

Healthwatch Report **Drugs & Alcohol**



Drugs & Alcohol Report

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Executive Summary

Aim & Objective

This report has been created to highlight the issues young people have with 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. Part of this report is to also find out if young people are aware of the legal and physical limitations that drinking alcohol and using drugs comes with.

Methodology

We used a mixture of social media campaigns, surveys and first hand interaction with young people. In total we received 204 responses which will give us a good sample size to take findings from.

Highlights of the findings

- 88% of young people surveyed have had access to alcohol under age
- 32% of young people have used drugs under the age of 18
- 77% of those surveyed were aged between 16 - 21
- Most young people are not aware of recommended guidelines for alcohol consumption per week.
- 55% of those surveyed were female.

Recommendations

The information collected for this report has allowed Healthwatch East Riding to provide the following recommendations.

- Raise the awareness of the dangers of drugs and alcohol and how it impacts young people.
 - HWERY C&YP to promote the findings of this report to schools and colleges to highlight the findings from this report.
 - Local schools and colleges to pass on information to students and highlight dangers of drug and alcohol consumption.

----- **End of exec summary** -----

Report History & Background

Healthwatch East Riding of Yorkshire Children & Young Peoples service focused on the topic of Drugs & Alcohol from April - July 2015. During this time we rolled out a survey which was to focus on young people under the age of 25 and their relationship with and knowledge of drugs & alcohol.

The decision to focus on drugs and alcohol was made based on the information we received from the “What Matters” report. Previously we looked at sleep issues with young people and again one of the factors was drugs and alcohol. This information combined with young people’s first hand testimonials was enough for Healthwatch to investigate this topic and produce a report.

The criteria for those who opted to participate in the survey was that they had to be under the age of 25 to class as a “Young Person” and be an East Riding resident. Please note the results are the outcome of a targeted demographic and are simply a sample size. They only hint at a trend within the mass population across the East Riding.

What are the dangers and effects of underage drinking?

Information provided from www.drinkaware.com

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.

- **Alcohol poisoning** - Drinking alcohol in volume in a short period of time can result in alcohol poisoning. Nearly 4000 young people were hospitalized last year due to this.
- **Liver damage** - The stereotype is that only alcoholics will be in danger of liver damage. Young people are equally in danger of being affected.
- **Accidents and injuries** - Young people are not physically capable of handling alcohol and as a result will be more likely to get hurt or injured whilst under the influence.
- **Unprotected sex** - Whilst under the influence young people are more likely to take bigger risks, one of these is having unprotected sex.
- **Drug use** - The reason this report will focus on drugs too is because alcohol proves to be a gateway to taking illicit drugs.
- **Changes to physical appearance** - Young people are still developing and alcohol does not affect young people in a positive way. Alcohol is more likely to impact their weight, skin and overall physical appearance.
- **Vulnerability** - Young people are not in full control of their mental capacity when under the influence of alcohol and as a result are vulnerable to numerous dangers.

- **Aggression and violence** - Young people drinking alcohol will act in an unpredictable manner, this may lead to acts of rebellion, aggression and violence.
- **Education** - Statistics say that young people who start drinking from the age of 13 do not do as well during school as those young people who don't use alcohol.
- **Mental health** - Young people who drink consistently are more likely to suffer from mental health issues.
- **Brain development** - During puberty young people, specifically their brains are still developing. Using alcohol will hurt this growth and development.

Health effects of young people using drugs

Young people are now using drugs at an extremely high rate. Nationally there is now more danger than ever for young people who take drugs especially how it directly influences young people's health and social skills.

The following information is provided by www.cyh.com

- **Short-term**
 - Reduced ability to think clearly and to behave safely
 - Effects of the drug on the body and brain depending on what has been used
 - Being exposed to unsafe people and places
 - Involvement with the criminal justice system
 - The risk of overdose.
- **Longer-term**
 - There can be effects on the way their brain is developing - for example, the use of cannabis by young people has been shown to increase the risk of problems with thinking later in life, and increase the risk of serious mental illness
 - Harm to the body, such as infections from IV (intra-venous) drug use
 - Impact on future relationships, education and employment.

Research Methodology

Objective

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

Timescale

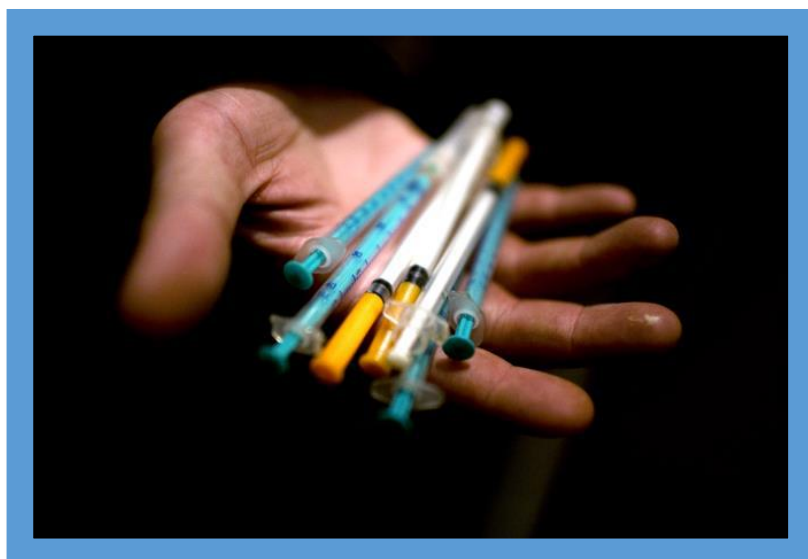
Information was collected over a four month period from April - July 2015

Recruitment & Publicity

Healthwatch wanted to make sure we spoke to a varied demographic from a wide geographical area. We spoke with schools and colleges and made sure that our survey was available on the Healthwatch website as well as through social media. During the whole process we spoke to a large number of young people in both a formal and informal manner and really got a good grasp of what issues young people have with drugs and alcohol. The final number of surveys we had was 204 and we spoke to roughly around 1000 young people about this topic.

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 they had to live within the East Riding.



Data Protection

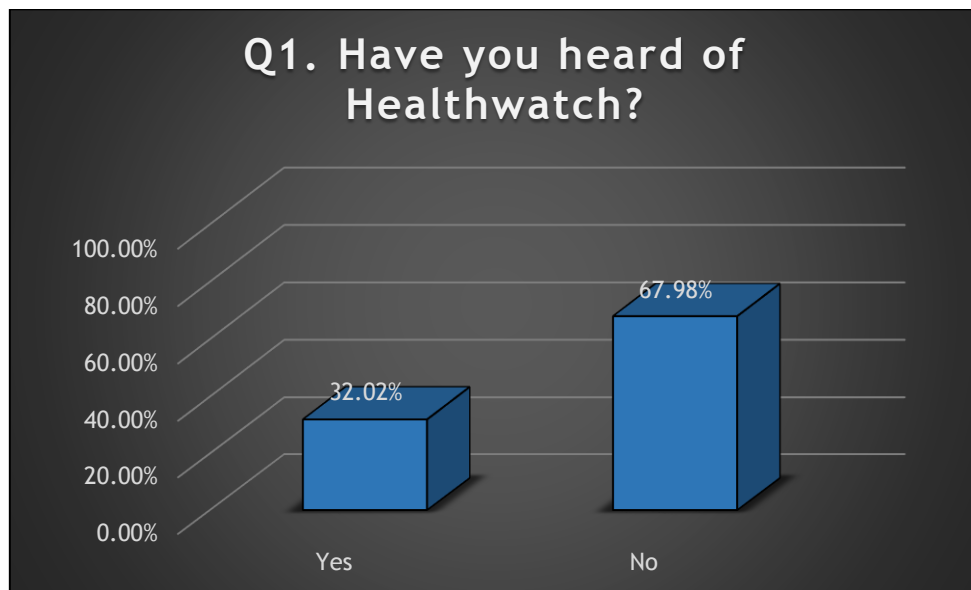
All surveys completed remained anonymous as the information being collected was extremely sensitive and private to young people. Privacy was maintained throughout the entire process. This report will not publish any names of young people who participated.



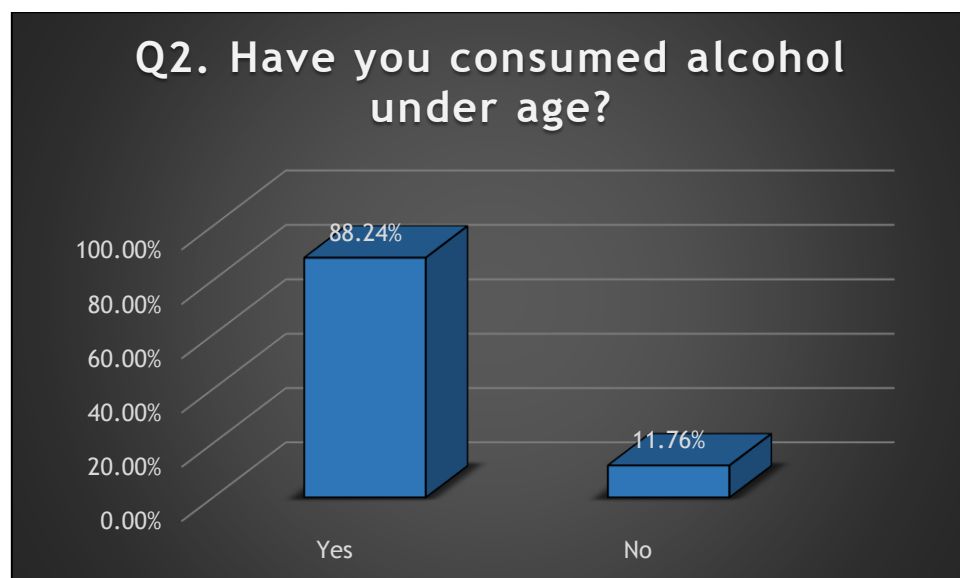
The Results

Results of the Drugs & Alcohol Survey

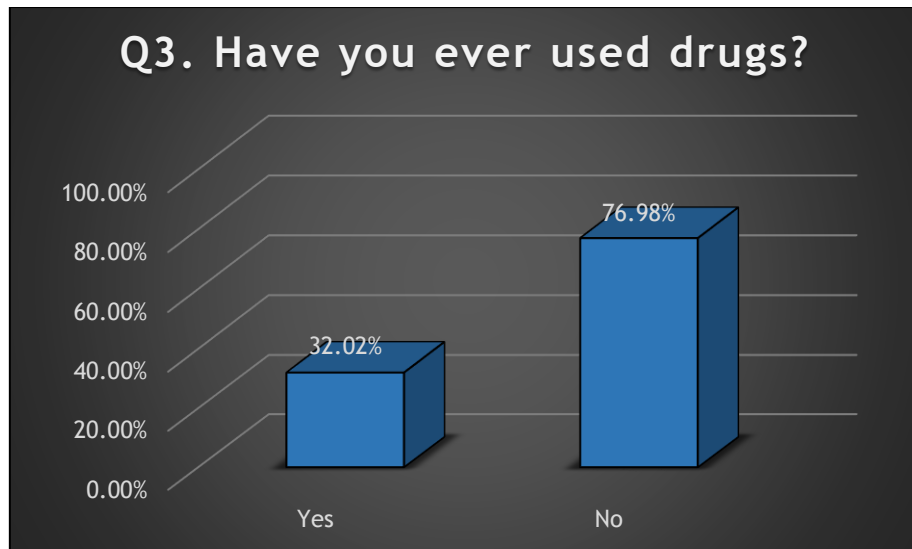
The following are the results of the survey we ran on drugs and alcohol.



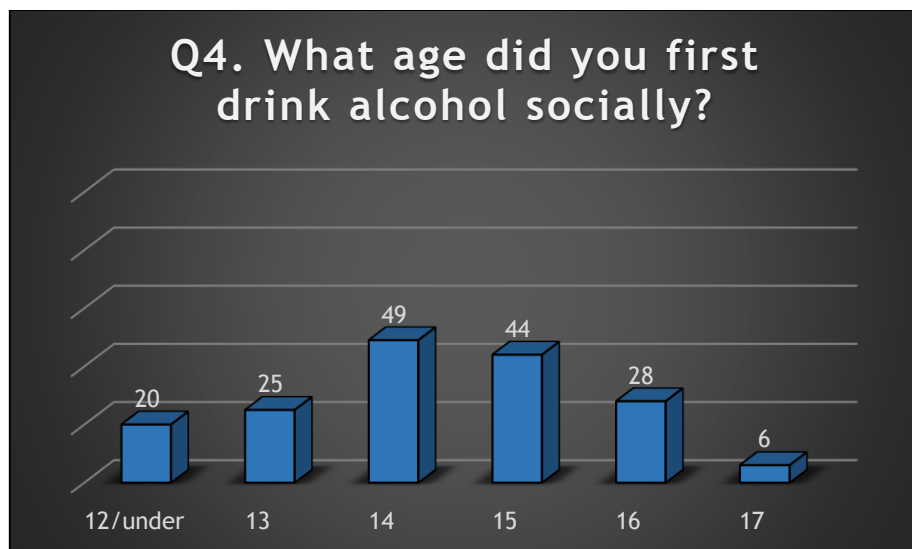
This result is a huge step forward for the C&YP service. Our previous survey the response to this was that 7% of young people had heard of us. Through our face to face engagement our response this time was that nearly a third of young people surveyed had heard of Healthwatch before.



The results of this question are in line with national trends. The high percentage highlights the fact that young people are getting access to alcohol.

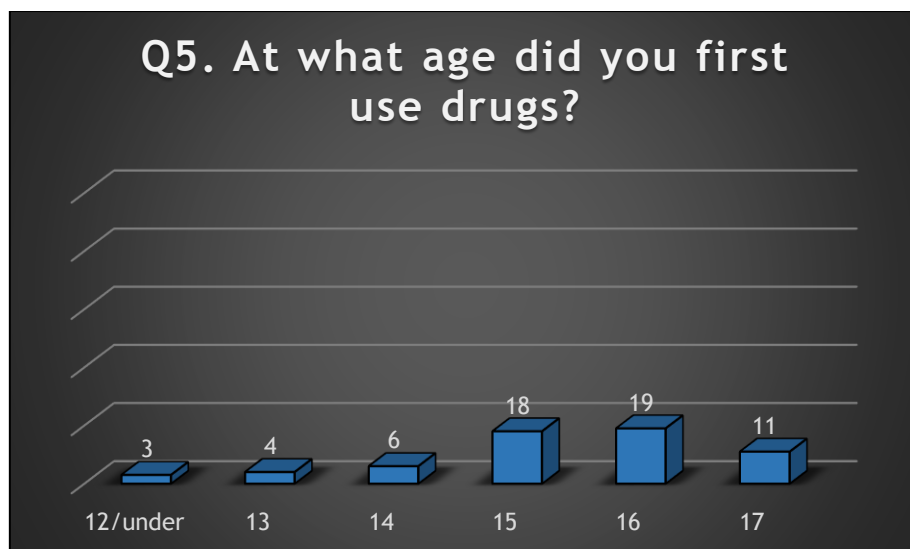


The percentage shown here shows how available illicit drugs are to young people. Nearly a third of young people have admitted to using drugs. To be clear this percentage doesn't reflect which young people use drugs on a regular basis. However it does show that young people are curious and experimenting.



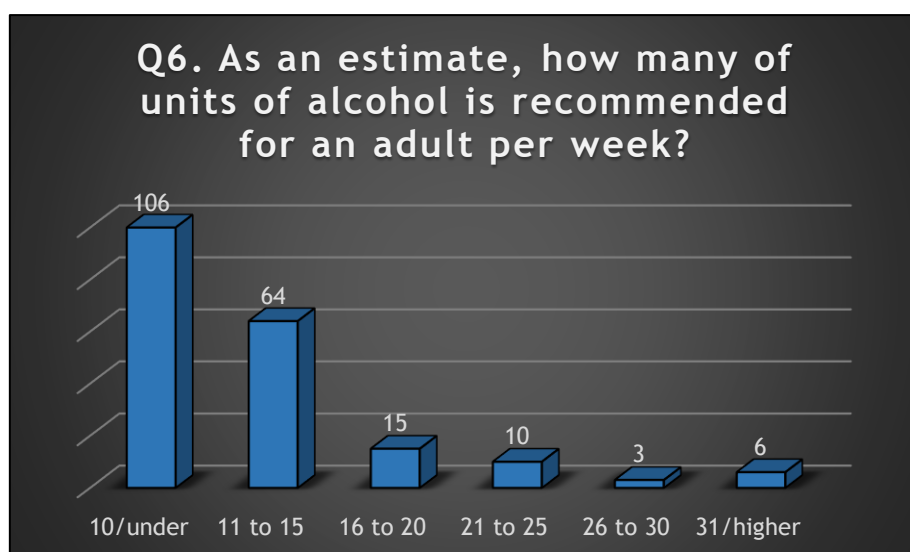
172 Responses

88% of the young people surveyed have drunk alcohol socially underage. The ages of 14 & 15 seem to be the most frequent times for young people to start drinking. However what is shocking is that 20 people who completed the survey have drunk socially before the age of 12.



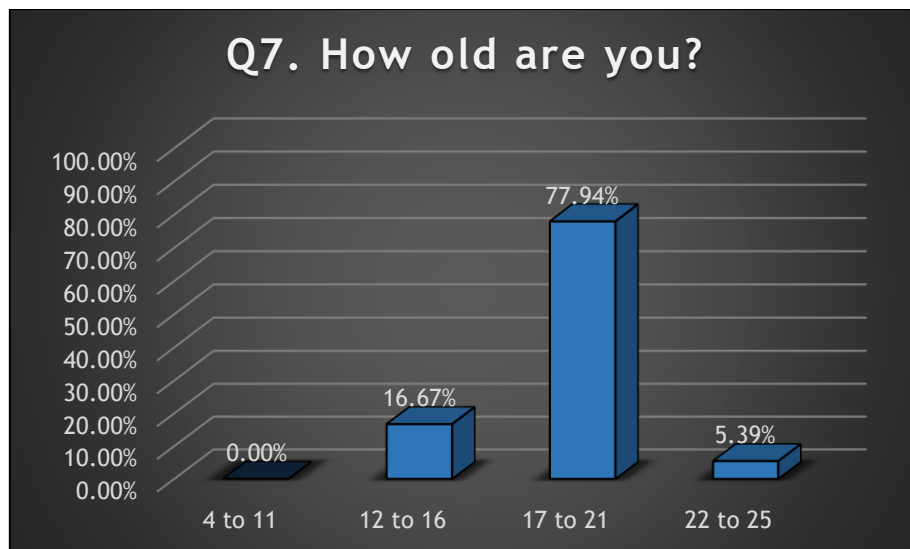
61 Responses

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. These statistics suggest that drugs is becoming increasingly available to young people and they are using without any knowledge of the dangerous outcomes.

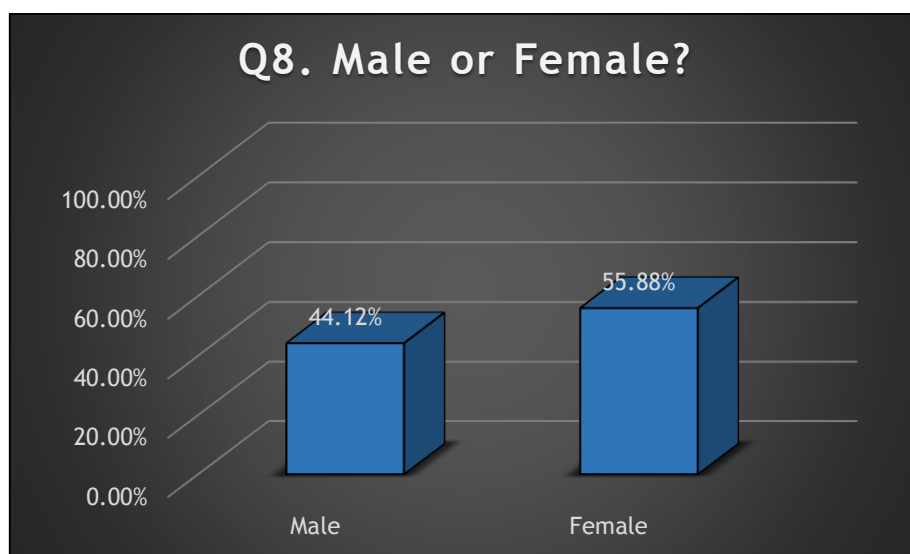


204 Responses

The responses from this question suggest that the education of young people surrounding alcohol consumption is pretty wide of the mark. The national recommendations are that Men should drink no more than 21 units per week, whilst women should drink no more than 14 units. Over half of the people who completed the survey believe it is 10 units, which obviously can be portrayed as positive however young people who completed the survey afterwards asked "What is a unit" and "how much is a unit"



The nature of this subject and the adult themes that go along with it meant that the desired demographic for completing surveys was of an older age group. HWERY made the conscious choice to not ask anybody under the age of 12. 78% of the surveys were completed by young adults between the age of 17 and 21. This age group specifically have the most recent and relevant experience of trying drugs and alcohol for the first time.



The split in this survey between genders is pretty evenly split with a slight lean indication more females completed the survey. This means that the results will not be too biased towards a single gender. The results are more likely to favour age over gender.

Question 9. If you have drank alcohol or used drugs under age, can you explain the reason why?

<p>Party Parties Celebrations Most people did so didn't see it as a bad thing Joining in with friends</p>
<p>Wanted to try it Boredom Joining in with others Wedding For fun</p>
<p>Party Fun At parties or with friends It was Christmas Was at a party</p>
<p>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</p>
<p>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</p>
<p>At a party With mates Peer pressure Party for drinks and drugs but drugs was an accident. Parties</p>
<p>All my mates did and dad offered me alcohol Friends taking part Drugs because depression friends and family Friends pressure Socially</p>
<p>Peer pressure Wanted to look cool in front of others Social occasions The other people do it Family party and house party</p>
<p>Went to a party and it was ok to drink Fancied trying it Just to try it Friends was drinking it Party with friends.</p>
<p>It was a laugh Experimentation Mates older brother, just an experience</p>



Conclusion

Young people now more than seem to have more access to drugs and alcohol and the East riding follows national trends in that young people are consuming high volumes of alcohol but do not have too much knowledge about the health and social effects.

One thing that stood out from this report was the amount of young people who did not know what a unit of alcohol not that they didn't know the measurement, they had never heard of a unit before.

Binge drinking is at an all-time high with young people and if they do not know what they are drinking they will be a higher risk to the long term and short term issues alcohol brings with it.

The survey also focused on if young people are using drugs and again what their experiences are. The number of young people using drugs before the age of 18 is lower than alcohol consumption however only one person who took the survey stated they used drugs and have not consumed alcohol. This means that everybody else who was using or has at one time used drugs did so having used alcohol.

The main reasons young people in the East Riding stated that they used alcohol was due to:

- Peer pressure
- Social Situations
- Bored
- Curiosity
- Celebrations & Family

A good outcome from this report will be if young people can just take time to understand what they are putting in their bodies. Having knowledge of what it is they are taking and the effects will hopefully lead to safer young people and a reduction in underage substance consumption.

Recommendations

The information collected for this report has allowed Healthwatch East Riding to provide the following recommendations.

- Raise the awareness of the dangers of drugs and alcohol and how it impacts young people.
 - HWERY C&YP to promote the findings of this report to schools and colleges to highlight the findings from this report.
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