

## Underage Drinking Debate

**Underage drinking is one of the problematic issues constantly associated with adolescence. Eshe Nelson, 17, speaks to her peers and gives their perspective on the debate as well as her own.**

Everyone knows that drinking alcohol under 18 is illegal, and just as many of us know that it's a law liberally broken. Because of this the drinking behaviour of young people is widely criticised, and although some people may have provoked damning media reports of reckless drunken behaviour, for the majority of young people there is very little justice in these accusations.

It's understandable that underage drinking is considered a serious problem, but it's also fair to say that it's a problem which is exaggerated by the national media leading some adults into condemning its hellish ways. However according to most young people, the adult perception of what teenagers actually get up to on a Friday night is far from real.

Young people I spoke to agreed. Hannah Austin, 19, reflected back on when she was underage and said; "I think adults can't relate to the culture. My parents don't really understand why me and my friends got drunk before we went out - to save money." Ellie describes underage drinking as; "part of growing up, something you try with your friends for the first time."



Adults being misguided by the media and rarely being a first hand witness has led to an often unrealistic image. Melissa Freeman, 17, says that adults think underage drinking; "is worse than it is and that every teenager is paralytic every night." Popular British comedy, *Skins*, has played a part in creating this image. Initially praised for being so true-to-life of the average British teenager, the infamous *Skins Party*\* now represents what adults consider a typical teenage party. Annabel Davis, 19, thinks that *Skins* is "really unrealistic, you may go to one party like that in your life but it's not like that every single weekend."

Between the demands of school, work and trying to get enough sleep, there is very little time to socialise during the week and no one wants to experience a Sunday morning headache on a Thursday half way through Maths class.

Although the majority of young people do drink and the responsible attitude doesn't extend to everyone, a lot of young people don't consider always getting drunk an idealistic way of life. Melissa Freeman condemns binge drinking as; "a lack of self-control and thinking it's cool to be throwing up and passing out." Underage drinking is recognised as being "unhealthy" and Ellie Child, 17, described the situation as "out of hand" because teenagers are starting to drink younger and younger. Selina Purcell, 17, also recognises the dangers of drinking: "Everyone know it's dangerous because the effects of it won't kick in until we're older, we ignore it and drink excessively regardless."

The government's bid to control what is being considered a worsening epidemic is apparently failing miserably. Legal consequences of underage drinking include arrest and fines of up to £500, however the majority of government legislation targets license holders and does very little to discourage underage drinking. According to Selina "underage drinkers are so common, the age limit doesn't seem to have a major effect on who is drinking, it just stops people drinking in certain places". Hannah agrees with this stating; "it might discourage places not to sell it to underage people but we were never worried about getting caught drinking underage." The laws against drinking seem to be having the opposite to their intended effect. Annabel described it as; "like wanting the forbidden fruit you can't have" and if Eve couldn't fight the temptation, what hope does anyone have.

Everyone needs to find things out for themselves and make their own mistakes. Young people need to experiment with alcohol, act excessively and learn their limits. The novelty then quickly wears off and young people can drink fully aware of what they're doing and by the time they're legally adults they can behave responsibly when the responsibilities start to pile up.

So maybe the answer is to accept that underage drinking happens, then it would stand more chance of being tackled effectively, rather than people either assuming young people are horrendous binge drinkers or ignoring the problem because it's illegal.

And maybe in trying to find a solution we should take a closer look at why young people start binge drinking in the first place. The UK has the third highest rate of binge drinking in Europe and according to the Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS); young people drink because it's become an integral part of their social scene. Well the IAS is right and this tradition didn't start with 16 year olds in 2009. It should come as no surprise that the drinking habits of adults have rubbed off on young people. According to Melissa, adults; "still drink too much on average and just ignore any mention of livers." Drinking is dangerous to everyone's health so rather than having one rule for some and another for others, maybe its time for adults to lead by example.

\*A *Skins Party* involves loads of people, alcohol, drugs, strobe lights and dance music.

### About this article

This article was written by Eshe Nelson, 17.

### 5 comments

drinking age legislation

For almost three decades, anyone in the United States had to be twenty-one years of age or older in order to legally purchase a drink. The arguments about the "fairness" of this law have been considered since long before the law passed. An Alaska lawmaker has suggested a significant change to the law, however. Members of the military would be exempted from the regulation, if the newly-proposed bill passes. The proof is here: [Alaska drinking age reduction proposed, not likely to pass](#)

zanzhine o. from california, 13 April 2011 10:15

Article

i have read though you article on under age drinking and the country plays a big part in it is the law that entitles young people to drink i have had a look at some age limits they are all listed below -

5 years old or over.(in private)

16 years old or over in a pub or restaurant with a table meal as long as an adult purchases the alcohol (no adult is required to be present in Scotland)

18 years old or over.(pubs, bars, restaurants, off-licences etc.)

you can be 5 years over to drink in your home!

you have an alcoholic drink if you have a meal !

if the4 police and government want to tackle under age drinking they should look at the law and change we are one of the only countries that has so many set

age limits in US its strictly 21 anywhere if your not you don't drink!

i like the article but people cant change under age drinking unless the law changes and we all know that isn't going to happen.

danny from england, 28 December 2009 19:41

Booze Britain?

Thanks for this article, it helped me write one of my own [I'll pop the link in at the bottom]. Drinking is a huge problem in this country and this is as much to do with the fact that it is very much an accepted past time, the damage that it does to your body quickly forgotten when you're pumped full of booze. Awareness needs to be raised, specifically amongst very young drinkers - pre 15, it has been proven that alcohol not only damages the development of your brain, but can also have other long lasting effects too.

I'm working on a project called Voicebox with the charity vinspired and we are getting to the heart of what kdis care about. it may be of some interest [hopefully].

Anyways here is the article that I have written - thanks for your help:

<http://voicebox.vinspired.com/blog/commentary/booze-britain/>

T

Tarik (age 19) from London, 03 August 2009 23:11

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[When's old enough to drink?](#) At the age of 16 you can join the army and kill another person or have sex and get married if you choose to. Yet you can't have an alcoholic drink. Is this right? Eshe Nelson, 17, puts this question to her peers.

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