

HEALTHWATCH
DRUGS & ALCOHOL

REPORT



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Introduction

About Healthwatch and our role in the community

Healthwatch East Riding of Yorkshire works to help people get the best out of their local health and social care services. Whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow, Healthwatch East Riding of Yorkshire is all about local voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services. Not just people who use them now, but anyone who might need to in the future.

At Healthwatch East Riding we want to ensure everyone has the opportunity to have their say. We know that sometimes it is harder for children and young people to make their views known to those who design and deliver services so we have a dedicated Children and Young Person's Officer who works to ensure younger people have the same opportunities to have their say and to shape services.

In this report we ask three key questions:

1. Why is this issue important?

Here we explain why we wanted to find out more about young people's views and experiences of drugs and alcohol and why the Healthwatch Children and Young People's service spent time highlighting this issue. Healthwatch also want to highlight the health effects of drugs and alcohol, specifically for young people.

2. What did young people tell us about Drugs and Alcohol?

Healthwatch conducted a survey with young people from across the East Riding of Yorkshire to find out about their views and experiences of alcohol and drugs. This report sets out our key findings and how they measure against the national picture.

3. What can we all do about this issue locally

On the basis of our research, we have made a number of recommendations to local commissioners and service providers to try to tackle the issues raised in this report.

Why is this issue important?

Reason for the investigation

This report has been written to highlight the views and experiences young people in the East Riding have in relation to drugs and alcohol. Healthwatch wanted to identify at what age young people are being introduced to drugs and alcohol and what are the reasons behind this. We also sought to find out if young people are aware of the legal and physical implications of drinking alcohol and using drugs.

Healthwatch East Riding undertook this investigation because young people told us directly that this was an area of concern for them. In 2014, Healthwatch published the “What Matters” report. This report was the result of an extensive investigation in which we spoke to over 1000 young people who told us what concerns they have locally with their own health and social care services. This information has steered the work of Healthwatch East Riding’s Children and Young People’s service which has been established to tackle the issues that are of importance to young people in the East Riding.

Drugs and alcohol were also implicated in the previous Children and Young People’s report that Healthwatch East Riding produced about sleep. This report again came from the “What Matters” report and highlighted how much sleep young people were getting and if young people did not sleep enough or had too much sleep what are the factors. Among the large list of factors one that stood out was that young people who consumed drugs or alcohol had disturbed sleep patterns.

What are the dangers and effects of drug use and underage drinking?

The government in the United Kingdom has set the legal drinking age to 18. This is for the protection of young people as exposure to alcohol and consistent use can result in the following health and social implications.

Information provided by *Drink Aware* shows that young people who have consumed alcohol at an early age can be at a higher risk for any of the following long term health conditions.¹

Liver damage, alcohol poisoning, aggressive behaviour, vulnerability, drug use, sleep inconsistencies, unprotected sex, education and truancy, accidents, mental health problems, unkempt physical appearance, issues with brain development and more.

All of these factors have health risks of their own and can impact upon a young person’s life both in the short and longer term.

Based on research compiled by Alcohol Concern²:

- UK teenagers are amongst the most likely in Europe to consume alcohol underage.
- The UK also has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe.
- Every day in 2009, an average of 36 young people (under 18s) used hospital services as a result of alcohol consumption.
- The number of young people between the ages of 11-15 who drink alcohol has decreased in recent years. However, the amount of alcohol that those who do drink consume has almost doubled.
- Research shows that the earlier a young person starts drinking the more likely they are to develop alcohol dependency which in turn leads to some of the above health factors.

Drug use amongst young people has slowly been on the decline in recent years according to research published by Public Health England³ with cannabis being the most popular and accessible drug available to young people.

Health effects of using cannabis are well documented and are often similar to the health effects of drinking alcohol underage. More details of the effects of drugs and alcohol on young people can be found at www.drinkaware.co.uk and www.nta.nhs.uk.

What did young people tell us about Drugs and Alcohol?

Research methodology

Objective

To find out why and when young people were introduced to drugs and alcohol and what knowledge they have about using these substances.

Timescale

Information was collected over a four month period from April - July 2015.

Recruitment & Publicity

In order to ensure we spoke to a varied demographic from a wide geographical area, we worked with local schools and colleges and made sure that our survey was available on the Healthwatch website as well as through social media. During the investigation we received 204 completed surveys and spoke to around 1000 young people altogether in both formal and informal settings. We heard a wide range of views on what issues young people have with drugs and alcohol in the East Riding.

Criteria

With drugs and alcohol being an issue that was primarily focused at an older age group, HWERY made a conscious choice not to include anybody below the age of 12. The information we were going to receive is of a sensitive nature and was to be treated as such. The survey was open to anybody between the ages of 12 and 25 and living within the East Riding.

Data Protection

All surveys were completed independently and remained anonymous. Privacy was maintained throughout the entire process. This report will not publish any names of young people who participated.



Results of the Drugs and Alcohol Survey

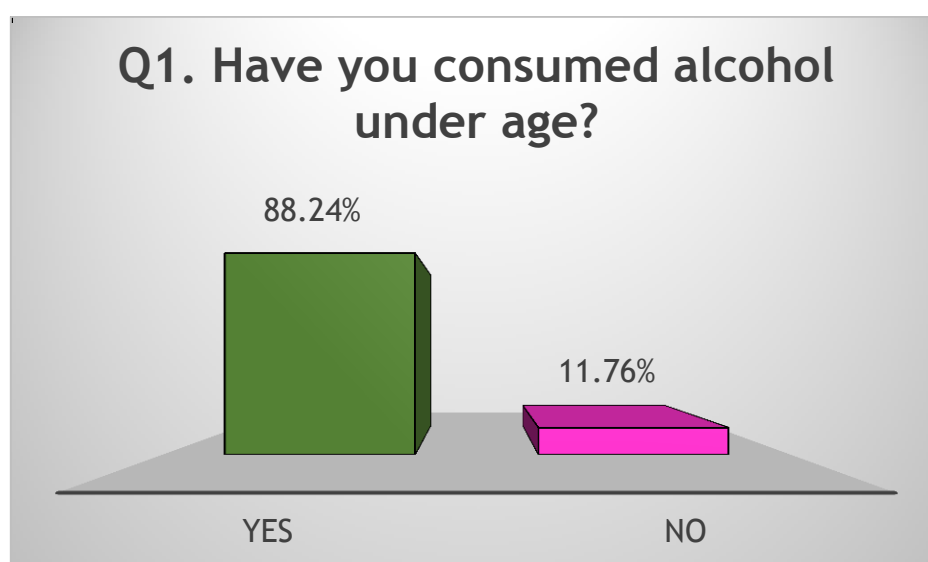
We spoke informally to around 1000 young people at local colleges across the East Riding. This was predominantly in groups; therefore there may have been an element of ‘bravado’ in the responses they gave. In addition to the informal focus groups, we also conducted an anonymous survey. These surveys were completed on an individual basis and therefore are likely to provide more accurate responses from the young people.

Altogether 204 participants completed the survey of which 56% were female and 44% were male. 78% of those surveyed were aged between 17 and 21. This was a conscious choice made by HWERY as we wanted to get the opinions of those young people who are closest to the issue age-wise and could speak about their own, recent, experiences. The “What Matters” report also influenced the decision to survey this age group because of the responses we received from this age group in the survey.

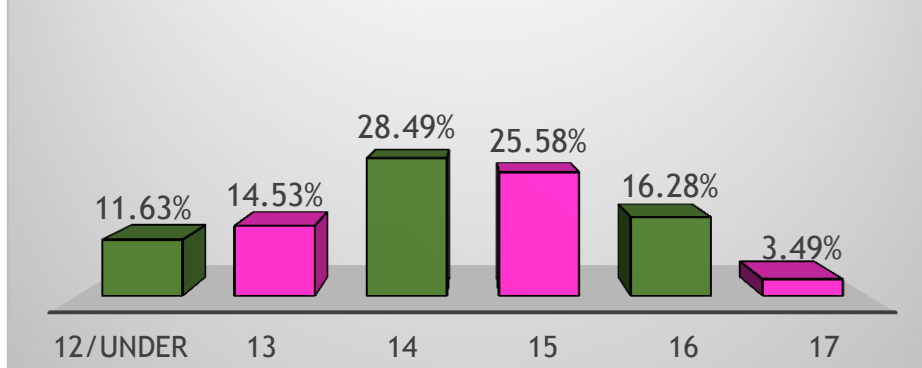
The survey results below reflect the views of the 204 young people who completed the formal survey and therefore cannot be taken as representative of the whole county. Nevertheless, they give a valuable insight into the perspectives of the young people we spoke to.

Experience with Alcohol

We asked survey respondents if they had consumed alcohol under the age of 18 and if so at what age they had first tried drinking alcohol socially.



Q3. What age did you first drink alcohol socially?



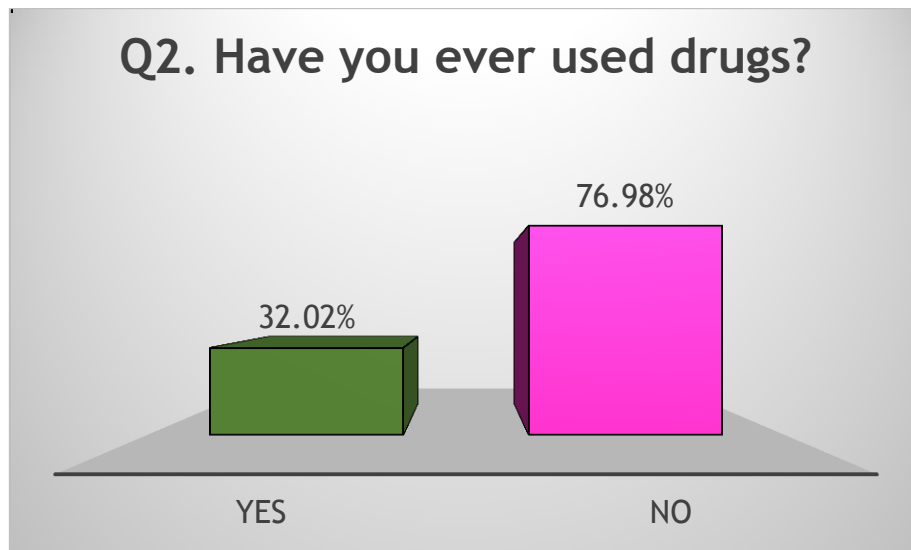
Of our 204 survey respondents, 88% had consumed alcohol under the age of 18. Of the young people who have drunk alcohol under the age of 18, 80% of those first tried alcohol at the age of 15 or younger. 11.63% consumed alcohol before the age of 13.

National figures show that the percentage of 11-15 year olds who have consumed alcohol have been falling in recent years. The most recent 'Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England' Report commissioned by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) showed that in 2014, 38% of 11 to 15 year olds had tried alcohol at least once, the lowest proportion since the survey began.⁴ In 2012, this figure was around 43%.⁵

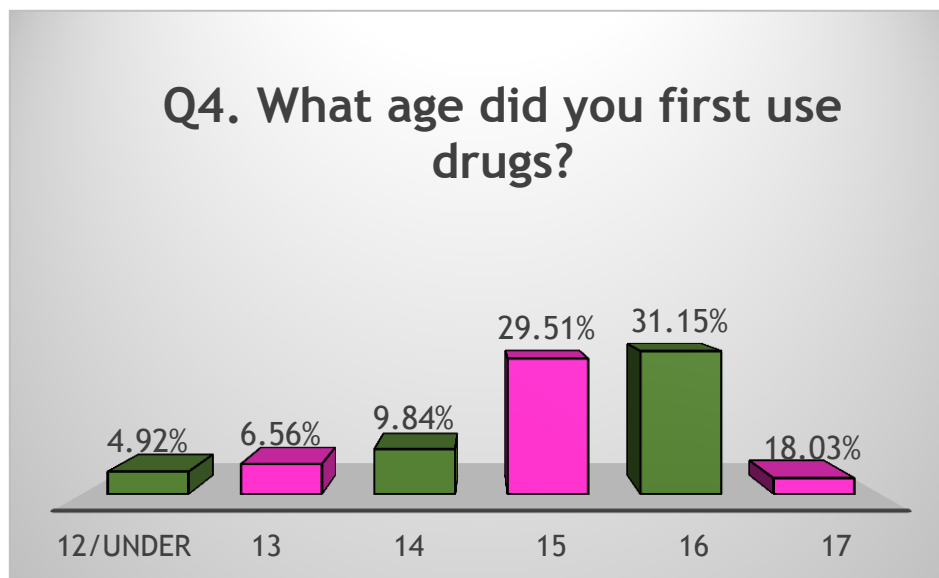
Of the young people who completed our survey, 70% had consumed alcohol by the age of 15, which is significantly higher than current national figures. It is worth noting, however, that our survey was conducted predominantly with young people aged 17 to 21 and therefore it would be more relevant to compare our figures with historical figures. For example, in 2009 around 49% of 11 to 15 year olds had tried an alcoholic drink.⁶

Experience with Drugs

We also asked the young people we surveyed about their experiences with illegal drugs.



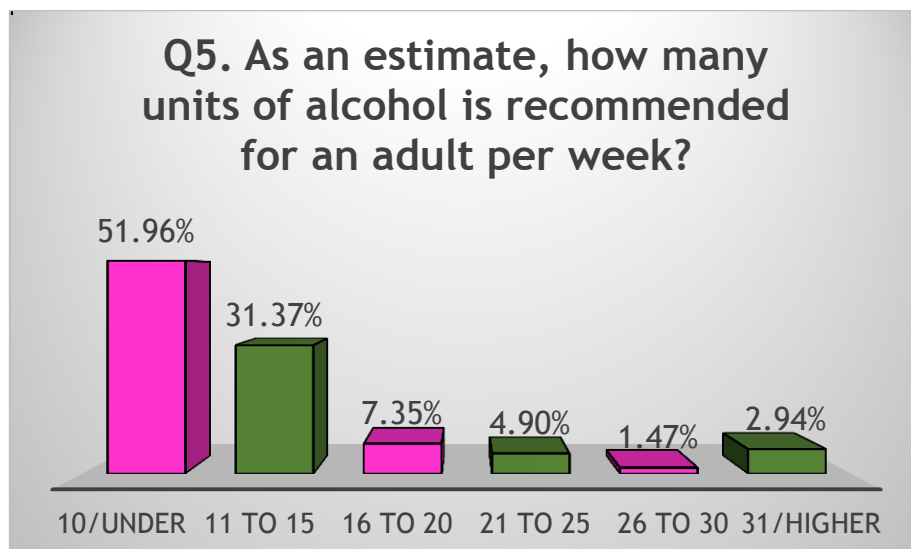
The percentage shown here shows how available illicit drugs are to young people. Nearly a third of young people have admitted to using drugs. To be clear this percentage doesn't reflect which young people use drugs on a regular basis. However it does show that many of the young people we spoke to are curious and experimenting.



61 Young people, or 32% of the individuals surveyed, have experimented with drugs before the age of 18. The ages of 15 upwards would appear to be when this becomes a factor in young people's lives.

Knowledge of Alcohol

We also asked the young people we spoke to how much they knew about the harm drinking alcohol can cause and what levels of consumption the government recommends for adults.



More than half of the respondents to our survey under-estimated the maximum number of units of alcohol that an adult should consume in a given week. The national recommendations are that men should drink no more than 21 units per week, whilst women should drink no more than 14 units.

This under-estimation, we believe, is due to significant lack of knowledge on this topic. After completing the survey many of the young people we were surveying asked us “what is a unit?” and “how much is a unit?”

When we spoke with the groups of young people during our focus group sessions, many asked us and one other if they knew what a unit of alcohol was and how many were considered safe. Their responses suggest a gap in the knowledge of the young people we spoke to around alcohol consumption and what levels of alcohol consumption are considered safe.

Reasons for trying alcohol

We also wanted to learn from the young people we spoke to why they had chosen to experiment with alcohol and/or drugs under the age of 18. They gave a variety of reasons, some of which are listed below. Amongst the most common reasons given were parties and other social occasions and pressure from friends or sometimes family to join in.

Q6. If you have consumed alcohol or used drugs under the age of 18, can you explain the reason why?

Party
Parties
Celebrations
Most people did so didn't see it as a bad thing
Joining in with friends
Wanted to try it
Boredom
Joining in with others
Wedding
For fun
Party
Fun
At parties or with friends
It was Christmas
Was at a party
Friends
Socialising and seemed the thing to do... just a sheep!
Because it was available
Social
It was just at a family party not much of a drinker
Brought up round it
Because my friends were doing it
Wanted to have fun
At a family party and grabbed the wrong drink.
Peer pressure
At a party
With mates
Peer pressure
Party for drinks and drugs but drugs was an accident.
Parties
All my mates did and dad offered me alcohol
Friends taking part
Drugs because depression friends and family
Friends pressure
Socially
Peer pressure
Wanted to look cool in front of others
Social occasions
The other people do it
Family party and house party

Went to a party and it was ok to drink
Fancied trying it
Just to try it
Friends was drinking it
Party with friends.
It was a laugh
Experimentation
Mates older brother, just an experience

experience
alcohol celebrations
wrong boredom available
laugh because sheep
social family thing part
depression try drink other
grabbed drugs just peer see
fancied bad
social party older
doing mates drinks
dad brother cool
party
friends wanted
fun offered
people pressure Christmas
Wedding drinking
others joining accident
occasions experimentation
trying socialising



What can we do about it?

Conclusion

One of the most glaring findings from this investigation by Healthwatch East Riding into young people's relationship with drugs and alcohol was the lack of knowledge surrounding the subject. 88% of the young people we surveyed had consumed alcohol before the age of 18, however, more than half of those surveyed were unable to correctly identify how many units of alcohol an 18 year old should drink per week.

Young people across the board demonstrated their lack of knowledge of what a unit of alcohol is. The answers given about units per week could be very different if young people knew what a unit was. This lack of knowledge, however, means that the dangers behind drinking at a younger age are increased.

Based on the research we carried out, our results indicate a higher than average number of young people in the East Riding trying alcohol at or before the age of 15, even on the basis of the 2009 figures of 49% of 11 to 15 year olds. Nevertheless, we only surveyed a total of 204 young people in the East Riding and therefore this statistic should be understood within that context.

32% of the young people we surveyed also had experimented with drugs. We did not ask questions regarding knowledge of drugs and their potential harm. Based on the information we received about the lack of knowledge around alcohol volumes, we also have concerns about young peoples' knowledge of the potential dangers of drug use. This could lead to further investigation in the future from HWERY.

Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence in this report, Healthwatch East Riding makes the following recommendations.

To East Riding of Yorkshire Council (Public Health and Children, Families and Schools Directorate):

1. To commission and/or produce resources for young people, specifically targeted at improving their understanding of alcohol volumes and recommendations around maximum levels of consumption.
2. To ensure all schools and colleges in the East Riding have access to this report and encourage them to promote it amongst their students.
3. To review the effectiveness of existing work aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of drugs and alcohol and how it impacts young people and consider what more can be done in this area.

References

- ¹ Drink Aware, 2015. 'Why underage drinking is a risky business'. Online at: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/underage-drinking/the-risks-of-underage-drinking>
- ² Alcohol Concern, 2011. 'Factsheet: Alcohol and Young People'. Online at: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/12/Young-People-factsheet-Dec-2010.pdf
- ³ National Treatment Agency (NTA), 2015. 'Drugs and Alcohol'. Online at: <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/>
- ⁴ Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), 2015. 'Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England - 2014' Online at: <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/searchcatalogue?productid=18273&q>
- ⁵ Alcohol Concern, 2014. 'Facts on Alcohol'. Online at: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Statistics-on-alcohol-draft-December-2014.pdf
- ⁶ Alcohol Concern, 2011. 'Factsheet: Alcohol and Young People'. Online at: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/12/Young-People-factsheet-Dec-2010.pdf