

# Teenage drinking

and the role of parents and guardians

Findings from Drinkaware Monitor 2016

An Ipsos MORI report for Drinkaware



Ipsos MORI  
Social Research Institute

**drinkaware**

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# Executive summary

# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Background and methodology

Drinkaware works to reduce alcohol misuse and harm in the UK, and draws upon a base of evidence and research in order to maximise its impact. Drinkaware commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a survey of young people aged 13-17 in the UK and their parents and guardians, aiming to provide a picture of young people's drinking behaviour, parents/guardians' awareness of their children's drinking, and the effects of parents/guardians' drinking behaviour and attitudes on those of their children.

In November/December 2016, Ipsos MORI conducted a quota survey through its online panel and those of its partners with 1,003 UK adults who have a child aged 13-17. Quotas were set based on the known demographic profile of parents and guardians of this age group, and the final data were weighted to reflect this profile. With the consent of their parents or guardians, 561 young people aged 13-17 also took part. The data were later 'matched' between children and their parents or guardians. The questionnaires for children and their parents or guardians were deliberately designed to afford as much overlap as possible in question wording and responses, thus allowing a greater ability to compare the responses of children and their parents or guardians<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.2 Young people's drinking

### Drinking behaviours

Around half of 13-17 year olds in the UK have had a drink (53%), with most trying their first drink between the ages of 13 and 15 (54% having done this). Most young people who drink, do so infrequently. A small group of 13-17 year olds say they drink at least once a week (11%). Instead, young people most commonly say they drink 1-6 times a year (34%).

Among all 13-17 year olds, just under a quarter say they have been drunk at least once (23%). Of those who have drunk alcohol before, 45% have been drunk at least once. Three in ten have experienced a negative consequence of their drinking – most commonly vomiting (24% of those who have tried alcohol have vomited as a consequence).

As is widely evidenced, drinking is strongly related to age with the proportions who have drunk alcohol increasing in a step-wise progression from one quarter at age 13 (25%) to three quarters at age 17 (76%). Older teenagers are not just more likely to have tried alcohol, but also to drink more frequently than their younger counterparts (42% of 15-17 year olds drink at least once a month compared to 33% of 13-14 year olds). 17 appears to be an age of experimentation, with drunkenness much higher among this age group compared to all other age groups – 59% of 17 year olds who have tried alcohol report having been drunk compared to 40% of individuals aged 13-16.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note, some of the analysis in this executive summary is based on relatively small base sizes but is indicative of wider patterns in the data. Readers should consult the full report for more information.



Boys and girls exhibit very similar drinking behaviours being as likely as one another to have tried alcohol, drink to the same levels of frequency and experience being drunk. There are no obvious or consistent patterns in the demographic profile of parents/guardians affecting how their child behaves with respect to alcohol. There is some suggestion that household income might play a part with riskier drinking behaviours linked to higher household incomes but the evidence is limited in support of this conclusion.

Age of first drink does however appear to affect subsequent drinking behaviours with those who start drinking earlier exhibiting riskier behaviours. For example, 50% of those who first tried alcohol aged 6-14 have been drunk at least once compared to 36% of those whose first drink was aged 15-17. And those who start drinking earlier are more likely to have experienced a negative consequence as a result of drinking (36% compared to 22% of those whose first drink is between the age of 15 and 17).

### Reasons for drinking or not

Young people who drink do so primarily for social reasons saying it helps them enjoy a party/makes social gatherings more fun (75% mentioning drinking for a social reason at least some of the time). They also drink for reasons related to enhancement – because they find it fun or want to get a ‘buzz’ (68%). Some young people say they drink to conform, with 65% mentioning reasons such as wanting to fit in or not wanting to be left out. Much less common, though still mentioned by 43% of young people who drink, is drinking to cope in some way, such as to cheer themselves up or to forget about problems.

Younger teenagers who don’t drink alcohol most commonly say this is because they are too young (60% of 13-14 year olds say this). The most common reasons given by older teenagers for not drinking are that they are not interested (50% of 15-17 year olds say this) and they don’t like the taste or smell of alcohol (50%).

### Drinking environments

Most young people who have had a drink have drunk with a family member and have accessed alcohol through a relative. Just under three quarters of young people who have had a drink have drunk alcohol with a family member (72%), with two thirds having drunk with a parent or guardian (66%) and just under a third having drunk with another adult relative (31%). Nearly two thirds have drunk with friends (63%).

Younger teenagers are just as likely as older teenagers to have drunk with their parent/guardian (60% of 13-14 year olds who have had a drink have done this, broadly in line with the 68% of 15-17 year olds who have had a drink who have done the same). But differences emerge when considering drinking with friends – something much more common among older teenagers (68% of 15-17 year olds who have had a drink have drunk with their friends, compared to 52% of 13-14 year olds who have had a drink). The incidence of drinking with friends is particularly high for 17 year olds with 80% of those who have drunk alcohol saying they have done this with friends.

Young people most commonly get alcohol from their friends and their parents or guardians, which links very closely to who they have drunk alcohol with. Nearly two thirds of young people who have drunk alcohol have got it from family members (62%). Most notably, over half of young people who have had a drink have got alcohol from a parent or guardian (54%). When looking at all young people (not just those who have drunk alcohol), over a quarter (27%) have been given alcohol by their parent or guardian.

### **1.3 Parents/guardians' awareness of young people's drinking behaviour**

Overall, parents/guardians have a fairly accurate awareness of their child's drinking behaviour. This may stem, in part, from the fairly high levels of parents/guardians who are there when their child drinks alcohol or who have provided their child with alcohol. Indeed, parents/guardians say they feel more knowledgeable about their child's drinking than what their child does in their spare time or who their friends are (a view shared by their children). There are however areas where parents/guardians show less awareness of their child's behaviour – such as how frequently their child drinks.

Overall, 92% of parents/guardians are correct about whether or not their child has drunk alcohol. Among those who are incorrect about the extent of their child's drinking, there is a slight tendency towards optimism by believing their child has had less exposure to alcohol than is correct. Of the children who have tried alcohol, there remains a group of parents/guardians (10%) who believe they have not.

More often than not, parents/guardians are correct about the age of their child's first drink, with 71% naming the same age as their child. However, one quarter of parents/guardians incorrectly believe their child had their first drink at a later age than they actually did (25%).

Of the young people who have had a drink, only 56% of their parents/guardians are correct in their estimate of how regularly their child drinks. Again parents/guardians show a slight optimism bias with a greater proportion incorrectly believing their child drinks less frequently than they do, compared to those parents/guardians who think their child drinks more frequently than is the case.

Among young people who have been drunk, just under four in five of their parents/guardians know or suspect their child has been drunk (79%). There remains a group of parents/guardians who are not so aware – 18% incorrectly believe their child has not been drunk when indeed they have.

While 74% of young people say at least a few of their friends drink, only 62% of parents/guardians think likewise, suggesting parents/guardians may not fully grasp the prevalence of drinking in their child's peer groups.

## 1.4 Effects of parental behaviour on young people's drinking

Certain parental behaviours appear to influence young people's drinking behaviour, which is particularly evident when examining parents/guardians' AUDIT scores, with riskier behaviours by parents being reflected more often in the behaviour of their children

Parents/guardians with higher AUDIT scores (and who therefore exhibit more harmful drinking behaviours) are more likely to have children who drink, started drinking at a younger age, drink more frequently, have ever been drunk, and have experienced negative consequences as a result of drinking (and this is not connected to the age profile of these children). For example, 51% of children with parents/guardians in AUDIT zones 2-4 have themselves been drunk (compared to 42% of children with parents/guardians in zone 1), and they are also more likely to have experienced a negative consequence from drinking (40% versus 22%).

Children with parents/guardians in AUDIT zone 1 and zones 2-4 are as likely as one another to drink for reasons pertaining to social or enhancement factors. However, children whose parents/guardians exhibit riskier drinking behaviours (AUDIT zones 2-4) are more likely to say they drink for reasons pertaining to conformity (73% versus 58% of children with parents/guardians in zone 1) and in relation to coping (51% versus 36%).

Parents/guardians who exhibit riskier drinking behaviours (zones 2-4) are more likely to assume more of their child's friends drink compared to those in zone 1 (67% believe at least a few of their child's friends drink compared to 59%). This belief may be incorrect given parents with higher AUDIT scores tend to know less about how much alcohol their child consumes. Two-thirds of children with parents/guardians in AUDIT zones 2-4 (63%) say their parent knows a lot about their drinking which compares less well to children with parents/guardians in zone 1 who appear to be more knowledgeable (76%). A similar pattern is seen for parents/guardians' knowledge of what their child does in their spare time – with better knowledge being exhibited by parents/guardians with lower AUDIT scores.

Whether young people see their parents or guardians drinking or not appears to have an impact on their own behaviour, though this is likely to reflect parental attitudes to alcohol rather than the act of seeing their parents/guardians drink (or not as the case may be).

Parents or guardians providing children with alcohol does not appear to be linked to more harmful drinking behaviours for young people. There is very little difference in the mean age of first drink for children whose parents/guardians have given them alcohol (13.7) compared to those whose parents/guardians have not (13.6). Similarly, there is no difference in children having been drunk according to getting alcohol from parents/guardians (42% of those who have been given alcohol by their parents/guardians have ever been drunk compared to 50% of those who have not been given alcohol by their parent). Indeed, the data suggests that those who have been given alcohol by their parent are actually less likely to have experienced a negative consequence of drinking (23% versus 38% of those who

have not got alcohol from their parents/guardians). Those who have not been given alcohol by their parent are much more likely to have got it from friends instead.

## **1.5 Rule setting**

Two fifths of 13-17 year olds believe that their parent would prefer them not to drink at all, and a similar proportion believe their parent would prefer if they only drank under certain circumstances. About one in six teenagers think their parent is happy for them to make their own choices. These results closely match parents/guardians' actual responses, indicating a good understanding of their parents/guardians' views among children.

Half of all 13-17 year olds believe their parent has set rules related to drinking alcohol, and the same proportion of parents/guardians say they have put rules in place (52% and 51% respectively). One in five 13-17 year olds (20%) and one in five parents/guardians (19%) say these are strict rules without negotiation, while a third of each group (32%) say the rules are discussed and agreed together. When looking specifically at matched data between parent and child, most 13-17 year olds are right about whether or not their parent has set rules, and whether these rules can or cannot be negotiated (68%). Nonetheless, one in five teenagers who think their parent has no rules in place are incorrect (21%), suggesting that there is some miscommunication between parents/guardians and their children about these matters.

There is not a clear pattern in terms of parents/guardians' AUDIT score and their propensity to set rules. Whilst it could be theorised that parents/guardians with a lower AUDIT score are more likely to set rules, if anything it appears that those with higher AUDIT scores are stricter about the alcohol consumption of their child, though the data is not conclusive on this point. As to be expected, the child's age is an important determinant of whether parents/guardians set rules about drinking, with strict, non-negotiable rules more commonly in place for younger teenagers: 28% of 13-14 year olds think that their parent sets strict rules, compared to 14% of 15-17 year olds.

There is an observable relationship between parental rules and teenage drinking behaviour but this is likely to be mediated by these age differences. In line with this, the presence of strict, non-negotiable rules – but not negotiated rules – is associated with a lower likelihood of having had an alcoholic drink and having been drunk. There is some evidence to suggest that children whose parents/guardians negotiate rules with them actually demonstrate riskier drinking behaviours than children with no rules in place (despite having a younger age profile) – but the patterns are not consistent across all drinking behaviours.

When asked under what circumstances they might allow their child to drink, parents or guardians most commonly say they would allow this if: the child tells them where they are (mentioned by 30% of parents/guardians), the child doesn't drink and drive/get into a car with someone who has been drinking (29%), the child only drinks on special family occasions (27%), and the child comes home by an agreed time (27%).



## 1.6 Speaking about drinking

The vast majority of 13-17 year olds in the UK say they feel very or fairly informed about the risks of drinking alcohol (89%), with two in five saying they feel *very* informed (41%). Only seven per cent admit to feeling uninformed about the risks of alcohol. There appears to be a step-change in how well informed young people feel between the ages of 13 and 14, with 17% of 13 year olds saying they feel fairly uninformed – which drops to six per cent of 14 year olds and remains low for all subsequent ages.

Some parents or guardians assume their child is ‘fairly informed’ when actually their child feels ‘very informed’ (23%), whilst others believe their child to be more informed than their child actually feels (26% of parents/guardians say their child is ‘very informed’ but their child only feels ‘fairly informed’). Overall, 69% of parents/guardians are correct about the degree to which their child feels informed on the risks of alcohol.

Nearly all parents or guardians surveyed said they felt very or fairly comfortable talking to their child about drinking alcohol (95%) with only four per cent admitting to feeling uncomfortable. Whilst two thirds say they are very comfortable (66%), there remains just over a quarter of parents or guardians who are *fairly* rather than *very* comfortable (28%). Some differences in levels of comfort are observable according to demographics with, for instance, mothers feeling more comfortable discussing alcohol with their children compared to fathers (73% of women saying they are *very* comfortable compared to 58% of men, with men conversely more likely to say they feel *fairly* comfortable). The drinking behaviour of parents or guardians also plays an important part in determining how comfortable they feel about discussing alcohol with their child – those exhibiting more moderate drinking behaviours feel more comfortable discussing the issue with their children. This level of discomfort does not however appear to impact on their likelihood of having a conversation with their child about drinking.

In the vast majority of cases, young people say their parent has spoken to them about drinking alcohol (88% with only nine per cent believing this not to be the case). As would be expected, older teenagers are more likely to have had a conversation with their parents/guardians about alcohol, though it appears that these conversations begin to happen at around the age of 14. There is a high level of agreement between parents/guardians and children as to whether they have, or have not, had a conversation about drinking alcohol (92% of answers provided matched). In general, these conversations are positively received by children, with nine in ten (89%) using positive words to describe them such as ‘honest’, ‘helpful’ and ‘supportive’.

Conversations about alcohol are most commonly prompted by questions from children and take the form of gentle reminders about the need to be safe rather than more detailed discussions about the risks of drinking. They cover a number of topics such as how to drink moderately and avoid peer pressure whilst also addressing the health effects of drinking. Parents or guardians hold very similar views to young people in terms of what they describe as being the main topics of conversation. However, in all but one instance (‘the risk of getting in trouble with the police’), parents and guardians are more likely to think they have covered

a variety of topics compared to young people, potentially suggesting that some of the topics discussed might not have landed or been as memorable to young people as their parents/guardians might have thought.

There do appear to be differences in the drinking behaviour of young people according to whether they have spoken to their parent about alcohol or not. However, the picture is heavily influenced by age with older teenagers experimenting more with alcohol, and at the same time being more likely to have spoken with their parents or guardians about it.

### **1.7 Information seeking**

There appears to be a step-change in interest levels in alcohol from ages 13 to 14 with the latter more likely to consult various sources for information about drinking compared to the former. Parents and guardians are by far the most popular source of information about alcohol, reflecting the importance of their role in educating young people about the risks of alcohol. 43% of young people have got helpful information about alcohol from their parent or guardian, and 62% would turn to their parents/guardians if they wanted more information – substantially more than those who would turn to their friends (the second most popular source of information). The internet is also fairly popular as a medium through which young people would look for information about drinking (50% say they would do this though only 27% say they have actually done so).

### **1.8 Implications for Drinkaware**

This research offers the unique ability to cross-analyse the attitudes and behaviours of young people against those of their parents or guardians. In doing so, a number of areas are highlighted which could inform Drinkaware's messaging to parents/guardians:

- It is encouraging to see that conversations about drinking appear to be taking place between parents/guardians and children. However, given the high proportion of both parents/guardians and children who say they have discussed alcohol, misinformation still remains suggesting that parents and guardians may not be getting a full picture of their child's drinking whilst discussing it with them. In addition to this, it seems that parents/guardians are overestimating the extent to which their messages are being received and potentially Drinkaware has a role in making parents/guardians aware of this and helping them to more successfully relay their messages.
- Similarly, the research points to some miscommunication between parents or guardians and children in terms of how well rules have been put in place – with a group of children unaware of the rules their parents/guardians say they have laid down. This provides further evidence that the conversations parents and guardians have with their child about alcohol could be more effective and Drinkaware can provide support for them in this regard.
- Young people, on the whole, are positive about the conversations they have had with their parents or guardians which may alleviate some fear among parents and

guardians that these conversations are unwelcomed. Parents and guardians do show some level of discomfort about having these conversations which Drinkaware is well placed to help facilitate.

- Whilst parents and guardians show fairly accurate levels of knowledge about their child's drinking behaviours, they tend to be less aware of how frequently their child drinks and this could be something Drinkaware wishes to draw attention to.
- The research strongly evidences the impact of parental drinking on the drinking behaviours of children (primarily shown by the AUDIT classification tool) which again may be important for Drinkaware to highlight as part of its work.
- In line with this, the research provides some evidence that having a Risky Social and Coping Drinker as a parent may have a negative impact on a young person's drinking behaviour. Drinkaware may wish to reach these parents or guardians to highlight their role in shaping their children's relationship with alcohol.

# Introduction

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background to this report

Drinkaware works to reduce alcohol misuse and harm in the UK, and draws upon a base of evidence and research in order to maximise its impact. Ipsos MORI has conducted an annual Monitor survey for Drinkaware since 2009, and in 2016 was commissioned by Drinkaware to undertake a survey of young people aged 13-17 in the UK and their parents or guardians, aiming to provide a picture of young people's drinking behaviour, parents/guardians' awareness of their children's drinking, and the effects of parental drinking behaviour and attitudes on their children's own behaviour and attitudes.

### 2.2 Methodology

Between 25<sup>th</sup> November and 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016, Ipsos MORI conducted a quota survey through its online panel and those of its partners, with 1,003 UK adults aged 28-80 who have a child aged 13-17. Quotas were set based on the known profile of parents and guardians of this age group, and the final data were weighted to reflect this profile.

Upon completing the survey, parents were asked if they would consent for their child to complete a survey also. With the consent of their parents/guardians, 561 young people took part. The data were later 'matched' between parents/guardians and children. The questionnaires for parents/guardians and children were deliberately designed to afford as much overlap as possible in question wording and responses, thus allowing a greater ability to compare the responses of children and their parents/guardians. Input into the questionnaire design was provided by Drinkaware's external advisory panel.

Data were also collected from parents and guardians for whom there was not a 'matched' child (442) but, as this report focuses primarily on the relationship between young people's drinking behaviour and the behaviour of their parents/guardians, this additional data is not drawn on for this report except for in a few instances where it is flagged accordingly.

### 2.3 Specific sub-groups

Throughout this report, various terms are used to refer to specific groupings of participants. These groupings are determined by responses to questions or sets of questions within the survey. In order to group participants, the following standardised tools and/or definitions were included in the survey and analysis. Please be aware that these groupings only apply to parents/guardians as the question sets are not suitable for use with children and young people.

#### Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT)

The AUDIT tool, developed by the World Health Organisation, is used to measure an individual's level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns. The



test consists of 10 questions, each of which carries a score of 0-4, depending on the answer given. This gives an individual an overall AUDIT score between zero and 40, used to allocate them to one of the four following groups:

- Zone 1 (low risk), score of 0-7
- Zone 2 (hazardous), score of 8-15
- Zone 3 (harmful), score of 16-19
- Zone 4 (dependency), score of 20-40

## Segmentation

When discussing parents, this report refers to segments of UK drinkers. These segments were developed following the results of the 2014 Drinkaware Monitor survey<sup>2</sup>, and bring together clusters of participants who expressed similar attitudes and/or displayed similar drinking patterns and behaviours. Segments are clustered around the survey participants' values, attitudes and behaviours, based on their responses to a number of 'key questions'. The key questions concern gender, age, drinking frequency, motivation and moderation activity. Please see the appendix for more information on the segmentation methodology, and a brief profile of each of the segments derived.

## 2.4 Interpreting the data

The data in this report are primarily presented in three ways:

- The data for young people are presented in isolation (where the report focuses specifically on the behaviour and attitudes of young people and not the comparison with parental views);
- The data for young people and parents/guardians are presented side by side but do not show the inter-relation between children and their own parents/guardians as opposed to parents/guardians in general (this is where the complexity of the question wording and responses do not allow for a comparison to be made); and
- The data for young people and parents/guardians are crossed such that the data shows what children think or do in direct comparison to their own parent's views.

In this report we do not discuss any emerging differences between children and parents/guardians according to ethnicity. 83 parents of a Black or Minority Ethnic background took part in the survey which became too small for reliable analysis of particular sub-groups within.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2014 report can be found at: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/our-research-and-evaluation-reports/drinkaware-monitor-young-people-report/>

Note, where differences in the responses of particular sub-groups are discussed in this report, only those differences that are considered statistically significant are reported unless otherwise explicitly stated. These differences are statistically significant to a confidence level of 95%<sup>3</sup>. Base sizes of less than 100 should be treated with caution and results seen as indicative only. Where base sizes are particularly small this is noted in the report.

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding and/or participants being able to select multiple responses.

## **2.5 Limitations of the research**

As with all research, there are some limitations presented by the methodology which readers should be mindful of. It is possible that online panellists are qualitatively different with respect to alcohol consumption compared to individuals who are not on such a research panel. However, quotas were set to reflect the known profile of the offline population, and reported estimates of alcohol consumption are in-line with other wider research.

In designing the methodology for this research, it was identified as a potential risk that the parents and guardians who consented for their child to take part in the survey would be attitudinally or behaviourally different to those who did not consent, and thus the group of children surveyed may be atypical in some way. Comparing the parents and guardians who consented for their child to take part with those who did not reveals very few differences on key metrics including AUDIT scores, frequency of drinking, having spoken with their child about drinking, and having rules about alcohol consumption in place. Please see the appendix for further details.

## **2.6 Structure of this report**

This report sets out Ipsos MORI's analysis of responses to the survey. Chapter 2 looks at the drinking behaviour of young people and the awareness of their parents/guardians about such behaviour. Chapter 3 looks in greater detail at the environments young people drink in, giving consideration to where they get alcohol from and why they may choose to drink or not. Chapter 4 examines the effects of rule setting. Chapter 5 looks at conversations between parents and children about alcohol, while Chapter 6 discusses information seeking.

## **2.7 Acknowledgements**

The 2016 Drinkaware Monitor report explores in detail how the drinking attitudes and behaviours of young people link to those of their parents or guardians. The decision to adopt this focus and the selection of suitable measurement instruments in this area were guided by external research experts: Dr Antony Moss, London South Bank University; Professor Derek Heim, Edge Hill University; Elizabeth Fuller, NatCen Social Research; and Professor W. Miles Cox, Bangor University. We also consulted experts from organisations working in this

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<sup>3</sup> The confidence interval mentioned here assumes a random probability sample. In reality, the design effects associated with using a quota sample would slightly widen the margins of error.

field: Kate Winstanley, Community Alcohol Partnerships and Karen Tyrell, Addaction. We are grateful to everyone for their valuable contributions.

**Young people's drinking and  
parents' and guardians'  
awareness**

## 3. Young people's drinking – and parents' and guardians' awareness

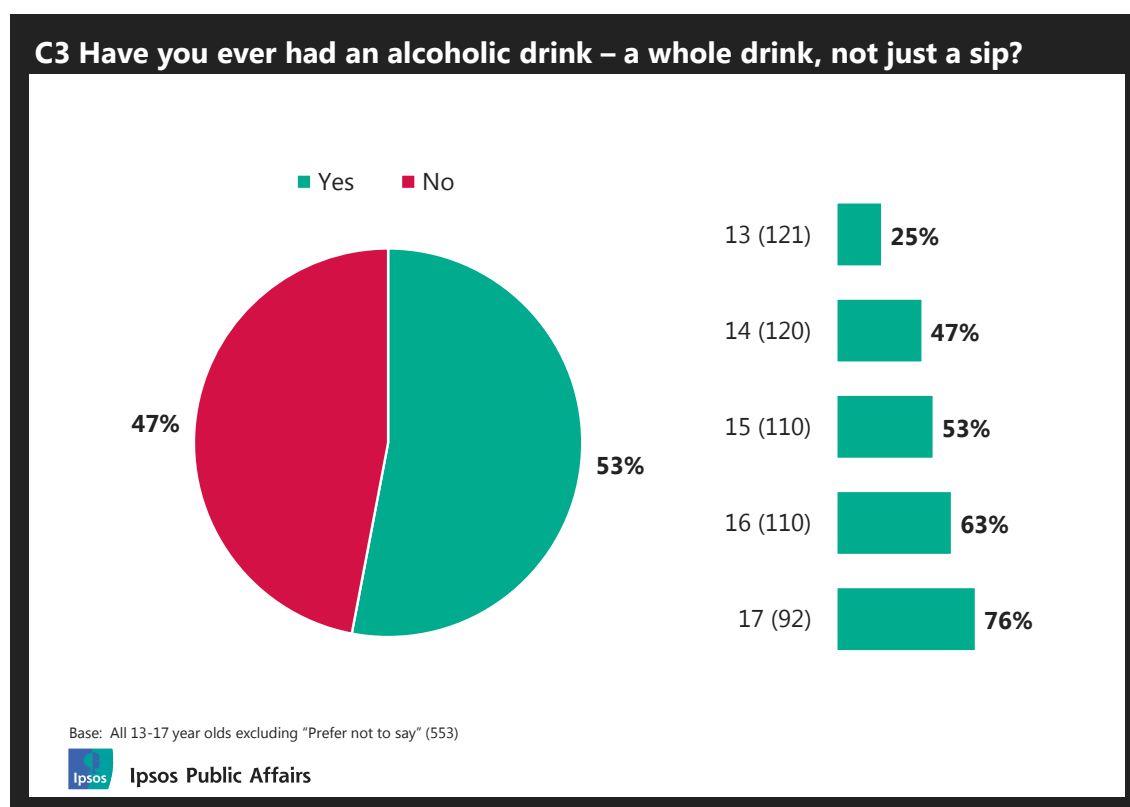
This chapter examines the drinking behaviour of young people in the UK aged 13-17 – considering aspects such as frequency of drinking, experiences of drunkenness and associated negative consequences. The latter half of the chapter moves on to examine the extent to which parents and guardians have a good grasp of the drinking behaviour of their children, concluding with a discussion of how parents/guardians' own drinking behaviours affect those of their children.

### 3.1 Young people's drinking

#### Prevalence of drinking

***Around half of 13-17 year olds have had a drink, with most having their first drink between the ages of 13 and 15.***

Figure 1.1: Prevalence of drinking



Among 13-17 year olds in the UK, slightly more have had a drink than have not (53% compared to 47%). This remains in-line with results from previous waves of the Drinkaware Monitor where 54% of 13-17 year olds had drunk an alcoholic drink in both 2014 and 2013.

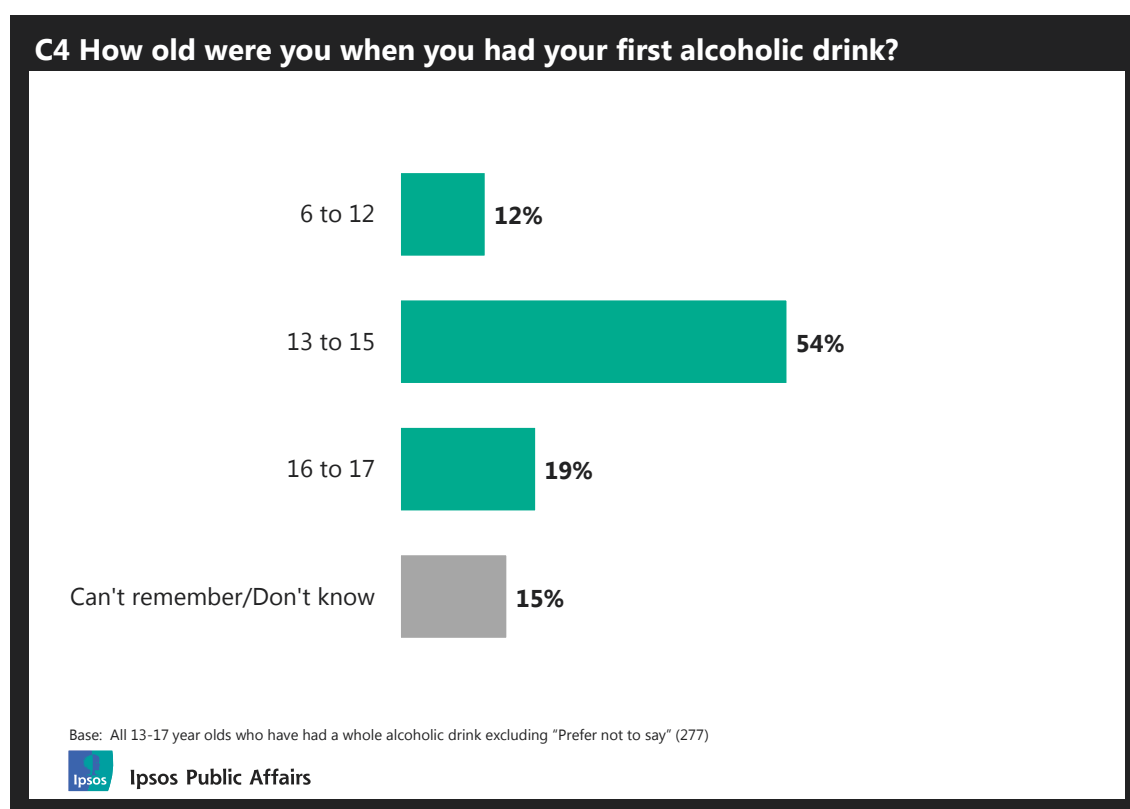


This suggests drinking levels among this group are fairly stable, though the long-term trend is a decline in the prevalence of drinking (as measured from the late 1980s)<sup>4</sup>.

There are no observable differences in the behaviour of boys and girls, with 52% of boys and 54% of girls having had a drink. But, as seen historically and in the wider literature, the likelihood of having drunk alcohol increases with age. Just over one third of 13-14 year olds have drunk alcohol (36%), while nearly two thirds of 15-17 year olds have done likewise (64%); increasing in a step-wise progression from only one quarter at age 13 (25%) to three quarters at age 17 (76%).

Data from the 2016 Monitor reflect findings from wider research: 42% of 13-15 year olds have had an alcoholic drink which is slightly higher than the 38% of 11-15 year olds as identified in the most recent Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use survey (HSCIC, 2014), with the difference likely to be explained by the older age range included in the Monitor survey.

**Figure 1.2: Age of first drink**



Again reflecting wider research<sup>5</sup>, the most common age of first drink is 13 to 15, with over half of young people having their first drink at these ages (54%). One fifth have their first drink later at 16 or 17 (19%), and one in eight have their first drink between the age of six and 12 (12%). Boys and girls are likely to try alcohol at similar ages.

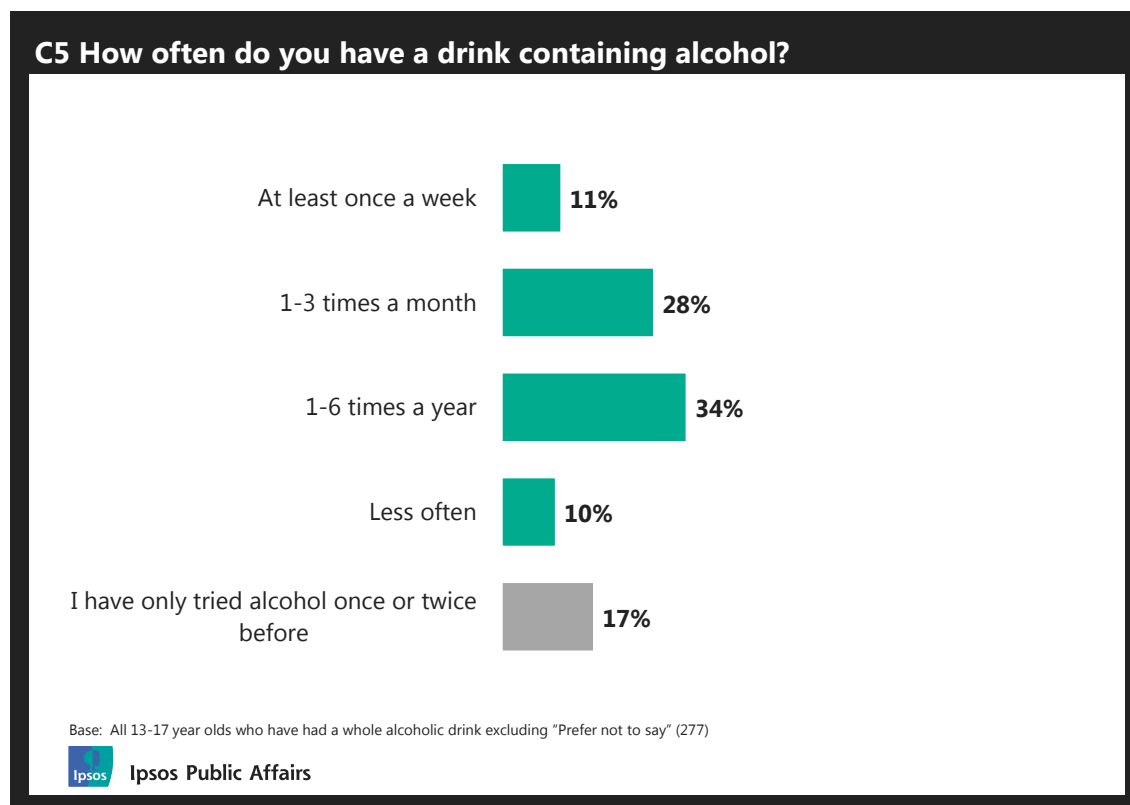
<sup>4</sup> HSCIC (2016), Statistics on Alcohol: England 2016

<sup>5</sup> HSCIC, Ipsos MORI (2014), What About YOUTH?

## Frequency of drinking

**Most young people who drink, do so infrequently – most commonly drinking 1-6 times a year.**

Figure 1.3: Frequency of drinking



A small group of 13-17 year olds say they drink at least once a week (11%). Instead, young people most commonly say they drink 1-6 times a year (34%). One in six say (17%) they have only tried alcohol once or twice before and thus there is not yet any pattern to how frequently they drink.

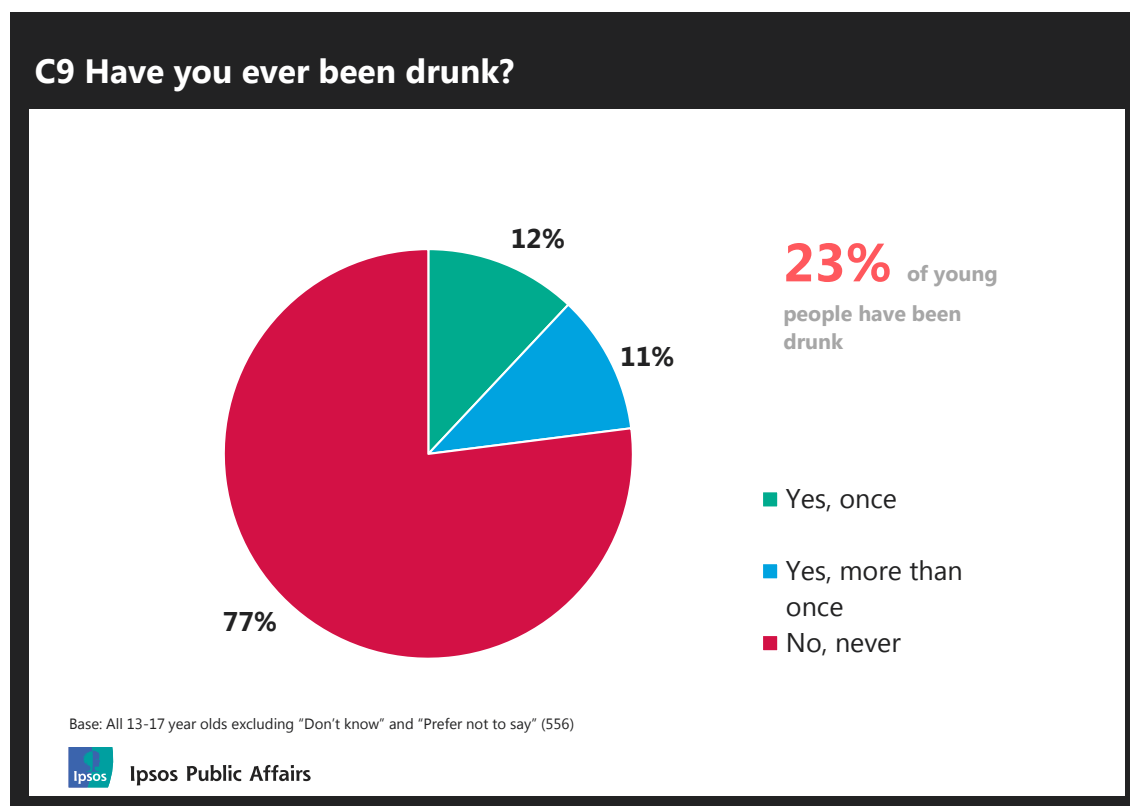
Age affects frequency of drinking, with older teenagers drinking more frequently than younger teenagers. For example, those aged 15-17 being more likely to drink at least once a month compared to 13-14 year olds (42% versus 33%<sup>6</sup>). Boys and girls are equally as likely to drink at least once a week/month.

## Drunkenness and negative consequences experienced

**Among all 13-17 year olds, just under a quarter say they have been drunk at least once. Three in ten 13-17 year olds have experienced a negative consequence of their drinking – most commonly this being vomiting.**

<sup>6</sup> Please note, 83 13-14 year olds who completed the survey had drunk alcohol. Due to small base sizes, this difference cannot be considered statistically significant but is indicative of a wider pattern in the data.

Figure 1.4: Prevalence of drunkenness



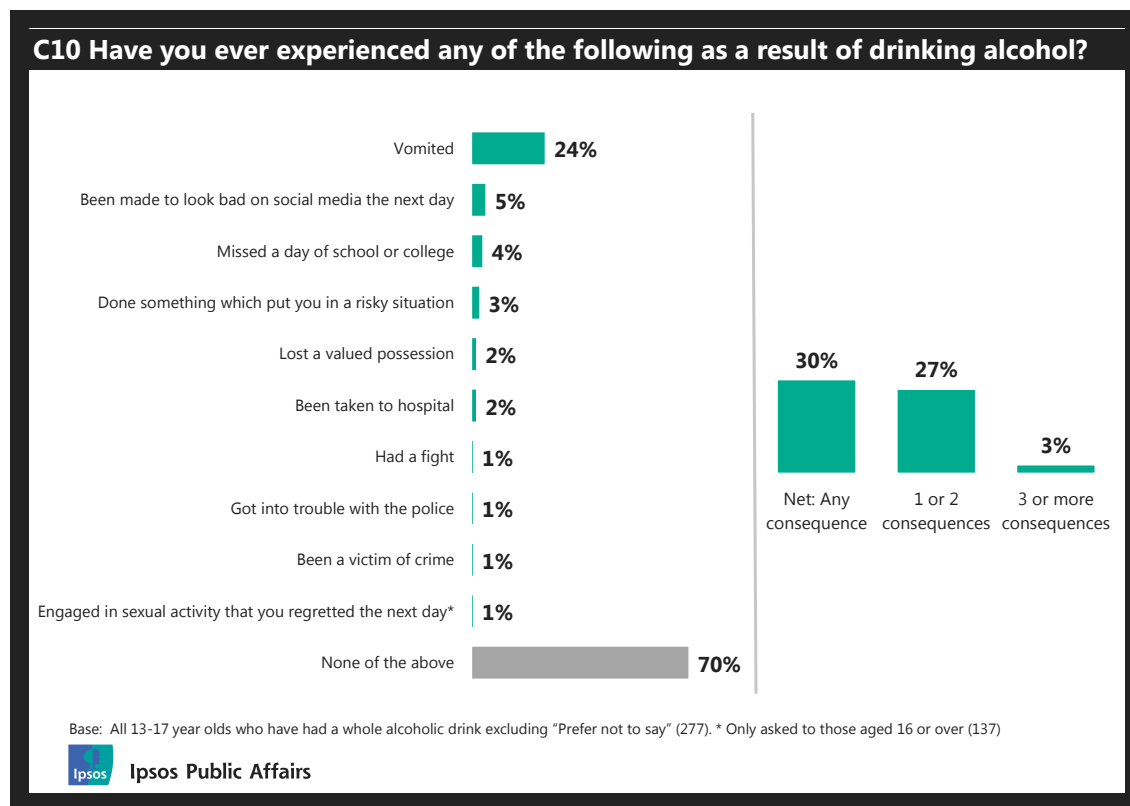
Almost a quarter of young people say they have been drunk (23%), with 11% admitting to having been drunk on more than one occasion. Three quarters of young people say they have never been drunk (77%). Of those who have drunk alcohol before, 45% have been drunk at least once, with 22% admitting to having been drunk on more than one occasion.

There appears to be a difference between 17 year olds and younger individuals when considering drunkenness. Whilst needing to be interpreted with caution due to the small base size (n=67), 59% of 17 year olds who have tried alcohol report having been drunk compared to 40% of individuals aged 13-16, suggesting this is an age of experimentation with alcohol. Again, there are no observable patterns between males and females regarding drunkenness.

Those who started drinking earlier are more likely to have been drunk at least once – 50% of those who first tried alcohol aged 6-14 have been drunk compared to 36% of those whose first drink was aged 15-17<sup>7</sup>. And, as might be expected, frequency of drinking is closely linked to drunkenness such that those who drink at least monthly are much more likely to have been drunk before, compared to those who drink less frequently (74% versus 31%).

<sup>7</sup> Please note, this is based on 141 individuals who had their first drink aged 6-14 and 91 individuals who had their first drink aged 15-17.

**Figure 1.5: Experience of negative consequences from drinking**



Three in ten young people who have drunk alcohol (30%) have experienced a negative consequence of their drinking. Mostly individuals have experienced one or two negative consequences, though a small percentage (three per cent) have experienced three or more negative consequences following drinking alcohol. The same proportion (three per cent) have experienced ‘serious harm’ meaning they have got into trouble with the police, been a victim of crime, been involved in a fight or been taken to hospital<sup>8</sup>.

The most common negative consequence experienced by young people is vomiting, with a quarter who have drunk having experienced this (24%). Small proportions of young people have experienced other negative consequences, including being made to look bad on social media the next day (five per cent), missing a day of school or college (four per cent) and doing something which put them in a risky situation (three per cent). 17 year olds are the age group most likely to have vomited as a result of drinking (36% compared to 19% of 15-16 year olds and 18% of 13-14 year olds<sup>9</sup>): this is unsurprising given they are the age group who will have had most exposure to alcohol by virtue of being the oldest.

Those who had their first drink at a younger age are more likely to have experienced negative consequences as a result of drinking. Over a third of people who had their first

<sup>8</sup> Note the data shown here are not comparable to the 2014 Monitor data on experience of serious harm due to the different age profile of respondents and significant revisions to the question wording.

<sup>9</sup> Please note, this is based on 83 13-14 year olds, 125 15-16 year olds and 69 17 year olds so should be interpreted with caution.

drink between the age of six and 14 have experienced at least one negative consequence (36%) compared to around one fifth of those who had their first drink between 15 and 17 (22%)<sup>10</sup>. Again, this is likely to be function of time spent drinking: the longer a young person has been drinking for, the more opportunities there have been to experience a negative consequence as a result of drinking. It is also possible that drinking at an early age could be associated with more harmful drinking practices.

Similarly, frequency of drinking also increases the likelihood of young people experiencing negative consequences. Just under half of those who drink at least once a month have experienced at least one negative consequence (47%), compared to just under a fifth of young people who drink less than monthly (19%).

The motivation behind drinking also seems to be related to the likelihood of experiencing harmful consequences. Of those young people who drink for coping reasons nearly half (48%) have experienced at least one negative consequence, compared to 30% among all 13-17 year olds who have had drink. This is in line with findings in the wider literature that suggest there is a link between negative reasons for drinking and alcohol-related problems in young people<sup>11</sup>. Young people's drinking motivations are discussed in more detail in section 3.1.3.

## 3.2 Parental awareness of young people's drinking behaviour

### Prevalence and frequency of drinking

***In the majority of cases, parents and guardians have a good awareness of their child's drinking behaviour. Among those who are incorrect about the extent of their child's drinking, there is a slight tendency towards optimism by believing their child has had less exposure to alcohol than is correct. Parents and guardians are less aware of how frequently their child drinks.***

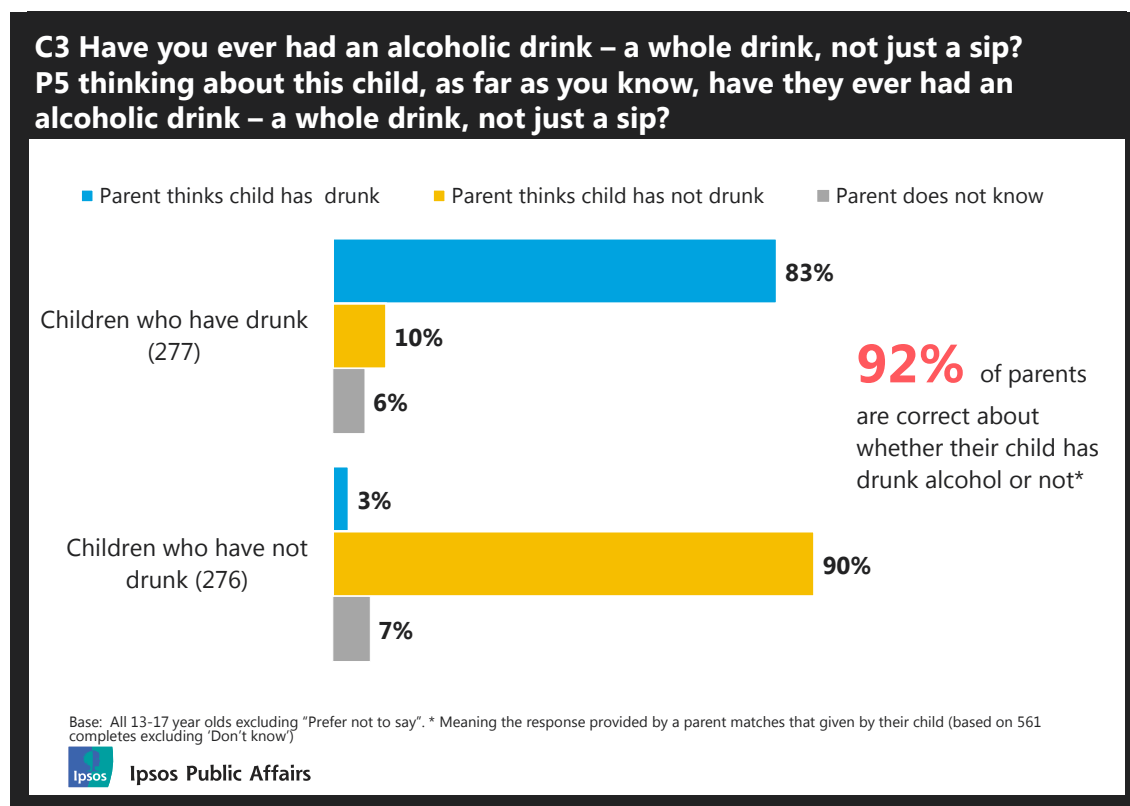
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<sup>10</sup> Please note, this is based on 141 individuals who had their first drink aged 6-14 and 93 individuals who had their first drink aged 15-17.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Cox, W. M., et al. (2006). "Motives for drinking, alcohol consumption, and alcohol-related problems among British secondary-school and university students." *Addictive Behaviour* 31(12): 2147-2157



Figure 1.6: Parental awareness of their child's drinking



Most parents and guardians are well aware of whether their child has had an alcoholic drink or not. Among children who have *not* drunk, 90% of their parents/guardians agree their child has not had a drink, with only three per cent mistakenly thinking their child has had an alcoholic drink. The parents and guardians of children who have drunk alcohol are marginally less accurate, with 83% agreeing their child has had a drink but 10% thinking they have not. This perhaps suggests a slight optimism about young people's drinking behaviour. Overall, 92% of parents and guardians are correct about whether or not their child has drunk alcohol.

As with awareness of drinking at all, parents and guardians are generally correct about the age of their child's first drink, with 71% naming the same age as their child. One quarter of parents and guardians incorrectly believe their child had their first drink at a later age than they did (25%), with only three per cent incorrectly thinking their child was younger than they actually were when they had their first drink.

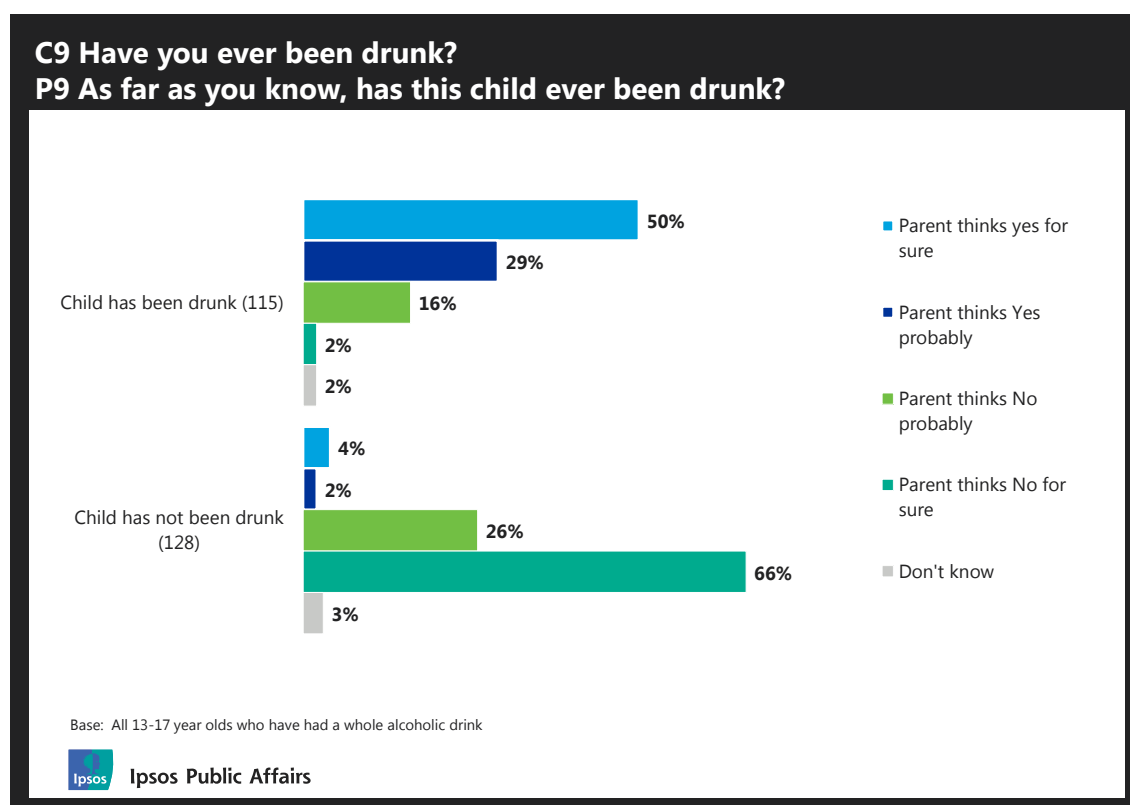
Parental awareness of how frequently their child drinks is much less accurate than awareness that they have drunk and the age of their first drink. Of the young people who have had a drink, 56% of their parents or guardians were correct in their estimate of how regularly their child drinks, compared to 44% who were incorrect. Parents and guardians were much more likely to underestimate the frequency of their child's drinking with 30% believing them to drink less frequently than they do, compared to 14% who believe their child drinks more frequently than is the case. Frequency of drinking is therefore an area that

parents and guardians are particularly unaware of, at least in comparison to other measures of young people’s drinking.

### Drunkenness and negative consequences experienced

***Parents and guardians have a fairly accurate appreciation for whether their child has been drunk or not, and are fairly knowledgeable about what, if any, negative consequences young people have experienced as a result of drinking alcohol.***

Figure 1.7: Parental awareness of their child’s drunkenness

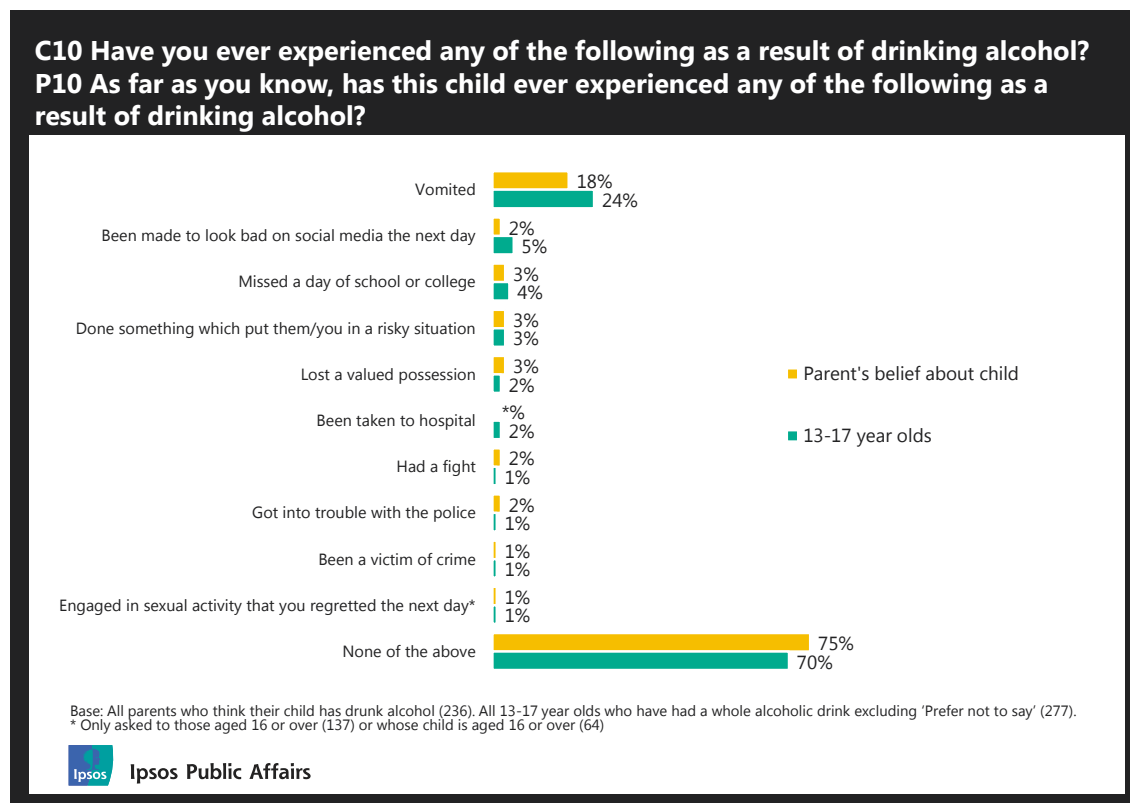


Parental awareness of whether their child has been drunk or not is fairly accurate. Among young people who have not been drunk, nine in ten parents and guardians are either certain or suspect their child has not been drunk (91%), with just six per cent incorrectly believing their child has been drunk. Among young people who *have* been drunk, just under four in five of their parents or guardians know or suspect they have been drunk (79%). A higher percentage of parents and guardians are incorrect here than among the parents or guardians of children who have not been drunk, with 18% of parents and guardians incorrectly believing their child has not been drunk.

Young people were also asked if they thought their parents or guardians believed they had ever been drunk – 58% of young people were correct in their assessment of their parent’s awareness, compared to 42% who were incorrect. On balance, young people are generally

aware of how much their parents or guardians know about their drinking, although this is by no means a universal truth.

**Figure 1.8: Parents and guardians’ perceptions of negative consequences experienced as a result of their child drinking**



Parents and guardians appear to be fairly knowledgeable about any negative consequences of drinking their child might have experienced and are right in believing that the most common negative consequence is vomiting. Compared to young people overall, parents and guardians are marginally more likely to say their child hasn't experienced any negative consequences (75% compared to 70% of all young people who say this), reflecting the general trend towards optimism about young people's drinking. When looking at the 64 children who have experienced at least one consequence, 25% of their parents or guardians believe they have never experienced any such negative consequences from drinking alcohol.

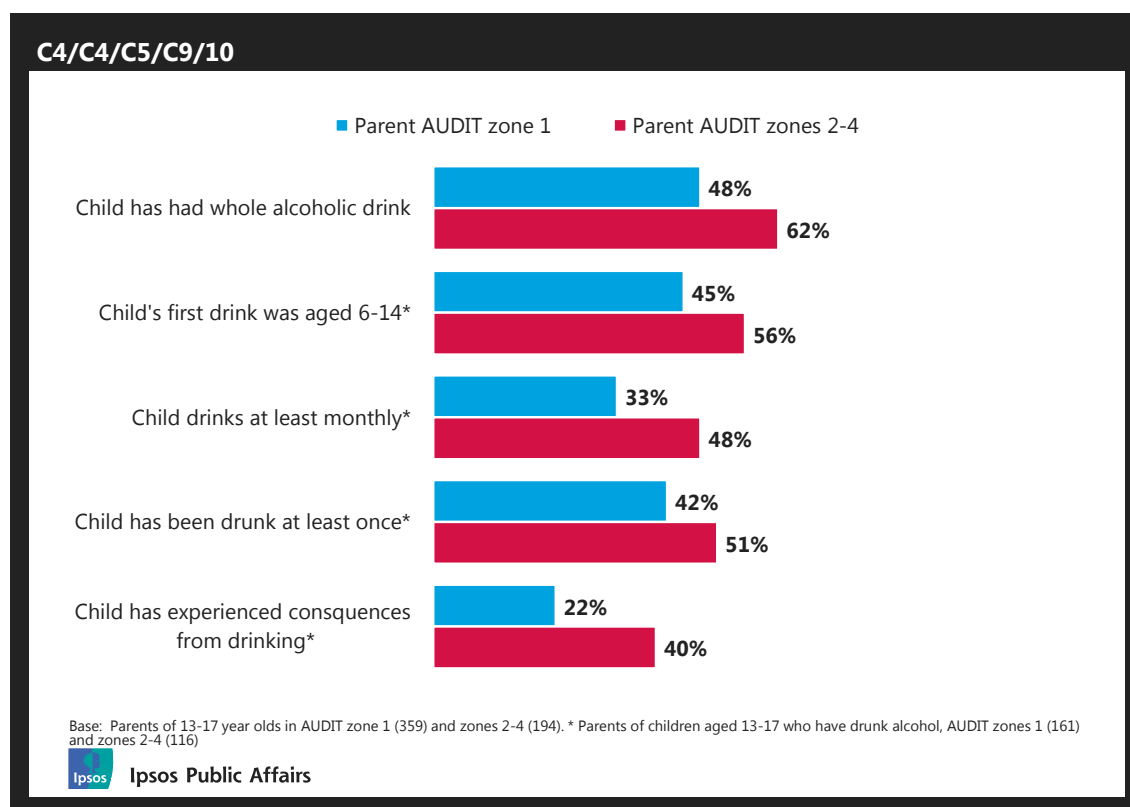
### 3.3 Effects of parental behaviour on young people's drinking

***Certain parental behaviours appear to influence young people's drinking behaviour, which is particularly evident when examining parents and guardians' AUDIT scores, with riskier behaviours set by parents and guardians being exhibited more often in the behaviour of their children***

## Parents and guardians' AUDIT scores

***The children of parents and guardians with higher AUDIT scores exhibit more harmful drinking behaviours themselves.***

**Figure 1.9: Effect of parents and guardians' drinking on their children's drinking behaviours**



Parents and guardians with higher AUDIT scores (and who therefore exhibit more harmful drinking behaviours) are more likely to have children who drink, started drinking at a younger age, drink more frequently, have ever been drunk, and have experienced negative consequences as a result of drinking. This pattern seems particularly strong given parents and guardians in AUDIT zone 1 have slightly older children (who you could expect to exhibit more harmful drinking behaviours)<sup>12</sup>.

Young people whose parents or guardians have an AUDIT score in zone 1 are less likely to drink than those whose parents or guardians have scores in zone 2-4, with under half of the children with parents or guardians in zone 1 having had a drink (48%) compared to three fifths of children with parents or guardians in zones 2-4 (62%). Parents and guardians with higher AUDIT scores are more likely to have children who start drinking young – 56% of parents and guardians with an AUDIT score of 2-4 have a child whose first drink was

<sup>12</sup> 63% of parents in AUDIT zone 1 have a child aged 15-17 compared to 55% of parents in AUDIT zones 2-4. Note, this difference is not considered statistically significant.

between the ages of six and 14. This compares to 45% of parents and guardians with an AUDIT score of 1.

Similarly, there is a relationship between parental AUDIT score and young peoples' frequency of drinking, with young people whose parents or guardians have higher AUDIT scores being more likely to drink frequently. Half of parents or guardians in zones 2-4 have a child who drinks at least monthly (48%) compared to 33% of parents or guardians in AUDIT zone 1.

Young people whose parents or guardians have AUDIT scores in zone 2-4 are more likely to have been drunk than those whose parents or guardians score in zone 1 (51% compared to 42%) and to have experienced a negative consequence as a result of their drinking (40% compared to 22% of those whose parents or guardians score in zone 1).

### Parents' drinking segment

***Children of parents or guardians who are Risky Social and Coping Drinkers demonstrate riskier drinking behaviours themselves (linked to parents' AUDIT scores).***

Some differences in young people's drinking behaviours are apparent according to the drinking segment their parent or guardian belongs to – however, the patterns are not well established and interpretation of the results needs to be mindful of the very small base sizes<sup>13</sup>. Parents or guardians who fall into the Risky Social and Coping Drinker segment appear to have a negative impact on their child's drinking behaviour. This is linked to parents and guardians' AUDIT scores since a much greater proportion of Risky Social and Coping Drinkers fall into AUDIT zones 2-4 (77%) compared to parents and guardians overall (36%).

Having a Risky Social and Coping Drinker as a parent or guardian means young people are more likely to start drinking earlier – 62% of children with parents or guardians who are Risky Social and Coping Drinkers had their first drink between the ages of six and 14, compared to 50% overall. Similarly, children of Risky Social and Coping parents or guardians drink more frequently themselves with 29% drinking at least once a week compared to 11% overall.

In addition, the children of Risky Social and Coping Drinkers are more likely to have been drunk (57% have been drunk at least once compared to 45% overall) and to have experienced negative consequences from their drinking (48% versus 30% overall).

### Parents visibly drinking

***Whether young people see their parents or guardians drinking or not appears to have an impact on their own behaviour, though this is likely to reflect parental attitudes to alcohol rather than the act of seeing their parents or guardians drink (or not).***

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<sup>13</sup> Note, that of the children who have drunk alcohol, there are 58 parents who are 'Comfortable Social Drinkers', 65 parents who are 'Controlled Home Drinkers', 59 parents who are 'Risky Social and Coping Drinkers', 38 parents who are 'Self-contained moderate drinkers', and 43 parents who are 'Risky Career Drinkers'.

Young people who never see their parents or guardians drinking are less likely to have had a drink than those who see their parents or guardians consuming alcohol. Just over one third of young people whose parents or guardians never drink around them have had a drink (36%<sup>14</sup>), while over half of young people whose parents or guardians do drink around them have had a drink themselves (55% of those who ever see their parents or guardians drinking, 59% of those who see their parents or guardians drinking at least once a week, and 51% of those who see their parents or guardians drinking less than once a week).

Young people who see their parents or guardians drinking at least once a week are more likely to drink at least once a week themselves than those who see their parents or guardians drinking less than once a week (18% compared to five per cent)<sup>15</sup>.

This may well not reflect the effect of actually *seeing* their parents or guardians drinking (or not) but rather is likely to reflect parents' attitudes towards alcohol. So, for instance, the children who never see their parents or guardians drinking and who themselves don't drink, are more likely to say they abstain from alcohol because they 'think drinking is wrong' (24% say this compared to 13% of those who see their parent or guardian drinking) and because it is against their religious and spiritual beliefs (16% versus two per cent).

No differences are observable in young people's experience of drunkenness and harm according to whether, or how frequently, they see their parent or guardian drinking.

On balance, parents and guardians believe that they should drink small amounts in front of their child to demonstrate a moderate approach to alcohol (with 68% of parents and guardians believing this). Significantly smaller proportions of parents and guardians believe their drinking should not be affected by the presence of children (16%) or that they should never drink in front of children (10%)<sup>16</sup>. Parents and guardians hold similar views regardless of the age of their child, though parents and guardians of older teenagers (15-17) are more likely to say their behaviour should not be affected by the presence of their child (19%) compared to parents and guardians of younger teenagers (13-14, 12% of whom say the same).

### Parents' demographics

There does not appear to be any effect on whether children have drunk alcohol or not according to the demographic profile of their parents or guardians (considering factors such as household income, working status of parents, or region).

Some differences are apparent when looking at the age of the child's first drink according to household income, with those whose families have a higher household income (here taken to be £50,000 or more per year) more likely to have tried alcohol at a younger age. Children

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<sup>14</sup> Note this is based on 75 young people who never see their parents drink.

<sup>15</sup> Note it is not possible to compare with children who have drunk alcohol but who never see their parents drink alcohol (of which there were 25 respondents).

<sup>16</sup> Note this is based on all 1,003 parents who completed the survey and not just 'matched' parents. This question asked parents their views about young people the same age as the child they answered the survey about.

with a household income in this highest bracket say they tried alcohol at the mean age of 13.75 compared to children with a household income under £30,000 who have tried alcohol at a mean age of 14.32<sup>17</sup>. But this pattern is not particularly evident elsewhere with, for example, no notable differences in children's drunkenness or experience of negative consequences as a result of drinking according to household income.

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<sup>17</sup> Note this is based on 76 children who have had an alcoholic drink with a household income of £50,000 or more, and 94 children who have had an alcoholic drink with a household income of less than £30,000.

**Young people's drinking  
environments and parents'  
awareness**



## 4. Young people's drinking environments and parents' awareness

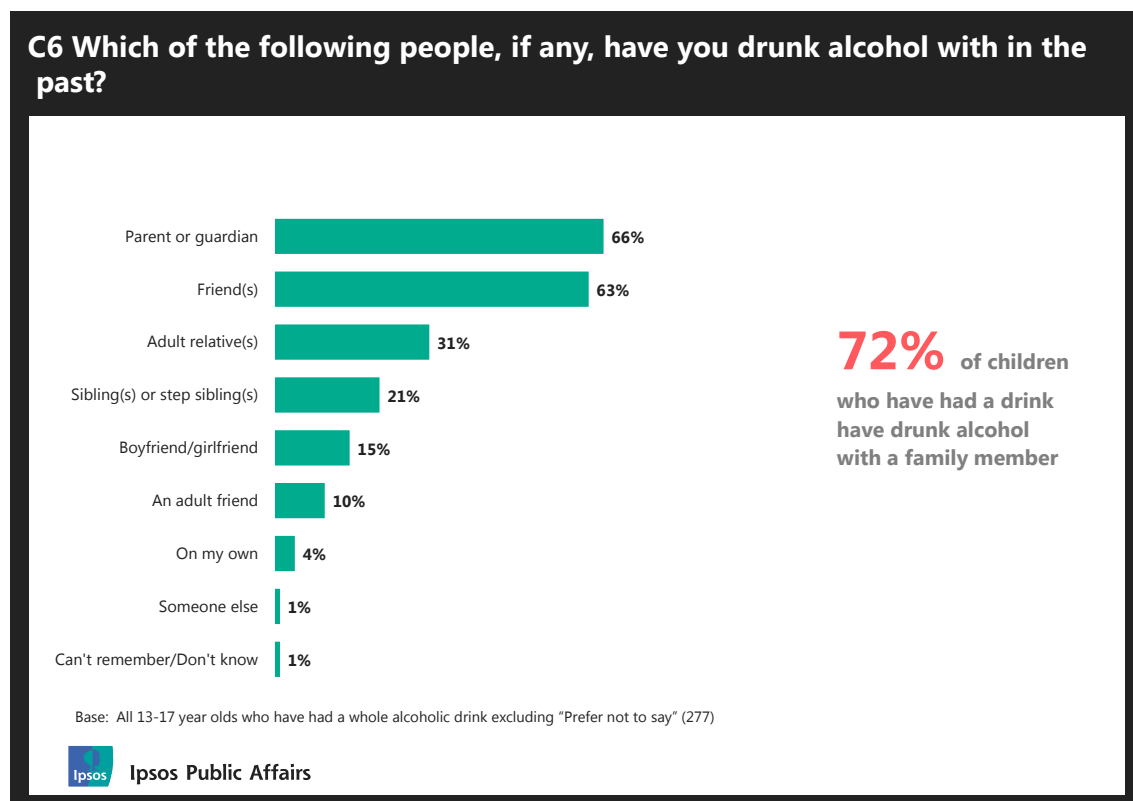
This chapter continues to examine the drinking behaviour of young people in the UK aged 13-17. It discusses areas including how young people access alcohol, the role of their social groups, and motivations behind drinking behaviour. The chapter also looks at the extent to which parents or guardians are aware of their child's drinking behaviour, before focusing again on how parental drinking habits affect their children.

### 4.1 Young people's drinking

#### Accessing alcohol

***Most young people who have had a drink have drunk with a family member and have accessed alcohol through a relative.***

Figure 1.10: Who young people drink with



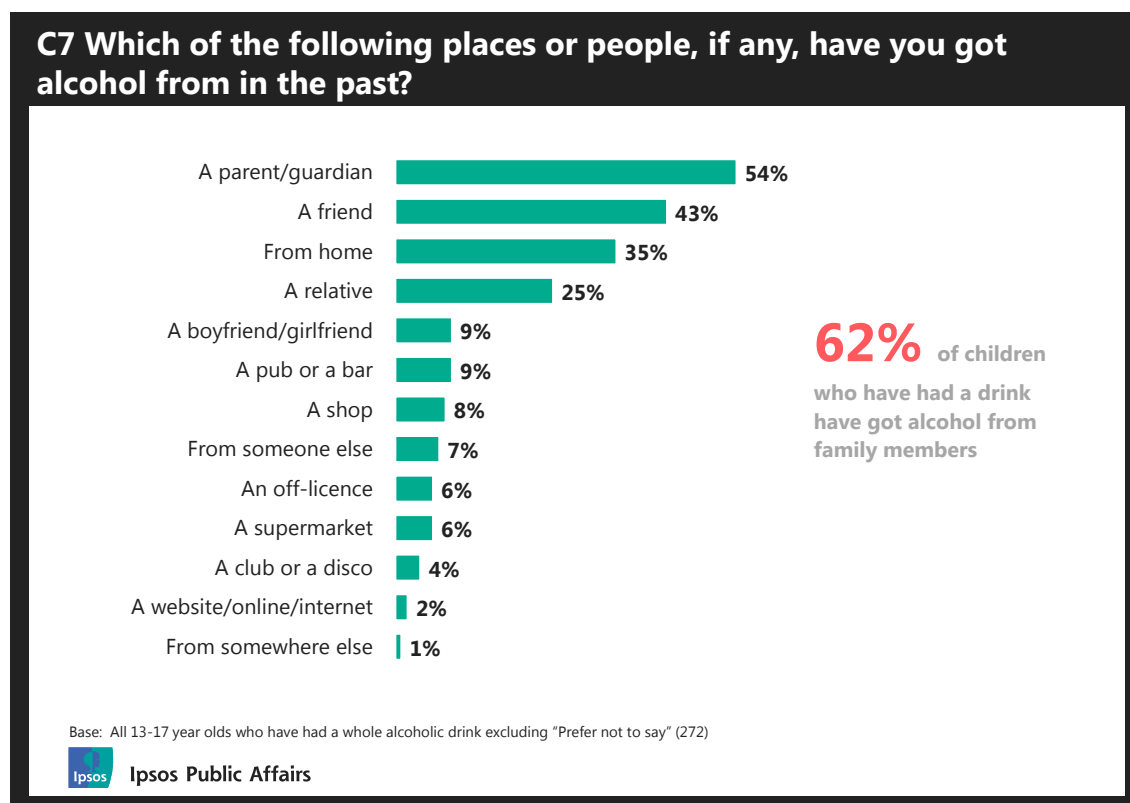
Just under three quarters of young people who have had a drink have drunk alcohol with a family member (72%), with two thirds having drunk with a parent or guardian (66%) and just under a third having drunk with another adult relative (31%). Nearly two thirds have drunk with friends (63%), and 15% have drunk with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Only four per cent of

young people say they have drunk alone, suggesting drinking is generally a social activity for young people.

As with other metrics, age plays a role in who young people drink with. Younger teenagers are just as likely as older teenagers to have drunk with their parent/guardian (60% of 13-14 year olds have done this, broadly in line with the 68% of 15-17 year olds who have done the same). But differences emerge when considering drinking with friends – something much more common among older teenagers (68% of 15-17 year olds have drunk with their friends, compared to 52% of 13-14 year olds). The incidence of drinking with friends is particularly high for 17 year olds with 80% of those who have drunk alcohol saying they have done this with friends<sup>18</sup>.

Young people who have never been drunk are much more likely to say they have drunk alcohol with their parents. Three quarters of those who have not been drunk before (75%) say they have drunk with their parents or guardians compared to 55% of those who have been drunk before. Conversely, those who have been drunk before are more likely to have been drinking with friends (87% versus 44% of those who have not been drunk).

**Figure 1.11: Where young people get alcohol**



Where young people get alcohol from links very closely to who they have drunk alcohol with; most commonly getting it from parents/guardians and friends. Nearly two thirds of young people who have drunk alcohol have got it from family members (62%). Most notably, over

<sup>18</sup> Note this is based on 69 17 year olds and 82 13-14 year olds.

half of young people have got alcohol from a parent or guardian (54%), with a further quarter getting alcohol from another relative (25%). Young people also commonly get alcohol from their social groups, with 43% getting alcohol from a friend and nine per cent getting it from a boyfriend or girlfriend. A further 35% say they have got alcohol from home. Small proportions of young people have got alcohol from other places, like a pub or a bar (nine per cent), a shop (eight per cent) an off-licence or a supermarket (six per cent) but the majority of young people access alcohol from specific individuals. This is not surprising given that under-age purchasing of alcohol is illegal and this has been more closely enforced in recent years both by police and licencing authorities and through self-regulation schemes such as Challenge 25.

When looking at all young people (not just those who have drunk alcohol), over a quarter (28%) have been given alcohol by their parent or guardian.

Parents/guardians and friends remain the most common sources of alcohol irrespective of age. Though older teenagers aged 15-17 are more likely to mention they have got alcohol from both these sources (58% getting alcohol from their parents or guardians and 46% from a friend) compared to younger teenagers aged 13-14 (42% and 34% respectively).

Where young people get alcohol from does appear to shift between the ages of 15 to 17. 16 year olds are more likely than all other age groups to have got alcohol from a parent or guardian: 69%, compared to 42% of 13-14 year olds, 55% of 15 year olds and 51% of 17 year olds. 16 may therefore be seen by many parents and guardians as an appropriate age at which to supply alcohol to their children. Conversely, by the time young people reach the age of 17, they are less likely to have got alcohol from their parents and guardians but are much more likely to have sourced it through friends – 62% having done this compared to 33% of 16 year olds, 38% of 15 year olds and 34% of 13-14 year olds<sup>19</sup>.

Parents providing children with alcohol does not appear to be linked to more harmful drinking behaviours for young people – despite the fact that parents and guardians are more likely to give children alcohol the older they are, and we know the prevalence of drinking and drunkenness is known to increase with age. Instead, there is very little difference in the mean age of first drink for children whose parents or guardians have given them alcohol (13.7) compared to those whose parents or guardians have not (13.6). Similarly, there is no difference in children having been drunk according to getting alcohol from parents or guardians (42% of those who have been given alcohol by their parents or guardians have ever been drunk compared to 50% of those who have not been given alcohol by their parent). Indeed, the data suggests that those who have been given alcohol by their parent are actually less likely to have experienced a negative consequence of drinking (23% versus 38% of those who have not got alcohol from their parents).

Those who have not been given alcohol by their parent or guardian are much more likely to have got it from friends instead (51% have got alcohol from their friends compared to the 35% who have received it from their parents or guardians also). And, as seen earlier,

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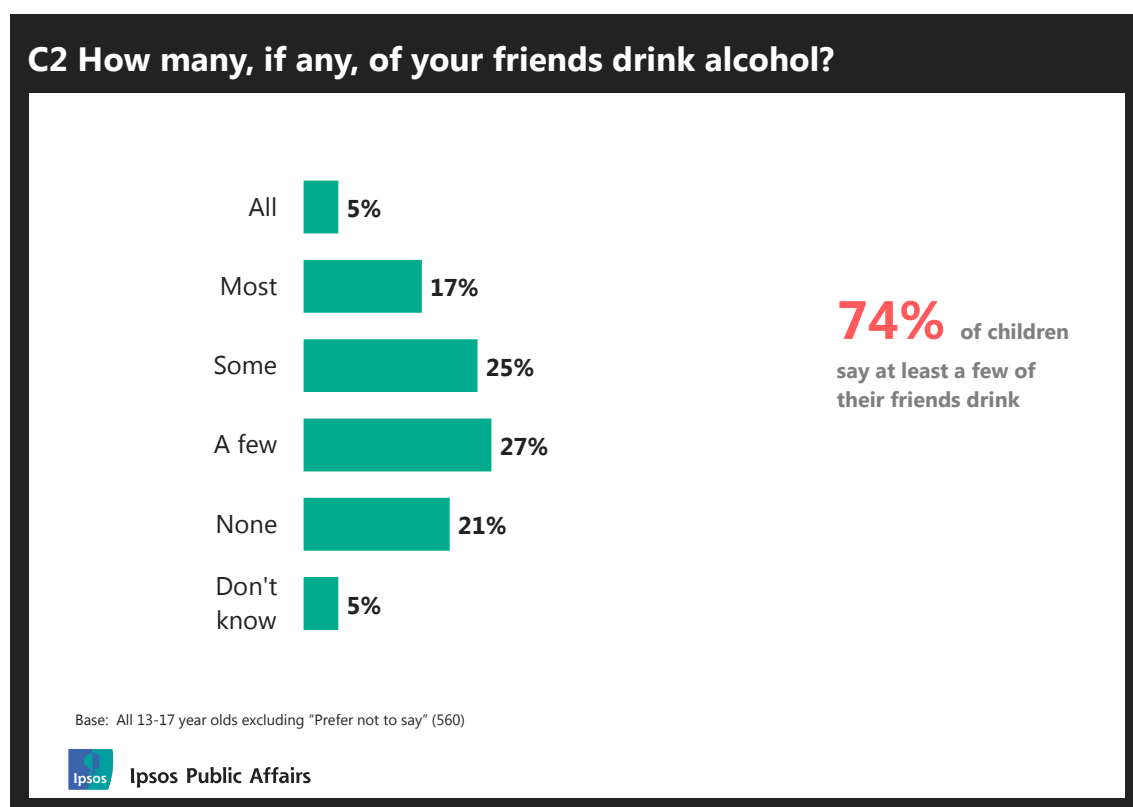
<sup>19</sup> Please note the small base sizes this analysis is based on: 81 13-14 year olds, 56 15 year olds, 67 16 year olds, and 68 17 year olds.

drunkenness is linked to drinking with friends – those who have been drunk before are much more likely to say they get alcohol from their friends compared to those who have not been drunk before (63% versus 26%).

### Social group

**Most young people say at least a few of their friends drink.**

Figure 1.12: Prevalence of drinking among social group



The majority of young people say at least a few of their friends drink (74%). Most young people say only a few (27%) or some of their friends drink (25%). A minority say most of their friends drink (17%) or that all of them drink (five per cent) – around one in five young people say none of their friends drink (21%).

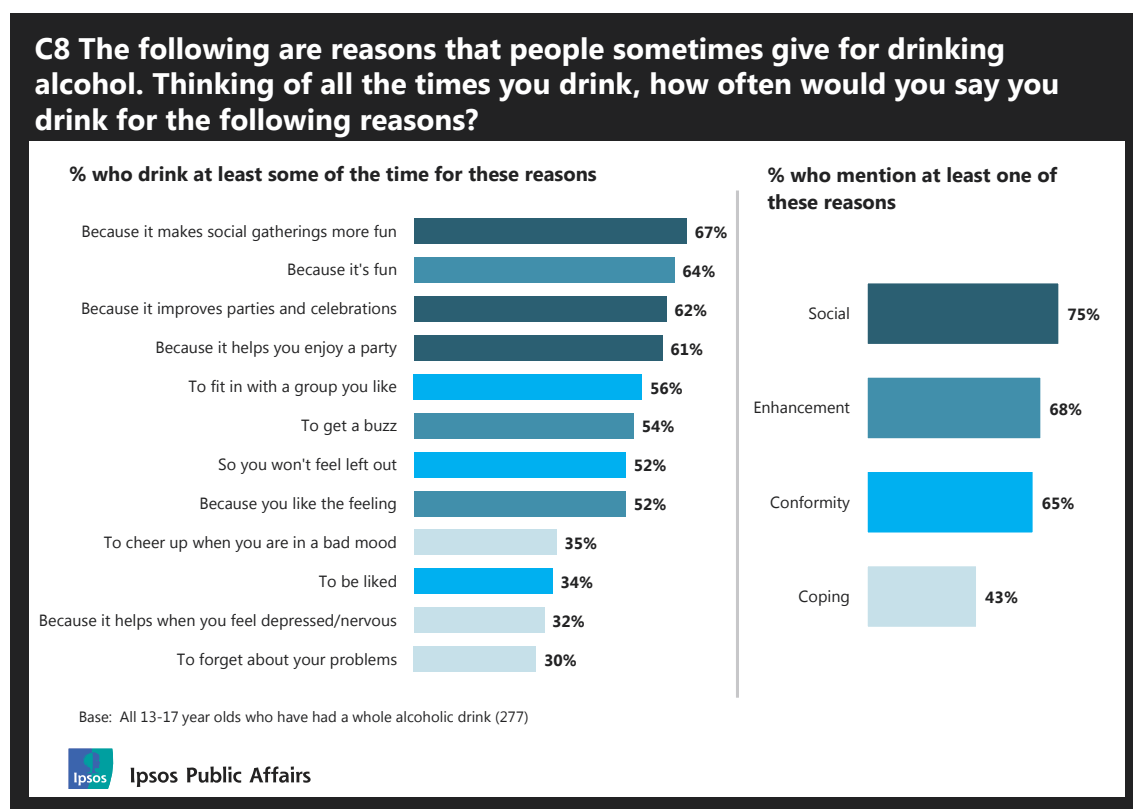
There is a clear age gradient in the proportions of their social group young people say drink, with the older the young person, the more of their friends they say drink. The vast majority of 17 year olds say at least a few of their friends drink (94%), compared to 88% of 16 year olds, 73% of 15 year olds, 68% of 14 year olds, and 47% of 13 year olds. Looking at the differences between younger and older teenagers, those aged 15-17 are more likely to say all or some of their friends drink than those aged 13-14 (eight per cent compared to two per cent and 29% compared to 18%), while those aged 13-14 are more likely to say that none of their friends drink (36% compared to 12% among those aged 15-17).

As to be expected, there is a link between the behaviour of a young person's social group and their own drinking behaviour. The majority of young people who have had an alcoholic drink also have at least a few friends who drink (93%), compared to just over half of those who have not (53%). Similarly, 100% of young people who drink at least once a month say at least a few of their friends drink, compared to 91% who drink less than monthly. 99% of those who have been drunk say at least a few of their friends drink, compared to 89% who have not been drunk.

### Motivations behind drinking behaviour

***Young people who drink often do so for social reasons, helping them to enjoy a party, while those who do not drink primarily do so due to a lack of interest.***

Figure 1.13: Motivations for drinking

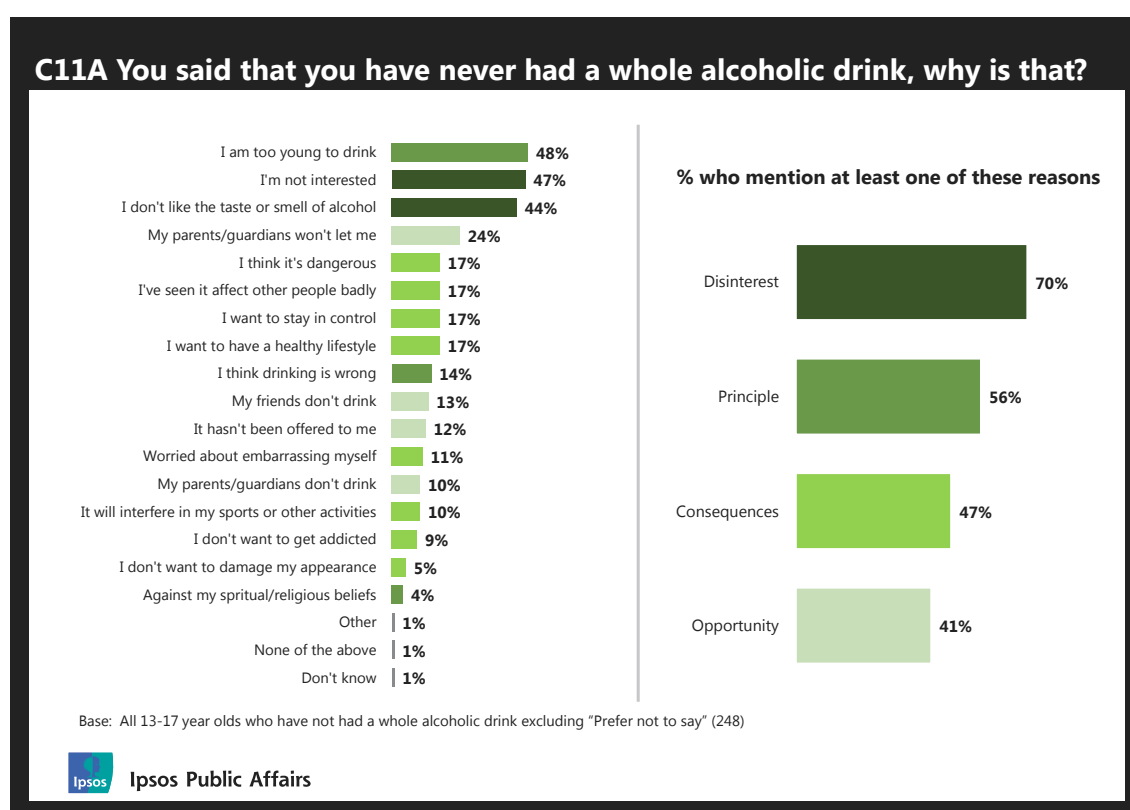


Three quarters of young people say they drink for social reasons (75% say they do this at least some of the time). Most prominent among these are 'Because it makes social gatherings more fun', 'Because it improves parties and celebrations' and 'Because it helps you enjoy a party' – 67%, 62% and 61% respectively. A further 68% of young people say they drink (at least some of the time) for enhancement reasons, with 64% saying 'Because it's fun', 54% saying 'To get a buzz' and 52% saying because they 'like the feeling'. 65% of young people drink to conform: 56% drink at least some of the time to 'fit in with a group you like', 52% so they 'won't feel left out' and 34% 'To be liked'.

The least common reasons for drinking are connected to ‘coping’ in some way (43% drink at least some of the time for these reasons). A third drink to cheer themselves up (35% do this at least some of the time), 32% because it helps when they are feeling depressed or nervous, and 30% to forget about their problems.

There are no consistent trends between age groups when looking at drinking motivations. However, those who had their first drink between the ages of six and 14 are more likely to say they drink for enhancement reasons (72%, compared to 57% among those who had their first drink between 15-17).

**Figure 1.14: Motivations for not drinking**



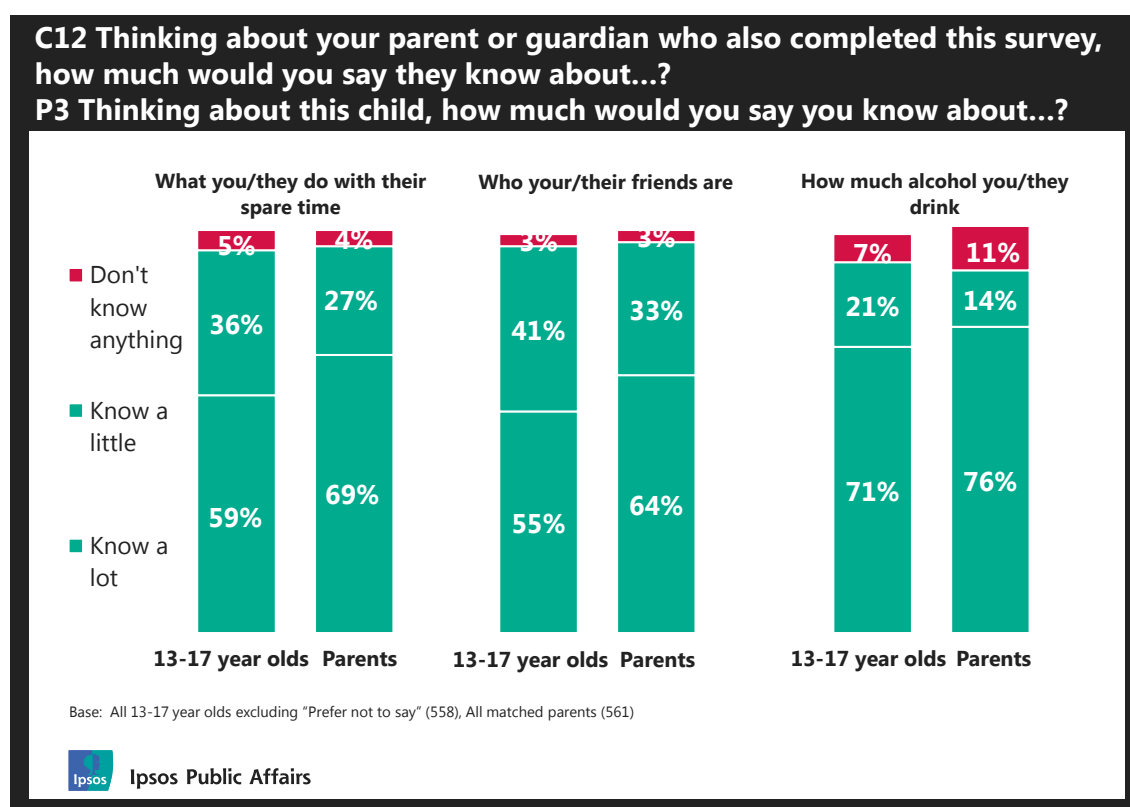
Of young people who do not drink, the majority express some form of disinterest in drinking (70%), with key reasons including ‘I’m not interested’ (47%) and ‘I don’t like the taste or smell of alcohol’ (44%). A further 56% of young people say they do not drink on principle: for example, because ‘I am too young to drink’ (48%) or ‘I think drinking is wrong’ (14%). Just under half of young people do not drink because of the potential negative consequences of drinking (47%), in particular because they think it is dangerous, they have seen it affect others badly, they want to stay in control and they want to have a healthy lifestyle (all at 17%). Two in five young people do not drink because they lack the opportunity to do so (41%), with key reasons being that ‘My parents or guardians won’t let me’ (24%), ‘My friends don’t drink’ (13%) and ‘It hasn’t been offered to me’ (12%).

Younger teens are more likely not to drink for a reason of principle, with 65% of 13-14 year olds who do not drink naming such a reason compared to 45% of 15-17 year olds. Mainly this stems from younger teenagers saying they feel too young to drink (60% of 13-14 year olds say this compared to 35% of 15-17 year olds). The most common reasons given by older teenagers for not drinking are that they are not interested (50% of 15-17 year olds say this) and they don't like the taste or smell of alcohol (50%). Note, 15-17 year olds are no more likely to say this than 13-14 year olds.

## 4.2 Parental awareness of young people's drinking behaviour

**Parents appear to be more knowledgeable about their child's drinking compared to what they know about what their child does in their spare time and who their friends are. Whilst parents or guardians seem knowledgeable about their own child's drinking, they tend to underestimate the proportion of their child's friends who drink.**

Figure 1.15: Parental awareness of young people's social lives



In general, young people are more likely to think their parents or guardians only know a little about their social lives than parents and guardians believe they do: parents and guardians are more likely to think they know a lot.

Looking specifically at what young people do in their spare time, 36% of young people say their parents or guardians know a little about it, while only 27% of parents and guardians say the same. Conversely, 69% of parents and guardians say they know a lot about what their

child does in their spare time, compared to 59% of young people. Similarly, 41% of young people say their parents or guardians know a little about who their friends are, compared to 33% of parents and guardians – while 64% of parents and guardians believe they know a lot (compared to 55% of young people).

For the majority of parents, most believe they know more about the alcohol consumption of their child compared to what they know about how their child spends their spare time and who their friends are. Young people also believe their parents or guardians are more informed about their drinking than other aspects of their social lives. Three quarters of parents and guardians (76%) say they know a lot about how much alcohol their child drinks. A similar proportion of young people (71%) say the same. This may be because young people most commonly drink with their parents or guardians and get alcohol from them as discussed earlier in this chapter.

There are however a small proportion of parents or guardians who say they don't know anything about how much their child drinks (11%) which is higher compared to how much they know about what their child does in their spare time or who their friends are (four per cent and three per cent respectively).

The older the child, the less well informed they believe their parents or guardians are about how much alcohol they drink. The majority of 13 year olds say their parents or guardians know a lot (79%) which declines gradually to 64% among 17 year olds. Parents and guardians of 17 year olds still appear to have some knowledge of their child's drinking but they just know less about it (32% of 17 year olds say their parents or guardians know a little which declines to 12% of 13 year olds).

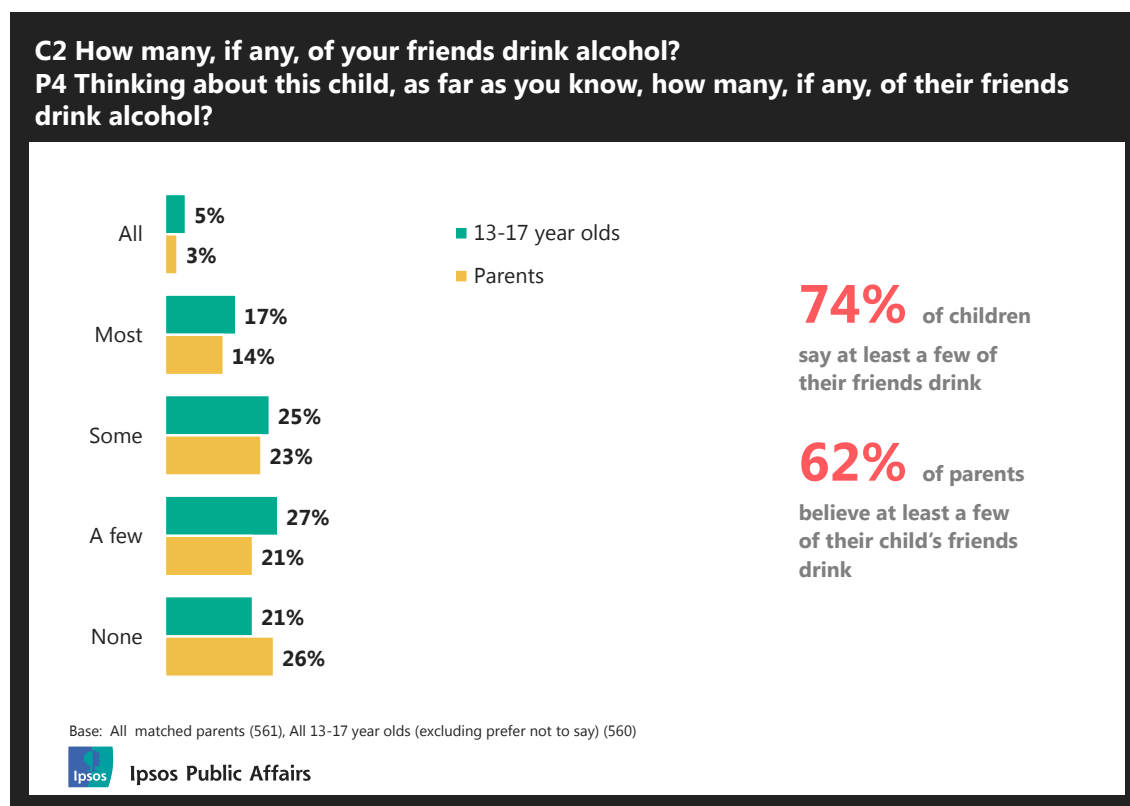
For young people who have not yet had an alcoholic drink, it is easier for parents or guardians to know a lot about their drinking (86% of children yet to drink say their parents or guardians know a lot). Once young people start drinking, it becomes harder for their parents or guardians to be certain about how much alcohol they drink and the proportion of children who say their parents or guardians know a lot about their drinking falls to 60%. As you would expect, having a conversation about drinking means parents or guardians are much better informed about how much alcohol their child drinks. Three quarters (74%) of children who have spoken to their parent or guardian about alcohol say their parent or guardian knows a lot about their drinking, compared to 53% of those who have not spoken to their parents or guardians about it<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Note this is based on the 56 young people who have not spoken to their parent about drinking.



Figure 1.16: Parental awareness of drinking amongst their child's friends

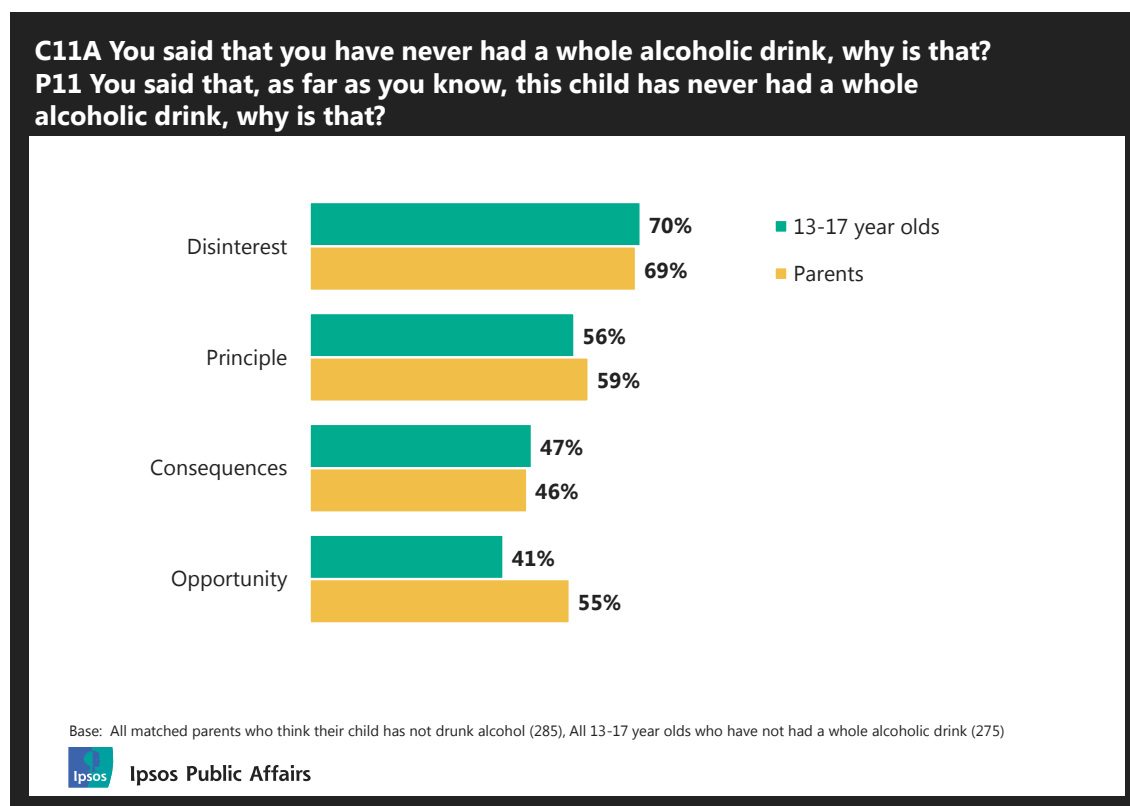


Parents generally underestimate – compared to their child's estimate – the proportion of their child's friends that drink. Around one quarter believe none of their child's friends drink (26%), while around one fifth of young people say this is actually the case (21%). In contrast, one fifth of parents and guardians say 'a few' of their child's friends drink (21%) but their child's estimate is 27%. Similarly, 23% of parents and guardians say 'some' of their child's friends drink (compared to 25% among young people) and 14% say 'most' of their child's friends drink (compared to 17% among young people). Overall, while 74% of young people say at least a few of their friends drink, only 62% of parents and guardians think likewise. This suggests that parents and guardians might have a good understanding of the drinking behaviour of their own child but assume a lower prevalence of drinking in their children's peer groups than their child does.

### Motivations for not drinking

***Parents are more likely to believe that their child does not drink because of a lack of opportunity instead of other reasons.***

Figure 1.17: Parental awareness of motivations for not drinking



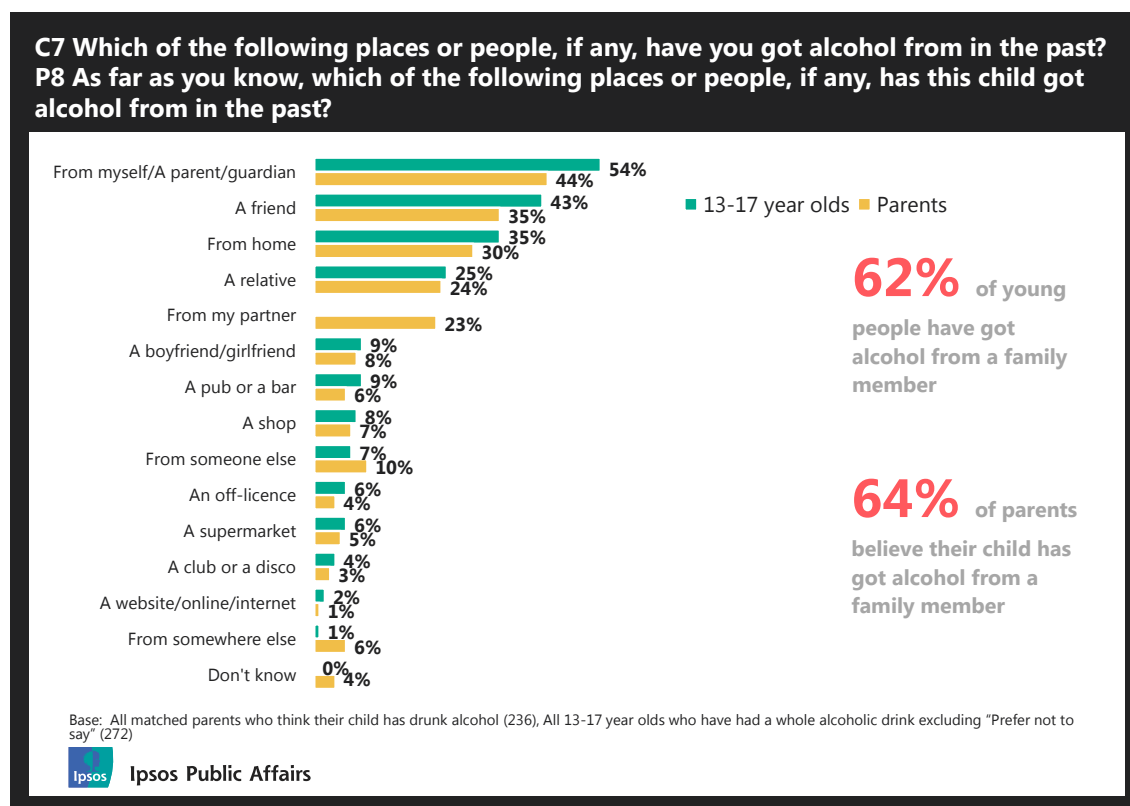
Parents of young people who do not drink are broadly correct as to the motivations behind this. 70% of young people say they do not drink for a reason related to disinterest, and 69% of parents and guardians also believe this is why their child does not drink. Similarly, 56% of young people say they do not drink for reasons related to principles, and 59% of parents and guardians say likewise. 47% of young people do not drink because of the potential negative consequences, and 48% of parents and guardians also understood this to explain why their child does not drink.

In contrast, parents and guardians significantly overestimate the role that opportunity plays in young people not drinking – only 41% of young people suggest this is a motivation for them (saying things such as ‘my parents or guardians won’t let me’ and ‘it hasn’t been offered to me’), but over half (55%) of parents or guardians assign this as a reason. Parents are therefore perhaps overly optimistic of the role that accessing alcohol plays in stopping young people drinking: in fact, young people are more likely not to drink because they are just not interested in it than because they cannot easily access it.

#### Awareness of how children access alcohol

***Parents and guardians are reasonably well aware of where their child accesses alcohol, however they tend to underestimate the role they/their partner and their children’s friends have in providing alcohol.***

Figure 1.18: Parental awareness of child's sources of alcohol



Overall, 64% of parents and guardians think their child has got alcohol from a family member, compared to 62% of young people who say the same. However, parents and guardians are more likely to underestimate getting alcohol from a parent or guardian – only 44% think their child had got alcohol from them, compared to 54% of young people who say this. This discrepancy could be due to a parent or guardian other than the one responding to the survey providing alcohol – indeed, 23% of parents and guardians say their partner has supplied their child with alcohol. Parents and guardians are also likely to underestimate the role of friends in supplying alcohol to young people, with only 35% suggesting their child's friend gave them alcohol, as opposed to 43% of young people who say this has happened. In general, parents and guardians are fairly well aware of where their child is getting alcohol.

### 4.3 Effects of parental behaviour on young people's drinking

*As in Chapter 2, some parental behaviour appears to influence how and where young people drink: in particular this is affected by parental AUDIT scores.*

#### Parents' AUDIT scores

*The drinking behaviour of parents and guardians does not appear to strongly affect whether children drink with their parents or guardians or get given alcohol by them. However, parents and guardians who exhibit less risky drinking behaviours appear to be more knowledgeable about their child's drinking.*

The drinking behaviour of parents and guardians doesn't appear to have a big impact on who young people have drunk with. Children whose parents or guardians are classified as AUDIT zone 1 are only marginally more likely to have drunk with their parents or guardians (70%) compared to children whose parents or guardians are classified as AUDIT zones 2-4 (61%) and this difference is not considered statistically significant.

Similarly, it appears parents or guardians who exhibit less risky drinking behaviours are only slightly more likely to have provided their child with alcohol – 56% of children with a parent or guardian in AUDIT zone 1 have got alcohol from them compared to 50% of children with a parent or guardian in AUDIT zones 2-4, though again the difference is not considered statistically significant. That said, there is some suggestion that parents or guardians with an AUDIT score of 3 or 4 (classified as exhibiting harmful or dependency drinking) are less likely to have drunk with their child or to have provided their child with alcohol though this is only based on 38 parents or guardians and thus cannot be considered a conclusive finding.

Parents or guardians who exhibit riskier drinking behaviours (zones 2-4) are marginally more likely to assume more of their child's friends drink compared to those in zone 1 (67% believe at least a few of their child's friends drink compared to 59%). This belief may be incorrect given parents or guardians with higher AUDIT scores tend to know less about how much alcohol their child consumes. Two-thirds of children with parents or guardians in AUDIT zones 2-4 (63%) say their parent or guardian knows *a lot* about their drinking which compares less well to children with parents or guardians in zone 1 who appear to be more knowledgeable (76%). A similar pattern is seen for parents' knowledge of what their child does in their spare time – with better knowledge being exhibited by parents or guardians with lower AUDIT scores.

Children with parents or guardians in AUDIT zone 1 and zones 2-4 are as likely as one another to drink for reasons pertaining to social or enhancement factors. However, children whose parents or guardians exhibit riskier drinking behaviours (AUDIT zones 2-4) are more likely to say they drink for reasons pertaining to conformity (73% versus 58% of children with parents or guardians in zone 1) and in relation to coping (51% versus 36%).

### Parents' drinking segment

***Young people whose parents or guardians are Risky Social and Coping Drinkers appear to drink less often with their parents or guardians and appear to be more likely to drink for negative reasons. They also believe their parents or guardians know less about how much they drink.***

As in Chapter 2, the drinking behaviour of children whose parents or guardians are classed as Risky Social and Coping Drinkers appears to be different to children with parents or guardians who fall into different segments. However, the base sizes are very small and there

are likely to be a number of confounding factors at play meaning these findings should be treated with caution<sup>21</sup>.

Young people with Risky Social and Coping Drinker parents or guardians are less likely to have had a drink with their parents or guardians than young people whose parents or guardians fall into the other segments. Less than three in five young people whose parents or guardians fall into this segment have drunk with them (44%), compared to 66% overall. Similarly, the children of Risky Social and Coping Drinkers are less likely to have got alcohol from a family member: only 38% have accessed alcohol this way, compared to 54% overall.

Parents or guardians who fall into the Risky Social and Coping Drinker segment are also less likely than those in other segments to have children who believe they know a lot about their alcohol consumption. Just under two-thirds of young people with a parent or guardian in this segment believe their parents or guardians know a lot about how much they drink (61%, compared to 71% overall).

The children of Risky Social and Coping Drinkers also appear to be different in terms of their reasons for drinking, being more likely than other children to drink for reasons pertaining to coping (65% do this compared to 43% overall) and conformity (80% versus 65% overall).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, a higher proportion of Risky Social and Coping Drinkers fall into AUDIT zones 2-4 (77%) compared to 36% overall and it is likely that this is impacting upon the results observed.

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<sup>21</sup> Note that of the children who have drunk alcohol, there are 58 parents who are 'Comfortable Social Drinkers', 64 parents who are 'Controlled Home Drinkers', 58 parents who are 'Risky Social and Coping Drinkers', 38 parents who are 'Self-contained moderate drinkers', and 43 parents who are 'Risky Career Drinkers'.

# Rule setting

## 5. Rule setting

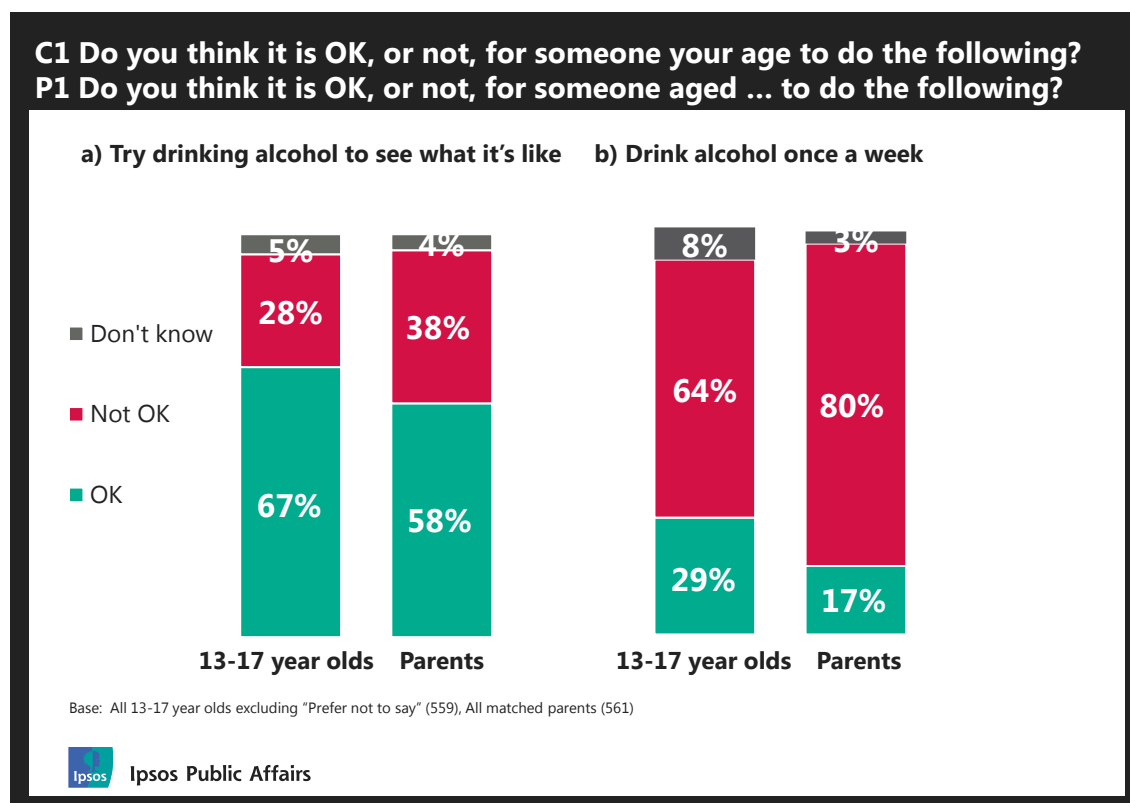
This chapters looks at how acceptable young people think it is for them to drink, and how that compares to their parents' views. It then moves on to analysing young people's perceptions about being allowed to drink, whether formal rules about alcohol are being set between parents or guardians and their teenage children and what they are. It also looks at whether young people think that their parents or guardians agree with one another in their approach to these matters.

### 5.1 Acceptability of drinking behaviours in young people

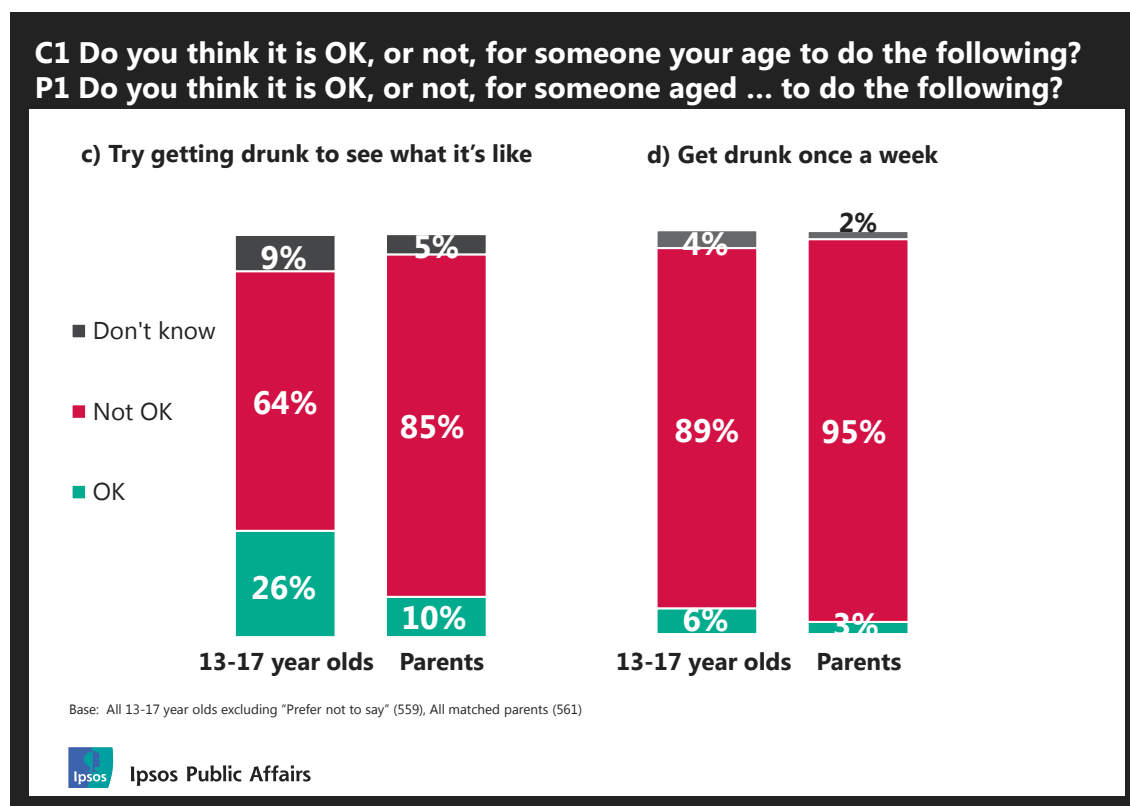
#### Drinking and getting drunk

*Young people are, overall, more likely than their parents or guardians to say that drinking alcohol and getting drunk is OK at their age. While most young people and parents or guardians say that it's OK to try drinking alcohol for someone their (child's) age, there is much less acceptance of drinking regularly and getting drunk, even if just to see what it's like.*

Figure 1.19: 13-17 year olds' and parents' views on acceptability of drinking at their age



**Figure 1.20: 13-17 year olds' and parents' views on acceptability of getting drunk at their age**



Overall, young people are more likely than their parents or guardians to think that it is acceptable for someone their age to drink alcohol and get drunk. At the same time, there is a clear difference in acceptability between experimental and regular (weekly) drinking, with the former more acceptable than the latter among both young people and parents. While the majority of both young people aged 13-17 and their parents or guardians think that it is OK for someone their age to try drinking alcohol to see what it's like (67% and 58% respectively), there is much less acceptance of drinking once a week among both groups (29% and 17% respectively). Drinking to get drunk is also seen as less acceptable than drinking as such: a quarter of young people say that it's OK to try getting drunk to see what it's like at their age (26%), while one in ten parents or guardians agree (10%). Getting drunk once a week is the least acceptable of all behaviours asked about, with the vast majority of 13-17 year olds and their parents or guardians saying that it's not OK and only very small proportions saying that it is OK (six per cent and three per cent respectively).

As to be expected, the young person's age has a bearing on whether individuals and their parents or guardians think it is acceptable for them to drink. While overall 67% of 13-17 year olds say that it is acceptable for them to try alcohol, this proportion increases to three quarters (74%) among 15-17 year olds, compared to 57% among younger teenagers (13-14). This appears to be a consistent pattern across all four behaviours looked at, with older teenagers more likely to find experimenting with alcohol, as well as regular consumption and getting drunk, acceptable at their age. This overall age pattern is replicated in parents'



responses (that is, parents or guardians of younger teenagers are less tolerant and vice versa). Boys and girls have mostly similar views on how acceptable different drinking behaviours are at their age, with boys slightly more likely to say that it's OK to drink once a week (33% vs 24%).

While parents and guardians are less tolerant of drinking behaviours compared to children at all ages looked at, the difference in parent-child views diminishes as teenagers grow older. For example, among of 15-year olds, as many as 74% say that trying alcohol at their age is OK, compared to 58% of their parents. This difference reduces as the child gets older, with 76% of 17-year olds saying this is OK compared to 72% of parents. Perhaps surprisingly, one in five parents or guardians of 16 year olds and two in five parents or guardians of 17 year olds (21% and 43% respectively) think that it's OK for someone that age to drink alcohol once a week.

There is also some evidence that parent's views on teenage drinking may be associated with their own relationship with alcohol. In particular, a higher AUDIT score (zones 2-4 versus zone 1) appears to be associated with increased tolerance towards regular drinking (24% versus 13%), getting drunk to see what it's like (14% versus eight per cent) and regularly getting drunk (eight per cent versus one per cent). In addition, parents or guardians who never drink themselves appear to be much less tolerant towards teenage drinking than those who do (with, for example, 22% of those who never drink being tolerant of trying alcohol to see what it's like compared to 58% overall<sup>22</sup>), while frequency of drinking does not have any apparent effect.

While there is no difference in the views of male and female parents or guardians on drinking as such (whether it is just to try what it's like, or on a regular basis), mothers are slightly less accepting of teenage drunkenness, even if experimental (88% think it is not OK, compared to 81% of fathers). Higher income seems to be associated with an increased tolerance towards teenage drinking – whether just experimental or on a weekly basis – but not drunkenness. For example, two thirds of parents (67%) with a household income of £50,000 or more per year think it's OK for someone the age of their child to try alcohol, compared to just over 51% and 57% for parents who earn less than £30,000 and between £30,000 and £49,000 respectively.

Analysis of “matched” responses (i.e. where a young person and their parent or guardian gave the same response, excluding “Don't know” and “Prefer not to say”) also reveals high levels of agreement between young people and their parents or guardians across all behaviours looked at. In eight cases out of ten, the child and parent or guardian gave the same response as to whether it is OK for someone their (child's) age to drink alcohol to see what it's like (79%), drink alcohol once a week (80%) and get drunk to see what it's like (79%). Child-parent/guardian agreement is even higher for the least acceptable behaviour – getting drunk once a week – reaching 96%.

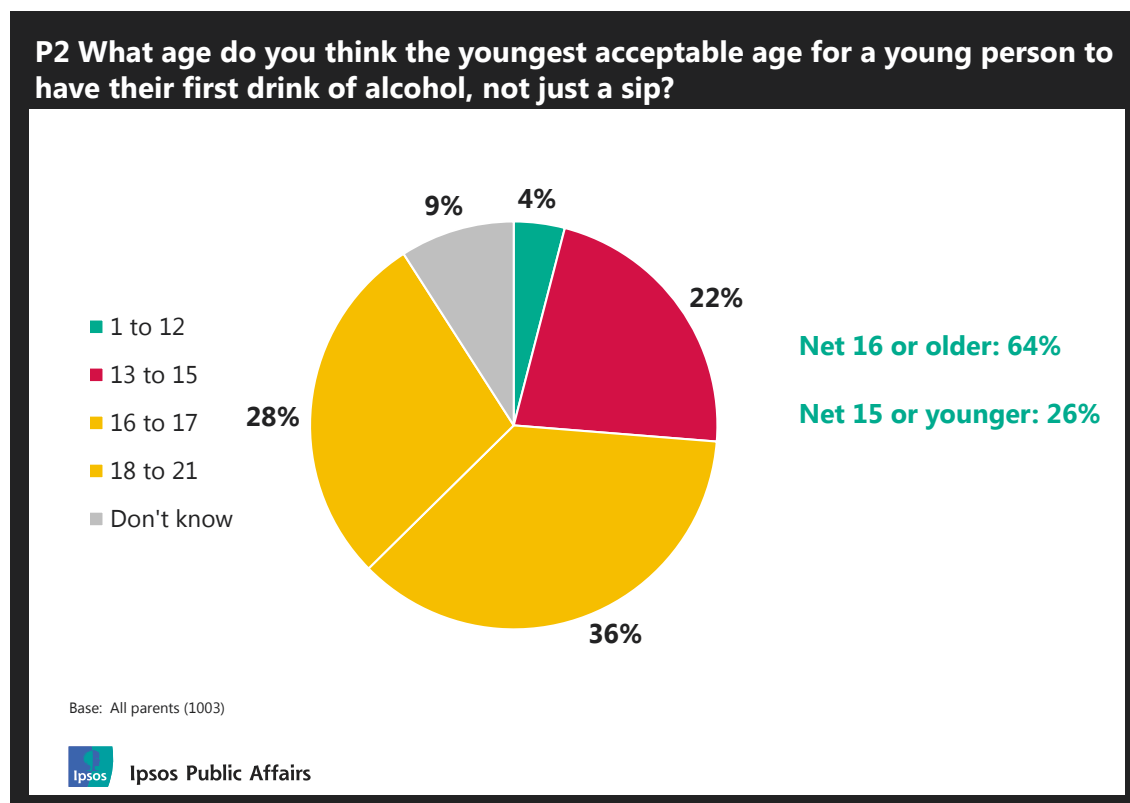
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<sup>22</sup> Though note this is based on 58 parents who say they never drink.

## Youngest acceptable age of first drink according to parents

About two thirds of parents or guardians say that a young person should not drink alcohol until they are 16 or older, the mean response being 16.18 years old. At the same time, about one in four parents or guardians think it is acceptable to have a first drink at 15 years old or younger.

Figure 1.21: Youngest acceptable age of first drink according to parents



As the chart above shows, a vast majority of parents and guardians (86%) think that a young person should be at least 13 years old when they have their first alcoholic drink<sup>23</sup>. Two thirds (64%) think that they should be at least sixteen, and over a quarter (28%) believe that young people should wait until they are adults (18 or over) to have their first whole drink of alcohol. A quarter of parents and guardians (26%) think that it is acceptable for young people aged 15 or younger to have a first drink, of which a small minority (four per cent) find it acceptable for children younger than 13 to have their first drink. This gives a mean “acceptable” age of 16.29. One in eleven parents and guardians (nine per cent) say that they don’t know what an acceptable age of first drink is.

As with acceptability of particular drinking behaviours (section 4.1.1), there appears to be a link between parents’ own drinking habits and their views – such that parents and guardians in zone 1 of AUDIT are more likely to say a young person should wait until they are 18 to

<sup>23</sup> Note the data referred to in this section of the report are based on all parents surveyed (not just those for whom their child also took part) as the question was only asked of parents.

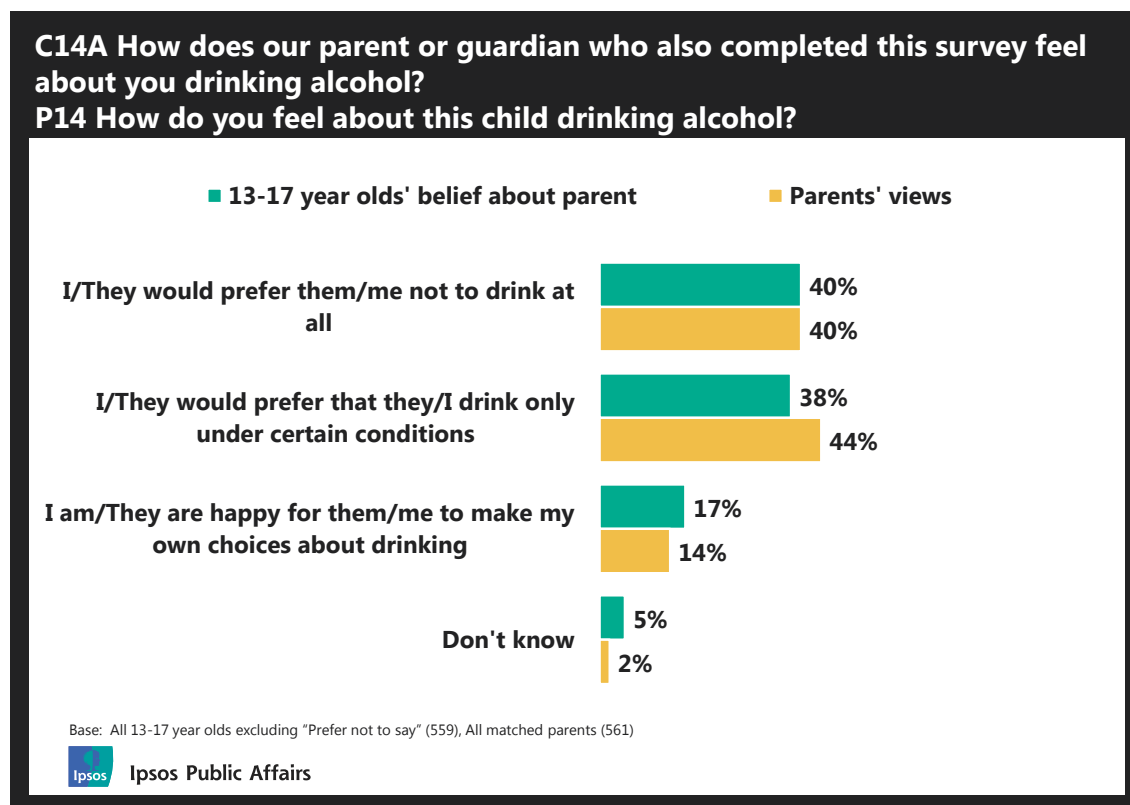
drink alcohol (30% versus 25% of parents and guardians in zones 2-4). Similarly, those who drink less than once a week are more likely to share this view (32% compared to 24% of parents and guardians who drink at least once a week).

There is some indication that parents and guardians with lower incomes find drinking at younger ages less acceptable (31% of parents and guardians with a household income of less than £30,000 say young people should be at least 18 before having their first drink compared 22% of those with an income of £50,000 or more).

## 5.2 Parent's attitudes to their child drinking alcohol

**Two fifths of 13-17 year olds believe that their parent or guardian would prefer them not to drink at all, and a similar proportion believe their parent or guardian would prefer if they only drank under certain circumstances. About one in six teenagers think their parent or guardian is happy for them to make their own choices. These results closely match parents' actual responses, indicating a good understanding of their parents' views among children.**

Figure 1.22: How parents and guardians feel about their child drinking alcohol



The vast majority of 13-17 year olds believe that their parent or guardian would prefer them not to drink at all or only under certain circumstances (40% and 38% respectively), while about one in six thinks their parent or guardian is happy for them to make their own choices about alcohol (17%).

As to be expected, younger teenagers are more likely to believe that their parent or guardian would rather they did not drink – over half of 13-14 year olds think this (55%), compared to less than a third of 15-17 year olds (29%). Teenagers whose parent or guardian does not drink and those who never see their parent or guardian drinking are much more likely to believe that their parent or guardian would not want them to drink at all (65% and 68%). In line with this, those whose parents and guardians score lower on AUDIT (classed as zone 1) seem somewhat more likely to believe that their parent or guardian would prefer them not to drink at all than parents and guardians exhibiting more harmful behaviours, although the differences cannot be considered statistically significant<sup>24</sup>.

Parents' responses closely match those of 13-17 year olds. The vast majority of parents and guardians of 13-17 year olds would prefer them not to drink at all or only under certain circumstances (40% and 44% respectively), while about one in seven is happy for their child to make their own choices about alcohol (14%).

As to be expected, and in line with young people's beliefs, parents and guardians of younger teenagers (13-14) would rather they did not drink (54%); nonetheless, two fifths declare that they could accept that their child drank if they did so under certain circumstances (38%). The proportion who would prefer their child not to drink at all decreases gradually among parents and guardians of 15, 16 and 17 year olds (40%, 29% and 22% respectively). Only very small proportions of parents and guardians would be happy for their young teenagers (13-14) to make their own choices (seven per cent and five per cent respectively); this compares to 17% of parents and guardians of 15 and 16 year olds and a quarter (24%) of parents and guardians of 17 year olds.

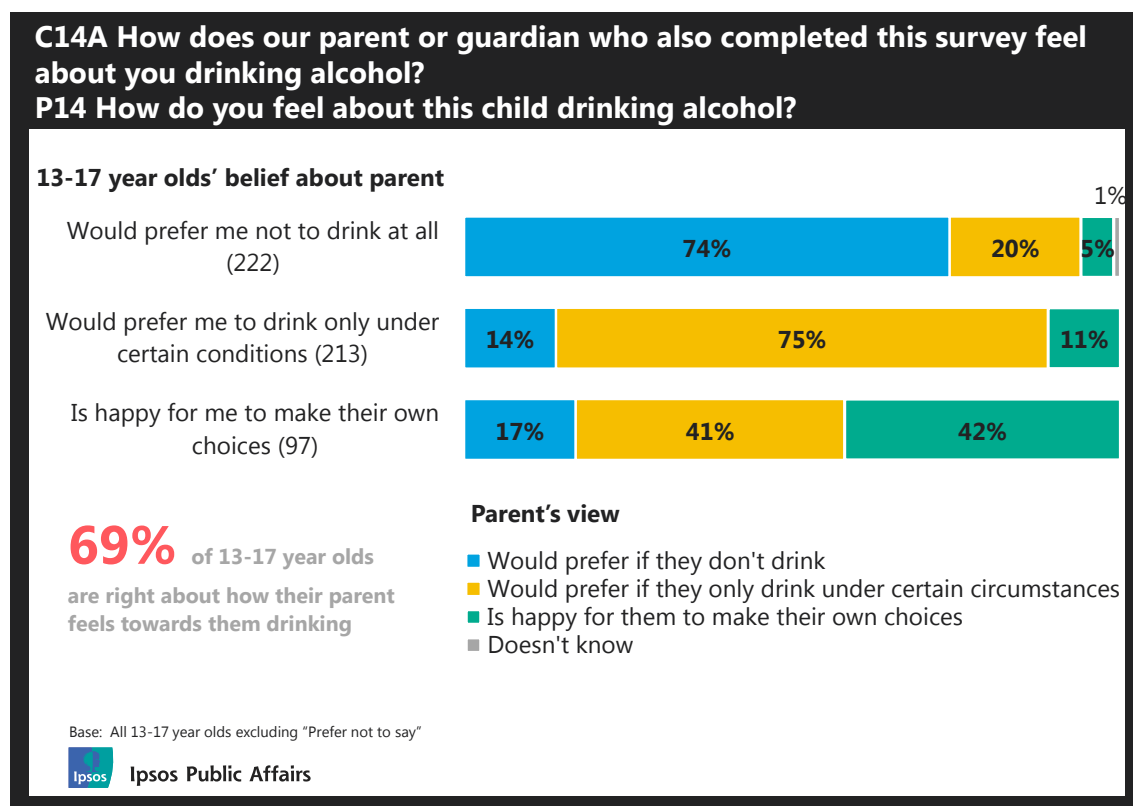
Mothers tend to be stricter than fathers – they are more likely not to want their child to drink at all (45%, versus 33%), while fathers are more often happy for the child to make their own choices (18% versus 11%). This is likely to explain an apparent (though not statistically significant) tendency for non-working parents and guardians to prefer their child not to drink at all, compared to working parents and guardians (45% versus 38%), as female parents and guardians are more likely to be not working<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> 42% of 13-17 year olds whose parents are classed as AUDIT zone 1 think they would prefer them not to drink, compared to 35% in zones 2-4. Note, these differences are not statistically significant.

<sup>25</sup> In our sample, 25% of women are not working compared to 13% of men.

**Figure 1.23: Perceptions of how parents and guardians feel about their child drinking alcohol**



Overall, seven out of ten 13-17 year olds have an accurate perception of their parent's feelings towards them drinking alcohol (69%). Of those who don't, about half think their parent or guardian is stricter than in reality (48%) and half that they are less strict (52%).

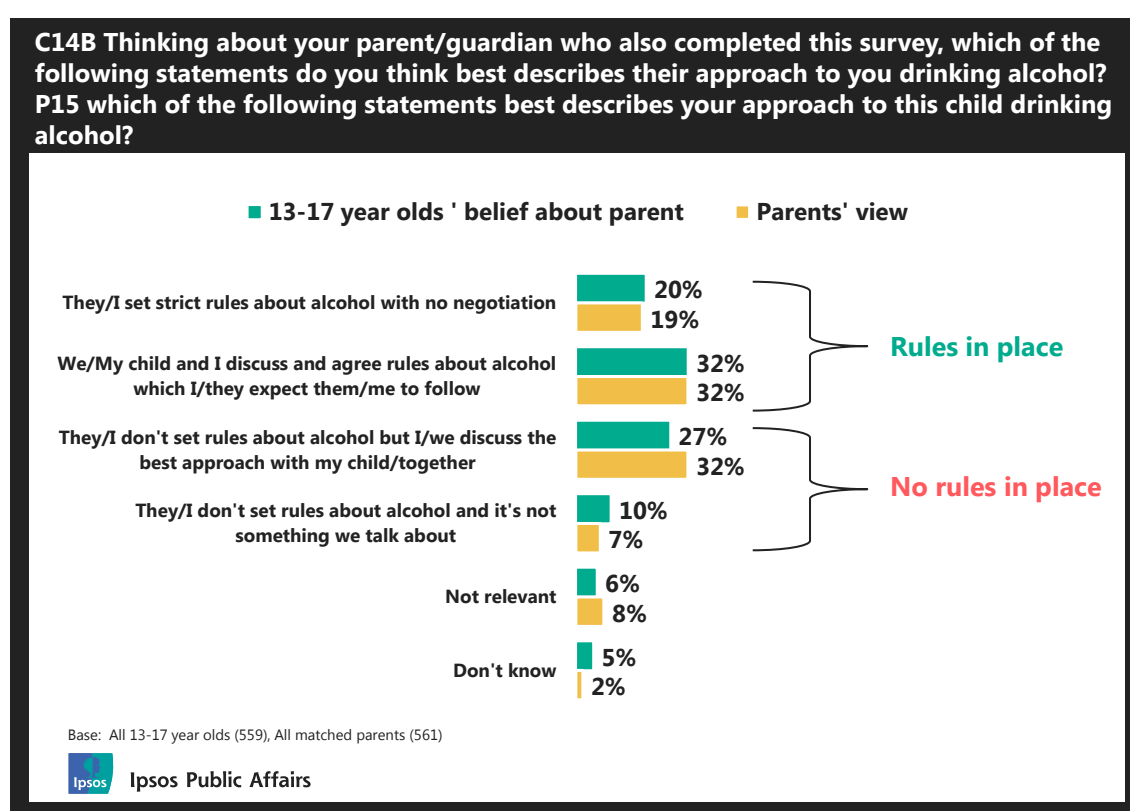
Of the young people who believe their parent or guardian would prefer them not to drink at all, three out of four are accurate in their perception (74%); a quarter believe their parent or guardian is stricter than in reality – they would accept if their child drank under certain conditions (20%), or are happy for them to make their own choices (five per cent). Similarly, three out of four teenagers who believe their parent or guardian would accept if they drank alcohol, but only under certain circumstances, are right in thinking so (75%). One out of seven has a parent or guardian who would prefer them not to drink at all (14%), and one in ten has a parent or guardian who is happy for them to make their own choices (11%). Individuals who think their parent or guardian is happy for them to make their own choices are most likely to get it wrong – nearly six out of ten do, thinking their parent or guardian is less strict than in reality.

### 5.3 Parental rules about their children's drinking

#### Presence or absence of rules about drinking

**About half of 13-17 year olds believe that their parent or guardian has some rules in place about them drinking alcohol; about a fifth say these are strict rules without negotiation, while about a third feel that these are discussed and agreed with them first. Around one in ten think that no rules have been set about alcohol and it's not something they talk about. This closely matches parents' responses to the same question.**

Figure 1.24: Presence or absence of rules about drinking alcohol



About half of all 13-17 year olds believe that they are expected to follow rules related to drinking alcohol, and the same proportion of parents and guardians say they have rules in place (52% and 51% respectively). One in five 13-17 year olds (20%) and parents and guardians (19%) say these are strict rules without negotiation, while a third of each group (32%) say the rules are discussed and agreed together. Similar proportions of young people and parents and guardians (27% and 32%) declare that they follow/set no formal rules, but that they discuss the best approach to alcohol with their parent/child. Smaller proportions of young people and parents and guardians (10% and seven per cent respectively) say that there are no rules in place and it's not something they discuss, while six per cent of young people and eight per cent of parents and guardians think it's not relevant to them. Individuals

aged 13 and their parents and guardians are most likely to have selected “not relevant” (13% and 17% respectively), with the proportion saying so being much lower and consistent across all other ages.

As to be expected, the child’s age is an important determinant of whether, and what type, of rules parents and guardians set about alcohol. Among younger teenagers (13-14), 28% think that their parent or guardian sets strict rules, compared to 14% of 15-17 year olds; this very closely matches parents’ responses (28% and 14% respectively). While a quarter (25%) of 13-14 year olds think their parent or guardian does not set any rules about drinking alcohol, approaching half (44%) of 15-17 year-olds think this. This reflects the response of their parents or guardians (27% among parents or guardians of 13-14 year-olds, and 46% among parents and guardians of 15-17 year-olds). There are no differences related to age in setting rules through negotiation, however.

There are no significant differences between mothers and fathers in their approach to setting rules. Non-working parents and guardians are more likely to set *strict* rules (28%, compared to 17% of working parents); this does not appear to be linked to differences in the age of child asked about or in relation to household income. There is some indication that parents and guardians with a particularly problematic relationship with alcohol (zone 4 of AUDIT) may be more likely to set strict rules than those with lower AUDIT scores; however, it needs to be interpreted with caution due to the small base size of this group<sup>26</sup>. Consistent with this, parents and guardians who are Risky Social and Coping Drinkers are the most likely of all segments to set rules, whether negotiated or not (68%, compared to 51% overall).

The design of the question on setting rules about drinking alcohol was informed by the well-known theory of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967<sup>27</sup>). This theory distinguishes between three main approaches to parenting, or “styles”: Authoritarian, Authoritative and Permissive. Authoritarian parents and guardians tend to set rules with little or no explanation and the child is expected to “behave”, risking punishment. Authoritative parents and guardians place limits on the child’s actions, but encourage them to be independent and explore. Permissive parents and guardians don’t set expectations, but act more like a “friendly resource” the child can use as they wish. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between the style parents and guardians adopt and various behavioural and adaptation outcomes in children, which can continue to adulthood.

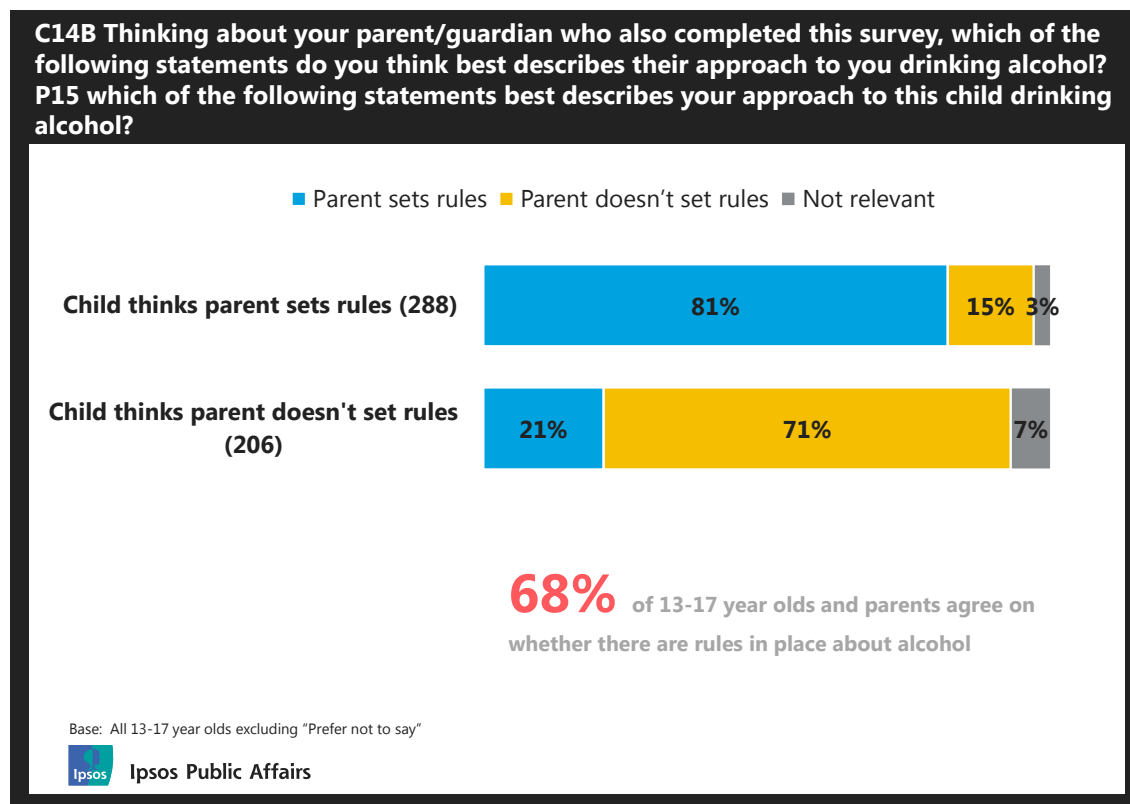
This study was not designed to examine parenting styles and a validated tool would be required to do so. Nevertheless – and acknowledging the limitations – a parent’s approach to setting rules can be treated as a useful approximation, albeit constrained to the matter of drinking alcohol. The observed relationships between the parent’s approach to setting rules and the child’s behaviour are discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>26</sup> 35% of parents classed as AUDIT zone 4 set strict rules, compared to 18% in zone 1 and 16% in zones 2 and 3. Please note the small base sizes this analysis is based on: 364 zone 1, 131 zone 2, 26 zone 3, and 40 zone 4.

<sup>27</sup> Baumrind, D. (1967). Child care practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behavior. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 75(1), 43-88.

Figure 1.25: Perceptions about presence or absence of rules about drinking alcohol



As the chart above illustrates, most 13-17 year olds are right about whether or not their parent or guardian sets rules in relation to them drinking alcohol, and they are more likely to be correct when they think the parent or guardian has put rules in place (81%) as when they think they have not (71%). Nonetheless, one in five teenagers who think their parent or guardian has no rules in place are incorrect (21%), suggesting that there is some miscommunication between parents or guardians and their children about these matters. Similarly, just under one in seven young people who say their parent or guardian expects them to follow rules think so incorrectly (15%).

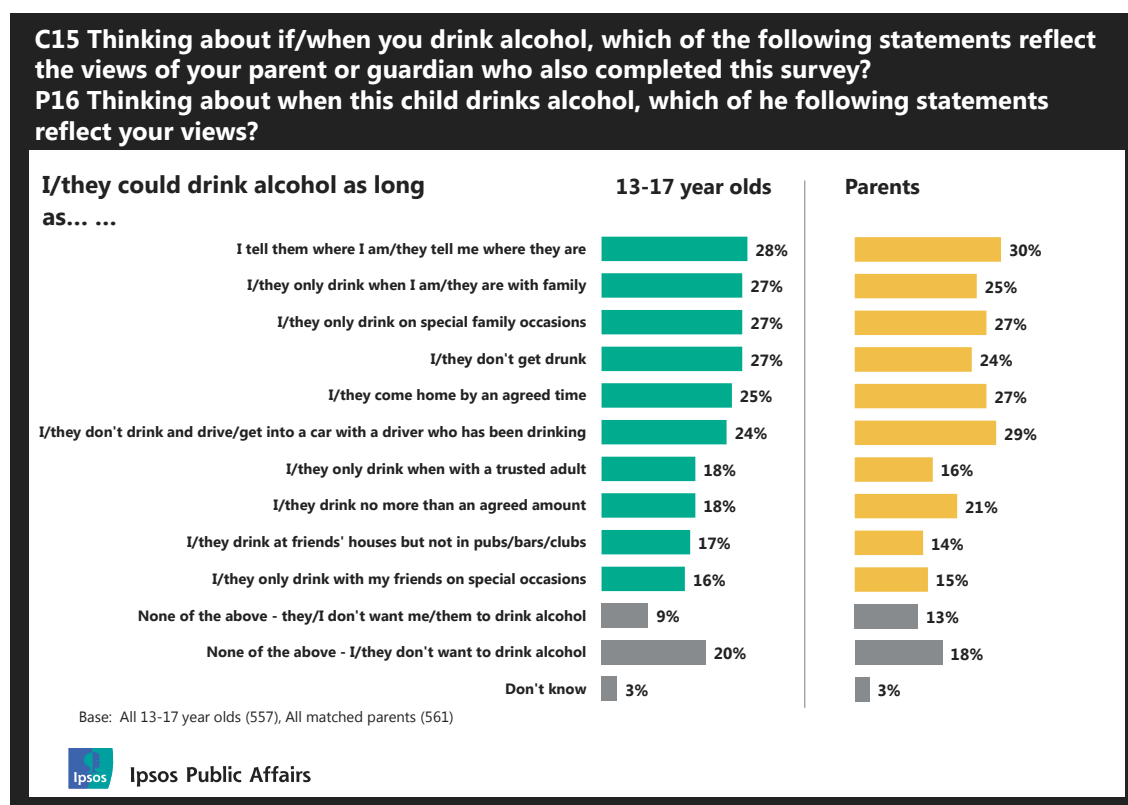
A more detailed analysis of matched responses reveals that about two thirds of young people (68%) are correct about whether their parent or guardian sets rules in place and whether these are rules with or without negotiation, while about a third (32%) are to some extent wrong about whether and/or what type of rules their parent or guardian intends to have in place. This suggests that while most young people and their parents or guardians are broadly in agreement about what, if any, rules there are in place about them drinking alcohol, there still remains a fair degree of miscommunication between some parents or guardians and their teenage children.



## Specific rules about drinking

Drinking on special family occasions or with family members present, telling parents or guardians about their whereabouts, coming home at an agreed time and avoiding drunkenness are most commonly cited by 13-17 year olds as circumstances in which they might be allowed to drink. This closely reflects parents' actual views.

Figure 1.26: Specific rules about drinking alcohol



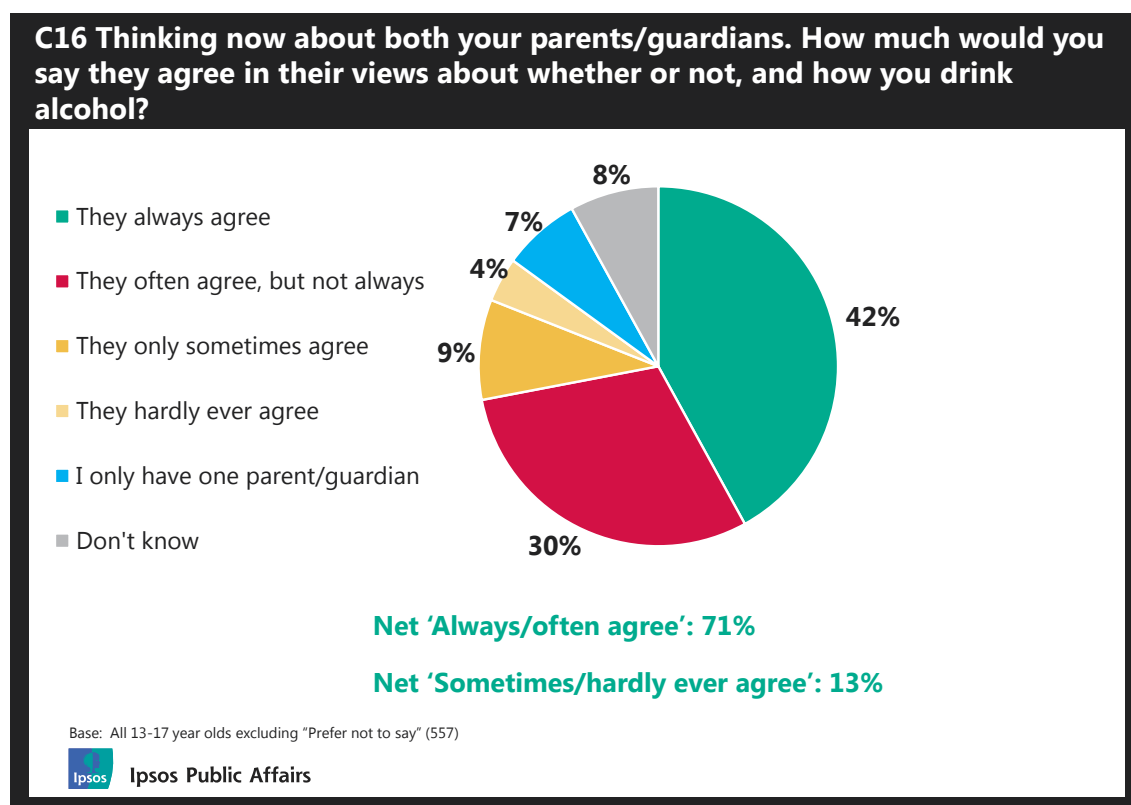
Most young people believe that that their parents or guardians would allow them to drink under one or more specific conditions (68%). They most commonly cite special family occasions, presence of family members, telling parents or guardians about their whereabouts, coming home at an agreed time and avoiding drunkenness as circumstances in which they might be allowed to drink (ranging from 25% to 28%). A similar proportion cites making sure they don't drink and drive, or get into a car with a driver who has been drinking (24%). Smaller, but sizeable proportions think that drinking with other trusted adults, with friends on special occasions, at friends' houses (as opposed to bars/clubs) and drinking no more than agreed amount might be circumstances in which their parent or guardian would allow them to drink.

Young people are fairly well aligned with parents or guardians in their perceptions about specific circumstances in which they might be allowed to drink. While nearly four in ten parents and guardians think that young people should wait until they are 18 or older to have a whole drink of alcohol (see Figure 4.4 in this chapter), two thirds of parents and guardians would consider allowing their child to drink alcohol if they met one or more conditions (66%).

Just under a third of parents and guardians might allow their child to drink provided that they knew the child's whereabouts (30%); other important circumstances in which a parent or guardian might think it acceptable for their teenage child to drink include if they don't drink and drive/get into a car with someone who has been drinking (29%), come home by an agreed time (27%) and don't get drunk (24%). Parents and guardians are also clearly more comfortable with their child drinking on special family occasions (27%), or at least with family members present (25%), than with other trusted adults (16%) or with friends on special occasions/at friends' houses (15% and 14% respectively).

#### 5.4 Perception of agreement between parents

**Most 13-17 year olds say that their parents/guardians always or often agree in their views about whether or not, and how, their child can drink alcohol.**



Seven out of ten 13-17 year olds perceive their parents or guardians to hold congruent views around them drinking alcohol: four in ten say that they 'always' agree (42%), while three out of ten say they agree 'often' (30%). However, 13% of teenagers perceive their parents or guardians as mostly in disagreement on these matters; nine per cent say that they 'sometimes agree', while four per cent that they 'hardly ever agree'.

How much the individual's parents or guardians agree in their approach is not related with the likelihood of having drunk alcohol. However, teenagers whose parents or guardians *sometimes* or *hardly ever* agree in their approach to alcohol are more likely to have been

drunk more than once than those whose parents or guardians *always* or *often* agree (39%, 20%).

### **5.5 Effects of parental rules on young people's drinking**

There is an observable relationship between strict parental rules and teenage drinking behaviour, although it is likely to be mediated by age. We know that parents or guardians of younger teenagers (13-14) tend to be stricter in setting rules than parents or guardians of older teenagers (15-17); at the same time, the likelihood of drinking and being drunk, frequency of drinking and experiences of alcohol-related harm all increase with age.

In line with this, the presence of strict rules without negotiation – but not negotiated rules - is associated with a lower likelihood of having had an alcoholic drink and having been drunk. Individuals who think their parent or guardian expects them to follow strict rules with no negotiation are less likely to have had an alcoholic drink (43%, compared to 68% of those whose parents negotiate with them and 55% who do not think there are any rules). These individuals are also most likely to say that they have only tried alcohol once or twice in the past, as opposed to drinking more regularly (30%, compared to 11% and 13% of those whose parents or guardians negotiate rules with them or set no rules at all). These findings appear consistent with the younger age profile of those individuals who are expected to follow strict rules, as opposed to negotiated rules or no rules at all (57% are aged 13-14, compared to 37% and 28%, respectively).

Notably however, individuals whose parents or guardians negotiate rules with them (as opposed to setting strict rules without negotiation) are no less likely to drink and get drunk than those who say that there are no rules in place, despite a slightly younger age profile. In fact, they are the group most likely to have had an alcoholic drink (68%), and are as likely to have been drunk more than once as those not expected to follow rules (25%)<sup>28</sup>. At the same time, those who do drink seem to do so somewhat less frequently if they feel there are rules in place that can be negotiated, compared to no rules – 51% drink alcohol less than monthly compared to 40% in the latter group, leading to a more complicated picture.

“Negotiating” rules is likely to include a wide range of parental approaches, likely with varying degrees of agreement between parent or guardian and child as to what the rules are. Parental rule setting may also be affected by the child's actual behaviour – for example, a parent or guardian might consider it sufficient to just talk about alcohol but resort to a firmer approach (either negotiating or setting strict rules) if they are concerned that their child's drinking has got out of hand. This could further confound the relationship between rules and young people's alcohol-related behaviour.

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<sup>28</sup> Please note, this is based on individuals who have had a whole alcoholic and think their parent has no rules in place (104), has negotiated rules in place (115), has strict rules in place (40). Due to small base sizes, these findings need to be treated with caution.

There are no differences in the number of harmful alcohol-related negative consequences experienced by young people expected to follow rules, with or without negotiation, or no rules.

**Speaking about drinking**

## 6. Speaking about drinking

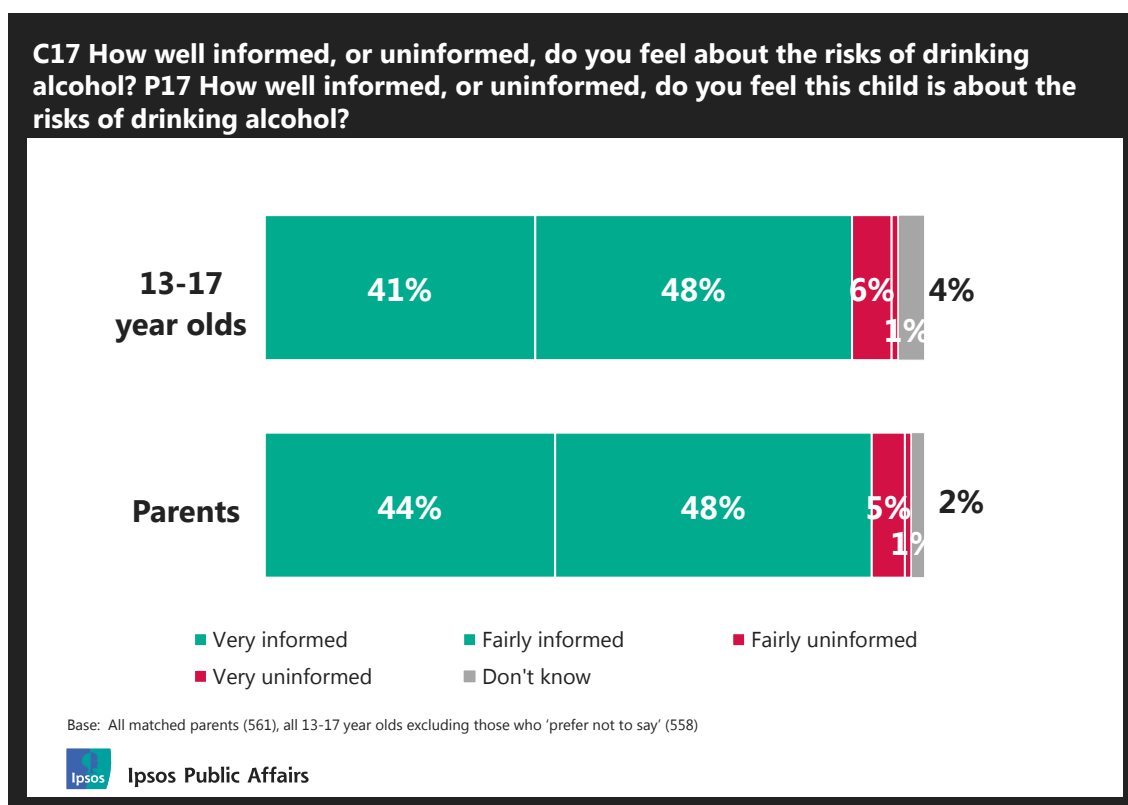
This chapter focuses on how well informed young people are about the risks of drinking alcohol – looking at parents’ willingness to discuss drinking and individuals’ experiences of discussing such matters.

### 6.1 Being informed

#### Feeling informed about the risks of alcohol

*The vast majority of 13-17 years say they feel informed about the risks of drinking alcohol. Between the ages of 13 and 14, there appears to be a shift in how well informed young people feel about drinking. Parents and guardians are fairly accurate in their beliefs about how well informed their child is about the risks of alcohol.*

Figure 1.27: How well informed 13-17 year olds are about the risks of alcohol



The majority of 13-17 year olds in the UK say they feel very or fairly informed about the risks of drinking alcohol (89%), with two in five saying they feel very informed (41%). Only seven per cent admit to feeling uninformed about the risks of alcohol. Very few individuals say they are 'very uninformed', though the proportion saying they are 'fairly uninformed' increases the younger respondents are, such that 10% of 13-14 year olds hold this view, compared to three per cent of 15-17 year olds. There appears to be a step-change in how well informed

young people feel between the ages of 13 and 14, with 16% of 13 year olds saying they feel fairly uninformed – which drops to four per cent of 14 year olds and remains low for all subsequent ages.

Whether young people have tried alcohol or not does not appear to affect how well informed they feel about the risks of drinking. Nine in ten (90%) young people who have tried alcohol say they are very/fairly informed compared to 88% of those who are yet to have a whole alcoholic drink. Similarly, whether young people have been drunk or not does not affect how informed they feel about the risks of alcohol (89% of those who have been drunk feel very/fairly informed compared to 91% of those who have not been drunk).

If parents and guardians exhibit more moderate drinking behaviours (and thus are classified as AUDIT zone 1), their children are more likely to feel very informed about the risks of alcohol (45% compared to 34% of children whose parents or guardians are classified as AUDIT zones 2-4). The children of parents or guardians who are grouped as Comfortable Social Drinkers, Controlled Home Drinkers, and Risky Career Drinkers are more likely to say they feel informed (95%, 94% and 90% respectively) compared to children of parents or guardians who are Risky Social and Coping Drinkers, and Self-contained Moderate Drinkers (82% and 81% respectively).

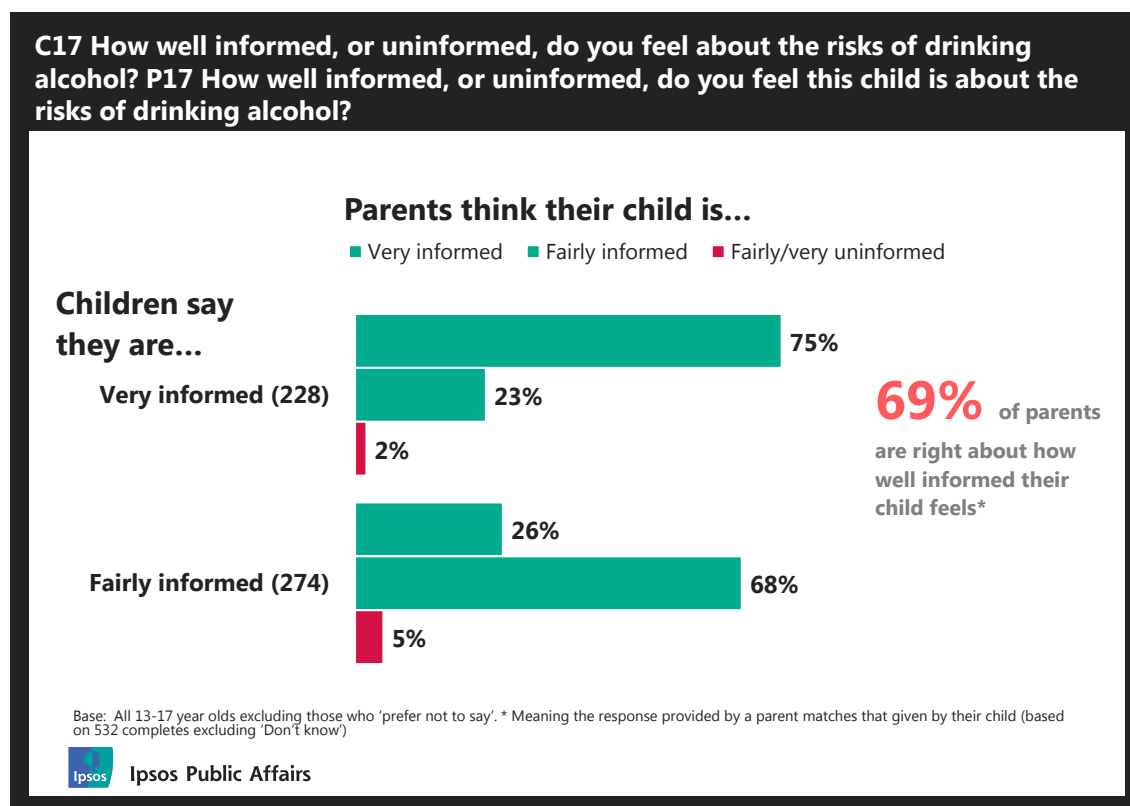
Encouragingly, individuals who have sought information from Drinkaware's website feel more informed about the risks of alcohol compared to those who have not. Again, this is based on a small group of young people who have accessed the website (37 in total) but the data indicates a positive impact on how well informed individuals feel (with 71% saying they are 'very informed' compared to 39% who have not visited the website). This finding does not appear to be linked to age as 13-14 year olds are as likely to have visited Drinkaware's website as 15-17 year olds. This could also reflect an increased engagement with the subject of alcohol among young people prior to visiting Drinkaware's website.

Parents or guardians overall appear to hold similar views to young people with 91% saying they believe their child is very/fairly well informed about drinking alcohol (44% saying very informed, 48% saying fairly informed). As would be expected, parents or guardians who have had a conversation with their child about drinking are more likely to say their child is very informed (46% versus 26% of parents or guardians who are yet to have this conversation with their child<sup>29</sup>).

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<sup>29</sup> Note this is based on 65 who are not spoken to their child about alcohol and thus this finding should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 1.28: How informed parents and guardians think their child is about the risks of alcohol



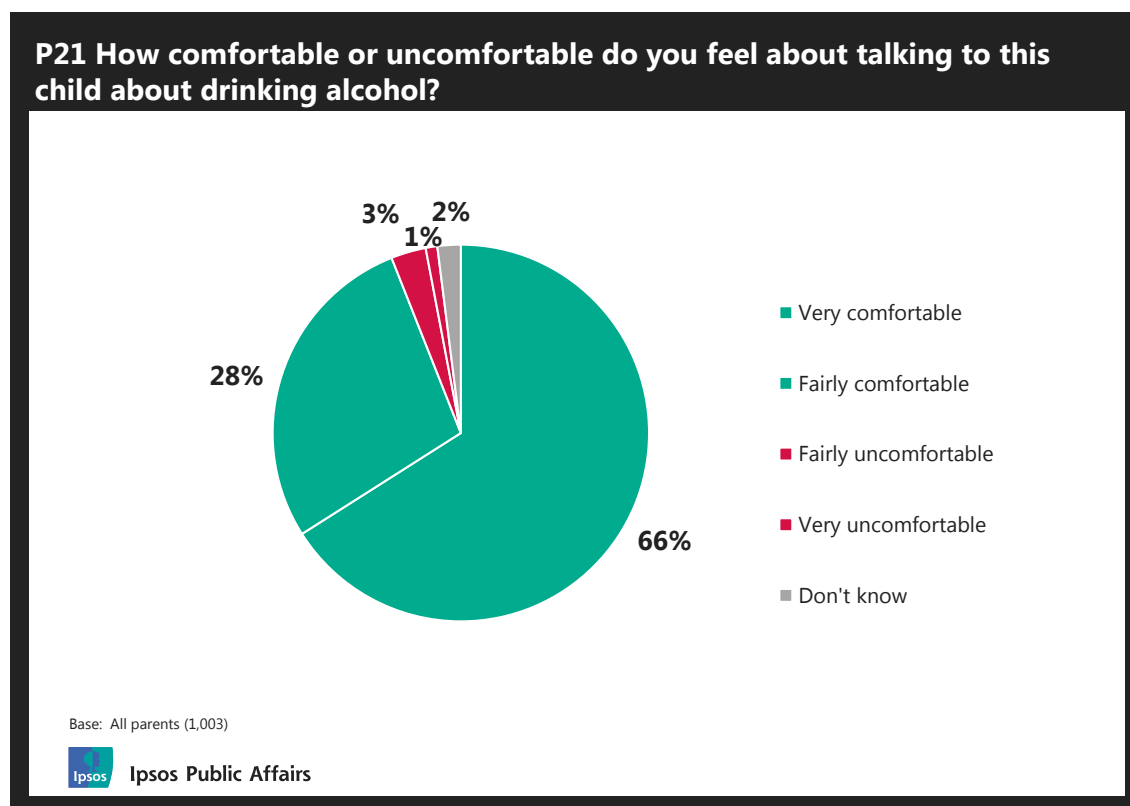
Parents and guardians are broadly in agreement with their children concerning whether their child feels informed or uninformed about the risks of alcohol. Of the children who say they feel informed, 96% of their parents and guardians also believe them to be informed. However, parents and guardians show some lack of awareness about just how well informed their child is about alcohol. Some parents and guardians assume their child is 'fairly informed' when actually their child feels 'very informed' (23%), whilst others believe their child to be more informed than their child actually feels (shown here as the 26% of children who feel 'fairly informed' but whose parents or guardians believe them to be 'very informed'). Only a very small proportion of parents and guardians believe their child is uninformed when their child would in fact say they are informed (three per cent). Overall, 69% of parents and guardians were correct about the degree to which their child feels informed on the risks of alcohol.

### Feeling comfortable discussing alcohol

***The vast majority of parents and guardians claim to feel comfortable speaking to their child about alcohol, though just over a quarter say they are 'fairly' rather than 'very' comfortable. Parents and guardians who exhibit more moderate drinking behaviours tend to feel more comfortable about the notion of speaking to their child about alcohol.***



Figure 1.29: How comfortable parents and guardians feel about conversations on alcohol



Nearly all parents and guardians surveyed said they felt very or fairly comfortable talking to their child about drinking alcohol (95%) with only four per cent admitting to feeling uncomfortable<sup>30</sup>. Whilst two thirds say they are very comfortable (66%), there remains just over a quarter of parents and guardians who are *fairly* rather than *very* comfortable (28%).

Some differences in levels of comfort are observable according to demographics with, for instance, mothers feeling more comfortable discussing alcohol with their children compared to fathers (73% of women saying they are very comfortable compared to 58% of men, with men conversely more likely to say they feel *fairly* comfortable – 36% compared to 23% of women).

Age also appears to have an effect with older parents and guardians more comfortable discussing alcohol with their children compared to younger counterparts, though this may well reflect the age of their children with parents and guardians generally being more comfortable having such discussions as the age of child increases (72% of parents or guardians of 17 year olds say they are very comfortable discussing alcohol compared to 61% of parents of 13 year olds).

<sup>30</sup> Note the data referred to in this section of the report are based on all parents surveyed (not just those for whom their child also took part).

The drinking behaviour of parents and guardians plays an important part in determining how comfortable they feel about discussing alcohol with their child. Those exhibiting more moderate drinking behaviours feel more comfortable discussing the issue with their children. Three quarters of parents and guardians classified as being in AUDIT zone 1 say they feel very comfortable discussing drinking with their child (73%). This level of comfort decreases for parents and guardians whose own drinking is classified as being in AUDIT zones 2-4 with 60% saying they feel very comfortable, instead they are more likely to say they feel *fairly* comfortable (34% versus 23% of parents and guardians in zone 1). Similarly, those who drink less than once a week feel more comfortable discussing alcohol compared to those who drink once a week or more (74% versus 62% saying they feel very comfortable with these discussions). And those who believe themselves to be drinking within safe levels are more likely to say they feel very comfortable with such discussions (69% compared to 60% of those who believe themselves to be drinking above safe levels).

Differences in the extent to which parents and guardians feel comfortable discussing alcohol are also apparent when looking at the segment parents and guardians belong to. The highest levels of comfort are seen in parents and guardians classified as being Comfortable Social Drinkers (79% saying they are very comfortable), Controlled Home Drinkers (72%) and Self-contained Moderate Drinkers (70%). This compares to 58% of Risky Career Drinkers and 50% of Risky Social and Coping Drinkers who also say they feel very comfortable holding these conversations; most likely reflecting the riskier drinking behaviours of these latter two groups.

As you would expect, parents and guardians who have actually spoken to their child about alcohol are more likely to say they feel comfortable with the notion of doing so compared to those who are yet to speak to their child (70% versus 44% saying they feel very comfortable). However, there is still a high proportion of parents and guardians who are yet to speak to their child about alcohol who say they feel comfortable about doing so (with 44% saying they feel very comfortable and 42% saying they feel *fairly* comfortable). This suggests that, with the exception of a few, most parents and guardians are choosing not to speak to their child for reasons other than feeling uncomfortable about doing so (such as the child's age or the parent or guardian's willingness to set rules).

Parents who admitted to feeling uncomfortable talking to their child about drinking alcohol provided a number of explanations for why. Of the 35 parents, four said they did not want to bring attention to the matter, four felt they did not know where to start or how to broach the subject, three said they did not drink themselves, three felt their child was too young for such discussions (their children were all aged 13-14) and two simply said they felt awkward about discussing the subject. A selection of verbatim comments are shown below.

*"I don't like drawing too much attention to alcohol. It seems in this country we talk about it too much."*

*"Because I don't think I know all the right things to say."*

“Talking to my daughter about this subject I would find it hard to explain how dangerous drinking can be.”

“Because we have never drunk ourselves so I don’t know how to start and understand their views.”

“He is young and cares about his sports, he wouldn’t drink.”

“It’s awkward.”

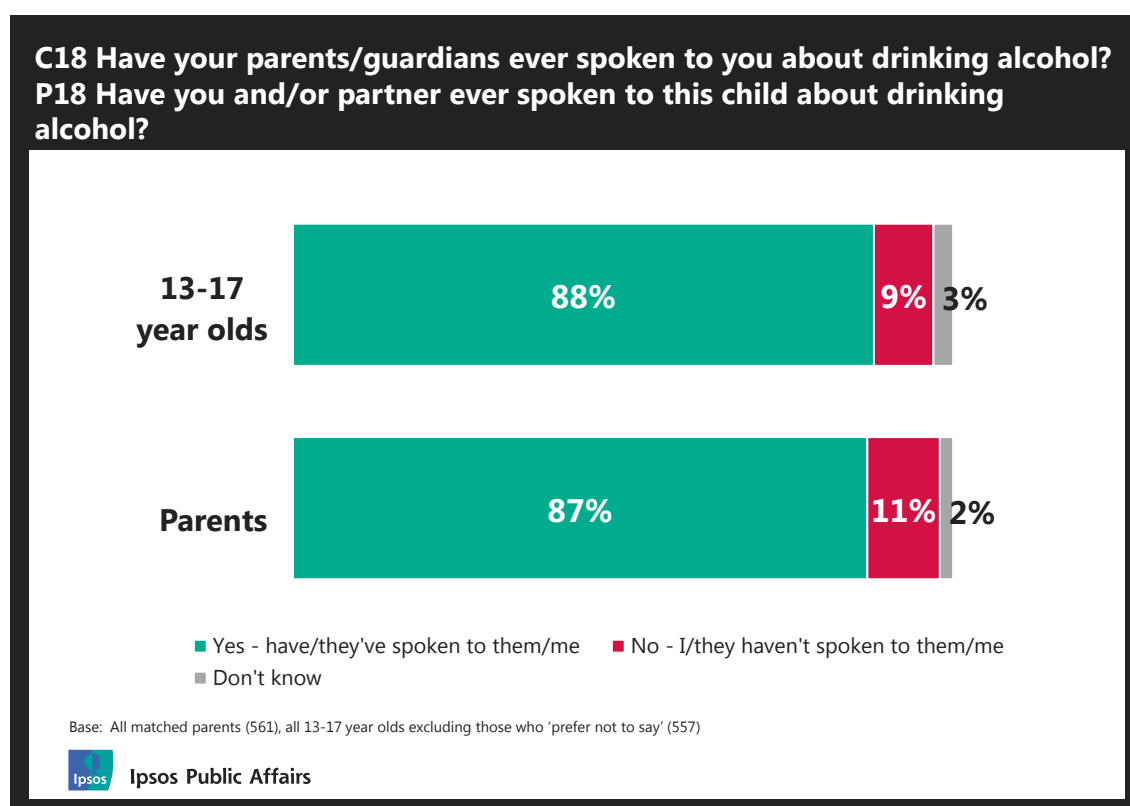
“Usual teenage reluctance to engage in conversation puts me off.”

## 6.2 Experiences of conversations about alcohol

### Speaking about alcohol

**Most parents and guardians believe they have spoken to their child about drinking alcohol, as do most 13-17 year olds. Whilst parents’ own drinking behaviour affects how comfortable parents and guardians feel about having such conversations, it does not affect their likelihood of speaking to their child about alcohol. Instead, parents and guardians are most likely to have spoken to their child about drinking alcohol if they have set rules in place regarding drinking.**

Figure 1.30: Whether spoken to parents/child about drinking alcohol



In the vast majority of cases, young people say their parent or guardian has spoken to them about drinking alcohol (88% with only nine per cent believing this not to be the case). As

would be expected, older teenagers are more likely to have had a conversation with their parents or guardians about alcohol, though it appears that these conversations begin to happen at around the age of 14, with 78% of 13 year olds having had their parents or guardians speak to them about alcohol, compared to 89% of 14 year olds (very similar to the 88%, 93% and 90% of 15, 16 and 17 year olds respectively).

The results from parents and guardians are very similar with 87% claiming to have spoken to their child about alcohol and 11% saying they have not yet done so. Working status appears to have an effect on the propensity to speak with children about alcohol such that parents and guardians who are not working are more likely to have spoken to their child about drinking. Of those who are not working, 94% say they have spoken to their child about alcohol compared to 85% of working parents. Whilst women are more likely to be not working<sup>31</sup>, this is not driving the apparent difference, as mothers and fathers are as likely to say they have spoken to their child about drinking (86% versus 88% respectively), despite fathers feeling less comfortable about the prospect of doing so (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Instead, the differences seen according to working status may reflect the greater propensity of parents and guardians who are not working to have rules in place with their child about the consumption of alcohol<sup>32</sup>. Those who have rules in place are more likely to have spoken to their child about drinking (93% versus 85% of those without rules in place).

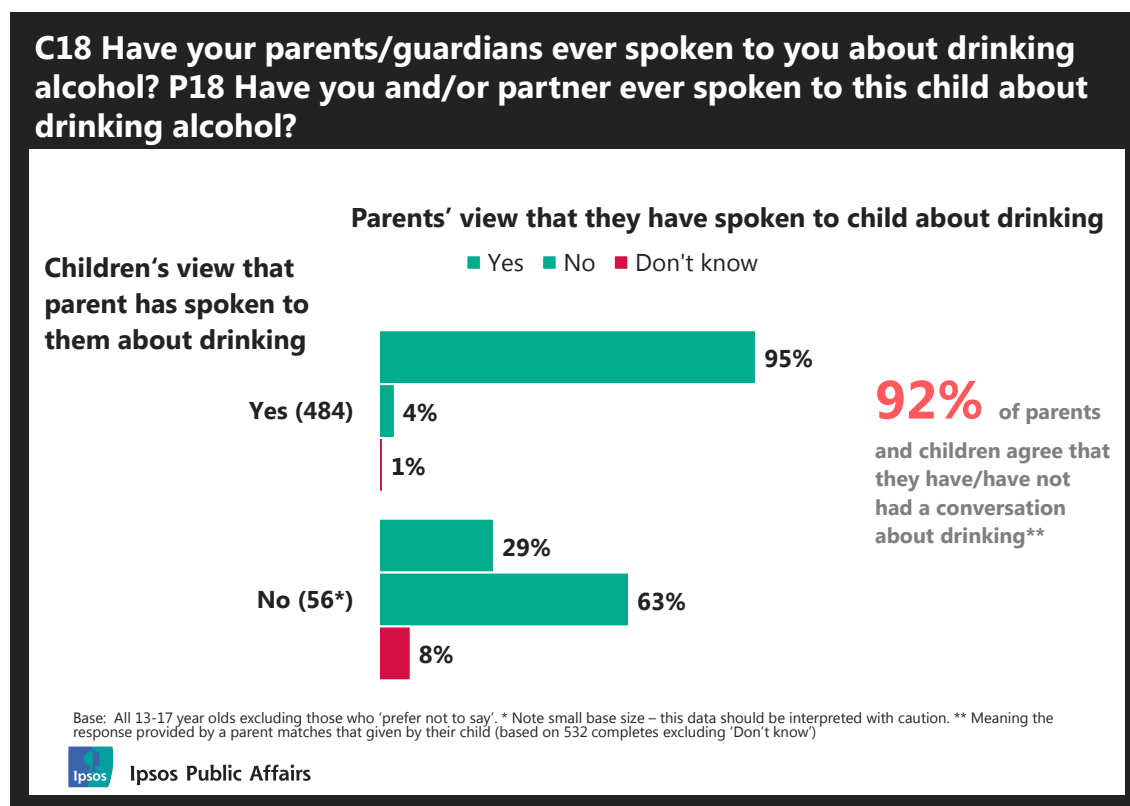
Whilst parents' own drinking behaviour appears to affect how comfortable they feel discussing alcohol (see discussion above), it does not appear to affect their likelihood of having had a conversation with their child about it. Parents and guardians classified as AUDIT zone 1 are as likely to have had these conversations compared to parents and guardians in zones 2-4 (87% versus 86%). Similarly, 89% of parents and guardians who drink less than once a week say they have spoken to their child about drinking compared to 87% of those who drink once a week or more.

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<sup>31</sup> 25% of women are not working compared to 13% of men.

<sup>32</sup> 62% of non-working parents have set rules regarding alcohol consumption with their child compared to 48% of working parents.

Figure 1.31: Perceptions on whether spoken about drinking alcohol

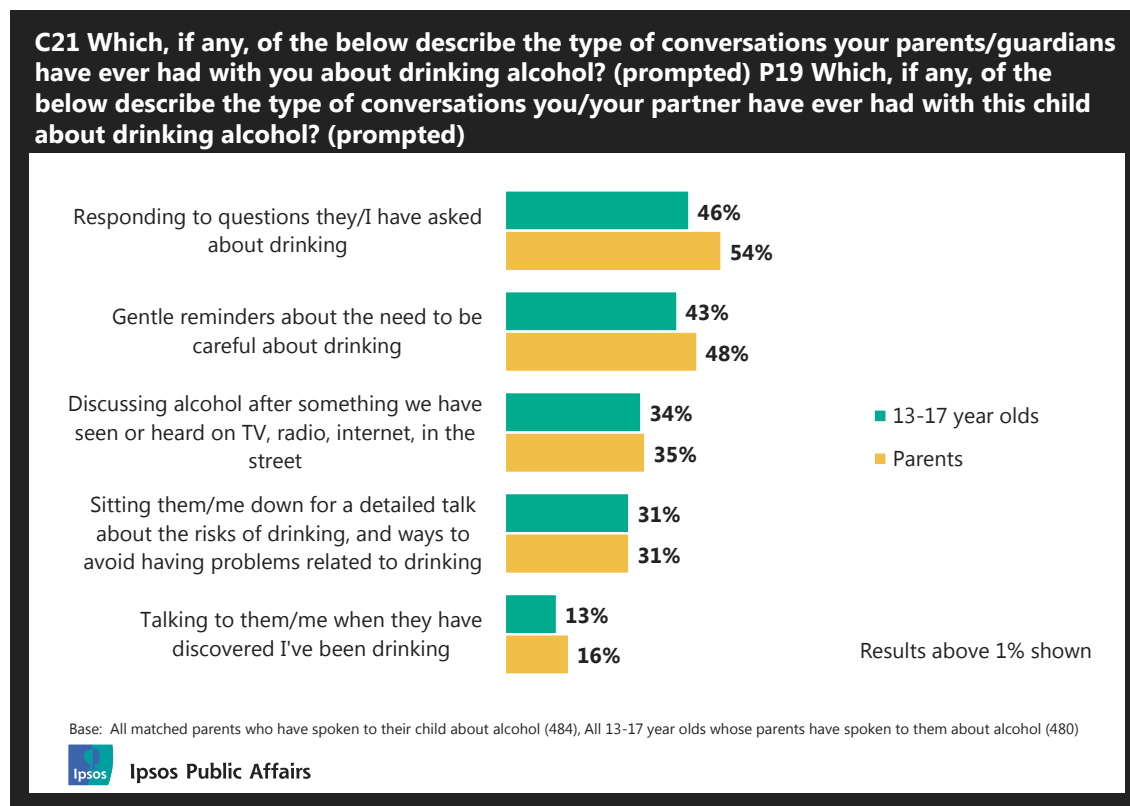


There is a high level of agreement between parents or guardians and children as to whether they have, or have not, had a conversation about drinking alcohol (92% of answers provided matched). Of the 13-17 year olds who felt their parent or guardian had discussed alcohol with them, 95% of parents or guardians felt the same. Only a small number of parents or guardians in this instance felt that they had not spoken to their child about drinking (four per cent). There is a slightly higher proportion of parents or guardians who incorrectly believe they have spoken to their child about alcohol when the child does not think this is the case (29%) though, due to the very small base size, this can only be considered an indicative finding.

#### Types of conversation had

***Conversations about alcohol are most commonly prompted by questions from children and take the form of gentle reminders about the need to be safe rather than more detailed discussions about the risks of drinking. In general, these conversations are positively received by children.***

**Figure 1.32: Types of conversations had**



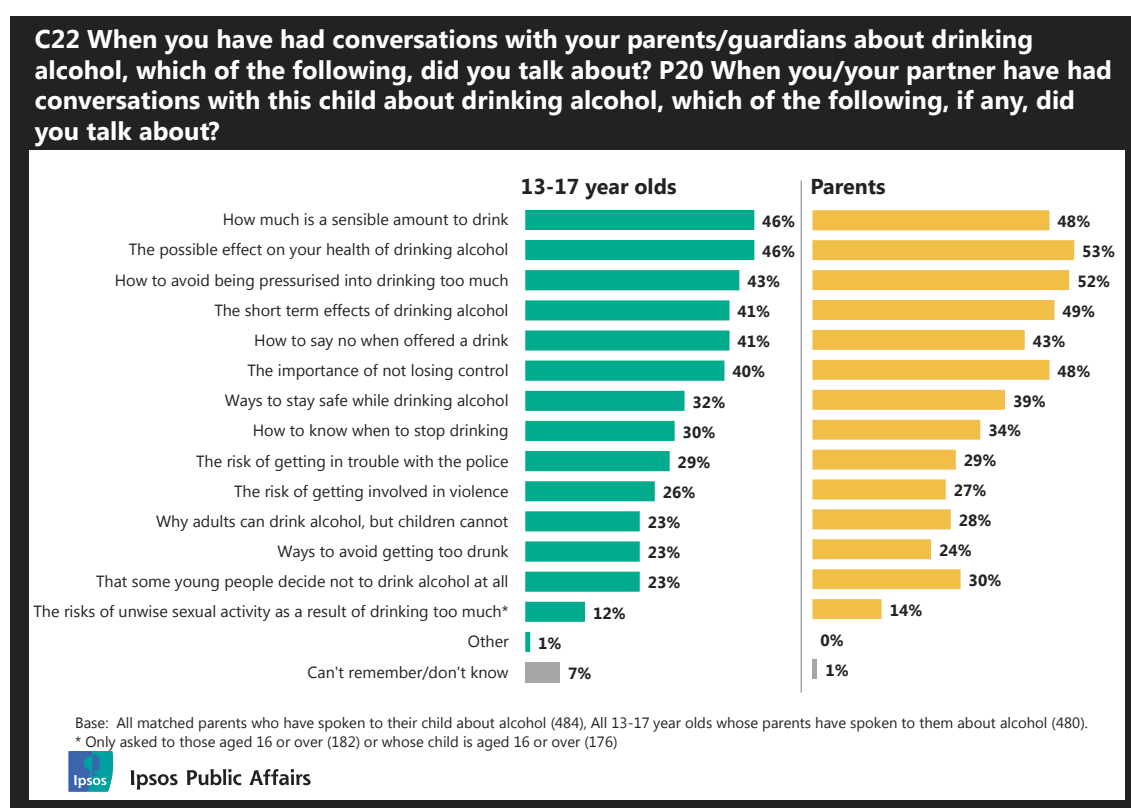
Conversations about alcohol appear most commonly to stem from questions young people may ask of their parents or guardians (rather than in response to a parent finding out their child has been drinking), and take the form of gentle reminders (as opposed to sitting down to have a more detailed talk about the risks of drinking). Both young people and parents/guardians hold similar perceptions of the types of conversations they have had with one another.

The most common form of conversation is in response to a young person's questions about drinking (46% of young people say this and 54% of parents). Conversations are also commonly described as 'gentle reminders' about the need to be careful when drinking (43% of young people and 48% of parents and guardians describe the conversations as this). Some conversations about alcohol are prompted after drinking appears in some form of media or on the street, though this is not in the majority of instances (34% and 35% of young people and parents and guardians mention this form of conversation respectively). Similarly, about a third of 13-17 year olds and parents and guardians say the conversation was more of a detailed 'sit down' chat about the risks of drinking (31% for both groups). The least prevalent form of conversation is one that is prompted after a parent or guardian finds out their child has been drinking (13% of young people say a conversation was prompted by this, as do 16% of parents). However, this type of conversation is more common with older teenagers – 24% of 17 year olds say they have had a conversation with their parent or guardian prompted by a discovery that they were drinking alcohol.

Young people who feel more informed about the risks of alcohol are more likely to say they have had a detailed talk with their parents or guardians about the risks of alcohol, suggesting this kind of in-depth sit down discussion is a more effective mechanism for better informing children about the risks of drinking (38% of 13-17 year olds who are very informed say they have had this type of conversation with their parent or guardian compared to 28% of those who feel *fairly* informed).

Parents or guardians who set rules in place are much more likely than those without rules to say they have sat their child down for a detailed discussion of the risks (41% compared to 21%).

**Figure 1.33: Subject of conversations**



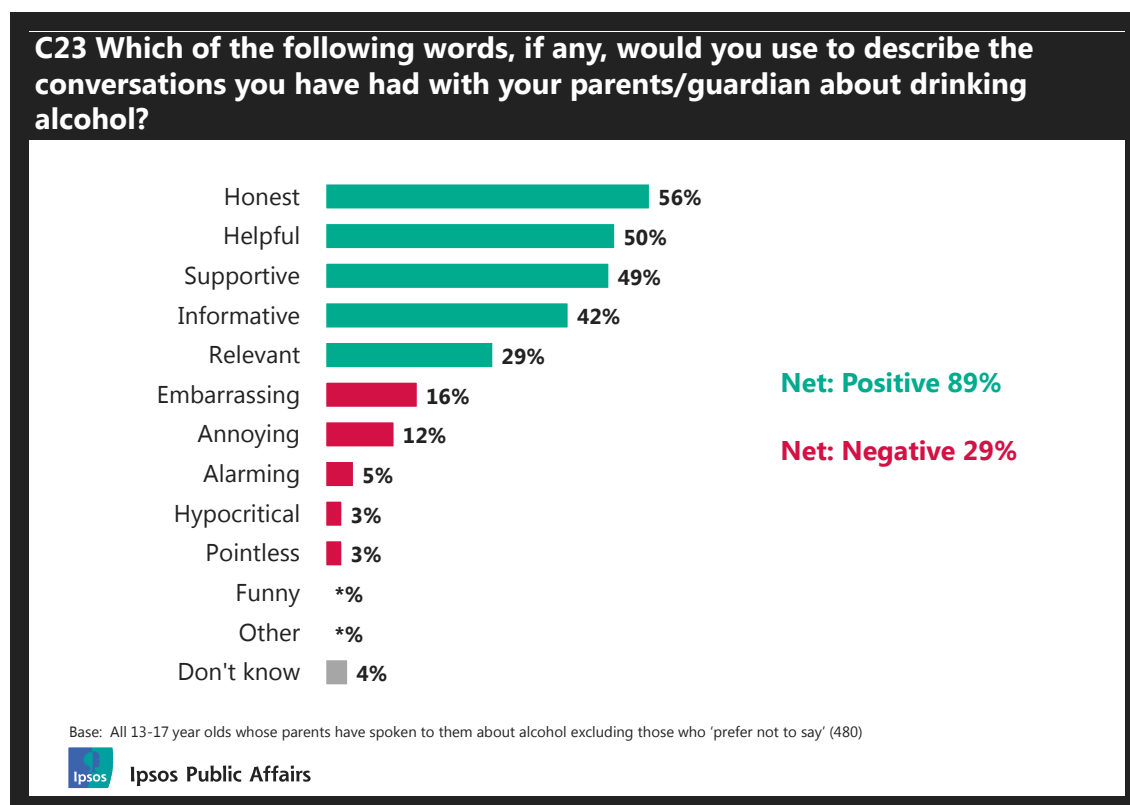
It is clear that conversations between parents and guardians and children about drinking cover a variety of topics. Primarily, they appear to cover ways that young people can moderately and sensibly drink alcohol with, for example, 46% of young people saying the conversation with their parent covered how much is a sensible amount to drink. Parents and guardians also appear to be coaching their children in how to avoid peer pressure – 43% of children say the conversation with theirparent or guardian covered how to avoid being pressurised into drinking too much, and 41% said they discussed how to say no when offered a drink. Parents and guardians are also quick to point out possible effects on their child’s health (46% of young people say they discussed this) and the short term effects of drinking (mentioned by 41% of 13-17 year olds).

Some of the least discussed topics are why adults can drink but children cannot, ways to avoid getting too drunk, and why some young people decide not to drink (each mentioned by 23% of young people who have had a conversation with their parent or guardian about alcohol). The risks of unwise sexual activity is brought up in 30% of cases (according to young people aged 16-17 of whom this question was asked).

There is a great variety in the number of different subjects covered in these discussions. One or two of the listed topics are covered in 30% of conversations (according to young people), 3-4 are discussed in 21% of instances, and 5-9 topics are mentioned in 31% of conversations. Only a small number of children say they discussed 10 or more of the subjects listed (10%),

Parents and guardians hold very similar views to young people in terms of what they describe as being the main topics of conversation. However, in all but one instance ('the risk of getting in trouble with the police'), parents and guardians are more likely to think they have covered the subject topics shown compared to young people, potentially suggesting that some of the topics discussed might not have landed or been as memorable to young people as their parents or guardians might have thought.

**Figure 1.34: Description of conversations**



On the whole, young people who have had a conversation with their parent or guardian about drinking alcohol are very positive about the experience with nine in ten (89%) using positive adjectives to describe it, compared to three in ten (29%) using negative adjectives.



Most commonly, young people describe the conversation as being 'honest' (56%), 'helpful' (50%), and 'supportive' (42%). While on the whole these findings seem positive, it also means that half of young people did *not* think that conversations about drinking alcohol with their parent/guardian have been helpful, indicating room for improvement. Where young people are negative towards the conversation they have had with their parent, this most commonly stems from the experience being 'embarrassing' (16% mention this) or 'annoying' (12%).

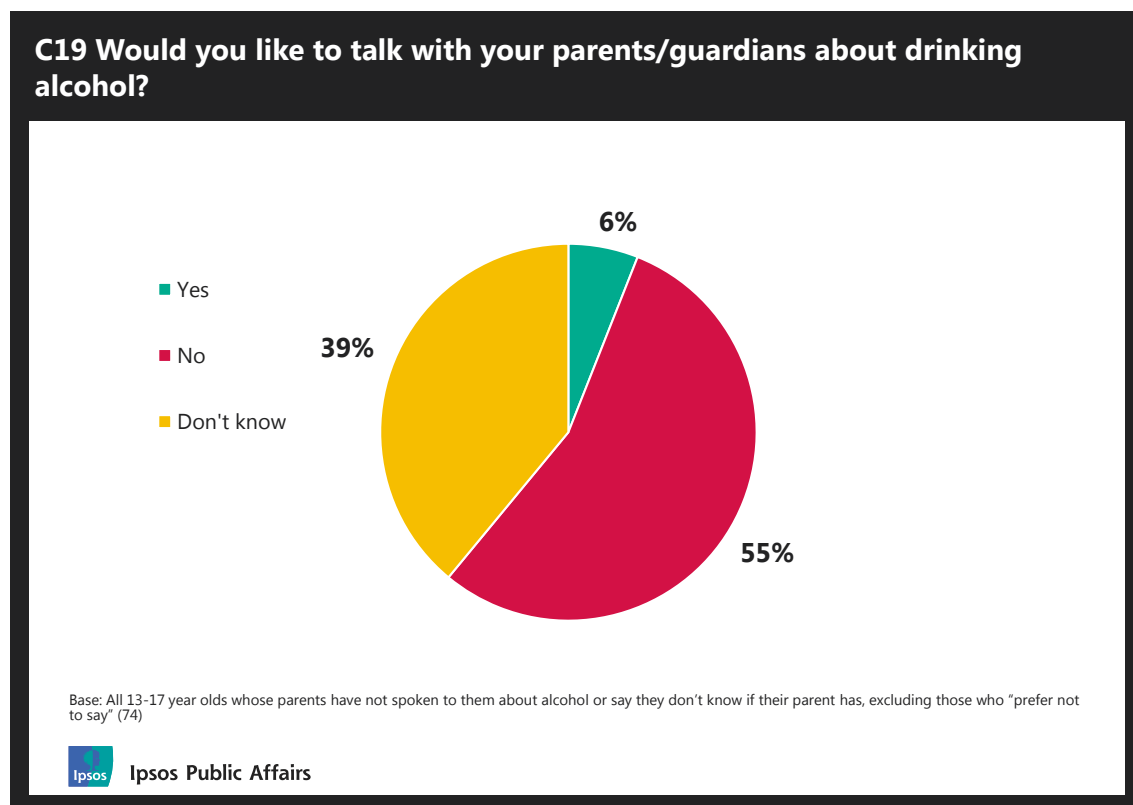
Some differences in opinion are evident by age with, for example, older teenagers more likely to describe the conversations as being 'supportive' (55% of 15-17 year olds say this compared to 41% of 13-14 year olds) and 'relevant' (36% compared to 19%). Young people are more likely to describe the conversation as 'hypocritical' if their parent or guardian is classified as drinking in AUDIT zones 3-4 (15%) compared to those with parents or guardians in zone 1 (one per cent), though note this is based on 50 parents or guardians who fall into the former category. Similarly, young people are marginally more likely to say the conversation was hypocritical if they see their parent or guardian drinking once a week or more (five per cent) compared to those who see their parents or guardians drink less than once a week (one per cent) but the proportions using this as a descriptor remain very low.

Referring back to the discussion earlier in this chapter, having a conversation with their parents or guardians about drinking alcohol positively impacts on how well informed young people feel. Though only 56 children say their parents or guardians have not spoken to them about alcohol (hence we must be mindful of how this data is interpreted), young people who have had a conversation with their parents or guardians are much more likely to say they feel 'very informed' about the risks of alcohol compared to those who have not had such a conversation (45% versus 19%).

### 6.3 Desire to talk about alcohol

*Most young people who have not had a conversation about alcohol with their parents or guardians are okay with this scenario, with a handful saying they would appreciate such a discussion.*

Figure 1.35: Desire to talk to parents or guardians about alcohol



Of the young people who say their parent or guardian has not spoken to them about alcohol, only a few say they would like to have such a discussion with their parent or guardian about it (six per cent). Instead, there is a sizeable group of young people who are not sure what they think about this matter (39%), alongside a large proportion (55%) who do not wish to speak to their parents or guardians about drinking.

Of the 41 13-17 year olds who said they would not like to talk to their parents or guardians about drinking alcohol, the most common reason why was simply that 'we do not talk about alcohol' – it's not something that they and their parents or guardians do (mentioned by 9 individuals). There was also a sense that parents or guardians would not answer young peoples' questions adequately with seven individuals say their parents or guardians would 'not know the answers to my questions' and four individuals saying their parents or guardians would 'not give me honest answers'. Six individuals said they were 'too young' to speak to their parents or guardians about these things (all of these individuals were aged 13 or 14). Five individuals felt that embarrassment would stop them from speaking to their

parents or guardians about alcohol, and four (all of whom were aged 13-15) believed they would be told off by their parents or guardians for bringing the subject up.

#### **6.4 Effects of speaking about alcohol on young people's drinking**

There do appear to be differences in the drinking behaviour of young people according to whether they have spoken to their parent or guardian about alcohol or not. However, the picture is heavily influenced by age with older teenagers experimenting more with alcohol, and at the same time being more likely to have spoken with their parents or guardians about it. For example, 55% of children who have spoken with their parents or guardians about alcohol have tried drinking, compared to 37% of children yet to have such a discussion with their parent. And 25% of children who have discussed alcohol with their parents or guardians have been drunk (versus 12% who have not)<sup>33</sup>. It is not supposed that by speaking with their parents or guardians about alcohol, children are more likely to try drinking or try getting drunk, but rather this reflects the age of these children and their greater likelihood of experimenting with alcohol.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, young people who have talked about alcohol with their parents or guardians feel much better informed about the risks of drinking (94% say they are informed compared to 64% of those who have not yet spoken with their parent or guardian about drinking). Given their greater likelihood of having spoken with their parents or guardians about alcohol, those who are older tend to be better informed.

Very few young people admit to feeling uninformed about the risks of alcohol (even among those who do not drink) limiting the comparative analysis it is possible to complete<sup>34</sup>. However, even when comparing young people who say they are 'very' versus 'fairly' informed, there appears to be little difference in the drinking behaviours of these groups. For example, they are as likely to have been drunk with 24% of young people who feel *very* informed having experienced this compared to 22% of those who are *fairly* well informed. And they are as likely as one another to have experienced a consequence from their drinking (28% of both those who are very and fairly informed having experienced this).

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<sup>33</sup> Note the figures in this section are based on 55-56 young people who have not yet spoken to their parent about drinking (and who are willing to answer the question).

<sup>34</sup> Only 36 young people said they felt uninformed about the risks of drinking.

**Information seeking**

## 7. Information seeking

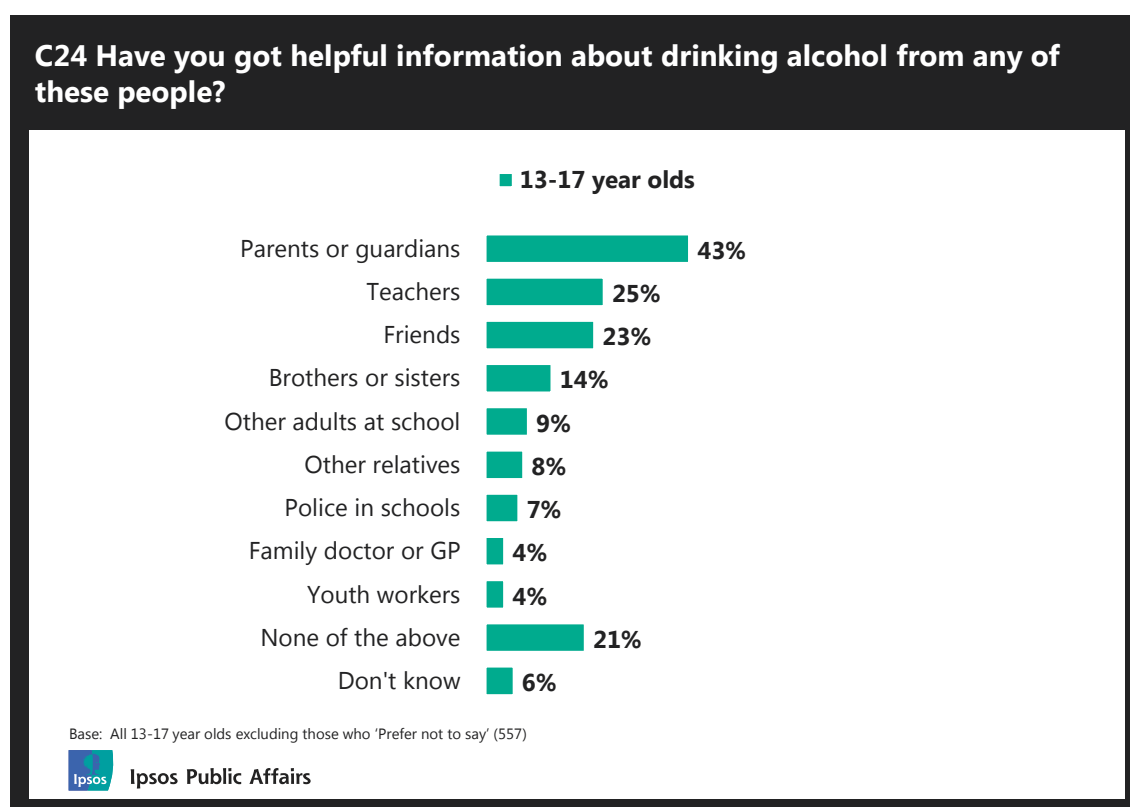
This final chapter examines from whom, and from where, young people aged 13-17 have got helpful information about drinking alcohol, and which of those sources they would go to if they wanted more information. It also looks at what types of information young people have found to be helpful and what, if any, unanswered questions they have about drinking alcohol.

### 7.1 Sources of information about alcohol

#### Sources of helpful information about alcohol

**Young people aged 13-17 most commonly get information about drinking alcohol from their parents. Other common sources, though not to the same extent, include teachers, friends and the internet.**

Figure 1.36: People 13-17 year olds get helpful information about alcohol from



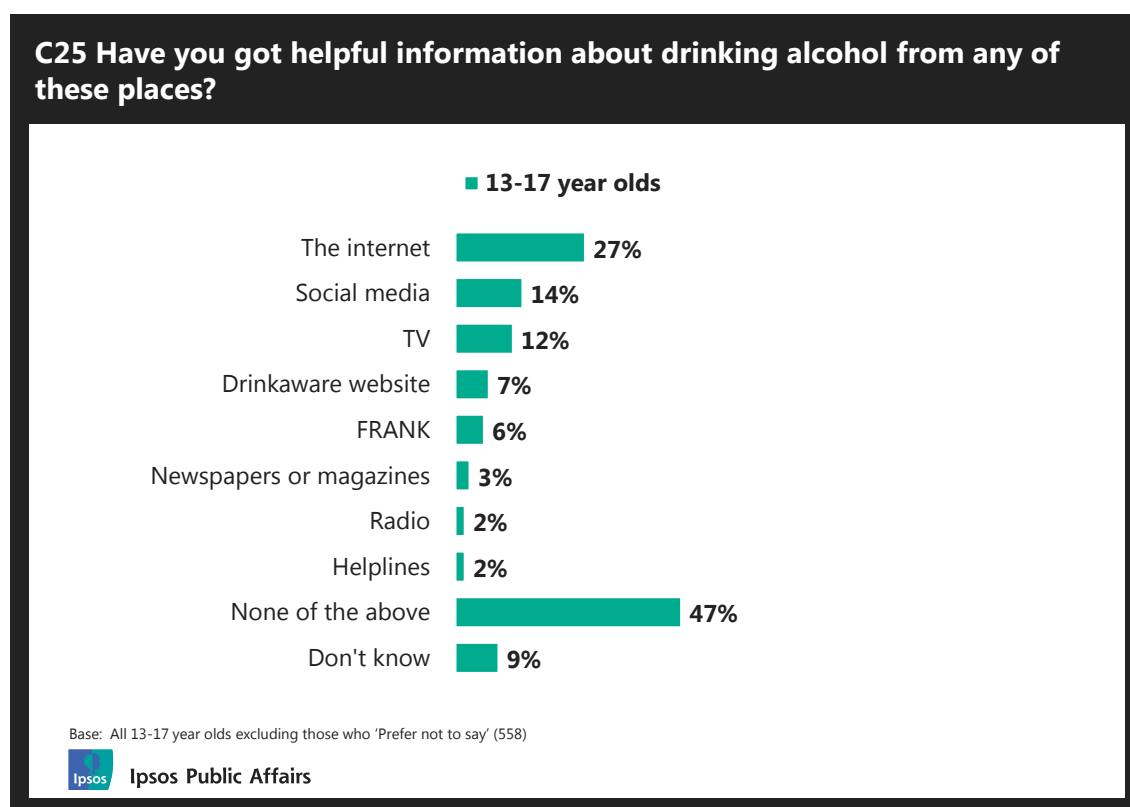
Parents or guardians are more commonly cited as a source of helpful information about drinking alcohol than any other type of people. Two fifths (43%) of 13-17 year olds say that they have got helpful information from them, while about a fifth quote teachers (25%) or friends (23%). One in seven teenagers have got helpful information from a sibling, and smaller proportions from other adults at school (nine per cent), other relatives (eight per cent), police in schools (seven per cent), a family doctor or a youth worker (four per cent each). While the majority of young people aged 13-17 are able to name at least one type of

person that has been a source of helpful information, a fifth cannot (21%), and a further six per cent say they “Don’t know”.

The sources of information sought are very similar between age groups, with the exception of ‘parents/guardians’ – 48% of those aged 15-17 have got information from parents/guardians compared to 34% of 13-14 year olds. This reflects the discussion in Chapter 5 whereby older teenagers are more likely to have had a conversation with their parents or guardians about alcohol. Few other differences are observable according to demographics.

Young people who have been drunk are more likely than those who haven’t to have received information about alcohol from their friends (32% versus 19% who have not been drunk).

**Figure 1.37: Places 13-17 year olds get helpful information from**



When thinking about the *places* young people can get information from rather than the *people*, the internet is the most common source, mentioned by 27%. About one in seven and one in eight mention social media and TV (14% and 12% respectively). Small, but sizeable proportions have got helpful information from the Drinkaware website (seven per cent) and from FRANK (six per cent). Newspapers or magazines, radio and helplines have been a helpful resource for only very few teenagers.

Notably, nearly half of young people aged 13-17 (47%) are not able to name a resource where they have got helpful information. It may suggest that teenagers aren’t actively searching for information about alcohol, perhaps because they don’t feel they need to know

more about drinking alcohol or they don't have an interest in drinking. This is corroborated by findings later in this chapter, showing that 85% of young people don't have any questions about drinking alcohol.

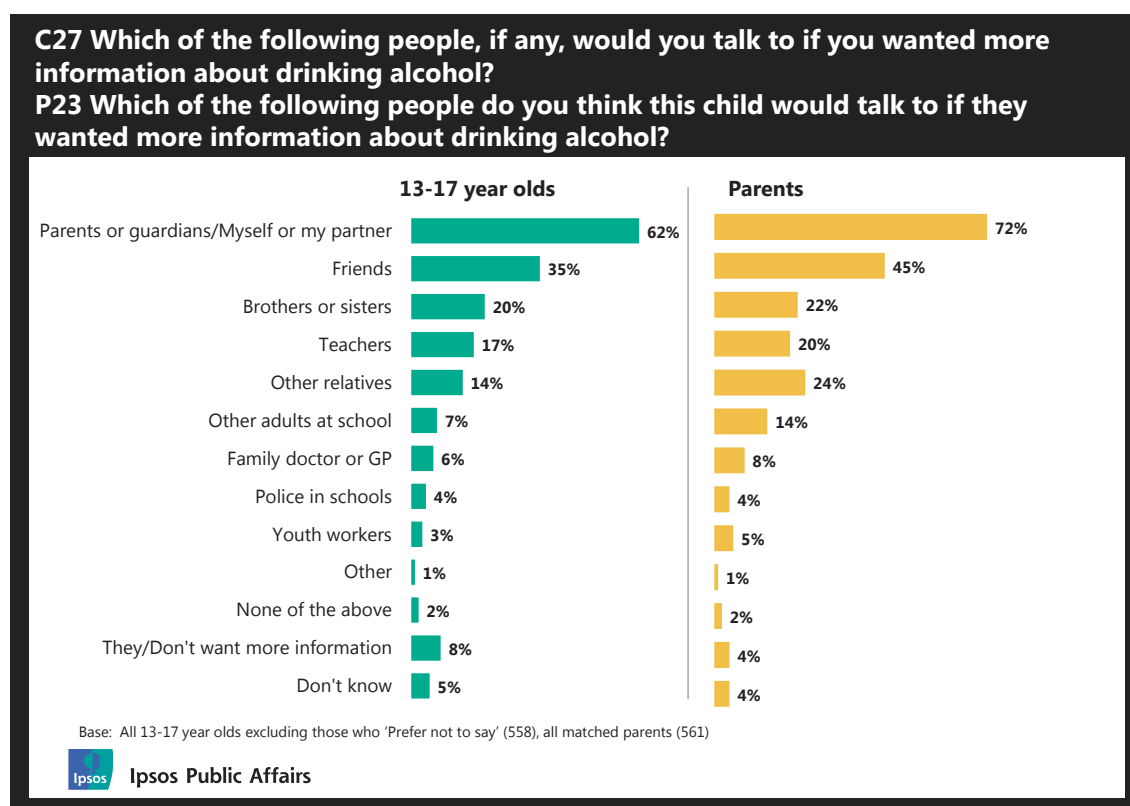
The internet is a more popular medium for information about alcohol for girls than it is boys (32% of girls have used it to research drinking compared to 23% of boys), and for young people 14 years or older (30% compared to 18% of 13 year olds). It is unlikely this is something specific to the internet but rather reflects a higher interest among girls and older age groups to find out more about drinking alcohol.

Of the 37 individuals who have visited the Drinkaware website, there are even proportions of boys/girls and of each age group.

### Sources young people would go to for more information about alcohol

**Parents and guardians are by far the most popular source of information about alcohol, reflecting the importance of their role in educating young people about the risks of alcohol and how to consume it sensibly. The internet is also a popular source of information for young people.**

Figure 1.38: People 13-17 year olds would go to if wanted more information on alcohol



When asked who they *would* go to if they wanted more information about drinking alcohol, the majority of 13-17 year olds declare that they would talk to their parents or guardians (62%). Friends are also a common source of information but not to the same degree (35%).

Siblings, teachers and other relatives are also considered appropriate sources of information, but again not to the same extent. Young people aged 13-17 are much less likely to seek advice from other adults at school (seven per cent), their GP (six per cent), police in schools (four per cent) or youth workers (three per cent).

Parents and guardians are right in thinking that they are the most likely source of information their child would turn to for information on drinking alcohol (72% say their child would turn to them or their partner). They are also right in believing that friends are the second most common source of advice. However, in both instances parents and guardians are more likely to think their child will seek information from these sources than their child believes to be the case.

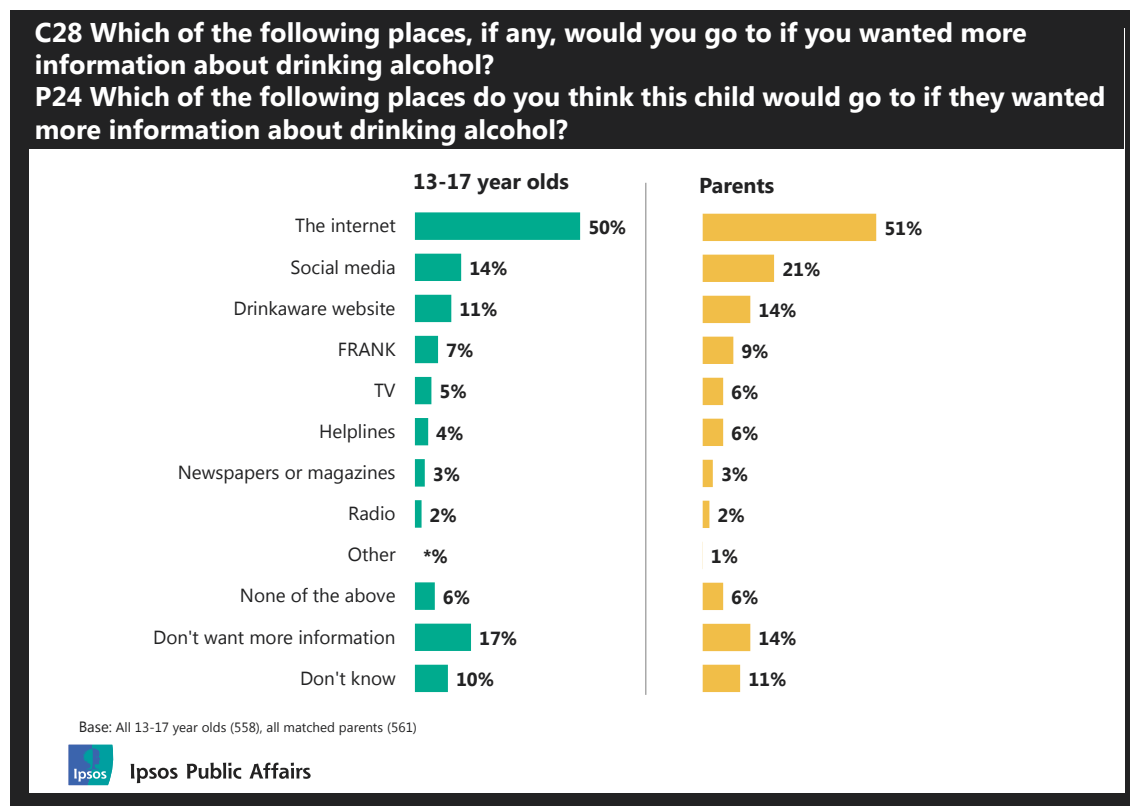
Girls appear to have a greater interest in finding out information about drinking alcohol – 66% say they would talk to their parent/guardian compared to 59% of boys (note this is not considered statistically significant), and 40% would talk to friends compared to 30% of boys. Conversely, boys are more likely to say they do not want any more information (10% versus six per cent of girls, though note again this cannot be considered statistically significant but is indicative of a pattern in the data).

There appears to be a step-change in interest levels in alcohol from ages 13 to 14 with the latter more likely to consult various sources for information about drinking compared to the former. 63% of 14 year olds would turn to their parents/guardians compared to 51% of 13 year olds, and 27% of 14 year olds would talk to a sibling compared to 16% of 13 year olds.

Children of parents or guardians who exhibit lower risk drinking behaviours (AUDIT zone 1) are more likely to seek information about drinking from their parents or guardians (67%) compared to those with parents or guardians drinking in AUDIT zones 2-4 (54%). This might not reflect what happens in reality, as parents or guardians in AUDIT zones 1 and zones 2-4 are as likely to have spoken to their child about alcohol as one another (see Chapter 5).



Figure 1.39: Places 13-17 year olds would go to if wanted more information on alcohol



Clearly the internet is a popular source of information about drinking alcohol with 50% of children saying they would look online for more information. One in seven young people say they would look at social media for information on alcohol. Encouragingly, Drinkaware is selected as the third most popular source of information (when considering places rather than people which can provide information). Parents or guardians again show a good understanding of the sources of information their children are likely to turn to with 51% mentioning the internet, 21% social media and 14% Drinkaware.

Again girls appear to show a greater interest in finding out more about drinking with 58% saying they would look on the internet compared to 42% of boys. Girls are marginally more likely to say they will turn to Drinkaware's website compared to boys (13% versus eight per cent though this difference is not considered statistically significant). There are no obvious patterns in where individuals would seek information with respect to age.

## 7.2 What is useful information?

### Information that has been helpful

The most common pieces of information or advice received by young people which they found to be helpful concerned the damage that can be done to your health as a consequence of long term drinking (15 young people mentioned this in their own words) and

that if drinking, they should drink sensibly and stick to a limit (mentioned by 11 individuals – see examples below).

In their own words, young people talked about the damaging health impacts of long term alcohol consumption:

*“[I learnt] that drink can damage your health in many ways and the younger you start to drink the more it can affect your health.”*

*“The effects too much drink can have on one’s appearance.”*

They also mentioned other negative consequences they had been made aware of:

*“That it changes your inhibitions and gives you false confidence. Can make you behave differently to how you normally behave. You can end up wandering off and being unsafe if you feel unwell.”*

*“That things happens after you get drunk, embarrassing situations, crimes that follows etc.”*

A handful of young people expressed surprise to learn of the link between alcohol and cancer:

*“That you can also get cancer which I never knew.”*

It appears that through speaking with parents, reading online and seeking information in other ways, these young people had learnt a number of ‘tips’ to lessen the impact of drinking and make sure they approach it sensibly:

*“Stay within your limits.”*

*“That it’s ok not to drink even if your friends are.”*

*“Drinking plenty of water between drinks and not drinking on an empty stomach.”*

*“Drink lots of water as well. Always have friends with you.”*

*“Just that if I wanted to try alcohol I should try it at home where I would be safe.”*

*“Like units, how to say no, when and why you should drink, health risks, when to stop etc.”*

*“That people can spike your drink so don’t put it down. Don’t mix drinks. Stop when you are getting out of control and stay with friends who look after you.”*

Some mentions were made of where young people have got information about drinking – for some this was through TV programmes, others mentioned lessons in school where the issue was discussed:

*“Seen a man on Eastenders who needs a new liver because of his heavy drinking.”*

*“TV programmes showing the effects of too much drinking and the dangers made me more aware.”*

*“In Life Skills at school we had a long discussion about health problems and dangers of drinking.”*

*“In science at school we did a topic on the effects of alcohol on the body and how addictive it is.”*

### Unanswered questions about alcohol

As shown earlier, it is encouraging that young people would talk to their parents or guardians or seek information online about drinking alcohol – but 85% say they don't have any questions when asked what they what like to know.

Of the handful of individuals who raised a question, most commonly it was to question why people like to drink alcohol – often stating that they themselves disliked the taste, or could not understand the appeal (mentioned by five individuals).

*“Why do people like it? Why do people get drunk and fall asleep? It doesn't look like fun.”*

*“Why drink anyway? It tastes awful.”*

*“Why do people drink?”*

Other individuals had specific questions they would like answers to and a selection of these are included below for Drinkaware's consideration:

*“How much is safe to drink?”*

*“How much can I drink for my age?”*

*“What it does to you.”*

*“Why some people can drink more than others with no effect.”*

*“How to identify signs of dangerous drinking behaviour.”*

*“How safe is it and what if I get drunk?”*

*“Whether you can get addicted to it.”*

*“Why does it make you sick, even a small amount? Why does it make you feel more relaxed and like you have fewer inhibitions?”*

*“Why does someone become an alcoholic?”*

*“Why does it make you do silly things and behave badly? And why are some people nasty when they drink?”*

*“Is it true it's the worst drug you can have?”*

# Appendix

# Appendix

## Parents and guardians whose child took part

A potential risk for this research was that parents who consented for their child to take part in the survey could be attitudinally or behaviourally different to those who did not consent. This could mean that the children surveyed could be a particularly atypical group and their responses would not be representative of children across the UK.

However, a comparison of the parents or guardians who consented for their child to take part with those who did not shows few differences between them. 62% of parents or guardians who consented fall into the lowest risk drinking category (AUDIT score 1) compared to 66% of parents or guardians who did not consent to their child to take part. Parents or guardians who consented drink alcohol to a similar frequency as those who did not consent (62% drink at least once a week compared to 60%). They are as likely to have spoken to their child about alcohol (87% of parents or guardians who consented say this versus 86% of those who did not consent), and they are as likely to have rules in place (52% versus 49%).

## Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT)

The AUDIT tool, developed by the World Health Organisation, is used to measure an individual's level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns<sup>35</sup>. The test consists of ten questions, each of which carries a score of 0-4 depending on the answer given.

**Table 7.1 – AUDIT questions and scores**

	Response	Score
<b>How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?</b>	Never	0
	Monthly or less	1
	2 to 4 times a month	2
	2 to 3 times a week	3
	4 or more times a week	4
<b>How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?</b>	1 or 2	0
	3 or 4	1
	5 or 6	2
	7-9	3
	10 or more	4
<b>How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?</b>	Never	0
	Less than monthly	1
	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3

<sup>35</sup>Babor et al. (2001). AUDIT; The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: Guidelines for Use in Primary Care. Second Edition. World Health Organisation: Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence.

<b>During the last 12 months, how often have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?</b>	Daily or almost daily	4
	Never	0
	Less than monthly	1
	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3
<b>During the last 12 months, how often have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drinking?</b>	Daily or almost daily	4
	Never	0
	Less than monthly	1
	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3
<b>During the last 12 months, how often have you needed a drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?</b>	Daily or almost daily	4
	Never	0
	Less than monthly	1
	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3
<b>During the last 12 months, how often have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?</b>	Daily or almost daily	4
	Never	0
	Less than monthly	1
	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3
<b>During the last 12 months, how often have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?</b>	Daily or almost daily	4
	Never	0
	Less than monthly	1
	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3
<b>Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?</b>	No	0
	Yes, but not in the last year	2
	Yes, during the last year	4
<b>Has a relative or friend, a doctor or another health worker been concerned about your drinking and suggested you cut down?</b>	No	0
	Yes, but not in the last year	2
	Yes, during the last year	4

The scores for each individual question are then added together to give an overall score between zero and 40. The overall score is used to allocate participants to one of four groups based on the risk of potential harm posed by their levels and patterns of drinking alcohol. The allocation of scores to risk categories is detailed in Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2 – Scoring AUDIT**

	Overall score
Zone 1 (low risk)	0-7
Zone 2 (hazardous)	8-15
Zone 3 (harmful)	16-19
Zone 4 (dependency)	20-40

### Segmentation (cluster analysis)

First designed for the 2014 Drinkaware Monitor Survey, the segments are created by bringing together clusters of survey participants who express similar attitudes or behaviours. In choosing which questions to use to identify the segments, a large number of different combinations were explored. This resulted in the selection of 34 questions on drinking behaviour and attitudes to be used. For details on the methodology, a full list of the segmentation variables and alternative approaches explored the please consult the Drinkaware Monitor 2014 report.

#### Golden questions

To allow us to apply the segmentation to a new sample, a reduced sub-set of questions was identified which would most efficiently and accurately segment the existing sample; these questions are referred to as ‘golden questions’. This process was done using discriminant analysis. For every cluster, a mathematical formula is calculated and each participant’s set of responses are fed into each formula; the participant is then assigned to the cluster which yields the highest score. This provides a tool to determine which segment each participant is likely to belong to. Although this is typically done with a high degree of accuracy, this method carries an error and therefore any fluctuations in the distribution of segments in the sample need to be interpreted with caution.

Table 7.10 lists the ‘golden questions’ that were used to replicate the segmentation. Please note that in order to maintain as far as possible a similar ordering of the survey questions to that used in previous years, the ‘golden questions’ were asked in the intended order but were interspersed with other questions.

**Table 7.10 – Segmentation - ‘golden questions’**

Please indicate your gender	Male
	Female
How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	6 or more times a week
	4 to 5 times a week

2 to 3 times a week

Once a week

2 to 3 times a month

Once a month

Once every couple of months

Once or twice a year

Less often

How often would you say you drink for the following reasons:<sup>36</sup>

*To forget about your problems*

Almost never/never

Some of the time

Half of the time

Most of the time

Almost always/always

*Because it makes social gatherings more fun*

Almost never/never

Half of the time

Most of the time

Almost always/always

*To be liked*

Almost never/never

Some of the time

Half of the time

Most of the time

Almost always/always

Here are some things people have said they do to moderate their drinking. Have you tried any of these?<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Please note that these questions were taken from longer sets; refer to the Drinkaware Monitor 2014 report for more detail.



***Stay off alcohol for a fixed time period***

I have been doing this for a while

I started doing this recently (last two or three months)

I have done this in the past but I no longer do it

I am not doing this but would be willing to do so

I could never see myself doing this

***Drink smaller glasses of wine or smaller bottles of beer***

I have been doing this for a while

I started doing this recently (last two or three months)

I have done this in the past but I no longer do it

I am not doing this but would be willing to do so

I could never see myself doing this

***Set myself a drinking limit e.g. just a glass/bottle***

I have been doing this for a while

I started doing this recently (last two or three months)

I have done this in the past but I no longer do it

I am not doing this but would be willing to do so

I could never see myself doing this

## The five segments

The segmentation analysis identified five key clusters of adult drinkers in the UK:

A high level summary of each segment follows.

### Segment 1: Comfortable social drinkers

This group tend to drink fairly frequently, sometimes at home but also fairly frequently outside the home. They are low risk drinkers who use a number of different strategies to moderate their drinking, with the majority rarely or never getting drunk or experiencing negative consequences from drinking. They are predominantly aged between 25 and 54, married or living with a partner, affluent and well-educated. They have good mental wellbeing, and predominantly drink for social and enhancement reasons.

### Segment 2: Controlled home drinkers

Drinkers in this segment are predominantly occasional, moderate and sensible drinkers. The vast majority are low-risk drinkers; they drink at home and are the least likely group to drink in pubs, clubs, bars or other venues. They do not binge drink. They are the most likely to use a variety of methods to moderate their drinking, and are the least likely to get drunk, either intentionally or unintentionally. This segment contains the highest proportion of women and the majority are aged 45 and over. They tend to be less well-educated and have lower household incomes; the majority are married or living with a partner, although this segment has the highest proportion who are divorced/separated or widowed.

### Segment 3: Risky social and coping drinkers

People in this segment are predominantly frequent drinkers, who regularly drink outside the home. A high proportion are increasing or high risk drinkers. They are the second most likely group to binge drink, and the most likely to get drunk. In particular, they are the most likely to intentionally pursue drunkenness. They drink primarily for coping and conformity reasons, although they are also highly likely to drink for social and enhancement purposes. Although relatively likely to try to moderate their drinking, this group includes a mix of attitudes towards drinking, including significant groups of people who either recognise, or do not acknowledge, their harmful drinking behaviour. This segment is mainly made up of younger adults and those from lower social grades.

### Segment 4: Self-contained moderate drinkers

People in this segment tend to drink fairly infrequently and moderately, and are considered low risk drinkers. They tend to drink at home, and are unlikely to get drunk or binge drink. Drinkers in this segment are the least likely to use moderation techniques, perhaps due to the generally moderate and sensible manner in which the majority usually drink.

## Segment 5: Risky career drinkers

People in this segment are predominantly male, over 45, well-educated and on relatively high incomes. The majority are married or live with a partner. They tend to drink frequently, with much of their drinking taking place outside the home. They drink primarily for enhancement and social reasons, although high proportions also drink for coping reasons. They are relatively unlikely to moderate their drinking in comparison to other segments, and all within this segment are considered increasing or high risk drinkers.

### Guide to statistical reliability

The variation between the sample results and the 'true' values (the findings that would have been obtained if every parent or guardian of a child aged 13-17 in the UK had completed the questionnaire) can be predicted from knowledge of the sample sizes on which the results are based, and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" values will fall within a specified range. The following table illustrates the predicted ranges for different percentage results at the '95% confidence interval'.

Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
1,003 parents or guardians aged 28-80	1.9	2.8	3.1
561 'matched' parents or guardians aged 28-80	2.5	3.8	4.1
561 children aged 13-17	2.5	3.8	4.1

For example, on a question where 50% of all parents or guardians aged 28-80 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary, plus or minus, by more than 2.8 percentage points if the survey was repeated. The smaller the sample responding to a question, the greater the potential variation. Please note, the confidence interval mentioned here assumes a random probability sample. In reality, the design effects associated with using a quota sample would slightly widen the margins of error.

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