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Underage drinking: findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey

Sian Matthews, Laura Brasnett and Jonathan Smith

The Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England (Cabinet Office, 2004) highlighted the costs to society of alcohol-related crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour. Key aims of the strategy are to reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder and to tackle the minority who consume and sell alcohol irresponsibly. This report presents findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) which is a nationally representative self-report offending survey of 10- to 25-year-olds which also includes questions on alcohol consumption. The 2004 OCJS predates the onset of the Government's Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign aimed at tackling alcohol-related crime and disorder including underage alcohol sales. This Findings is specifically focused on results for those aged 10 to 17 years (n=3,172). It explores both the prevalence and nature of underage drinking and the relationship between alcohol consumption and offending among young people.

Key points

- Over half (56%) of all 10- to 17-year-olds reported having had an alcoholic drink in the previous 12 months. This figure was highest among 16- to 17-year-olds (88%) and lowest among 10- to 13-year-olds (29%).
- There was no gender difference in frequency of alcohol consumption among 10- to 17-year-olds. However, among 18- to 25-year-olds, more men (68%) than women (51%) reported drinking alcohol once a week or more.
- One-third of those 10- to 17-year-olds who reported drinking alcohol once a month or more also reported feeling very drunk once a month or more in the previous 12 months.
- For those respondents aged 10 to 17 years who had drunk alcohol in the past year, the majority reported drinking alcopops (59%) and beer (46%).
- 48% of 10- to 17-year-olds who had drunk alcohol in the past year reported that they obtained alcohol from their parents, although those who got very drunk at least once a month generally obtained alcohol from pubs, bars and shops rather than from their parents.
- Around half of 16- to 17-year-olds had tried to buy alcohol from pubs and bars (59%) or shops (47%) in the past 12 months and most had been successful at least once (98% of those trying pubs and bars and 96% of those trying shops).
- Those who drank alcohol once a week or more committed a disproportionate volume of crime, accounting for 37% of all offences reported by 10- to 17-year-olds but only 14% of respondents. Those who had never drunk alcohol or had not drunk alcohol in the past year committed 16% of all offences but comprised 45% of respondents.
- A higher proportion of those who drank alcohol once a week or more reported committing criminal damage (12%) and theft (4%) offences during or after drinking than those who drank less frequently.

Prevalence of underage drinking

Over half (56%) of 10- to 17-year-olds reported having had an alcoholic drink at least once in the past 12 months. This figure was higher among the older age groups: under one-third (29%) of 10- to 13-year-olds reported having had a drink in the past 12 months, compared to 76% of 14- to 15-year-olds and 88% of 16- to 17-year-olds. Across all three age groups there was no significant change in the proportion of under-18s that reported having had an alcoholic drink compared with the first sweep of the survey in 2003.

Frequency of drinking also varied with age: 2% of 10- to 13-year-olds and 17% of 14- to 15-year-olds interviewed in the 2004 OCJS drank at least once a week compared to 36% of 16- to 17-year-olds. This trend continued into adulthood with 60% of 18- to 25-year-olds drinking at least once a week. There were no significant differences between the 2003 OCJS and 2004 OCJS in terms of frequency of drinking among 10- to 17-year-olds.

Among those aged 10 to 17, there was very little gender difference in terms of frequency of drinking (Figure 1). However, significant gender differences emerged in the 18- to 25-year-old age group with males drinking more often than their female counterparts.

Frequency of drunkenness

All those respondents who reported drinking alcohol at least once a month in the past 12 months were asked whether they had ever felt very drunk in the past year. Within this group, nearly two-thirds (63%) reported feeling very drunk at least once in the past 12 months. The number of respondents who reported feeling very drunk at least once in the past 12 months was higher among those aged 16 to 17 (71%) than those aged 10 to 15 (54%).

Among 10- to 17-year-olds who drank at least once a month, one-third (33%) reported feeling very drunk at least once a month in the past year. There was little difference between males and females. The proportion of respondents getting very drunk at least once a month was higher among the older age groups, with over half (55%) of 18- to 25-year-olds reporting that they had been very drunk at least once a month (Table 1). This was particularly true among 18- to 25-year-old men. Compared to their underage drinking counterparts, nearly double the proportion of young adult males who drank at least once a month also reported being very drunk once a month or more (62% compared with 34% of 16- to 17-year-old males and 28% of 10- to 15-year-old males respectively).

Type of alcoholic drink consumed

For those respondents in the 10- to 17-year-old age group who had drunk alcohol at least once in the past year, the majority reported drinking alcopops (59%) and beer (46%). Among girls, the majority reported drinking alcopops (74%), followed by spirits (38%) and wine (37%). Among boys, the majority reported drinking beer (66%) followed by alcopops (44%) and spirits (29%). These findings are comparable to those of the Department of Health's School Survey, which looks at drinking, smoking and drug use amongst 11- to 15-year-olds (National Centre for Social Research and the National Foundation for Educational Research, 2005).

The number of respondents drinking certain types of alcohol also varied with age. More 16- to 17-year-olds than 10- to 15-year-olds reported drinking spirits (49% compared to 24%) and beer (54% compared to 40%). Among 18- to 25-year-olds, fewer respondents drank alcopops, although these were still drunk by 55% of 18- to 25-year-old females,

Figure 1 Frequency of drinking in the previous 12 months amongst 10- to 25-year-olds by sex and age

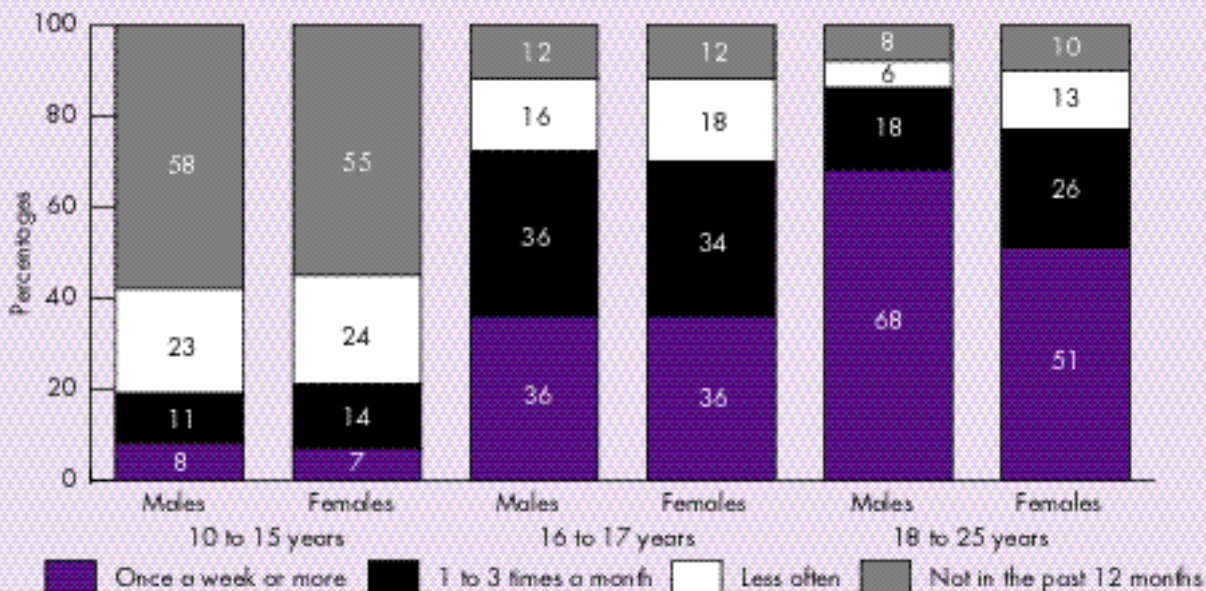


Table 1 Frequency of feeling very drunk in previous 12 months amongst 10- to 25-year-olds who drank at least once a month, by sex and age

	10–15 years		16–17 years		18–25 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Once a month or more	28	32	34	38	62	47
Less often	23	23	34	36	25	34
Not in the past 12 months	49	45	32	27	13	19
Base n	247	261	299	296	822	824

Notes: 1. Source: 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, weighted data. 2. Results are based on all those who have had an alcoholic drink at least once a month in the past year. Those who reported drinking alcohol less than once a month and those who had never drunk alcohol were not asked any questions relating to drunkenness.

alongside spirits (58%). Beer was reported as being drunk by the majority of 18- to 25-year-old males (87%).

Sources of alcohol

Those 10- to 17-year-olds who had drunk alcohol in the past year were asked where they usually obtained alcohol. Most respondents (48%) reported that they obtained alcohol from their parents. Other frequently cited sources were friends (29%) and pubs or bars (22%). Patterns changed with age, with more 16- to 17-year-olds obtaining alcohol from bars (49%) and shops (31%) than 10- to 15-year-olds (5% and 8% respectively).

There was also an association between drinking patterns and source of alcohol. Those respondents aged 10 to 17 who had drunk alcohol at least once a month in the past year and who reported feeling very drunk at least once a month, tended to obtain alcohol from either friends (50%), pubs/nightclubs (47%) and shops (40%). Only 23% said their main source of alcohol was their parents. Conversely, those who drank alcohol at least once a month in the past year but who had not felt very drunk in the past 12 months were most likely to obtain alcohol from their parents (58%).

Access to licensed premises

One-third of all 10- to 17-year-olds had been to a pub or bar without their parents in the previous 12 months and around one-quarter (26%) had been to a nightclub. Unsurprisingly, this was more common amongst the 16- to 17-year-old age group (23% had visited pubs or bars at least once a week compared to only 3% of 10- to 15-year-olds). Visiting nightclubs was less common; only 10% of 16- to 17-year-olds and 1% of 10- to 15-year-olds had visited a nightclub at least once a week. There was very little gender difference in access to licensed premises. Girls aged 16 to 17 were more likely to have gone to a nightclub (62%) than their male counterparts (53%) although this may have been a result of girls having more success at gaining entrance to nightclubs than boys.

Obtaining alcohol from licensed premises

Those aged 10 to 17 who had drunk alcohol in the past year were also asked whether they had tried to buy alcohol from shops or pubs in the past 12 months. Among 10- to 15-year-olds, 13% had tried to buy alcohol from a shop, and 11% from a bar or pub in the past 12 months. These figures were higher for the older age group: 47% of 16- to 17-year-olds had tried to buy alcohol from a shop and 59% had tried to buy alcohol from pubs or bars. Boys aged 16 to 17 were more likely (53%) than girls (41%) to have tried to buy alcohol from shops. There was no difference in the proportion of boys and girls who tried to buy alcohol from pubs or bars.

Most 10- to 15-year-olds who had tried to buy alcohol from a shop had been successful at least once (84%) and 14% had been successful more than 11 times in the previous 12 months (Table 2). A greater proportion had been successful in pubs (93%), with 22% being successful more than 11 times. For 16- to 17-year-olds the figures were even higher with nearly all successfully purchasing from a shop (96%) or pub (98%) at least once. 39% of 16- to 17-year-olds had successfully purchased alcohol in shops more than 11 times and 66% had successfully purchased alcohol in pubs and bars more than 11 times. It

Table 2 Number of times successful at buying alcohol from shops or pubs in previous 12 months amongst 10- to 17-year-olds who have tried to buy alcohol

	10–15 years		16–17 years	
	Shops	Pubs/ nightclubs	Shops	Pubs/ nightclubs
	%	%	%	%
Not at all	16	7	4	2
1–10 times	70	71	56	32
More than 11 times	14	22	39	66
Total %	100	100	100	100
Base n	142	121	342	436

Notes: 1. Source: 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, weighted data. 2. Results are based on those aged 10 to 17 who had reported they had tried to buy alcohol from a shop, supermarket, off-licence or a pub, bar or nightclub.

is not possible to say whether this is the result of 16- to 17-year-olds trying to buy alcohol in pubs and bars more often. There was no gender difference in the success rate of purchasing alcohol. These findings are in broad agreement with the results from the Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign Winter 2005, which targeted premises suspected of selling alcohol to underage persons using test purchase operations. This found a higher level of underage sales in pubs and clubs (on-licensed) than in off-licensed premises (Home Office, 2006).

Perceived parental awareness of drinking

Six out of ten (62%) underage drinkers reported that their parents were aware that they drank alcohol always or most of the time. One-third (33%) reported that their parents were aware at least some of the time (the remaining 5% said that their parents were not aware of their drinking). 16- to 17-year-olds were more likely to say that their parents were aware of their drinking always or most of the time (67%) compared with 10- to 15-year-olds (59%).

Of those who said their parents were aware, most felt that their parents did not mind as long as they did not drink too much (89%). Only 8% said their parents did not like them drinking and the remaining 3% said their parents let them drink as much as they liked. The findings were similar between the two age groups although 16- to 17-year-olds were more likely to believe their parents would let them drink as much as they liked (4% vs. 2%). In terms of drunkenness, 59% of 10- to 15-year-olds who had felt very drunk in the past year said their parents were aware that they had got very drunk compared with 82% of 16- to 17-year-olds.

Attitudes towards drinking

The 2004 OCJS asked those who drank at least once a month whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements relating to attitudes towards drinking. Those aged 10 to 17 were most likely to agree that drinking alcohol made them feel more friendly and outgoing (78%) and relaxed (76%).

Attitudes towards drinking were similar among the 10- to 15-year-olds and the 16- to 17-year-olds, although those aged 16 to 17 were more likely to agree that drinking alcohol

made them feel more friendly and outgoing (84%) than the younger age group (71%). There was no age difference in the proportion of respondents who drank alcohol with the purpose of getting drunk (34% in both age groups). There was also little difference in attitudes between boys and girls. The only significant gender difference was within the 16- to 17-year-old age group with boys being more likely to drink to get drunk (39%) than girls (28%).

Prevalence of offending

All respondents, regardless of whether they drank alcohol or not, were asked whether they had committed various 'core' offences in the 12 months prior to interview. It was found that frequency of drinking was strongly associated with offending, although these findings do not provide evidence of a causal relationship between drinking and offending.

Overall, a similar pattern was found for all offence types, with 10- to 17-year-olds who drank at least once a week committing more offences than those who drank less frequently or not at all. More specifically, the prevalence of violent offending was high among those who drank one to three times a month (with 26% reporting that they had committed a violent offence in the previous 12 months) and even higher among those who drank at least once a week (39%). Among those who had not drunk alcohol in the past 12 months the figure was much lower at 11%.

Those who drank at least once a week also reported committing more drug-related offences than those who had not drunk alcohol in the past 12 months or at all (10% vs. <1%). Reports of criminal damage (17%) and theft (34%) were also higher among those who drank at least once a week in comparison to those who drank less frequently or not at all. Among those who drank at least once a week, boys reported committing significantly more offences than girls, with the exception of drug offences (which had a similar prevalence rate for the two sexes).

Volume of offending

The 2004 OCJS also allowed the examination of the relationship between volume of crimes committed by 10- to 17-year-olds and their drinking patterns (Table 3). Those

Table 3 Proportion of offences, offenders and sample aged 10 to 17 accounted for by drinking patterns

	All offences			Violent offences		
	% of offences	% of offenders	% of sample	% of offences	% of offenders	% of sample
Once a week or more	37	28	14	34	29	15
1 to 3 times a month	34	27	18	32	24	18
Less often	13	20	22	13	20	22
Not drunk in the past 12 months/never drunk alcohol	16	25	45	20	26	45
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: 1. Source: 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, weighted data. 2. The sample percentage of those who drink at least once a week differ for all offences and violent offences, due to Base N being different for these two offence categories.

who drank at least once a month accounted for a disproportionate amount of crimes committed by 10- to 17-year-olds in this survey. Of the offences committed, over two-thirds (71%) were committed by those who drank at least once a month, despite this group only comprising just under one-third of respondents (32%). Disproportionate offending was particularly apparent among those who drank once a week or more. They committed 37% of offences but accounted for only 14% of respondents. By contrast, those who had never drunk alcohol or who had not drunk alcohol in the past year committed 16% of all offences, while representing 45% of respondents. A similar pattern was apparent when focusing on violent offences. Those aged 10 to 17 who drank at least once a week represented 15% of the sample but committed 34% of violent offences.

Table 3 also shows the percentage of offenders in each drinking group. Interestingly, the proportion of offences committed by those who drank one to three times a month and those who drank once a week or more is higher than the proportion of offenders in these groups, suggesting a higher rate of repeat offending in these groups.

Prevalence of criminal and disorderly behaviour during or after drinking

The results presented in the previous section suggest a strong association between drinking alcohol and offending, but they do not directly link drinking and offending behaviour in time. The 2004 OCJS also asked all respondents who reported drinking alcohol at least once a month about various types of criminal and disorderly behaviour committed during or after the consumption of alcohol. Of 10- to 17-year-olds who drank at least once a month, 28% reported that they had got into an argument during or after drinking in the past 12 months

and 12% reported getting into a fight. More boys reported fighting (14%) or stealing (3%) than girls (9% and 1% respectively). 18- to 25-year-olds had a similar pattern of behaviour to the under 18s, although more respondents in this age group (38%) reported getting into arguments during or after drinking.

Among 10- to 17-year-olds, the main differences in criminal and disorderly behaviour during or after drinking were associated with frequency of drinking (Figure 2). A greater number of those who drank once a week or more reported getting involved in arguments (43%), fights (19%) and criminal damage offences (12%) during or after drinking compared to those who drank between one and three times a month (16%, 6% and 4% respectively). There was very little difference between male and female 10- to 17-year olds who drank at least once a week, although more males reported getting involved in fights (23%) than females (14%).

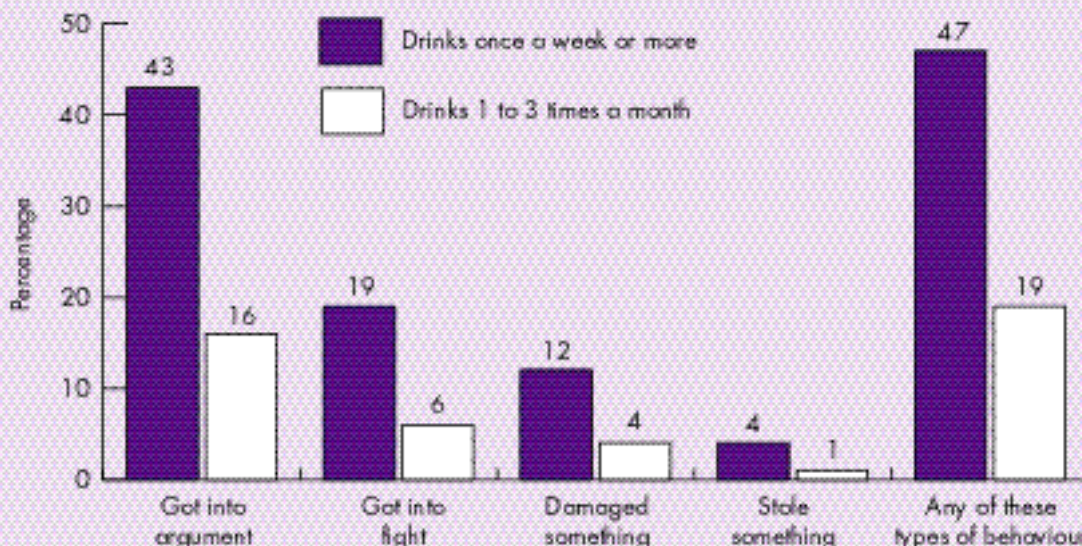
Other types of risky behaviour

As well as drinking and offending behaviour, respondents were also asked about smoking and drug use. Those 10- to 17-year olds who had drunk alcohol, particularly those who drank at least once a week, were more likely to smoke and take drugs. This finding is in line with previous research on school-aged children (National Centre for Social Research and the National Foundation for Educational Research, 2005).

More than one-quarter (28%) of those who drank at least once a week had taken drugs in the past month. This is in comparison to only 8% of those who drank one to three times a month, 3% who drank less than once a month and less than 1% of those who had not drunk alcohol in the previous year.

Of those who drank at least once a week, 43% reported that they smoked regularly compared to only 2% of non-drinkers.

Figure 2 Criminal and disorderly behaviour during or after drinking in previous 12 months amongst 10- to 17-year-olds who drank at least once a month



Conclusions

The Government has introduced a range of measures to tackle the problems of drinking and disorder, in particular those associated with young people. These include penalty notices for young people buying alcohol underage and closure powers against premises selling alcohol to underage persons. However, these findings show that frequency of drinking and drunkenness were high among 10- to 17-year-olds and that attempts to purchase alcohol by persons aged 16 to 17 were both frequent and successful.

In addition to current Government measures, these findings therefore suggest:

- the continuing need for vigilant management practices in licensed premises; in particular, the enforcement of 'no-ID, no sale' policies
- awareness campaigns specifically aimed at those aged 10 to 17 years, which highlight the harms and consequences of alcohol consumption, could also be introduced.

As parents were often reported as being the main supplier of alcohol to their children and were generally thought to be aware of their children's drinking behaviour, the findings indicate that parents may also need to take some responsibility for addressing their children's drinking behaviour.

Underage drinkers who drank at least once a week were found to commit a disproportionate number of offences (including violent offences). Therefore, successfully tackling underage drinking may also lead to a decrease in the number of offences committed by those aged 10 to 17 years.

Methodological note

The 2004 OCJS is an annual self-report survey of offending. A nationally representative sample of 5,205 10- to 25-year-olds living in private households in England and Wales were interviewed. The 2004 survey consisted of two elements – a panel sample (n=3,363) and a fresh sample (n=1,842). Fieldwork took place between January and September 2004. The response rate was 82% for the panel sample and 69% for the fresh sample. The interview included both interviewer-administered and self-completion sections. The drinking module used CASI (Computer Assisted Self-interviewing) whereby the questions and answers appeared on a computer screen and respondents keyed in their responses. All differences discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 5% level unless otherwise specified. Further details on the methodology of the 2004 OCJS can be found in Budd et al. (2005).

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Sian Matthews is a Research Officer in the Crime Reduction and Community Safety Group; Laura Brasnett is a Policy Analyst in the Strategic Policy Team; and Jonathan Smith is a Principal Researcher in Drugs Analysis and Research within the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.