Male, black British).

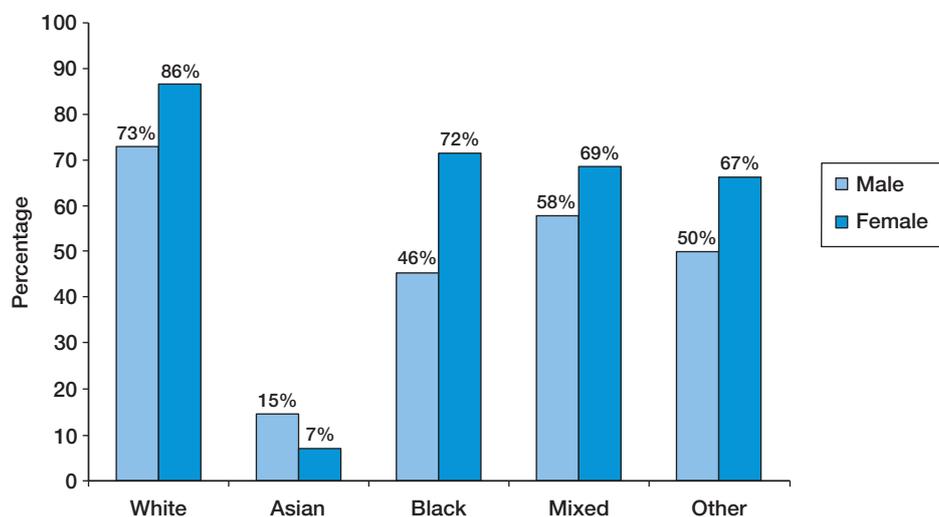
## Drinking by gender

Analysis of the questionnaire data showed that girls were significantly more likely to have had a drink than boys (59 per cent and 40 per cent respectively; see Figure 6 and Table A9 in Appendix 3). However, the higher number of female drinkers is related to the composition of the sample, as the proportion of boys from ethnicities with lower drinking rates (Indian, Pakistani and other Asian backgrounds) is higher than that of girls, whereas the proportion of girls from white British and white and black mixed ethnicity backgrounds is higher than that of boys (see Table A2 In Appendix 1). Therefore, we looked at gender differences by ethnicity (see Figure 6 and Table A10 in Appendix 3). Results showed that:

- Girls from white and black backgrounds are significantly more likely to have consumed alcohol than their male counterparts.
- Differences for other groups were not significant, though Asian girls are less likely to drink than Asian males. Indian girls were the only girls of Asian origin who reported having consumed alcohol.

Looking at drinkers only, an exploration of gender differences in drinking patterns (also see Table A7 in Appendix 3) revealed that:

**Figure 6: Percentage who have consumed alcohol by gender and ethnicity**



- *Frequent drinking*: Results were not significant, though girls are more likely to drink on a monthly basis, with boys more likely to drink occasionally.
- *Recent drinking*: Results were significant, with females more likely than males to report that they have drunk in the last month, and boys more likely to have drunk more than a month ago. However, these differences disappear when broken down by ethnicity except for black young people; black girls are significantly more likely to have drunk in the last month than black boys.
- *Heavy drinking*: Differences were significant, with girls nearly twice as likely as boys to drink heavily, though differences were again not significant when broken down by ethnicity.
- *Binge drinking*: Reported binge drinking rates were similar for boys and girls.

These findings are in line with other research, as they suggest that for some ethnic groups the gender gap in drinking rates is converging, with girls as likely to drink and drink heavily as boys (Stillwell *et al.*, 2004; Becker *et al.*, 2006). However, in the current sample gender differences are still apparent for Asian young people, as no girls from Asian ethnicities, except Indian girls, had consumed alcohol. This finding may in part reflect the process in which the sample for the current study was selected from areas with high numbers of Asian people. Young Asian girls are unlikely to be introduced to alcohol use within the family, and residing in an area with a large Asian population would further reduce opportunities for drinking among the group. Religion is also an important factor; all the Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls in the sample were Muslim.

## Summary

The research showed differences both between and within ethnic groups in terms of whether and how much alcohol is consumed. Questionnaire data showed that young people from white backgrounds were most likely to have consumed alcohol, to drink frequently and to binge drink. There were also relatively high rates of alcohol use among young people of mixed ethnicity compared with non-white ethnic groups, and black young people were most likely to drink heavily. Many young people from across ethnic groups perceived drinking to be an inherent part of white British culture. However, differences between ethnic groups were less marked than differences found in previous studies on ethnicity and alcohol, and young people from black and Asian groups also described drinking that takes place as part of their culture or way of life.

Reports of having ever drunk were low among Muslims; however, some young people reported that Muslims do drink, but it may be hidden or not discussed. Although differences were not significant, Muslim drinkers reported heavier rates of frequent, recent and heavy drinking than other religious groups and their drinking patterns most closely resembled those of young people with no religion. Young people with no religion, and Muslim young people, were significantly more likely than those of other religions to binge drink on a monthly basis. This suggests that, although religion is viewed as a reason for not drinking among many Muslims, it may not affect how much alcohol Muslim drinkers consume, or how often they drink.

Findings on gender suggest that for some ethnic groups the gender gap in drinking rates is converging, with white and black girls significantly more likely to drink than their male counterparts. However, gender differences were still apparent for Asian young people, as no girls from Asian ethnicities, except Indian girls, had consumed alcohol. Religion is clearly a factor here, as all the Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls in the sample were Muslim.

## 4 Ethnicity, friendships and drinking

The findings so far have shown that young people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds vary in terms of alcohol consumption and drinking rates. The findings also reveal that many young people have interethnic friendship groups, and enjoy the company of friends from different cultural backgrounds. Of interest to the current research is whether having friends from different ethnic backgrounds can be linked to differences in drinking attitudes and behaviour among young people. In the following section further quantitative analysis explores the relationship between drinking patterns, background variables and friendship groups. Qualitative analysis explores how young people describe the interactions between alcohol use, culture and friendships as they experience them in their daily lives.

### Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis aimed to look at a range of variables that have been shown to be related to drinking, both in the current study and in previous research. These variables included background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and religion, and friendship group characteristics and behaviours (see Methods in Appendix 4 and Table A11 in Appendix 3 for a breakdown of which variables were used and how). The purpose of further analysis was to see which variables are still related to drinking when other variables are held constant; for example, are interethnic friendships related to having ever drunk, when other variables including ethnicity, religion and so on are taken into account? Once again, we conclude that variables are significantly related if there is a probability of 5 per cent or less that an apparent relationship has occurred by chance (see Methods in Appendix 3).

The analysis is not able to look at whether one variable *causes* another variable, for example, whether having friends who drink causes young people to drink. This is because the direction of causation may run the other way round, insofar as young people who drink may seek out friends with similar attitudes and behaviours. There may also be other important factors that influence whether young people drink, such as how they spend their leisure time or how much money they have. These cannot all be taken into account in the analysis, which focuses on friendship group variables.

### Results

Table 4 summarises the results of the quantitative analysis, with more detailed results in Models 1–4 in Appendix 4. To interpret the results:

- For the drinking behaviours, the ‘event’ is the outcome that the explanatory variables may be related to, for example ‘drank in the last month’.
- For the explanatory variables, the reference variable is the variable with which other variables are compared. For example, the reference for ethnicity is white young people, so Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity young people are compared with white young people.
- A ‘+’ sign indicates that an explanatory variable is significantly associated with an increase in the likelihood of the drinking behaviour, and a ‘–’ sign indicates that there is a reduced likelihood. If there is no sign then there is no statistically significant association.

**Table 4: Summary of results from the quantitative analysis**

Explanatory variables	Drinking behaviours				
	Ever drunk (event: 'yes')	Frequent (event: drinks at least once a month)	Recent (event: drank in the last month)	Heavy (event: moderate/heavy drinking)	Binge (event: sometimes binge drinks)
<i>Ethnicity</i>					
White (reference)					
Asian	-				
Black					
Mixed					
Other	-				
<i>Religion</i>					
No religion (reference)					
Christian					
Muslim					
Other	+				
<i>Religious importance</i>					
Not important (reference)					
Important	-				
<i>Parental attitude</i>					
Parents allow or tolerate (reference)					
Forbid			-		
<i>Friends' drinking</i>					
Some friends drink (reference)					
None	-	-	-		-
<i>Friends' encouragement</i>					
Friends do encourage (reference)					
Friends do not encourage	-				
<i>Friends' approval of alcohol</i>					
Friends don't mind/approve (reference)					
Friends don't like drinking	-	-	-		
Don't know how friends feel		-	-	-	-
<i>Interethnic friendships</i>					
Diverse friendship group (reference)					
Mostly white friends	-				
Mostly Asian friends					
Mostly black friends					
Mostly mixed/other friends					
<i>Friends' age</i>					
Mostly older (reference)					
Mostly the same age		-			

## Summary of quantitative analysis

To summarise, the analysis found the following associations between the drinking behaviours and explanatory variables:

- Ever drunk was associated with ethnicity, religion, the importance of religion, friends' drinking, encouragement from friends to drink, friends' approval of alcohol use and interethnic friendships.
- Frequent drinking was associated with friends' drinking, friends' approval of alcohol use and the age of friends.
- Recent drinking was associated with parental attitude towards alcohol use, friends' drinking and friends' approval of alcohol use.
- Moderate/heavy drinking was associated only with friends' approval of alcohol use.
- Binge drinking was associated with friends' drinking and friends' approval of alcohol use.

Gender, school, and the gender mix of friendship groups were not significantly associated with any of the drinking outcomes, once other variables had been controlled for.

Associations between explanatory variables and drinking are explored in more detail in the following section, with supporting comments from qualitative data.

## Ethnicity and religion

Ethnicity was found to be significantly related to having ever drunk only, and was not related to the other drinking behaviours. The results showed that young people of Asian and other ethnicity were less likely to have consumed alcohol than white young people. Research in the 1990s suggested that young Asians may be drinking more than previous generations and that the gap in levels of abstinence between white and Asian young people was decreasing (Denscombe and Drucquer, 2000). However, the current findings show that Asian young people remain significantly less likely to drink than their white peers even after controlling for related factors such as religion, school, gender, parental attitude and friends' approval and behaviours.

Religion and the importance of religion were also only related to whether young people have ever drunk alcohol. Young people from other religions ('other' includes Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus) were more likely to have drunk alcohol than young people with no religion. Young people who report that religion is important to them were less likely to have ever drunk than young people who report that religion is not important to them.

The results show that religion and ethnicity are associated with abstinence or the likelihood of having ever drunk, but are not linked with drinking patterns among drinkers. Furthermore, although Muslim young people were less likely to have consumed alcohol than young people with no religion, differences were not significant when the importance of religion was added into the model.

## Qualitative comments

As discussed in Chapter 3, religion helps some young people deal with the drinking norms that they see around them, and helps them to avoid drinking. A boy informed the interviewer: 'I've had a few people asking me to drink and I said no straight away because I know God is watching me, plus I know it's not a good thing personally right now' (Male, Asian).

Talking to young people about the importance of religion in interviews helped to unpack the term and consider the different ways in which young people felt that religion was important to them. One cited measure of religious importance was strength of belief; for many young people this helped to determine whether religion plays a protective role against drinking. In particular, strength of belief was said to help young people resist pressures to drink from other sources, including friends. One girl explained: 'It's all about how strong you are to your religion, 'cos if you're strong enough, then you wouldn't do something, but if you're not strong enough, then you might get peer pressured into it' (Female, Bangladeshi). However, the importance of religion was not only related to strength of belief. Some young people spoke about how their religion helped to shape their values and attitudes, even when they did not practise their religion, or consider themselves to be religious. One girl explained that she was not really religious, but that her values (including her decision not to drink) were nevertheless based on her religion:

*I'm not really religious but I guess I have more religious values than others. I don't pray a lot which is pretty bad but I – most of my decisions and the things I do are based on my religion like if I think that is this right or something and am I allowed to do this, and I get like, if I don't do something like that's within the religious, I get like a guilty conscience.*

Female, Bangladeshi

Similarly, a Kurdish boy explained in his interview that he is a Muslim but is not religious, but nevertheless said that his reason for not drinking alcohol is still shaped by his religious background: 'It's against my religion ... I will never be drinking alcohol all in my life' (Male, Kurdish).

Despite the association between the importance of religion and drinking, many religious young people argued that religion was not their sole reason for not drinking. Health emerged as a reason to abstain, particularly for religious young people; data from the questionnaire revealed that two-thirds of young people who gave religion as a reason why they don't drink also reported that one of their reasons for not drinking is because it is bad for their health. In contrast, only half of non-religious young people gave health as one of their reasons.

Similarly, qualitative data showed that concerns for health, and disdain for disorderly drunken behaviour portrayed in the media, help to strengthen religious young people's views against alcohol consumption. Indeed, some respondents argued that they wouldn't drink even if it wasn't against their religion: 'Even if I wasn't in that religion, like if I had no religion, I don't think I would drink ... 'cos, I know the effects of it and all that' (Female, Bangladeshi). One boy said: 'It's against my religion but, not only that, I've seen what it does to people, like it messes you up a lot for a little while' (Male, Pakistani). Similarly, a boy told his interviewer: 'Even if I wasn't a Christian I still wouldn't' (Male, black African). Some young people reported that they gain their knowledge on the health effects of alcohol from school and advertising campaigns, and adverts from the television were particularly memorable for some young people: 'I think advertising campaigns like that, I think it does make people think and, you know, yeah it does stop people, but I think that's what this country needs, because there are a lot of binge drinkers (Female); and ' 'Cos teachers they say not to drink and stuff, like in lessons, when we learn about stuff like this, like it's not fun' (Male).

Other young people gained their impressions of the effects of drinking from the health consequences that alcohol has had on people they know:

*Because first of all it's strictly not allowed in my religion. The second one is the effect that can have on you. I know a person who lives in my area, he's right in the hospital because his liver is all damaged and he, every day, he just drinks.*

Male, Asian

It is apparent that messages around the health effects of alcohol help to reinforce views against drinking that young people may initially inherit from their cultural background and family. Furthermore,

many religious young people gave the impression that they derived their views on alcohol from their own considerations and experiences, as well as being influenced by the teachings of their religion and family.

## Parental attitude

Findings from the quantitative analysis showed that young people who reported that their parents forbid them to drink were less likely to have drunk alcohol in the last month than young people who reported that their parents tolerate them drinking alcohol. Previous research has also shown that parental attitudes predict drinking (Velleman, 2009). Although young people from Asian ethnicities and religions were more likely than other young people to report that their parents forbid drinking, the association between parental attitude and recent drinking remains after controlling for ethnicity and religion.

## Qualitative comments

For some young people, family and religion are combined influences, and it is seen as a transgression against both to consume alcohol: 'My parents. They're really strict, and because I'm Muslim, and in Islam we're not allowed to drink alcohol at all, so I think that's one of the reasons why I don't drink at all' (Female, Muslim). Another girl explained how her parents would react if she drank:

*I think they would tell me that it's wrong, and they try to put everything right for me and try and teach me the values of my religion and that, 'cos it's against our religion, it's not something that we should do.*

Female, Bangladeshi

Young people from non-religious backgrounds also spoke about being influenced by family and parents. In some cases, young people reported that their parents do not want them to drink: 'My parents, they would not want me to drink' (Male, Polish). Young people from white ethnic backgrounds commonly said that their parents advise them to drink in moderation, and that they are allowed to drink small amounts on special occasions under supervision.

Young people often spoke about being influenced by the drinking habits of their parents, something which the questionnaire for the current study did not measure. Sometimes young people have witnessed alcoholism within the family, and in these cases young people would be likely to report that this inhibited their own drinking. One boy spoke about how his father died when he was only a baby and how this has influenced his own attitudes: 'You don't want to die young really, you want to live so you learn from other people's mistakes, he drank too much and he died as a consequence. So I learn from it to not drink loads' (Male, white and black Caribbean).

In some cases, influences from family and friends may be conflicting. One minority ethnic girl from the focus groups described the conflicting influences in her life:

*Well, my family, I'm really scared of them, they're really strict, so I know that I'm not meant to drink, but if you look at it, if I have a social life then obviously I will be influenced from there, so I think these are the two factors which influence anyone to drink.*

Female, Muslim

Previous research has shown that, during the adolescent years, peers become more important than other factors in predicting alcohol use (Miller and Plant, 2003; Marsden *et al.*, 2005; Nash *et al.*, 2005; Williams *et al.*, 2007). The results from the existing study support these findings, as friendship group variables were significantly associated with respondents' drinking patterns, whereas parental attitude was linked only with recent drinking. The following section considers links between young people's friendship groups and drinking patterns.

## Friendships

### *Having friends who drink and approve of drinking*

The quantitative analysis found that having friends who drink is associated with an increased likelihood of respondents having ever drunk, drinking at least once a month, having drunk in the last month, and sometimes binge drinking, compared with respondents who reported that none of their friends drink.

Friends' approval of alcohol use was also significantly related to alcohol use; young people who reported that their friends do not like drinking are less likely to have ever drunk alcohol, drink at least monthly, and have drunk in the last month than young people who reported that their friends do not mind/approve of alcohol use. Young people who said that they do not know what their friends think about alcohol use are less likely to drink frequently, have drunk recently, drink moderately/heavily, and binge drink than young people who reported that their friends do not mind/approve of alcohol use.

These findings reiterate how young people's drinking attitudes and behaviours appear to resemble their friends during the adolescent years. However, as previously mentioned, the findings do not show that the relationship is causal; they do not prove that young people are influenced by their friends to drink, or that having friends who drink is a bad influence. It may be the case that young people are drawn to friends who already share similar attitudes. Furthermore, there is also the possibility that young people project their own behaviours and attitudes onto their friends, and believe the behaviour of their friends to be similar to their own. These possibilities are explored through the qualitative data.

### *Qualitative comments*

In the interviews young people commonly spoke about sharing similar values and attitudes around alcohol use with friends. Some young people in the interviews explained how their friends share their opinions on alcohol regardless of whether they share the same ethnicity or religion. One boy told his interviewer: 'Some of my friends, like a certain amount of them are Christian, but the others also they tend to believe what we believe as Christians, that you should drink in moderation' (Male, black Caribbean).

Previous research has suggested that young people's drinking may resemble that of their friends because they seek out friends who are similar to themselves, rather than because they are influenced by their friends (Sieving *et al.*, 2000; Lilja *et al.*, 2003). There was indeed an indication from the interviews and focus groups that some young people do actively seek out friends who are similar to themselves. In particular, young people who do not drink report seeking friends who also do not drink. One young person said he would not be able to get along with people who smoke and drink: 'So on that, on that basis I don't really get along with them. If they do smoking and drinking, I don't really get along with them' (Male, Asian). Another boy argued:

*Well basically, I pick friends randomly but I have to look at them, because I don't want to hang around with people who I think are like bad for me, because I personally think I should be around friends who have a good influence on me. I don't want to be around friends who tell me to go on alcohol and drugs.*

Male, Indian

One boy described how people who do drink tend to keep the company of other young people who drink and vice versa:

*Most of our friends they don't drink anyway and plus people, like when I go out, the people I go out with, they don't drink, so we just go out somewhere and we all agree where we want to go and we go there together as a group. The friends who do drink, they hang around with, after school they hang around with other people and they go different places.*

Male, Bangladeshi

Some non-drinkers reported having friends who do drink, but they often reported that their friends do not drink in front of them. As one boy explained: 'They have it from time to time, but not a lot. But when they are with me they don't drink or nothing' (Male, Pakistani). Similarly, another boy said:

*None of my friends drink alcohol in front of me, but they do, some of them, the ones, like other religions if you're not Mus– Islam, I do have friends that drink alcohol, but I've never seen a friend of mine drink in front of me.*

Male, Kurdish

Many young people who do not drink said that they prefer not to have friends drink in front of them: 'Cause like, they can do what they want, but I wouldn't really want it in front of me, because I don't drink' (Female).

Even among the large number of young people who argued that they 'don't mind' whether their friends drink alcohol, not minding was often accompanied by provisos such as friends not drinking heavily or to excess. One boy explained: 'It depends what kind of – if they are excessive drinkers, then I wouldn't be friends with them, but if they are like socially and they don't bring it to school, or bring it around me' (Male, Indian).

Some non-drinkers reported discouraging friends from using alcohol. One boy explained how he tries to discourage a friend who keeps company with other friends who drink from using alcohol: 'So I know one person who really likes – he hangs around with people, who like they say you drink. He's not doing it yet but I know he kind of will and I – but I say try not to' (Male, Sri Lankan).

At times, young people would say that they 'didn't mind' their friends drinking or that it didn't matter, but would then contradict this by saying that they would discourage their friends from drinking. One girl said:

*I don't mind because it's nothing to do with me, but I would every now and then say like, 'you know, there's no point in drinking' and like 'I think you should stop drinking' and they'll just say 'okay whatever.'*

Female, Indian

Similarly a boy told his interviewer: 'It doesn't really matter but, I guess, how do you explain? I do care that they drink ... and, so I will like discourage them to drink' (Male, black African).

One boy explained how he prefers friends not to drink, and would attempt to discourage them if he found out they drink after establishing a friendship. Like other young people who attempt to dissuade friends from drinking, he argued that he was motivated by concerns for their health and well-being:

*I think personally before when I'm with friends that don't, I don't really know about them, after some of them became my really close friends, I found out that they drink and, it's not that I mind them drinking, I mean I do, I have a friend and I'm trying to make him stop, trying to stop him drinking. Yeah, they're like ... Yeah because they're my friends, so obviously I care about them and because I care about them, I know alcohol is bad for them.*

Male, Bangladeshi

These comments suggest that some young people who are non-drinkers do actively seek friends who share their own attitudes and behaviours. When attitudes vary, young people prefer to spend time with people whose behaviours are similar to their own. In cases where behaviours are different, young people may try to influence their friends to *not* drink. These findings support findings from other research which has shown that participants who do not drink prefer to socialise with other non-drinkers (Valentine *et al.*, 2007). As young people are less likely to adopt new norms and behaviours around drinking if they

mix with other non-drinkers, this helps to explain why Asian young people in the current study remain significantly less likely to consume alcohol than their white peers, even after controlling for related factors such as religion, school, gender, parental attitude and friends' behaviours and attitudes.

The questionnaire data shows that respondents' drinking is associated with whether their friends drink or not, but what was not captured by the data was whether their friends' drinking patterns are similar to their own. Qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups showed that drinking patterns do vary, and young people were often aware of these differences:

*I only drink on special occasions. My friends, a few of my friends drink, just drink for the sake of drinking. They go to the park and they have like some kind of thing, and I'm like 'I ain't coming with you. I'm not going to get wasted in the park.' What's the point? Some of my friends, they like, drink alcohol at their houses. Some of my friends just usually drink alcohol with their family.*

Female, black British

And: 'Occasionally, yeah, same as me, like, some of them drink a bit more than others ... I've got two of my friends that wouldn't really touch anything' (Female, white British).

Although there is a risk that reported similarities between young people and their friends may be a result of young people projecting their own behaviour onto their peers, the above comments demonstrate that young people are aware of different drinking behaviours and attitudes in their friendship groups.

Some young people revealed that they try to reduce heavy drinking among friends who have heavier drinking patterns. However, it was often felt that friends do not always listen to the advice. These comments were more likely to come from young people who were drinkers themselves:

*We made her cut down and that – she goes to parties every, like, like, twice a week at least, she always gets drunk, like, in ... like, she can't even stop herself that's the thing, and now we've like made her cut down and we told her to stop going to parties and stuff.*

Female, Indian

*My friends, like girls, sometimes they won't listen, and I'll just have to deal with it, 'cos that's their issue – 'cos I remember when I used to drink, I know what I used to be like but sometimes they do listen to me, 'cos I'm strict!*

Female, Latino

The above comments are similar to comments from non-drinkers about attempting to discourage alcohol use among friends. Although the findings may in part be a consequence of young people attempting to portray themselves in a positive light in front of the researcher, they do challenge common associations between peer influence and an increased likelihood of drinking, and invite consideration of how young people can have a moderating or inhibiting influence on their friends' alcohol consumption.

## Being encouraged to drink

Results from the quantitative analysis showed that having friends who do not encourage alcohol use is associated with a lower likelihood of ever drinking than is the case with young people who do report some encouragement from friends. Being encouraged to drink was not related to drinking patterns among drinkers, however.

### Qualitative comments

Comments from young people on being encouraged to drink were mixed. Although some young people argued that peer pressure to drink does exist, most denied that they had personally been pressured.

Overall, there was a common perception from most of the respondents that young people who do pressure others are not 'good friends'. As a Bangladeshi boy reported: 'Cos, my friends, most of them are really close friends and they're really good friends as well, so they don't pressurise me to do something that I'm not going to do'. Another boy explained: 'Friends, if they are good friends they wouldn't force you to do anything bad or anything that you don't want to do and if they do, then they are not really good friends' (Male, Pakistani).

Being encouraged to drink was not viewed as negatively as being pressured, and some young people reported being encouraged by their friends. These admissions came mostly from young people who were drinkers, rather than non-drinkers. Young people differentiated between being actively encouraged to drink, drinking to fit in, and drinking because it is what other people are doing. The following comments are from girls discussing encouragement from friends to drink:

*I wouldn't say they encourage me to do it, it's just I feel like I should do it just because I'm with them, but I've, there's never been a time when they've made me do it, like peer pressure or something like that, there's never been a time like that.*

Female, Polish

*Sometimes friends say to you oh, if you don't drink then they're going to spread it round school saying that you're like you're a little pussy like, and you like can't do stuff like them, but then you don't have to drink if you don't want to. But it's just the way the friends are, you're thinking you're going to be more close to them if you do what they do, if you copy them.*

Female, white British

*When I used to drink, there were just times when I didn't want to, like even though I used to drink a lot, like, back then, there were just days when you just didn't feel like it, and they'd be like, 'drink, drink, drink!' At the end of the day, you end up drinking [laughs].*

Female, Latino

However, some young people wished to avoid being encouraged entirely. As discussed previously, non-drinkers often avoid being around others who drink, and one reason for this is to avoid any encouragement to drink:

*I know there are a couple of boys in the school who drink alcohol and I know if I hang around with them, they would encourage me to drink alcohol and that is the main reason I don't want to hang around with them.*

Male, Indian

Another boy explained how he would avoid being influenced by the behaviour of his friends:

*I try not to let them, their decision influence me. Some of my, some of my friends from this school drink, and I hear, I hear the stories about them drinking but then I try not to think about it and I try not to put it in my mind that I should drink because they are doing it.*

Male, Asian

Very few young people reported pressuring or encouraging others to drink. However, a few respondents did admit to this. Generally speaking, offering someone a drink was viewed as acceptable, but pushing someone after they had said 'no' was not deemed acceptable. One boy explained: 'I'd probably encourage, but if they told me they didn't want it, then I'd probably stop' (Male, white British). Another boy said:

*Personally I think it's not nice to do it, but I got to admit I've done it a couple of times to a friend, but it wasn't against his religion, he just didn't want to drink that night and it was like a couple of us just like encouraging him and that was it really. He tried a little bit and then we sort of, we all had fun.*

Male, white British

A girl told her interviewer: 'I gave some to my friends from school because they wasn't used to the alcohol, so I told them you can try it if you want to so I kind of influenced, but I gave some to them' (Female, Romanian).

## Interethnic friendships

The quantitative analysis showed that young people with friendship groups categorised as mostly white had significantly reduced odds of having ever drunk compared with young people with diverse friendship groups. Although findings for mostly Asian and mostly black friendship groups were not significant, they did show that these groups were also associated with a decreased likelihood of respondents' ever drinking, compared with respondents with diverse friendship groups. This may suggest that young people in homogeneous friendship groups have a reduced likelihood of reporting that they drink.

### Qualitative comments

The fact that young people in mainly white friendship groups have reduced odds of drinking is unexpected given the higher drinking rates found among white young people in the current and previous studies. In interviews young people themselves often described drinking as something white people, particularly white British people, do, as described in Chapter 3. There was no indication that respondents with white friends were less likely to drink, or that their white friends did not drink. In fact, one young person, of mixed ethnicity, described how her 'white English' friends from primary school were different in behaviour and attitude from her friends from her area, whom she described as not being heavy drinkers:

*My other friends that I used to go to primary with, they're really heavy drinkers and they do like drugs and stuff and they go out every single night drinking way too much and just really ... They're different, they've grown up much faster than people down here grow up, they're kids, they're supposed to be kids, they've like gone to adult stage already.*

Female, white British and Bangladeshi

Furthermore, the qualitative data did not support the finding that young people in more diverse friendship groups are more likely to drink. In fact young people, particularly minority ethnic young people, often indicated the opposite, in so far as they suggested that different drinking cultures and attitudes in friendship groups are not problematic as young people respect each other's views. One girl from the focus groups said that she didn't mind her friends drinking in front of her, because they understand why she doesn't drink and she knows that their behaviour will not change her behaviour: 'Yeah, they do, they understand that, but I think, they drink in front of me, then I don't, obviously I don't mind because it's their choice, but, yeah but, I wouldn't drink, I know that for sure' (Female, Muslim). Some young people reported how their friends from different religious backgrounds would not pressure them into drinking. One boy said:

*Once I would say 'no I'm a Muslim, I can't drink, it's against my religion', I think my friends will stop, they will not force me. They will just ask me, they would not like peer pressure me into doing something, they would ask me and if I say 'no' it would be no.*

Male, Kurdish

One girl explained how her friends who are not the same religion as her respect her values and would not pressure her: 'My friends, are, they believe what, you know, some people believe in my religion. Some people, even if they don't, they don't encourage me to do things that I don't want to do' (Female, Bangladeshi).

There was also a common view among young people that drinking in front of people who cannot drink for religious or cultural reasons is unacceptable. One Muslim boy felt that if his friends offered him a drink it would be a sign of disrespect:

*My friends, say someone offered me wine, yeah, a drink of alcohol, whatever, my parents would feel that's disrespect because, like, most people know, in Islam, you are not allowed to drink or anything, so, it's like disrespecting your religion.*

Male, Muslim

These views were also shared by white British young people as well as respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds. Several white British females reported that they had Asian friends who did not really approve of alcohol, and that those friends would not be with them when they were drinking. As one girl explained: 'If like, we had a Muslim friend come out with us, when we're drinking, then, I would – I would rather that they didn't 'cos then otherwise, that wouldn't be fair on them' (Female, white British).

Some young people in the interviews reported that sharing similar values is more important than ethnic background or religion:

*I would rather hang around with people with other backgrounds who have a good influence on me, rather than Asians who drink alcohol and who are forcing me to do bad things ... if someone is alcoholic no matter what race or what age they are, I would never be friends with them.*

Male, Indian

Although our findings point to a link between white friendship groups and reduced odds of drinking among young people, the research does not indicate causality. It may be the case that the factors that lead to young people having more homogeneous friendship groups may also lead to them being less likely to have drunk alcohol, such as family influences, local area and community, and willingness to mix with others with different beliefs. Furthermore, the findings could be an artefact of the current data, and should therefore be interpreted with caution. The current study measured the ethnic background of only five of each young person's close friends, and further research could consider a wider friendship group, as some friendship groups may be more or less diverse than captured by the current data.

## Friends' age

Quantitative analysis showed that young people who have friends mostly the same age as them are less likely to report drinking at least monthly than young people who reported having older friends.

### Qualitative comments

As older teenagers are more likely to drink than younger teenagers (Fuller, 2009), young people with older friends are more likely to be exposed to drinking cultures. For young people who do not want to drink this can be a problem. One girl explained that the influence of an older friend trying to encourage her to drink led to her avoiding the friendship:

*[Friends] are mostly the same age as me. I don't keep older friends, I don't know why, I have this feeling that they could like make me do things I didn't want to, that I wouldn't usually do, because*

*they are older and like I used to have an older friend and then she drinks and all that and she was like 'oh come, come, why don't you just join us' and I was like 'no, no it's alright'.*

Female, Indian

Some young people also spoke about having older siblings and drinking with them, or with their friends:

*It's not on a regular basis, it's just sometimes I just, like my older brother drinks alcohol, but not, it's not strong, he doesn't drink it a lot, but he just buys it and then I would ask to have some, I wouldn't have a lot, I'd just have a little bit. Or on special occasions, those are the only times I would be drinking alcohol.*

Male, black Caribbean

However, young people with older friends most frequently spoke about how having older friends enabled them to access alcohol more easily: 'You can get hold of alcohol so easily and cigarettes or anything, there's always older people that would get it for you' (Female, Indian); 'We have friends that are over 18. They get [alcohol] for us' (Female, White British); and:

*What happens nowadays yeah, this is smoking and alcohol, what happens is that the younger which is my age and younger which is 14, 13, 12, 10, well from about 14 to 10, they will go to an older which is around 17, 18 and will give them the money to buy cigarettes and stuff.*

Male, black Caribbean

It is possible that young people with older friends are able to access alcohol more readily, and it is access, as well as influence, that helps to explain the link between having older friends and drinking frequently.

## Summary

Further quantitative analysis was carried out to look at associations between drinking and a range of variables, specifically to see which variables are still related to drinking when other variables are held constant. These variables included background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and religion, and friendship group characteristics and behaviours.

The findings showed that young people from Asian backgrounds and the other ethnicity group were significantly less likely to report that they have consumed alcohol than white young people. Citing religion as important was associated with a lower likelihood of drinking, but religion was not only important for young people who believe in and practise their faith. Religion was also able to provide a moral grounding for young people who do not consider themselves religious, and this helps to explain why young Muslims who are not religious may continue to abstain. For religious young people who do not drink, religion was often cited as only one reason for not drinking. Other reasons tended to centre on the harmful effects of alcohol use, with knowledge about alcohol effects gained from the media and education. Consequently, government campaigns and health warnings against alcohol use appear to be effective, particularly for young people from backgrounds that discourage alcohol use. Family was also important; young people were significantly less likely to have drunk recently if their parents forbid alcohol use.

Friends' drinking and friends' approval of drinking was significantly associated with an increased likelihood of having ever drunk, and higher rates of frequent, recent and binge drinking.

Friends' approval was also significantly associated with heavier drinking among young people. These findings support other research which has shown that young people resemble their friends in terms of drinking behaviours. However, the qualitative data suggests that some non-drinkers seek friendships with those who are similar to themselves; prefer the company of other non-drinkers; and may attempt to dissuade drinking friends from consuming alcohol. These factors, rather than influence, may help to explain why non-drinkers are similar to their friends. Young people who drink, and are friends with other drinkers, also sometimes attempt to moderate heavier drinking among friends. Influencing friends to *not* drink, or drink *less*, is rarely considered in discussions of peer influence, where it is assumed that young people are influenced by their friends to consume alcohol. In fact, very few young people reported being pressured to drink by friends, and the quantitative analysis found that friends' drinking and friends' approval were more likely to be associated with respondents' drinking patterns than was being encouraged to drink by friends. For non-drinkers, avoiding being around people who drink can help to explain why they rarely report being pressured to drink. All young people viewed peer pressure negatively, although encouragement to drink was sometimes reported by young people who were drinkers themselves.

The quantitative data suggests that young people with diverse friendships are more likely to report that they have drunk alcohol than young people with mostly white friendship groups, though interethnic friendships were not related to drinking patterns among drinkers. However, in this regard, the qualitative data did not support the quantitative data, as there was no indication that young people with white friends were less likely to drink, or alternatively that young people with diverse friendships were more likely to drink. In fact, young people often indicated the opposite, insofar as they suggested that cultural differences in drinking behaviours and attitudes in friendship groups are not problematic as young people respect each other's views.

Having older friends was linked to more frequent drinking, although comments from interviews and discussions suggest that it may be the access to alcohol that older friends enable that is important, as well as being influenced by the behaviour of older friends.

# 5 Conclusions and policy and practice implications

Britain is a multicultural society, populated by people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. As diversity grows interethnic friendships become more common (see Smith, 2002). Some previous studies have shown that interethnic friendships and peer groups are related to drinking habits among young people (Purser *et al.*, 2001; Heim *et al.*, 2004; Amundsen *et al.*, 2005; Monshouwer *et al.*, 2007). This study sought to explore how young people in a multicultural society experience interethnic contact within friendship groups, and the potential impact of this on drinking attitudes and behaviours. The research was carried out with 14- and 15-year-olds from a range of backgrounds living in ethnically diverse locations in London and Berkshire.

## Brief summary of findings

An exploration of interethnic friendship groups showed that, while more than two-thirds of young people from all ethnic groups have at least one interethnic friendship, friendship groups still show a degree of homogeneity, insofar as young people are more likely to have friends from the same ethnic group as their own. This is sometimes a consequence of availability, as well as personal preference. The majority of young people argued that sharing hobbies and interests is more important than the ethnic and religious background of their friends. The research found differences in alcohol consumption and drinking patterns between ethnic and religious groups, supporting findings from previous studies that show higher rates of consumption among young people from white backgrounds, and young people with no religion. Despite this, differences between ethnic groups were not as marked, as previous research has found.

Young people tend to resemble their friends in terms of drinking behaviours and attitudes, with higher drinking rates generally found among young people who reported that their friends drink, and that their friends approve of/don't mind drinking. The behaviour and attitudes of young people's friends show a stronger association with drinking patterns than being encouraged to drink by friends or friends' characteristics (measured as ethnicity, gender and age). Having a mostly white friendship group was associated with a decreased likelihood of having ever drunk compared with having a diverse friendship group, but there was no association between interethnic friendships and drinking patterns. It is important to remember that association does not imply causation, and the findings do not suggest that diverse friendship groups will lead to young people drinking, or conversely that having mainly white friends is a protective factor against drinking. It may be the case that the factors that lead to young people having more homogeneous friendship groups may also lead to them being less likely to have drunk alcohol, such as family influences, local area and community, and willingness to mix with others with different beliefs.

In contrast to the findings from the quantitative data, qualitative data revealed that young people with white friends were not less likely to report that they drink, and young people in diverse friendship groups generally reported that friends respect differences in drinking attitudes and behaviours. It may be that having friends who drink is the more relevant factor, regardless of whether or not they are from one's own ethnic background. Indeed, some young people said that alcohol use, or heavy alcohol use, would affect their willingness to form and maintain friendships with others, whereas ethnicity and religion are far less important factors.

## Policy and practice implications

### Social norms

Findings from the current study show high rates of abstinence and relatively low rates of frequent, heavy and binge drinking among the young people in the sample compared with other recent surveys with young people in England (Fuller, 2009). Although these low rates are the result of a high proportion of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the sample and are therefore not generalisable, the results do serve as a reminder of how drinking rates vary among young people. Not all young people drink heavily, and binge drink during adolescence and 'social norms' around alcohol use vary considerably by ethnicity and culture. Previous research has shown that the 'social norms' approach to alcohol consumption has garnered some success at reducing excessive drinking amongst young people (see Borsari and Carey, 2001). This involves educating young people about the actual drinking patterns of their peers, and different cultural attitudes to alcohol, helping young people to deal with the pressures of living in a 'wet culture'. Although young people from the current study recognised differences in drinking behaviours between ethnic and religious groups, stereotypes were still prevalent for some groups. Education about how norms vary within, as well as between, groups can be useful for young people whose own behaviour goes against the grain; in particular, non-drinkers from drinking cultures and young drinkers from cultures where alcohol use is not seen as acceptable.

### Alcohol education

One of the reasons for the low numbers of young people, particularly Asian and Muslim young people, who have consumed alcohol was the practice and importance of religion. However, reasons for not drinking were not only influenced by traditional customs and values; young people often cited concerns about health gained from education and advertising around the risks of drinking as important reasons why they do not drink. These messages help to reinforce young people's existing attitudes towards alcohol, and may become as important as, or more important than, their traditional views. Government campaigns and education in schools about the adverse effects of alcohol consumption appear to resonate strongly, particularly with non-drinkers and minority ethnic young people.

Although the numbers of Muslim drinkers was low, the drinking patterns of Muslim drinkers resembled those of young people with no religion more closely than those of other religious young people. What may be of concern here is the hidden aspect of drinking among young Muslims. During interviews and focus groups a number of young people described drinking among their Muslim friends and peers, though very few Muslims discussed their own drinking. One boy reported that he and his friends drink but that this is not something that is discussed among them. Teachers and youth workers should be aware that alcohol education is important for young people from religions and cultures where alcohol use is prohibited, as rates may be higher than reported and drinking patterns resemble those of their non-religious peers. Cultural differences should also be noted; black Muslims are more likely to report that they have had a drink than are Asian Muslims. Gender differences also varied by ethnicity and religion, and different norms within, as well as between, ethnic and cultural groups should be emphasised.

### Peer support

Qualitative data from the study offers evidence that one of the reasons for similarities in drinking attitudes between young people and their friends is because young people prefer to be friends with those who are similar to themselves, and choose friendships accordingly. Specifically, non-drinkers may actively select friends who do not drink, avoid being around friends if they are drinking, and attempt to dissuade existing friends from using alcohol. These preferences are most evident for, but not limited to, minority ethnic

young people. Given these preferences, it is not surprising that very few non-drinkers reported that they are encouraged or pressured into drinking.

Rather than focusing on young people as perpetrators or victims of peer pressure, it is worth considering the different roles that young people attempt to fill within their friendship group around alcohol use. One of these roles is as a moderator of alcohol consumption or an advocate of abstinence. Non-drinkers from the current study frequently reported that they attempt to dissuade drinking among friends who are drinkers, and drinkers sometimes reported that they would attempt to moderate how much their friends drink. Most of the comments from young people revealed that they would talk to their friends about their drinking and offer advice.

Such an approach would encompass recognising how the regulatory role of the peer group as a form of informal control and support for young people learning to drink can reduce the risks of harmful drinking, and is potentially more effective than laws and sanctions alone. In fact it has been argued that legal sanctions are less effective when alcohol has a social function and forms part of a group culture (Beccaria and Guidoni, 2002). Interventions would therefore benefit from utilising the friendship group as an inhibitor against excessive drinking, whilst acknowledging that drinking with friends is part of growing up for some young people.

The role that young people may adopt as moderators of consumption among their friends could be fed into peer support programmes, which are popular among young people, but for which there is currently little evidence base around alcohol use (Harden *et al.*, 2001; Webster *et al.*, 2002). Peer support programmes may be effective in challenging normative assumptions regarding heavy alcohol use among young people. Young people in the interviews explained that they like to offer advice and support to friends around the health effects of alcohol, but many were uncertain whether their advice would be heeded. Peer supporters in schools receive specific training and experience which could help to make advice more effective and informed.

Peer supporters can also offer advice to young people who are not able to discuss their alcohol use with family or people within their community. Previous research has suggested that rates of drinking may be higher among Muslims because they are not socialised into drinking by consuming alcohol with family (Heim *et al.*, 2004). For young people who drink with friends but not with family, the peer group will be where young people 'learn' to use alcohol. For schools with peer support programmes, peer supporters would be able to offer Muslim young people a place to go where they can talk about their alcohol use, if teachers and authority figures are not approachable.

# Notes

## **3 Birds of a feather or opposites attract? Intra- and interethnic friendship groups**

- 1 Data from <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=455>
- 2 Accession 8 countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

## **4 Drinking patterns among young people**

- 3 One alcoholic drink = ½ pint beer OR ½ pint cider OR 1 small glass of wine OR one bottle of alcopops (e.g. WKD, Bacardi Breezer, Vodka Reef) OR 1 single spirit (e.g. whisky, vodka).

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# Appendix 1

## Research methods and sample

**Table A1: Ethnicity recoding**

<b>Ethnicity (recoded)</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Other white	White European or American backgrounds (including Lithuanian, Polish, Turkish, Irish, Italian)
White and black	White and black backgrounds (white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and black British)
Mixed ethnicity	Other mixed ethnicity backgrounds (including white and Bangladeshi, white and Pakistani, black Caribbean and Pakistani)
Other Asian	Asian ethnicities from the Indian subcontinent (excluding Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian) or Asian ethnicities not specified
Other ethnicity	Ethnicities not covered by the above categorisations (including Latin American, Chinese, Vietnamese)

**Table A2: Gender by ethnicity**

		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
White British	Number	77	67	144
	%	19.3	25.1	21.7
Other white	Number	36	29	65
	%	9.0	10.9	9.8
White and black mixed ethnicity	Number	11	14	25
	%	2.8	5.2	3.8
Other mixed ethnicity	Number	13	13	26
	%	3.3	4.9	3.9
Indian	Number	48	18	66
	%	12.1	6.7	9.9
Pakistani	Number	58	24	82
	%	14.6	9.0	12.3
Bangladeshi	Number	51	26	77
	%	12.8	9.7	11.6
Other Asian	Number	25	4	29
	%	6.3	1.5	4.4
Black British	Number	23	17	40
	%	5.8	6.4	6.0
Black Caribbean	Number	16	10	26
	%	4.0	3.7	3.9
Black African	Number	32	35	67
	%	8.0	13.1	10.1
Other ethnicity	Number	8	10	18
	%	2.0	3.7	2.7

Notes:

$\chi^2 = 30.9$ , degrees of freedom = 11,  $p = 0.001$ .

Owing to rounding, percentages in each column may not add up to exactly 100.

**Table A3: Gender by religion**

		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Church of England	Number	38	23	61
	%	9.7	9.0	9.4
Catholic	Number	36	23	59
	%	9.2	9.0	9.1
Other Christian	Number	59	51	110
	%	15.1	19.9	17.0
Muslim	Number	185	80	265
	%	47.2	31.3	40.9
Hindu	Number	23	9	32
	%	5.9	3.5	4.9
Other	Number	10	19	29
	%	2.6	7.4	4.5
No religion	Number	41	51	92
	%	10.5	19.9	14.2

Notes:

$\chi^2=31.592$ , degrees of freedom=6,  $p<0.001$ .

Owing to rounding, percentages in each column may not add up to exactly 100.

## Ethics and consent to participate

Ethical approval was given by the Middlesex University Social Science Ethics Sub-Committee and the research team complied with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Ethics Framework. Before each stage of data collection, letters were sent to parents and guardians explaining the research and giving them the choice to opt their child out if they wanted to. At every stage young people were fully informed about the research and could decline to participate at any time. Each young person signed a consent form, and confidentiality and anonymity were also assured at every stage. A list of contact organisations, telephone numbers and websites that offer advice and support on alcohol-related issues was given to each participant, and further copies were provided to school libraries.

## Limitations of the data collection process

The young people in the hard-to-reach groups proved to be the most difficult to engage, for a variety of reasons. Attendance by young people at the agreed time for data collection proved an obstacle, and at one organisation an incident that involved the police disturbed the group to such an extent that the decision was taken to suspend the use of the questionnaires. Contact was also made with other suitable organisations, but they were unable to participate at the time of asking. The research team would have liked to have been able to gain the views of larger numbers of marginalised young people, but the inherent difficulties involved in gaining access to them meant that only eight young people in this group completed the questionnaire. The decision was made to remove these groups from the semi-structured interview stage of the research, on account of difficulties encountered in gaining access.

**Table A4: Ethnicity by religion**

	White British	Other white	White and black	Other mixed	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Other Asian	Black British	Black Caribbean	Black African	Other ethnicity	Total
Church of England	43	2	3	1	0	0	0	1	5	3	2	1	61
	32.3	3.2	13.0	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6	13.5	13.6	3.1	5.9	9.6
Catholic	8	22	5	5	1	0	0	2	3	4	3	5	58
	6.0	35.5	21.7	18.5	1.5	0.0	0.0	7.1	8.1	18.2	4.6	29.4	9.1
Other Christian	7	17	5	1	2	0	0	0	20	14	39	4	109
	5.3	27.4	21.7	3.7	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	54.1	63.6	60.0	23.5	17.1
Muslim	1	13	3	11	28	80	76	15	5	0	19	2	253
	0.8	21.0	13.0	40.7	43.1	100.0	98.7	53.6	13.5	0.0	29.2	11.8	39.8
Hindu	0	2	0	1	22	0	1	5	0	0	0	1	32
	0.0	3.2	0.0	3.7	33.8	0.0	1.3	17.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	5.0
Other religion	3	2	0	1	12	0	0	4	2	0	2	4	30
	2.3	3.2	0.0	3.7	18.5	0.0	0.0	14.3	5.4	0.0	3.1	23.5	4.7
No religion	71	4	7	7	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	93
	53.4	6.5	30.4	25.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6	5.4	4.5	0.0	0.0	14.6

Notes:

 $\chi^2 = 983.565$ , degrees of freedom = 66,  $p < 0.001$ .

Owing to rounding, percentages in each column may not add up to exactly 100.

# Appendix 2

## Interethnic friendships

### Methods

Measuring interethnic friendships through survey data carries the risk of respondents inaccurately reporting how many of their friends are from a different ethnic background to their own. Smith (2002) identifies different ways that have been used to elicit information on friends' ethnicities, with corresponding differences in the reported prevalence of interethnic friendships. The two main approaches used are the one-step race-focused question and the network question. The one-step race-focused approach asks respondents how many of their friends are from different ethnic backgrounds from their own. The network approach asks people to consider their friends in their social network and then describe their friends' ethnicities. Smith argues that past research suggests that one-step race-focused questions elicit higher reports of interethnic friendships. This is likely to be partly a consequence of the focus on race, as people search their memories for friends they have of a different race. Second, people may want to appear open-minded and without prejudice. Lastly, if the study does not define what is meant by a 'friend', then people may interpret this broadly. Taken together these increase the likelihood that interethnic friendships are overreported in research.

The network approach is less likely to elicit responses that intentionally overreport interethnic friendships. However, answering a question on networks also takes more time and effort for respondents, and this approach can lead to underreporting of friends who are casual friends or on the periphery of networks. Overall, however, the network approach is thought to elicit more accurate information regarding ethnicity in friendship groups, and was used for the purposes of the current study (see Smith, 2002, for full discussion of measuring interethnic contact).

### Measuring the ethnic mix of young people's friendship groups

Young people were asked in the questionnaire to write down the ethnicity of up to five of their closest friends. The ethnicities of respondents' friends were categorised broadly into five groups: White, Asian, Black, Mixed ethnicity and Other ethnicity. Friendship groups with more than 50 per cent of friends from a particular ethnicity were then coded as mostly that ethnicity, e.g. Mostly white or Mostly black. Friendship groups without a majority ethnicity were coded as Diverse.

One reason for using broad categorisations was because respondents' answers often used broad ethnic groups to describe their friends. Second, the ethnicity of respondents is collapsed when looking at drinking patterns because of small numbers for some ethnic groups, so friends' ethnicities also need to be recategorised for consistency.

A fairly high number of young people (171) failed to provide a response on friends' ethnicities. This is likely to be a consequence of the extra time and consideration required to answer the question. Some young people also misinterpreted the question and wrote down their friends' names rather than their ethnic backgrounds.

**Table A5: Interethnic friendship groups by ethnicity (%)**

	<b>Mostly white</b>	<b>Mostly Asian</b>	<b>Mostly black</b>	<b>Mostly mixed</b>	<b>Mostly other</b>	<b>Diverse</b>
White British	81.7	3.3	2.5	2.5	0.0	10.0
Other white	68.8	2.1	6.3	2.1	2.1	18.8
<i>White (all)</i>	<i>78.0</i>	<i>4.2</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>12.5</i>
Indian	10.5	70.2	1.8	0.0	1.8	15.8
Pakistani	1.6	77.4	1.6	0.0	0.0	19.4
Bangladeshi	0.0	80.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	19.7
Other Asian	14.3	52.4	0.0	4.8	0.0	28.6
<i>Asian (all)</i>	<i>5.0</i>	<i>73.6</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>19.4</i>
Black British	6.7	3.3	63.3	0.0	0.0	26.7
Black Caribbean	0.0	6.3	68.8	0.0	0.0	25.0
Black African	1.9	5.8	65.4	0.0	0.0	26.9
<i>Black (all)</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>5.1</i>	<i>65.3</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>26.5</i>
White and black	34.8	0.0	17.4	4.3	0.0	43.5
Other mixed	38.9	27.8	5.6	0.0	0.0	27.8
<i>Mixed (all)</i>	<i>36.6</i>	<i>12.2</i>	<i>12.2</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>36.6</i>
<i>Other ethnicity</i>	<i>27.3</i>	<i>18.2</i>	<i>18.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>27.3</i>	<i>9.1</i>
Total (all)	31.2	32.2	14.8	1.2	1.0	19.7

# Appendix 3

## Drinking patterns

### Methods

Initial analysis explored differences in drinking patterns by ethnicity, religion and gender using cross-tabulation, with chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests for significance. The aim of  $\chi^2$  is to see if two or three variables are related to each other, or are independent of one another. Variables are considered to be related if there is a probability of 5 per cent or less that the observed relationship has occurred by chance, with significance determined by a  $p$ -value of less than 0.05.

Low numbers for some categories, such as some ethnic groups, can result in unreliable and inconclusive results from  $\chi^2$  tests and logistic regression. Where necessary, categories were collapsed to enable more reliable analysis.

Respondents from the survey were asked about a range of factors that are related to alcohol use, but analysis of these variables is not included in this report if it is not strictly relevant to the research questions defined for this study.

**Table A6: Having ever drunk alcohol by ethnicity**

		<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
White British	Number	21	121
	%	14.8	85.2
Other white	Number	22	40
	%	35.5	64.5
White and black ethnicity	Number	5	19
	%	20.8	79.2
Other mixed ethnicity	Number	13	14
	%	48.1	51.9
Indian	Number	51	15
	%	77.3	22.7
Pakistani	Number	73	3
	%	96.1	3.9
Bangladeshi	Number	67	6
	%	91.8	8.2
Other Asian	Number	23	6
	%	79.3	20.7
Black British	Number	13	25
	%	34.2	65.8
Black Caribbean	Number	9	15
	%	37.5	62.5
Black African	Number	32	34
	%	48.5	51.5
Other ethnicity	Number	7	10
	%	41.2	58.8
Total	Number	336	308
	%	52.2	47.8

Note:  
 $\chi^2 = 234.005$ , degrees of freedom = 11,  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table A7: Drinking patterns by ethnicity, religion and gender (number and percentage)**

	Ethnicity					Religion					Gender					
	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other ethnicity	Total	Church of England	Catholic	Other Christian	Muslim	Other religion	No religion	Total	Male	Female	Total
<i>Frequent</i>																
Weekly	35	3	3	4	0	45	4	4	7	7	1	18	41	24	23	47
	22.9	10.7	4.4	12.5	0.0	15.6	9.1	11.1	10.3	28.0	3.6	24.0	14.9	16.4	15.8	16.1
Monthly	38	4	12	13	1	68	13	11	14	3	6	18	65	25	41	66
	24.8	14.3	17.6	40.6	12.5	23.5	29.5	30.6	20.6	12.0	21.4	24.0	23.6	17.1	28.1	22.6
Occasionally	80	21	53	15	7	176	27	21	47	15	21	39	170	97	82	179
	52.3	75.0	77.9	46.9	87.5	60.9	61.4	58.3	69.1	60.0	75.0	52.0	61.6	66.4	56.2	61.3
Note: $\chi^2 = 27.045$ , degrees of freedom = 8, $p = 0.001$																
<i>Recent</i>																
Last week	39	5	10	9	2	65	6	9	15	7	5	18	60	31	35	66
	25.0	17.2	14.3	27.3	20.0	21.8	13.6	23.7	20.5	29.2	17.2	23.4	21.1	20.5	23.3	21.9
Last month	53	7	17	11	2	90	14	8	24	6	7	29	88	36	55	91
	34.0	24.1	24.3	33.3	20.0	30.2	31.8	21.1	32.9	25.0	24.1	37.7	30.9	23.8	36.7	30.2
Month+ ago	64	17	43	13	6	143	24	21	34	11	17	30	137	84	60	144
	41.0	58.6	61.4	39.4	60.0	48.0	54.5	55.3	46.6	45.8	58.6	39.0	48.1	55.6	40.0	47.8
Note: $\chi^2 = 8.206$ , degrees of freedom = 2, $p = 0.017$																

<i>Heavy</i>																
Light	61	12	25	12	4	114	22	17	31	5	12	24	111	57	57	114
	45.2	70.6	56.8	48.0	57.1	50.0	57.9	58.6	60.8	27.8	66.7	37.5	50.9	51.8	47.5	49.6
Moderate	45	4	7	8	2	66	12	8	10	7	3	23	63	37	30	67
	33.3	23.5	15.9	32.0	28.6	28.9	31.6	27.6	19.6	38.9	16.7	35.9	28.9	33.6	25.0	29.1
Heavy	29	1	12	5	1	48	4	4	10	6	3	17	44	16	33	49
	21.5	5.9	27.3	20.0	14.3	21.1	10.5	13.8	19.6	33.3	16.7	26.6	20.2	14.5	27.5	21.3
Note: $\chi^2 = 6.206$ , degrees of freedom = 2, $p = 0.045$																
<i>Binge</i>																
Monthly	43	1	7	7	0	58	8	6	10	6	3	24	57	27	32	59
	29.3	4.8	13.5	25.9	0.0	22.8	19.0	20.0	17.5	30.0	13.6	32.4	23.3	22.0	23.9	23.0
Occasionally	56	11	18	15	4	104	18	13	16	11	9	31	98	49	57	106
	38.1	52.4	34.6	55.6	57.1	40.9	42.9	43.3	28.1	55.0	40.9	41.9	40.0	39.8	42.5	41.2
Never	48	9	27	5	3	92	16	11	31	3	10	19	90	47	45	92
	32.7	42.9	51.9	18.5	42.9	36.2	38.1	36.7	54.4	15.0	45.5	25.7	36.7	38.2	33.6	35.8
Note: $\chi^2 = 19.427$ , degrees of freedom = 8, $p = 0.013$																
Note: $\chi^2 = 18.940$ , degrees of freedom = 10, $p = 0.041$																

**Notes:**

Percentages in the total columns vary because of non-response rates varying for questions on ethnicity, religion and gender.

Owing to rounding, percentages in the total columns may not add up to exactly 100.

Shaded boxes indicate significance at the 5% level.

**Table A8: Having ever drunk alcohol by religion**

		<b>Church of England</b>	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Other Christian</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>No religion</b>	<b>Other religion</b>	<b>Total</b>
No	Number	12	21	34	228	19	14	14	342
	%	20.0	35.6	31.8	89.1	59.4	15.4	45.2	53.8
Yes	Number	48	38	73	28	13	77	17	294
	%	80.0	64.4	68.2	10.9	40.6	84.6	54.8	46.2

Note:

$\chi^2=239.737$ , degrees of freedom=6,  $p<0.001$ .

**Table A9: Having ever drunk alcohol by gender**

		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
No	Number	236	109	345
	%	60.1	41.3	52.5
Yes	Number	157	155	312
	%	39.9	58.7	47.5

Note:

$\chi^2=22.294$ , degrees of freedom=1,  $p<0.001$ .

**Table A10: Having ever drunk alcohol by gender and ethnicity**

			<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
White*	No	Number	29	13	42
		%	27.1	13.7	20.8
	Yes	Number	78	82	160
		%	72.9	86.3	79.2
Asian	No	Number	148	66	214
		%	85.5	93.0	87.7
	Yes	Number	25	5	30
		%	14.5	7.0	12.3
Black**	No	Number	36	17	53
		%	54.5	28.3	42.1
	Yes	Number	30	43	73
		%	45.5	71.7	57.9
Mixed	No	Number	10	8	18
		%	41.7	30.8	36.0
	Yes	Number	14	18	32
		%	58.3	69.2	64.0
Other	No	Number	4	3	7
		%	50.0	33.3	41.2
	Yes	Number	4	6	10
		%	50.0	66.7	58.8

Notes:

\* $\chi^2=5.502$ , degrees of freedom = 1,  $p=0.019$ .

\*\* $\chi^2=8.861$ , degrees of freedom = 1,  $p=0.03$ .

# Appendix 4

## Ethnicity, friendships and drinking

### Methods

Binary logistic regression was used to consider which variables are related to drinking when other variables are held constant. A logit link function was used; a link function is a function that links the response variable to the explanatory one.

Based on previous analysis, explanatory variables were included in the regressions that were believed to link most closely with the response variables. Variables were included for the following reasons:

- Gender, ethnicity, and religion; these have been shown to be related to drinking behaviour in the current and in previous studies (Vora *et al.*, 2000; Becker *et al.*, 2006; Goddard *et al.*, 2006; Fuller, 2009).
- The importance of religion; some research has suggested that strength of belief is more important than religious affiliation for influencing drinking patterns (Pederson and Kolstad, 2000).
- School; drinking patterns vary by region and area, and have been shown to be related to the ethnic composition of schools (Amundsen *et al.*, 2005; Monshouwer *et al.*, 2007).
- Having friends who drink, friends' approval of drinking, and being encouraged to drink by friends; research has demonstrated links between peers and respondents' own drinking (Norton *et al.*, 1998; Boys *et al.*, 1999; Sieving *et al.*, 2000; Parry *et al.*, 2004; Bot *et al.*, 2005; Marsden *et al.*, 2005; Lundborg, 2006).
- Parental attitudes towards alcohol use; research has linked parental attitudes towards alcohol to young people's own use (Velleman, 2009).
- Interethnic friendships; links between interethnic friendships and drinking are the focus of the current study.

Initially, socioeconomic status (SES) was included in the models, but the low response rate for the question meant that results were not very reliable, leading to wide confidence intervals. Furthermore, one of the models failed to converge on a solution when SES was included, so the variable was left out of the models.

In order to explore associations between having friends from different ethnicities and drinking behaviour, a variable on the ethnic mix of friendships was included (see Figure 2 in Chapter 2). Initially, continuous variables for the percentage of friends from different ethnic backgrounds were to be used in the analysis. However, because the variables were highly correlated (as one variable increases, the others will decrease; e.g. an individual with a high percentage of white friends will have a lower percentage of friends from other ethnicities), not all the variables for friends' ethnicities could be fitted into the models

as this would lead to problems with multicollinearity (Berenson and Levine, 1989: 666). Consequently, we created a variable that would allow us to consider all the different types of friendship groups (see Methods in Appendix 2). Owing to very low numbers of young people with mostly mixed ethnicity or other ethnicity friendship groups, these were combined into one category. Other friendship group characteristics that were included in the models were the gender and age of respondents' friends.

Each response was fitted in turn against these explanatory variables in SPSS using two different logistic methods: backward stepwise likelihood ratio and backward stepwise Wald. These tests place all the selected variables into the model, and then remove variables, one at a time, which are not found to be significant. Each time a variable is removed, the model is then refitted with the remaining variables. This process is completed when removing variables no longer improves the model. Both methods produced the same models. Once the backward steps had produced a model that best fitted the data, the significant variables were entered into SPSS to produce the final model.

Initial modelling involved variables in their original categories. Overall it was found that variables that were significant had some subgroups that were not significant. Where categories were similar they were recategorised and the models refitted. This was also undertaken to improve the reliability of the results, where low numbers may sometimes result in wide confidence intervals. However, this could not be done with all variables as collapsing categories that are not similar, such as ethnic groups, would result in broad categorisations that are not meaningful. Table A11 shows how the control variables were used in the models.

To interpret the models, an odds ratio of more than 1 indicates an increased likelihood of the response variable (drinking), and an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates a decreased likelihood. A *p*-value of less than 0.05 indicates that the result is significant at the 0.05 level (see Methods in Appendix 3).

**Table A11: Explanatory variables used in the binary regression models**

Measure	Definition
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	Dummy variable (reference)
Male	Dummy variable
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
White	Dummy variable (reference)
Asian	Dummy variable
Black	Dummy variable
Mixed ethnicity	Dummy variable
Other ethnicity	Dummy variable
<i>Religion</i>	
No religion	Dummy variable (reference)
Christian	Dummy variable
Muslim	Dummy variable
Other religion	Dummy variable
<i>Religious importance</i>	
Not important	Dummy variable (reference)
Important	Dummy variable; religion is very or quite important to the respondent's way of life

<i>School</i>	
School C	Dummy variable (reference)
School B	Dummy variable
School D	Dummy variable
School E	Dummy variable
<i>Parental attitude to alcohol use</i>	
Tolerate	Dummy variable (reference); parents allow, accept or discourage alcohol use
Forbid	Dummy variable; parents do not allow alcohol use
<i>Friends' drinking</i>	
Some	Dummy variable (reference); some, most or all friends drink
None	Dummy variable; no friends drink
<i>Being encouraged to drink by friends</i>	
True	Dummy variable (reference); friends often, sometimes or not really encourage the respondent to drink
Not true	Dummy variable; friends never encourage drinking
<i>Friends' approval of drinking</i>	
Don't mind/approve	Dummy variable (reference); friends don't mind or approve of alcohol use
Don't like	Dummy variable; friends don't like drinking
Don't know	Dummy variable; respondent does not know how friends feel about drinking
<i>Interethnic friendships</i>	
Diverse friendship group	Dummy variable (reference); no ethnic majority in group
Mostly white	Dummy variable; over 50% of friendship group is white
Mostly black	Dummy variable; over 50% of friendship group is black
Mostly Asian	Dummy variable; over 50% of friendship group is Asian
Mostly mixed/other	Dummy variable; over 50% of friendship group is mixed or other ethnicity
<i>Friends' gender</i>	
Mixed friendship group	Dummy variable (reference); friends are a mix of boys and girls
Mostly female	Dummy variable; friends are mostly female
Mostly male	Dummy variable; friends are mostly male
<i>Friends' age</i>	
Mostly older	Dummy variable (reference); friends are mostly older than respondent
Mostly same age	Dummy variable; friends are mostly the same age as the respondent

## Models

### Model 1: Having ever drunk

#### Logistic regression table: Yes (event)/No, $N = 455$

Predictor	Coefficient	SE coefficient	$p$	Odds ratio	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	5.795	0.862	0.000	328.568		
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
Asian	-2.608	0.630	0.000	0.074	0.021	0.254
Black	-0.901	0.672	0.180	0.406	0.109	1.517
Mixed	-0.986	0.633	0.119	0.373	0.108	1.290
Other	-2.196	1.103	0.047	0.111	0.013	0.967
<i>Religion</i>						
Christian	1.495	0.790	0.058	4.461	0.949	20.981
Muslim	-0.747	0.877	0.395	0.474	0.085	2.644
Other	2.512	0.977	0.010	12.327	1.816	83.700
<i>Religious importance</i>						
Important	-2.601	0.760	0.001	0.074	0.017	0.329
<i>Friends' drinking</i>						
None	-1.726	0.389	0.000	0.178	0.083	0.382
<i>Friends' encouragement</i>						
Friends do not encourage	-1.250	0.379	0.001	0.286	0.136	0.602
<i>Friends' approval</i>						
Friends don't like drinking	-1.718	0.473	0.000	0.179	0.071	0.453
Don't know how friends feel	-0.696	0.391	0.075	0.499	0.232	1.073
<i>Interethnic friendships</i>						
Mostly white friends	-2.162	0.624	0.001	0.115	0.034	0.391
Mostly Asian friends	-0.893	0.518	0.085	0.409	0.148	1.130
Mostly black friends	-0.048	0.568	0.933	0.954	0.313	2.905
Mostly mixed/other friends	1.025	1.291	0.427	2.786	0.222	34.953

Notes:

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.724$ .

-2 Log-likelihood = 274.391.

Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test:  $\chi^2 = 5.14$ , degrees of freedom = 8,  $p = 0.742$ .

SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval.

## Model 2: Frequent drinking

### Logistic regression table: Quite often (event)/Occasionally, N=269

Predictor	Coefficient	SE coefficient	p	Odds ratio	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	1.275	0.323	0.000	3.578		
<i>Friends' drinking</i>						
None	-1.568	0.523	0.003	0.208	0.075	0.580
<i>Friends' approval</i>						
Friends don't like drinking	-2.934	1.070	0.006	0.053	0.007	0.433
Don't know how friends feel	-1.928	0.407	0.000	0.145	0.065	0.323
<i>Friends' age</i>						
Mostly the same age	-1.216	0.352	0.001	0.296	0.149	0.590

Notes:

Nagelkerke  $R^2=0.358$ .

-2 Log-likelihood=278.812.

Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test:  $\chi^2=3.943$ , degrees of freedom=5,  $p=0.558$ .

SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval.

## Model 3: Recent drinking

### Logistic regression table: Last month (event)/More than one month ago, N=276

Predictor	Coefficient	SE coefficient	p	Odds ratio	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	0.929	0.186	0.000	2.532		
<i>Friends' drinking</i>						
None	-0.775	0.389	0.046	0.460	0.215	0.987
<i>Friends' approval</i>						
Friends don't like drinking	-2.331	0.782	0.003	0.097	0.021	0.449
Don't know how friends feel	-1.317	0.321	0.000	0.268	0.143	0.503
<i>Parental attitude</i>						
Forbid	-0.673	0.279	0.016	0.510	0.295	0.882

Notes:

Nagelkerke  $R^2=0.241$ .

-2 Log-likelihood=327.020.

Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test:  $\chi^2=2.588$ , degrees of freedom=4,  $p=0.629$ .

SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval.

## Heavy drinking

A satisfactory model could not be fitted for heavy drinking. Backward and forward stepwise regression included only friends' approval as significantly associated with heavy drinking.

## Model 4: Binge drinking

### Logistic regression table: Sometimes (event)/Never, $N = 255$

Predictor	Coefficient	SE coefficient	$p$	Odds ratio	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	1.211	0.178	0.000	3.356		
<i>Friends' drinking</i>						
None	-1.141	0.388	0.003	0.319	0.149	0.684
<i>Friends' approval</i>						
Friends don't like drinking	-1.194	0.624	0.056	0.303	0.089	1.029
Don't know how friends feel	-1.337	0.332	0.000	0.263	0.137	0.503

Notes:

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.182$ .

-2 Log-likelihood = 293.836.

Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test:  $\chi^2 = 0.932$ , degrees of freedom = 2,  $p = 0.627$ .

SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval.

## How well the models fit the data

The aim of the current study was to explore whether friendships, particularly interethnic friendships, are related to alcohol use. The purpose of conducting further quantitative analysis was therefore to explore associations between variables, rather than find models that best predict drinking behaviours. However, we can gain a sense of how well the models fit the data, and therefore how good the variables included in the study are at predicting the drinking behaviours.

A good model helps to explain a large proportion of variation in drinking behaviour among the respondents in the sample. Models 1–4 show the Nagelkerke  $R^2$  value; this is used to assess how good the model is. The value ranges from 0 to 1, with a higher value indicating a better model. Model 1 shows a good  $R^2$  value (0.724), suggesting that the model is useful for explaining variations in whether young people drink. Models 2–4 have lower values, suggesting that other variables not included in the current study would need to be considered to help explain variations in drinking patterns among young people. In particular, owing to a low  $R^2$  value, we were unable to fit a satisfactory model for moderate/heavy drinking. Based on discussions and interviews with young people, other variables that may help to explain drinking patterns include the accessibility and affordability of alcoholic drinks, and messages received around alcohol use from advertising, the media and education.

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