

MEAS



**UNDERAGE DRINKING IS
RARELY BLACK & WHITE**

Research Studies, 16th June 2004

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INTRODUCTION

- Behaviour & Attitudes undertook two separate but related studies for MEAS to study issues in relation to underage drinking. These are the initial elements of an intended strategy to understand and address the problem of underage drinking in Ireland. Further research will track the effectiveness of the proposed strategy.
- A wide ranging qualitative, focus group based, study was undertaken among both parents and children (separately) to explore the broad issues and look for suggestions as to possible solutions, in a format which might meaningfully address children, while not alienating or upsetting their parents. Nine focus groups were undertaken with children (three aged 10 & 11, three aged 13 & 14 and three aged 16 & 17) and three longer groups with parents, all during September 2003. The parents groups included mothers of children within the relevant age groups. Some of these groups were with 'first time' parents of children of the relevant age; while others were with women who have a number of teenage children (i.e. their now 13 and 14 year old children had older brothers and/or sisters). The groups were well distributed around the country, representing urban and rural viewpoints, middle and working class views and so on. A detailed technical appendix is appended to this document.
- This exploratory qualitative study was followed by a benchmark quantitative survey among a representative, nationwide quota controlled sample of 400 12-17 year olds, fielded between 1st and 9th December 2003. The content and thrust of this survey was based upon the insights gleaned from the preliminary qualitative phase.
- At all stages of the research parental consent was received (in writing) prior to allowing the participation of their children in the study. The research agency explained the scope and objectives of the study to parents and ensured throughout that the process did not introduce ideas or thoughts to children which they may not have previously entertained. Focus group participants attended in 'Friendship Pairs'.
- Research about underage drinking among minors has traditionally been avoided by professional marketing research agencies, but it was decided to become involved in this study, given that it was being fielded 'in the common good' and was seeking to arrive at a better informed understanding of the causes of, and potential solutions to, the underage drinking problem. Without proper research we do not feel that the problem of underage drinking can be properly understood or addressed.
- Queries on the methodology and research approach to Larry Ryan, Director, Behaviour & Attitudes Marketing Research, 26 Burlington Road, Dublin 4. larry@banda.ie. Copyright in the research and this report is claimed by Behaviour & Attitudes and MEAS and reporting of it must state this copyright and acknowledge both the technical and ethical standards laid down by its authors and sponsors.

- This report summarises some key themes from both studies and is being released by MEAS to coincide with the unveiling of an underage drinking strategy. Queries on this report and strategy to Fionnuala Sheehan, Chief Executive, MEAS.

OVERVIEW OF THE CORE THEMES

- The study endorsed the widely held view that underage drinking is comparatively widespread, and tends to be well engrained from 15 or 16 years of age or so, on average. It seems however that underage drinking may not be appreciably 'worse' than in bygone years, at least in so far as it is possible to compare and contrast current underage drinker's behaviour with that claimed by parents of teenage drinkers (in their own adolescence).
- However, the types of alcohol being consumed nowadays are clearly more palatable and easily drunk by teenagers, while teenagers also tend to be much 'better off' than their parents had been at the same age. Many teenagers now work and ready access to money would seem to fuel teenager's propensity to drink. The escalation in the relationship between underage drinking and involvement in random violence is a striking generational difference, however.
- Another contextual change, which has fundamentally altered the teenage perspective upon alcohol, relates to its treatment and coverage by the media. The current media and general public fascination with celebrities and other aspects of popular culture, exposes children to apparent widespread use of alcohol by sports, pop and other icons. Alcohol use has been 'normalised' and most kids can recount details of favoured celebrities' over indulgence in alcohol. This influence is both pernicious and seemingly unstoppable, and is compounded by widespread unsupervised access to TV, magazines and so on.
- Access to alcohol is not a problem for teenage drinkers, and a combination of theft from home, use of fake IDs and the turning of a 'blind eye' by some pubs and off licenses makes it easy to drink underage. What is striking is that in some areas (particularly outside Dublin) underage drinkers are often getting alcohol from the same licensed premises and "off licenses" their parents had frequented (underage) in a previous generation. Many parents feel that law enforcement is disappointing, making their role much more difficult. This is compounded by widespread production/use of fake IDs, and the absence of a mandatory national identity card system.
- A number of the most striking aspects of these studies relate to parental attitudes and parenting styles. These have changed a lot it seems, and in many instances have had the effect of facilitating easier underage access to alcohol.
- Many parents now drink at home and there is evidence that in such homes underage alcohol use is also more common. This is particularly true of Dublin. Underage alcohol experimentation is much less common in homes where alcohol is not drunk.
- Many parents allow their children to drink in their company, or on special occasions, from a relatively young age. This is often justified on the basis that the regime operated 'in their day' was much more strict but no more successful; alcohol use was covert, illicit, hidden and a tempting 'forbidden fruit'. However, allowing more controlled use in home clearly does not substitute for illicit, out of home experimentation, which is still commonplace.

- A substantial shift in 'parenting style' is apparent. Many parents strive for a more open, trusting and friendly relationship with their children (rather than the much more hierarchical, rule-based manner of their own treatment by their parents). It is hoped that this will build honesty and trust, although it is evident that it is much harder for them to police transgressions, or to impose discipline where children step out of line.
- There is evidence of widespread youth dishonesty about underage drinking (how much, how often etc) and despite the greater empathy many parents hope to foster, this does not seem to be reciprocated by their children with a more honest dialogue about alcohol. Alcohol use remains a core 'boundary testing' activity for many Irish teenagers.
- A worry highlighted by these studies relates to a probable decline in parents contact with their children's friends parents. Many don't seem to have the time to forge links with other parents, but others undoubtedly don't have the inclination. Voluntarism is not evidently strong, and few seem inclined (or able) to help out in sports, organising youth activities, and so on. Integration into local communities seems to be on the wane, and with this attitudinal climate or shift it is difficult for common approaches or standards to be discussed. If anything, parents can seem suspicious of, and defensive when, alcohol use is raised by other parents; quick to defend their own children, and slow to discuss their approach to it honestly.
- A central requirement would seem to be for more genuine and open discussion about alcohol among parents. Many feel the need for a pragmatic approach and others (far fewer) seem to resist this more acquiescent or permissive stance. Variation in approach from family to family leads to a 'divided front' and parents are keen to be able to impose or consider a more universally agreed approach (which is both pragmatic, but capable of drawing a firmer and more generally endorsed 'line in the sand' in relation to underage drinking). While many parents may allow drinking from 16 or so, there is recognition that a more tolerant approach may not be wholly successful. However, the imposition of rigid rules seems to be an aspect that many parents are uncomfortable to handle, and they often would prefer to have access to a wider (and perhaps firmer) status quo approach.

UNDERAGE DRINKING IS RARELY BLACK & WHITE

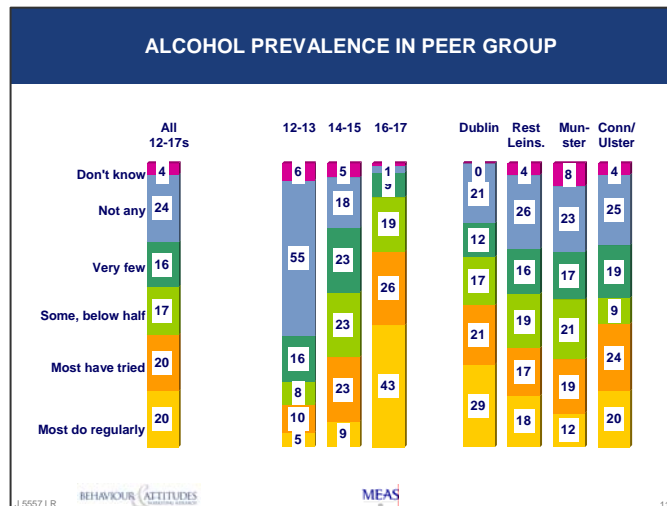
- Underage alcohol consumption is a very complex issue in Ireland today and this research highlights many ambiguities in this respect. It is not a black and white issue and it becomes more difficult to interpret the research data for this reason.
- A few of the principle ambiguities highlighted include:
 - a) Many children are allowed to drink by their parents from 15/16 onwards. As such, the reported levels of consumption are not all illicit per se in the eyes of underage drinkers. They indicate that they have some degree of parental sanction (possibly not carte blanche, but often permission to drink in moderation in certain situations).
 - b) Many parents have drunk underage themselves and they may prefer to know where and when their children are drinking (rather than it being covert, as in their youth). Parents indicated that underage drinking is more talked about now, but on reflection, it may not be vastly different to how they behaved themselves, albeit with different alcohol formats and much less money.
 - c) Some parents are fearful of setting dogmatic, unrealistic rules about alcohol. They don't want to seem dictatorial and they don't want to lose their children's trust, confidence or friendship, when there are 'worse' things that their children could be doing (becoming pregnant, taking drugs, etc).
 - d) Few parents seem to agree, or know 'what is the right thing to do'. Some parents are more lax and other more strict. In this light it is hard to formulate more stringent guidelines, leading to a gradual drift towards 'lowest common denominator' behaviour. Central guidance is undoubtedly necessary, although few can imagine that a firm adherence to 'no alcohol below 18' as a rule is likely to work in practise. A more pragmatic approach is more likely to work, many feel. Few parents discuss the issue with children's other parents however, and this is an unfortunate absence.
 - e) The evidence from the children's survey suggests that those whose parents drink at home are more likely to drink themselves (whether with consent or not). Nonetheless, this may only reflect the fact that some are being allowed controlled exposure to wine with meals, on holidays etc. They may push out the boundaries of the permission granted to them (drinking more than they are allowed, or in situations where they haven't permission) but it is impossible to conclude that their drinking is worse or more problematic. It is apparent however, that in situations where alcohol is more on display, it is more easily pilfered from home. Many children do this, and the vast majority feel that underage drinkers rarely tell the whole truth to their parents.

- f) Such 'boundary testing' is typical of adolescence, but it is apparent that many parents nonetheless feel reassured if they believe that there can be a more open dialogue with their children around alcohol. In the past, underage drinking was far too covert; it is more easily discussed now, even if not with total honesty or candour. This seems preferable to the relative omerta of the 1960s or 1970's.
- g) While many parents might prefer that their children did not drink before 18 few feel that this is realistic. We did not set out to research whether the current legal drinking threshold is workable or not, but most seem to be of the view that it operates in theory only. Many parents feel that they need to be more pragmatic about when and if their child should drink, although by avoiding the issue - and many seem to - some hope that they will not be indicating to their children that they are 'soft' on the issue.
- The introduction of a formal national identity card system is strongly supported by parents, based on qualitative evidence, while some feel that licensing infringements should be more stringently policed. This would remove from parents some of their worries about the more troubling alcohol abuse (i.e. out of home, concealed) by their children.

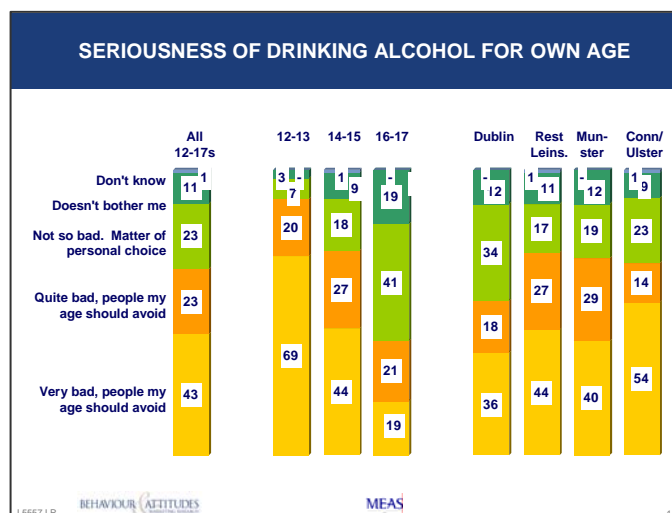
KEY FINDINGS

1. Levels of Consumption

- One in five 12-17 year olds indicate that alcohol consumption is effectively the norm within their peer group, although this masks its' near ubiquity among 16 and 17 year olds (43% drink regularly) and a far lower incidence among 12-15 year olds. Underage drinking is particularly pronounced in Dublin and in urban areas generally.

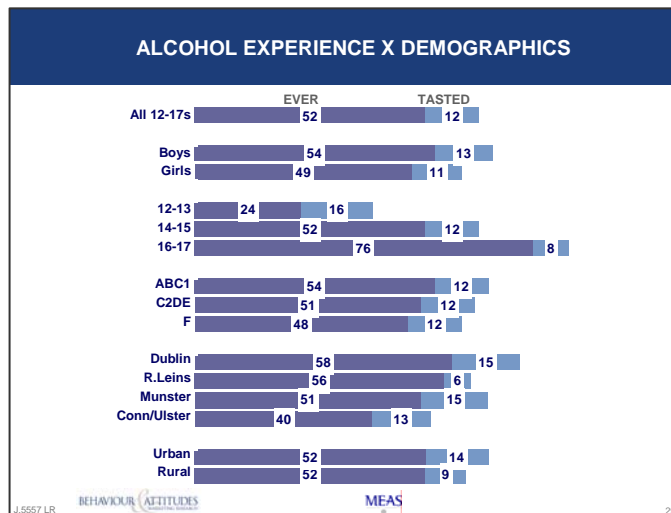


- The majority of 16 and 17 year olds consider alcohol to be relatively harmless and a matter of personal choice. Similar sentiments are most widespread in Dublin.

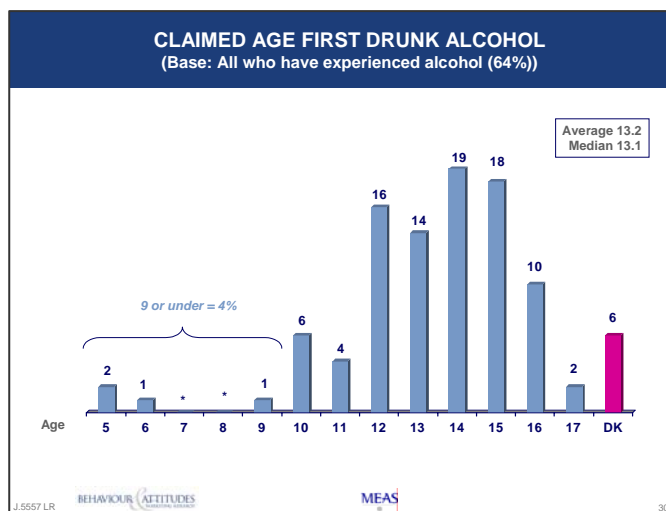


- Focus groups with parents largely back this up and many parents do not confront the issue of underage drinking by their 16 and 17 year olds. Parents are often quite embarrassed by their lack of a decisive stance on alcohol, but they do not have the confidence to advocate very firm rules in many instances.

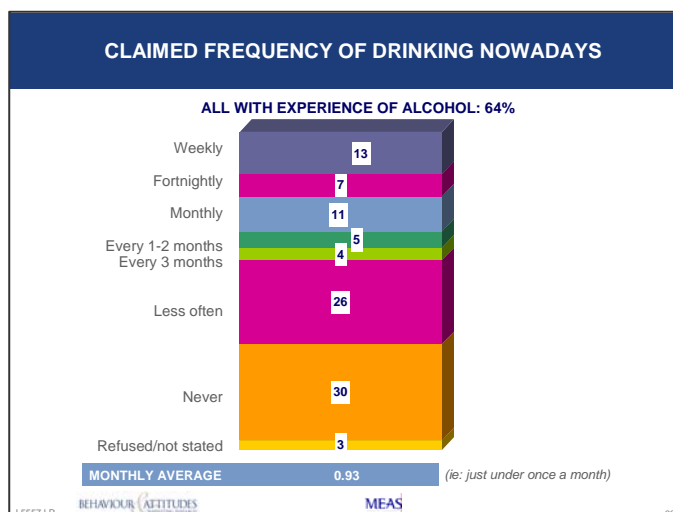
- Two in three 12-17 year olds have experienced alcohol; a quarter of 12-13 year olds, a half of 14 and 15 year olds and three quarters of 16 and 17 year olds.



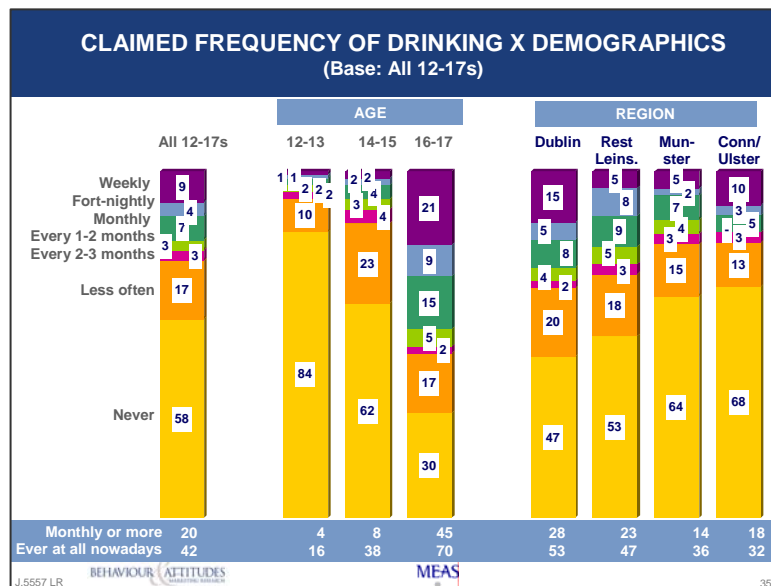
- Of those who have drunk alcohol (64%), a median starting point occurs in or around 13 years of age, but with roughly 30% not starting to try alcohol until 15 years of age or later.



- Of those who have drunk alcohol, 1 in 8 drink it weekly, and almost a third monthly. Underage drinkers consume alcohol once per month on average.

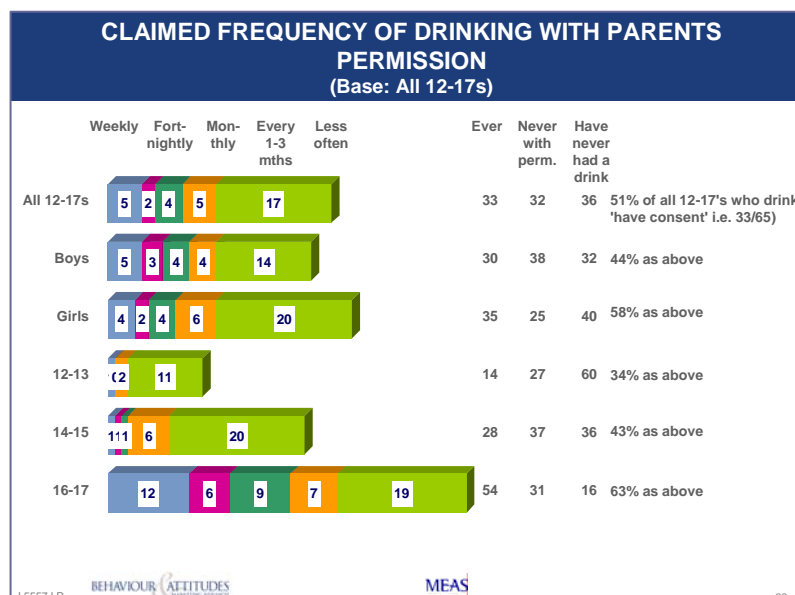


- These figures still mask relatively low involvement in alcoholic experimentation below 15, but the near majority participation by 16 and 17 year olds. 45% of all 16 and 17 year olds drink monthly or more often (but just 8% of 14-15 year olds and 4% of 12-13 year olds).



2. Parental Consent

- The extent to which young people claim to have parental consent for (some of) their drinking is striking.
 - 14% of all 12 and 13 year olds have drunk (at some stage) with parental consent (or a third of those who drink at this age).
 - 28% of all 14 and 15 year olds have drunk (at some stage) with parental consent (or 43% of those who drink at this age).
 - 54% of all 16 and 17 year olds have drunk (at some stage) with parental consent (or 63% of those who drink at this age).



- The qualitative study highlighted the frequently reported ambiguity of parents allowing their children to try alcohol (in moderation) at home, while their friends' parents may be wholly opposed to such experimentation. Many children will either pester their parents as a result, or quite commonly, decamp to the friends house and drink without telling their own parents.
- It was quite striking that parents rarely seem to talk to their children's friends' parents about their view of underage drinking. A very obvious weakness in the present environment is the absence of parents coming together to agree a concerted approach to alcohol (i.e. 'they can all drink at home from 16' or 'no alcohol at all until 18'.) Without more general "standard setting" by parents, and the application of universally endorsed and supported standards in relation to underage drinking, it becomes easy for many kids to 'fall through the cracks', or for parents to incorrectly believe that their own approach to the issue is working. Where each household has different rules, and some have none, lowest common denominator behaviour seems to develop. This contention was supported strongly by the focus groups with teenagers who are already drinking.
- Parents' misgivings about other parents' standards are very striking. A variety of verbatim quotations illustrate the extent and complexity of issues involved.

"I went to a party with her and the mother asked me "can I check whether she's allowed drink tonight or not? If I don't ask, she'll tell me she can". Of course, I didn't know what to say. She's only 16 and it's against the law. I let her stay at the party anyway, but I couldn't stop thinking about it."

(Middle Class, South Dublin, Mother)

"I rung the others' parents after he came home drunk and they said 'He wasn't in our house', 'Our sons weren't drinking', when I know he was drinking their (i.e. provided by other boys parents) alcohol. I was made to feel like the guilty one."

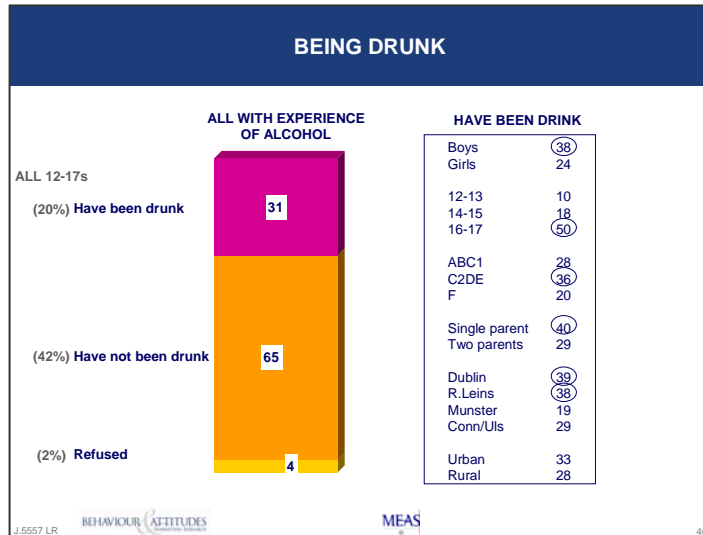
(Mother of 16-year-old boy, North Dublin)

"I don't think you should treat them as your friends, or as equals. They are children and if you can't assert your authority you have no control over them. My rules are strict and they must be in at certain times, and that's earlier than their friends. I feel if I am not strict - and it would be easier not to be - that I can't reassure myself I am doing the right thing...there is too much relaxation of the standards set in the past".

(Working class mother of 4, North Dublin)

3. Drunkenness

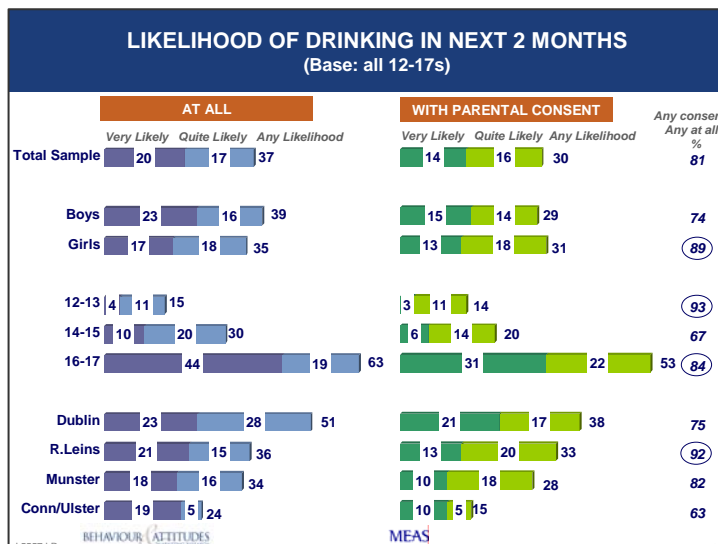
- Among those who drink alcohol just 31% consider themselves to have been drunk (or 20% of all 12-17 year olds), but these are primarily 16 and 17 year olds. Half of 16 and 17 year olds who drink at all have been drunk.
- Being drunk is much more common among boys and in Dublin.



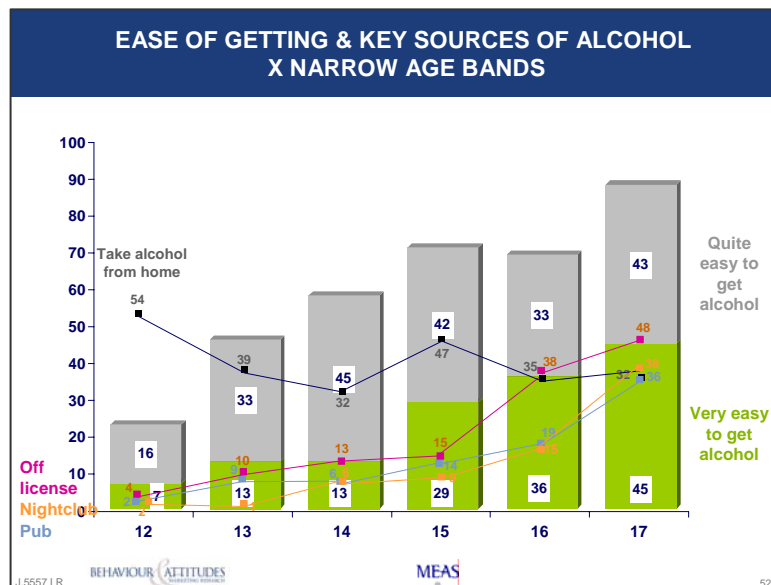
- 10% of those who drink get drunk at least occasionally, or 6% of all 12-17s. We suspect that the incidence of being drunk may be under-reported to some extent, although when asked to define drunkenness most visualise a very wide variety of symptoms (i.e. the coincidence of which would probably indicate severe drunkenness).

4. Access

- The majority of 16 and 17 year olds who drink are also likely to do so in the next two months, and the vast majority of these (6 out of 7) consider that they will do so with (at least some element of) parental consent.



- It is very easy for young people to obtain alcohol: One in three 12 and 13 year olds, two in three 14 and 15 year olds, and four out of five 16 and 17 year olds consider it easy to get alcohol.

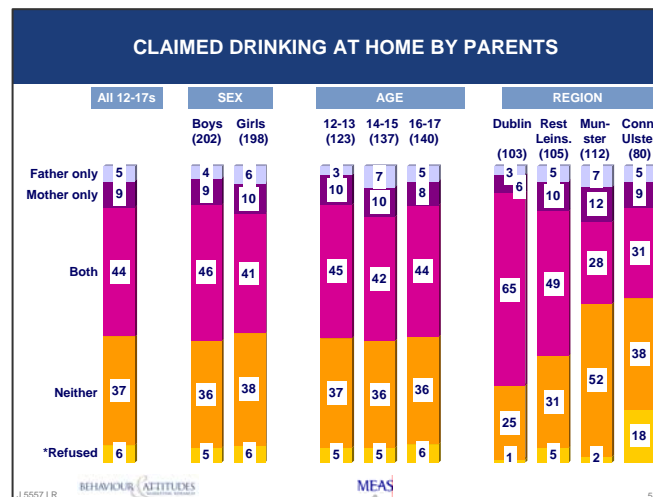


- The youngest respondents take it from home without asking, or get it from their friends.
- By 14/15 many will approach strangers to buy it for them, whereas by 16/17 most can nominate up to three ready sources, with some being confident enough to buy it from licensed premises. The qualitative study indicates widespread use of fake IDs being the norm from 16 or so onwards. Doctored and borrowed passports are reasonably common. The lack of a mandatory national identity card scheme is lamented by many parents.

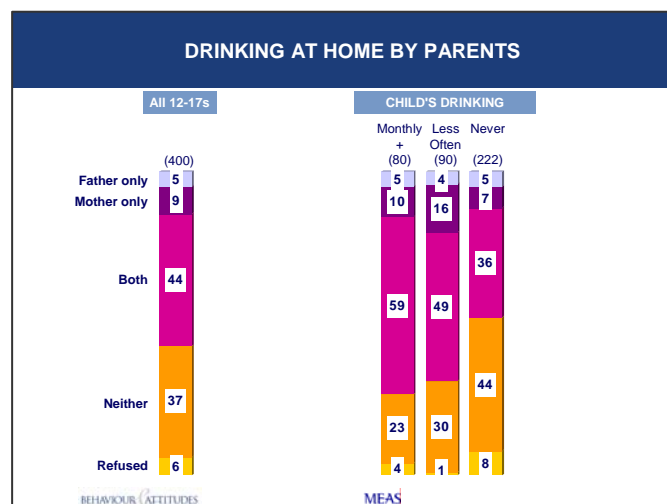
	Total	Sex		Age			Class		
		Male	Female	12-13	14-15	16-17	ABC1	C2DE	F
Given it by friends	53	52	53	46	(58)	54	47	56	60
Take it from home without asking	39	38	41	(46)	39	34	43	37	36
Get older brothers/sisters to buy for them	37	36	39	29	(41)	(41)	35	38	(43)
Get a stranger to buy it for them	29	32	25	18	(34)	(33)	30	31	12
Buy themselves from an off license	22	23	21	7	14	(43)	24	19	(31)
Buy themselves in a nightclub	15	16	13	6	9	(27)	12	14	(24)
Buy themselves in a disco	15	17	13	8	10	(26)	13	14	(29)
Buy themselves in a pub	12	12	12	2	7	(26)	9	13	(19)
Given it at home by parents etc.	8	8	8	7	9	9	(10)	8	2
Given it by friends parents	7	7	7	3	7	9	6	8	5
DK/not stated	3	1	4	6	2	-	1	3	2
<i>Avg No of mentions</i>	2.41	2.42	2.36	1.78	2.30	3.02	2.30	2.41	2.63

5. Drinking in the Home

- Just 1 in 12 children lives in a home where neither parent drinks alcohol at all, and the vast majority have two parents who drink alcohol, particularly in Dublin and on the East Coast generally.
- More than half of children live in homes where one or both parent drinks alcohol at home; Dublin is disproportionately over represented in this regard. Many separate studies indicate a very sharp rise in domestic alcohol consumption (by adults) over the past 10 years.

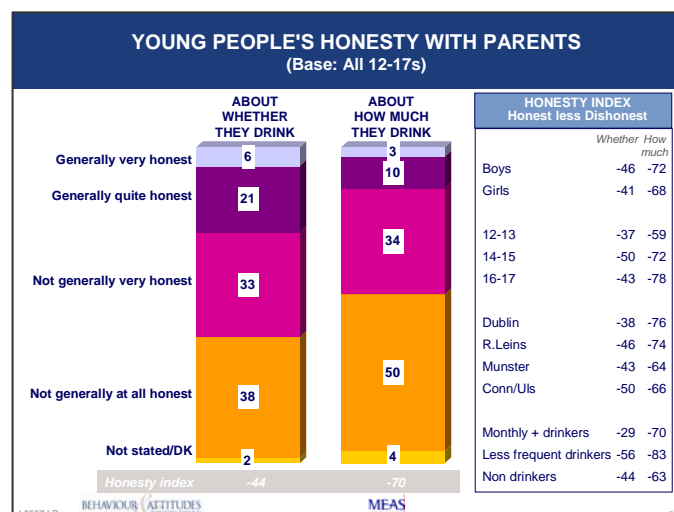


- There is a fairly direct relationship - whether causal or accidental - between parent's and children's alcohol consumption; the most regular underage drinkers largely live in homes where one or both parent drinks alcohol domestically. The qualitative study would suggest that this makes pilfering alcohol from home much simpler for teenagers. Conversely, where alcohol is not consumed at home by parents, the onset of underage drinking by their children is slower. This might also relate to geographic and other social factors, but the apparent relationship between domestic parental drinking and children's drinking is indisputable.



6. Honesty

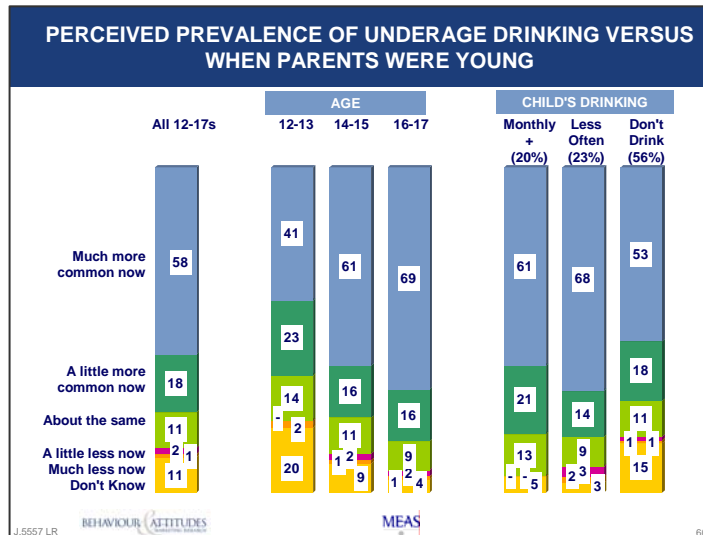
The vast majority of the 12-17 year old quantitative sample indicated that young people are generally not honest with their parents about whether they drink, nor indeed about how much they drink.



- This was a recurrent feature of the qualitative study as well. Many have sanction to drink to a limited extent, but feel confident enough to flaunt this rule, drinking in situations that are not sanctioned, or drinking more where they have some limited sanction.
- This general 'dishonesty' may be surprising but is widespread. Interestingly, it is directly reflective of how parents in this study described their own approach to alcohol, and their lack of truthfulness about it, when they were underage.

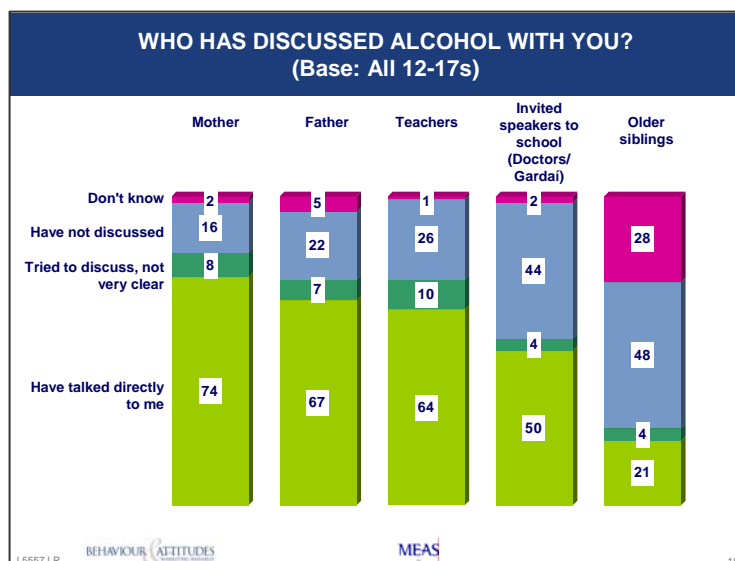
7. Cultural Context

- It seems that, on qualitative evidence alone, most parents behaviour 20 or 30 odd years ago was not vastly dissimilar from that of their children today, and that underage use of alcohol in Ireland is not a new phenomenon, although the range of drinks now available is much wider.
- Essentially, the use of alcohol underage, and being untruthful with ones parents about it, is effectively a cultural phenomenon (in that it is well engrained in Irish society, and largely repeated from generation to generation). However, 12-17 year olds feel that drinking is now a much more serious problem than it was in their parents day, and although parents endorse this view at some level, the historic behaviour (which they report about their own childhoods) indicates that the phenomenon of illicit/deceitful behaviour in respect of alcohol use is not entirely novel.

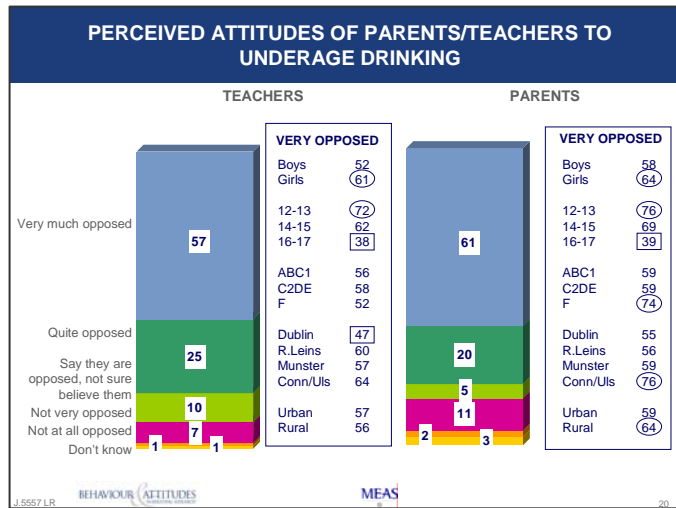


8. Rule Setting

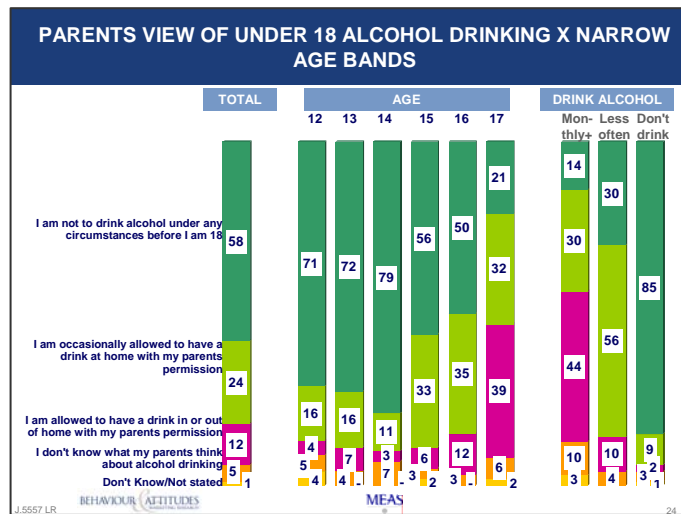
- Rule setting is clearly a weakness overall. While most children have been talked to directly by their mother (74%), father (67%) and teachers (64%) about alcohol, the numbers (who have been talked to) are constant across the three principle age bands. In effect, children may have been talked to once, but the message may not be reinforced or repeated over time, nor have subsequent conversations been initiated.



- What is quite clear is that most (61%) realise that their parents and teachers are opposed to them drinking underage, but the level of strong opposition is felt to sharply erode why they reach 16/17 (just 39% of such parents are felt to be strongly opposed, in comparison with 76% of parents of 12-13 year olds). The qualitative phase suggested that this variation of rules may not be explicitly communicated, but that tacit approval may be hinted at by parents, or interpreted by children from various mixed signals (or the lack of strong objection).



- Three quarters of 12-17 indicate the existence of domestic rules about underage drinking, but the level among 16 and 17 year olds is just 60%. Among this oldest group 36% are 'banned', 34% have occasional in home sanction and a further 25% approval to drink in or out of home. By the age of 15 many are granted some form of parental license and by 17 four out of five drink with permission, they claim.

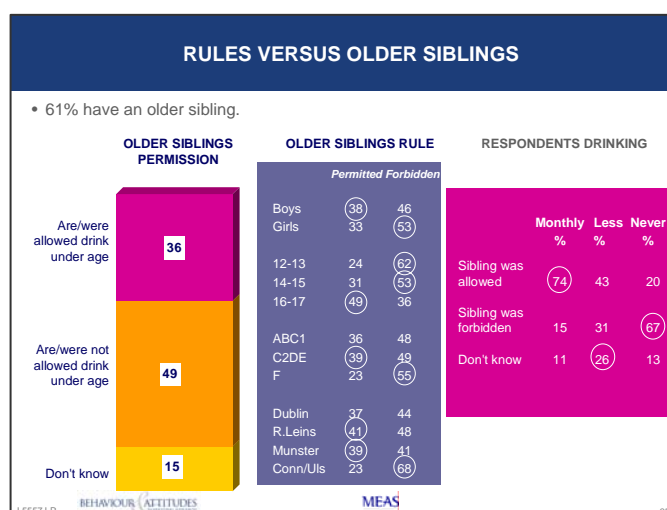


- In the focus groups many mothers were very troubled by this issue, citing many different conundrums:
 - It is hard to 'stay friends' with children if they dogmatically refuse permission to drink in any situation. Often they want children to feel that they are on the same wavelength/understand them, and alcohol may be a less worrying issue, perhaps, than underage sex, or drug use. Parents are much less authoritative with their children nowadays than was the case in respect of their own parents approach. This is felt to be a good thing but makes rule setting or policing much harder.

- Controlled in-home exposure is hoped to introduce children to alcohol in a less pressured and manic environment (in which they will hopefully learn to respect it). Many fear that if this is not allowed their children will be drinking in fields and where they may get into trouble. They would prefer to know when and if they are going to drink.
- Frequently mothers refer to overseas habits in respect of introducing children to wine, and commented that this does not seem to result in manic underage drinking by them. It is almost generally accepted that this must be the right approach, with foreign teenagers 'better' overall behaviour being used to justify this common view. Few, however, seem to acknowledge or think about the vast cultural difference in attitudes to alcohol between Ireland and mainland European countries.
- While not challenging the basis for the legal drinking threshold of 18, many believe that it does not operate in practise, and that their children may be mature enough at 17 (or part of a social group that socialises around alcohol and which it is impossible to forbid).
- There is wide variability from family to family: some girls are allowed drink at 'sweet 16' parties, boys might do so with permission after a Junior Cup Rugby match, many children are allowed a glass of wine at family dinners, or on holidays. Imposing a blanket ban causes too much trouble if other parents are facilitating controlled exposure, and leads to rows with other parents, and, not unusually, to those who advocate a ban being ostracised or characterised as unrealistic (or disconnected from reality).
- Rule setting is clearly hard but the absence of common acknowledgement of an acceptable modus operandi (whether a blanket ban or a compromise) undermines the intentions of many parents. For many parents the adoption of an independent stance is futile and more guidance and general agreement of a standard 'family policy' is needed.

9. Sibling Experience

- What is indisputable is that there is a very direct relationship between alcohol drinking by 12-17 year olds and whether their older brothers or sisters had been previously allowed to drink (underage). The majority of regular young drinkers who have an older sibling indicate that their sibling had been previously allowed to drink underage. Effectively, once one child is allowed drink underage it follows on that other brothers and sister will seek, or be given, (or assume that they have) the same sanction. 41% of 14, 15, 16 and 17 year olds are bought alcohol by older siblings (although we don't know whether this is 'unconditional' purchase or a means of monitoring and controlling their younger siblings behaviour/intake).



- In the focus groups some indicated that their big brothers/sisters were much better and more pragmatic in relation to alcohol than their parents; having 'been there and done that' they keep an eye on their little brothers and sisters, and give them stern warnings even if they may also buy them alcohol. However, this presupposes a degree of responsibility/cop on among older siblings which may not always be present.

10. Attitude Context

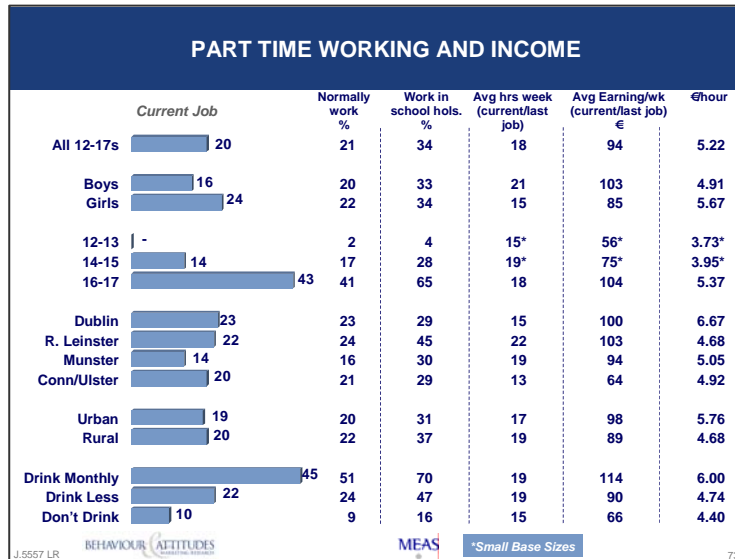
- This document focuses a lot on drinking by parents and speculates about a possible link between domestic parental drinking and children's drinking. However, there are indicators that in many instances this is not always deceitful behaviour, and that children may be operating with some degree of (often well intentioned) parental sanction.
- The research does not conclude that such 'license' is a bad thing per se, and can really only be definitive that the variability of rules about alcohol from family to family may undermine many parents' good intentions.
- It is interesting that many children who drink regularly feel that they should be entitled to drink if their parents do, while similarly, they are twice as likely (40% versus a 19% average for all 12-17s) to indicate that their parents drinking makes it easier for them to take alcohol from the home.
- Again, we can't definitively say that these children are either anarchic or underhand. They may simply be acting along the lines of the license or qualified permission laid down by their parents, or on the basis of some assumed element of tacit approval.
- Very few 16 and 17 year olds agree that drinking alcohol below the age of 18 is necessarily bad for them. It is regarded as a confidence booster but it is known and generally accepted to be dangerous.

ATTITUDES TO UNDERAGE DRINKING: NUMBERS AGREEING MINUS DISAGREEING (All 12-17s)									
	All 12-17s	X AGE			X SEX		X CHILD'S DRINKING		
		12-13	14-15	16-17	Boys	Girls	Monthly +	Less Often	Never
It is dangerous	+61	+78	+66	+42	+56	+66	+8	+48	+84
It is bad for people generally	+46	+67	+70	+4	+41	+50	-31	+50	+72
Bad for you under 18	+45	+70	+70	-1	+39	+50	-47	+27	+84
Helps you fit in	-19	-43	-26	+8	-7	-31	+42	-12	-44
Adults always seem happier after a few drinks	+32	+20	+34	-39	+41	+22	+62	+38	+20
Upsets my parents	+29	+40	-45	+5	+32	+27	-13	+26	+46
Causes fights at home	+25	+38	+27	+12	+26	+25	-10	+20	+38
Makes it easier to talk to people at parties or discos	+1	-37	-4	-40	+10	-7	+88	+12	-33
Makes you feel confident	-17	-59	-28	+29	-16	-18	+77	-4	-53
Its exciting	-43	-76	-53	-6	-37	-50	+35	-22	-80
Helps you forget your problems	-44	-67	-44	-23	-36	-52	+19	-48	-63

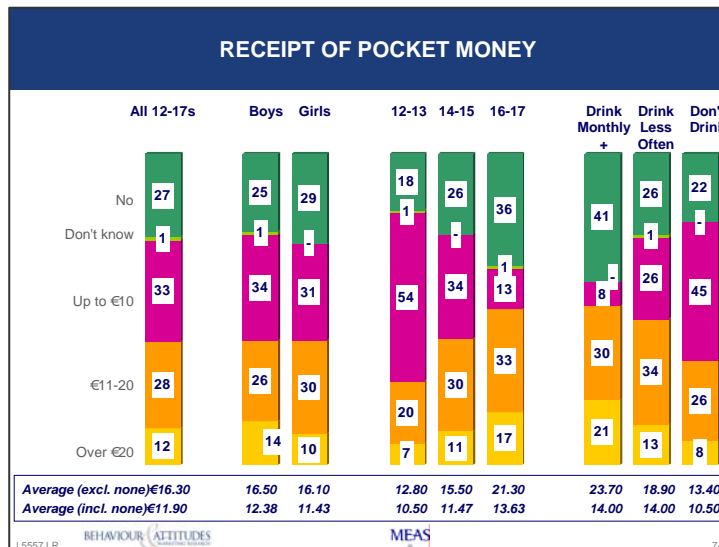
- On the contrary, being drunk is socially embarrassing and while this may be less of an issue when the culture of regular drinking becomes well engrained at 16 or 17, the fear of making a fool of oneself is a marked disincentive to getting drunk.
- Similarly, many accept that girls are more likely to get into trouble with boys as a result of drinking, and this does operate as a deterrent for them also.

11. Affluence and Privilege

- It was frequently mentioned by parents that many young children have ready access to money, characterising one of the key differences between the context of their own youth and that of their children.
- In this and other studies we have noted consistently a growth in parents 'spoiling' and indulging their children in many different ways. This results from a desire for a closer, more equal or adult relationship with their children, but also out of the guilt that many parents experience by spending so much time away from home, at work etc.
 - 9 out of 10 fathers and more than half of mothers are now in employment and the level of female employment, moreso part time than full time, rises to 61% among the mothers of 16 and 17 year olds, according to this study.
 - However, there is no evidence of a relationship between children drinking and maternal employment; the level of maternal employment is actually lower (49% versus 55%) for those children who drink regularly than it is among the generality of teenagers.
- Almost half (43%) of 16 and 17 year olds work part time and the level is highest (between 43% and 51% depending on whichever of two different indices is used) among regular underage drinkers.



- Many children receive regular pocket money as well, and only a third of 16 and 17 year olds do not. There is evidence that those who drink regularly are less likely to be in receipt of pocket money (as a deterrent perhaps?), but those underage drinkers who do receive it are being given an average of €24 per week.



- A typical 16 or 17 year old spends up to €44 per week, although they are in receipt of €58 per week from various sources on average (i.e. working plus pocket money).

WEEKLY INCOME & EXPENDITURE SUMMARIES*					
	AVERAGE EARNINGS (including nothing)	AVERAGE POCKET MONEY (including nothing)	TOTAL AVERAGE INCOME (including nothing)	TOTAL AVERAGE EXPENDITURE (including nothing)	AVERAGE DRINK EXPENDITURE
	€	€	€	€	€
All 12-17s	18.80	11.90	30.70	26.82	2.61
Boys	16.48	12.38	28.86	26.46	3.18
Girls	20.40	11.43	31.83	27.19	2.02
12-13	-	10.50	10.50	13.80	.02
14-15	10.50	11.47	21.97	21.26	.77
16-17	44.72	13.63	58.35	43.71	6.68
Drink Monthly	51.30	14.00	65.30	58.06	11.79
Drink Less	19.80	14.00	33.80	25.62	1.10
Don't Drink	6.60	10.50	17.10	16.56	-

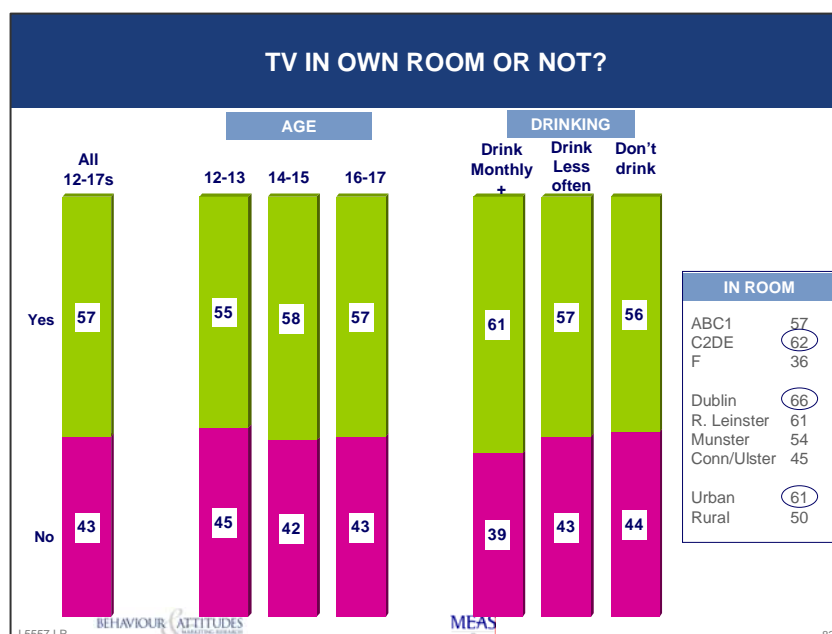
*Dividing total of pocket money/earnings received by all in each cell (i.e. amount of money remains same, but is spread further)

BEHAVIOUR ATTITUDES MEAS

- Alcohol forms only a small proportion of their expenditure (10% for all 12-17s, or 15%, at just under €7 per week, for 16 and 17 year olds) and is evidently quite affordable for potential underage drinkers. It is perhaps encouraging that it is only the sixth largest item in a list of things that children spend money on. 17% of 12-17s spend money on alcohol each week, with a per capita spend €2.53 only, but a far higher average of €14.90 among those teenagers who buy alcohol frequently.
- It is clear that the cost of alcohol cannot act as a deterrent, as teenagers are now quite affluent.

12. Popular Culture, the Media and Alcohol

- The quantitative survey indicated that 57% of all 12-17 year olds (and not increasing very markedly with age: it is 55% at 12/13) have a television in their own room. This is slightly more an urban and working class phenomenon, but not substantially so.



- During the focus groups it became apparent that many children's access to television is virtually unfettered, and the programmes which they watch are relatively adult, while the advertising and programming they most avidly discuss is rarely local, nor indeed screened on terrestrial (i.e. Irish regulated) channels.
- Thus, most have exposure to a wide variety of programming and it is very rare for them to watch TV in the company of either parent.
- This may be unremarkable perhaps, but it is very clear from even the youngest focus groups that many of their attitudes to and perspectives of alcohol are shaped and moulded by their exposure to it through the lens of popular culture. They may have little or no regard for alcohol advertising, nor very much exposure to or awareness of locally originated alcohol campaigns, but they witness massive usage of alcohol by celebrities, footballers, pop stars and so on. Some of this exposure is through tabloid and increasingly broadsheet newspapers and magazines (often their parents), but much of it is from pop culture TV programming and so on.
- The cultural context around alcohol is massively altered, and whereas footballers, pop stars and so on were once 'squeaky clean', many 12 year olds are well versed in the alcohol intake of Colin Farrell, Britney Spears, Wayne Rooney and many others. Alcohol is 'cool' in much of youth culture and society, and this coolness is fuelled by exposure to mainstream media.
- On the evidence of the focus groups this has had a substantial effect in normalising attitudes to alcohol, and would seem to be much more effective at boosting its cachet than overt marketing or advertising by alcohol brands themselves.
- Mobile phones are almost ubiquitous for teenagers; they give teenagers and their parents a greater sense of security, but also facilitate braver and sometimes more reckless behaviour by their kids. They operate as a security blanket but are also central to teens social networking and socialising.

13. Relationship With Adolescent Children

- Other aspects discussed in detail in the qualitative groups, but which are much less statistically quantifiable, underscore how the context of societal change opens up children to many more opportunities to transgress. These are commented upon by both children and parents.
 - Adolescence is now more of an 'awkward age' than it had been in the past, with a more marked delineation between being a child and being an adult.
 - Many, and particularly girls, transit into a limbo between childhood and adulthood much earlier nowadays. They tire of childish things much younger but are not able to live an adult life, although they may have started to dress, look and act older. This phase is as challenging for parents as it is for their children and few know how to handle these changes.

"You're watching people all around you drinking, and you want to try it too, there's nothing strange about that." 14-year-old girl, Dublin

- For boys, sport's participation bonds them to 'the world of the child' for longer, but among young girls sport is increasingly being given up very young.
- Children also have greater confidence and opportunity nowadays, allowing them to overstep a boundary of which their parents may have been much more fearful. This confidence increases their potential likelihood of drinking but also fuels other ills.
- Parents readily list drugs, alcohol, the risk of teen pregnancy, the possibility of becoming involved in random street violence, and exposure to 'crazies'/'perverts' outside the home as major worries.
 - Other subsidiary worries are "falling in with bad company"
 - Dieting and the risk of bulimia/anorexia etc. (mainly for girls).
 - General lawlessness and the risk of gradually drifting 'across the line' vis-à-vis being a public nuisance is also a concern. Teenagers push the boundaries of the law moreso nowadays.

"There is a local curfew now to stop trouble. If they're caught once they get a warning, the second time they're driven home and the third time they have to get their parents to pick them up from the Garda station. They think nothing of it, and have no shame at being driven home: in our day if a Garda looked at you, you'd run away". (Middle class suburb, Rathfarnham, County Dublin)

- Another aspect of the study which is striking relates to parents perception of how honest they had been with their own parents, and the extent to which they ultimately believe what their own children say to them nowadays. In essence, most of the mothers attending focus groups had drunk underage, but concealed this from their parents. They now place particular importance upon maintaining an honest, open relationship with their own children, in the belief that by being closer to them, they know better what they are doing. They would seem to (want to) largely believe what their children say to them about alcohol, although they often are conscious that they had been less than truthful themselves in their own youth. Some clearly do not believe their children all the time, but many want to believe what they say to them.
- The crux however, is that in maintaining an 'adult to adult' relationship of trust and openness, parents often sacrifice their ability to be vigilant, or more in control of their children when the need arises. For many parents however this trade-off is worthwhile; children may not fully tell them the truth, but the greater trust and honesty engendered between parent and child is normally considered more valuable than the stricter rule setting of their own childhoods, which many mothers feel did not work.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Qualitative Phase

- Nine focus group discussions were fielded with children and three with mothers of teenagers. The children’s groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.
- The groups were recruited by experienced field researchers with parental consent being granted in writing.
- The qualitative phase was moderated by two young but experienced researchers (David Fanning and Martha Fanning) and an older researcher (Larry Ryan).
- The groups were structured as follows:

Group	Sex	Age	Class	Location
1.	Boys	10-11	BC1	North Dublin
2.	Boys	10-11	C2	Kilkenny
3.	Girls	10-11	BC1	South Dublin
4.	Girls	13-14	C1C2	Cork
5.	Girls	13-14	BC1	West Dublin
6.	Boys	13-14	C1C2	Limerick
7.	Boys	16-17	BC1	North Dublin
8.	Girls	16-17	C2	West Dublin
9.	Girls	16-17	C1	Athlone

Group	Age	Class	Criteria	Location
1.	30-40	BC1	Mothers of first 14-16 year old child	Dublin
2.	35-45	C2		Athlone
3.	40-50	C12	Mothers of second/ subsequent 14-16	Dublin

- Parents who participated were all alcohol drinkers but no attitudinal or other participation controls were exercised.

Quantitative Phase

- 400 12-17 year olds were interviewed with the quota sample designed to match the known demographic characteristics of such children relative to sex, exact age, social class, region and area.
- Again, written parental consent was granted prior to interviews, but parents were not allowed to monitor the interview itself.
- The quantitative interview was interviewer administered, as opposed to self-completed.
- Refusal rates were comparatively low, and the necessity to grant written permission, despite the context of the study, did not seem to act as an undue impediment to getting parental approval.
- The conduct of the research conformed with the technical standards laid down by ESOMAR and the Market Research Society, and the results (based on the full sample of 400) can be quoted with an accuracy of plus or minus 5%.