



**Health Promotion  
and Protection**

**CHILD AND YOUTH DRINKING: THE CONTEXT OF  
ALCOHOL USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN NOVA  
SCOTIA**

*In-Depth Qualitative Research with  
Adolescents age 13-18 years and Their Parents*

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**FINAL DRAFT REPORT**

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***Turning Information Into Insight***

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## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection (NSHPP) has credible information about the scope and prevalence of alcohol use among minors in Nova Scotia, however, very little can be said of the context of such alcohol use and influences that prevent, reduce, or promote alcohol use. To move forward in addressing cultural shifts identified during development of the provincial alcohol strategy and to explore the context of various risk factors, NSHPP commissioned Focal Research to undertake qualitative research with adolescents and their parents across the province. Specifically NSHPP wished to obtain greater insight about the context of underage drinking; how adolescents access alcohol, why they consume alcohol, and the context of such consumption. Rural and urban adolescents across the province were engaged in formal and informal discussions. Differences between alcohol-related attitudes and experiences of younger (13-15 years) and older adolescents (16-18 years) were explored separately among male and female adolescents. Meaningful adolescent and parent engagement is required to develop successful strategies to prevent and/or delay onset of drinking and to reduce harms when drinking is initiated. Therefore, the study also included parents and legal guardians of participating adolescents to assess parent's knowledge of, attitudes towards, and approaches to preventing and/or addressing alcohol use by their child(ren).

In total, 12 focus groups with adolescents (8 groups) and parents (4 groups) were conducted across the province (Halifax, Sydney, Yarmouth, and Amherst) from January 30 to February 6, 2008. Overall, 110 participants took part in the study - 76 teenagers between 13-18 years of age and 34 parents. Those taking part in the study completed individual surveys (pre-session, in-session and follow-up surveys) throughout the research process to capture sensitive or private information and to obtain individual responses outside of the influence of group dynamics. Participants also took part in other within-group assignments designed to keep participants engaged, elicit both verbal and non-verbal responses, and to stimulate discussion.

In cooperation with the Nova Scotia Adolescents Alcohol Strategy Group, participants were selected to reflect mainstream students and parents living throughout the province based on the quantitative results of the most recent Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey (Poulin & MacDonald, 2007). As with all qualitative research the findings presented reflect the responses of those taking part in the study and should not be generalized to the population at large. Certain high-risk populations of adolescents (e.g. those living outside of family households or out of school) were excluded and are beyond the scope of the current study. The findings provide insight and contextual information for understanding quantitative results surrounding underage alcohol consumption in the province. The research was conducted in compliance with Canadian Tri-Council Ethics, federal and provincial privacy legislation and in accordance with national (MRIA) and international codes of conduct (ESOMAR/ICC) for social research.

*Parents and adolescents responded positively to the project and were engaged in the discussion and group activities. There was consensus found for many of the key issues explored including, challenges facing adolescents and parents, reasons for drinking or not drinking among adolescents, accessibility to alcohol, context of underage drinking, and suggestions for delaying and reducing alcohol consumption by minors. Generally, accessibility and how alcohol is portrayed in the media were also perceived to play significant roles in stimulating*

*alcohol use by adolescents. However, there were also specific issues and considerations identified by age, gender and for urban versus rural adolescents.*

## 1.1 Key Findings

### Key Challenges Facing Adolescents

- Key adolescent pressures identified across all groups included pressure to perform well academically; pressure to find and hold down a job; coping with parent's expectations and changing relationships with parents; dealing with personal image issues; peer pressure; alcohol, drugs and sex; and, coping with violence and bullying.
- Parents also felt pressured to help their children maximize their potential, develop responsibility, yet keep them safe. However, issues of cost and affordability are significant barriers mediating opportunities and outcomes for adolescents in Nova Scotia: "It isn't an even playing field".
- Technology has changed how kids communicate and, according to one parent, gives "every kid a conch shell", in reference to Lord of the Flies, and the power to summon action and escalate relatively trivial matters.
- All groups reported that, other than "hanging out" on the streets, there were only a few areas where adolescents were able to go in the community to spend their free time.
- Some believed that there was "a real lack of support when you are not mainstream" and that it was hard because "certain age groups are looked upon by adults as trouble". The community is interested in the "younger kids" but [adolescents] "seem to scare them". As a result, many adolescents reported experiencing discrimination and feeling isolated from their community with limited involvement or connection with other members of the community or each other and limited options for socializing within the community.
- Due to limited age-appropriate opportunities for socializing, adolescents are often exposed to "more grown-up experiences" including violence, aggression, alcohol, and drugs.
- Adolescents reported using a number of coping mechanisms to deal with pressures of school, friends and at-home stress, including: being with friends, sports and extra-curricular activities and drinking alcohol or doing drugs.

### ***Exposure to Alcohol***

- Almost half of the adolescents taking part in the study had consumed alcohol in the last year, a rate twice that noted for tobacco or drug use. Girls and those age 16 to 18 years had higher rates of past year consumption.
- Alcohol consumption among peers and friends was also common, especially for those 16 years or older. About 70% of adolescent participants reported that most of their friends consumed alcohol.
- Levels of exposure to tobacco and cannabis use through friends were substantially lower with only about one-third of participating adolescents reporting use by 50% or more of their friends. In fact, about one-third said that they had no friends who smoked cigarettes or cannabis as compared to only 9% whose friends for alcohol.

### ***Attitudes towards Drinking by Youth and Children (Underage Drinking)***

- Generally, participants spoke of alcohol as a fact of life and part of growing up. It is glamourized and made “to look exciting and cool” in advertising and is ubiquitous at social events.
- Adolescents believed that they have the choice of whether or not to consume alcohol despite the fact they were under the legal drinking age.
- There was generally high tolerance for drinking and over-drinking by adolescents, suggesting the activity is considered inevitable and has been normalized for most participants. Attitudes ranged from acceptance that it is “easy to get” and is “just going to happen”, to personal responsibility (“it’s your own choice not to drink” and peer pressure (“you end up drinking to be part of the group”).
- The majority of parents expressed negative views of drinking by adolescents but also considered alcohol a normal part of society that needs to be treated with responsibility.
- Parents expressed stronger concerns about drug use by adolescents than alcohol use although, when prompted, participating parents acknowledged there were more negative impacts for adolescents arising from alcohol use.
- There was a consensus that despite efforts to discourage consumption by minors “kids are going to drink” and that efforts need to focus on “keeping them safe” and not in prohibiting the activity “which just makes it more attractive to kids”.



- There was acknowledgement that society as a whole is fairly accepting of drinking by minors with few consequences for adolescents involved or adults facilitating underage consumption.

### ***Social Context of Underage Drinking***

- Adolescents rarely if ever reported drinking alone with underage alcohol use usually involving at least one other friend. Drinking by adolescents typically occurs at home or at homes of friends or anywhere adolescents congregate including “in the woods”, “on the street”, “in parking lots” “camping” and “mainly on weekends” during the school year.
- Participating adolescents reported that most drinking occurs in private homes “when parents aren’t around”. Lack of supervision, boredom, curiosity, and access to alcohol creates opportunity to experiment.
- Non-drinking adolescents also “hang out with friends” at home or at the home of friends but without alcohol involved; “My friends and I just don’t drink, wouldn’t even think of it”.
- For younger drinkers the intent is to “get drunk as quickly as possible” so liquor tends to be consumed quickly on a trial and error basis. In fact, for many taking part in the study, early teens and junior high was characterized as the key time for experimentation with drinking.
- In contrast, as they got older, many adolescents claimed that they settled down with their drinking. In most cases, they were still drinking but less likely to drink to excess; “Grow up and not into getting drunk anymore”, “Older guys they will take their time, learn to space [their drinks] and take shots”.
- Adolescents thought the principal difference in alcohol consumption between kids and adults is that “teenagers drink to get drunk and older people drink to be social”.
- Drinking and overdrinking were associated with dances, parties and times when larger groups of kids congregate primarily due to the availability of alcohol in this context usually through older kids or adults.
- Although drinking happens during parties or events, adolescents report that pre-drinking is more the norm with kids drinking beforehand and arriving at an event intoxicated or drinking early at the event “so they can sober up before they go home” or are exposed to parents.
- Adolescents arranged to be away from home such as “staying at friend’s house over night”, camping, or other arrangements so parents would not see them drunk.

- Among younger adolescents 13-15 years who drink, there were few differences reported in drinking patterns or amounts consumed between the sexes although drinking most often was opportunistic and segregated occurring with same-sex friends.
- Boys and girls tended to drink differently as they start to get older. Boys tended to report higher alcohol consumption when they were “drinking with their buddies” but as they took on more responsibilities and were involved in relationships with girls they tended to reduce their consumption. There was also a shift to a more protective role in looking out for girlfriends while drinking.
- In contrast, girls who consume alcohol often indicated they drank more around males to reduce inhibitions and get attention; “Relaxes me, makes you feel sexier, adventurous, like, ‘look at me’”.
- However, girls universally found drunk males to be a “turn-off” and “kinda gross”, “sometimes funny but mostly embarrassing”. Males tended to be aware of this although some thought drinking especially by girls improved their chances of sexual activity (e.g., “getting laid”).

## Accessibility

- Methods for obtaining alcohol were many and simple including having others purchase it such as older people, cab drivers, “runners” who are paid to obtain alcohol, siblings and other family members, friends and through the use of fake ideas. Even parents acknowledged that “if they wanted the liquor they could get it easy”.
- In addition, there were specific locations such as drive-thrus and smaller retail outlets that were perceived as easy locations to obtain alcohol, although almost all of the older adolescents 16-18 years had been in a liquor store and most personally knew underage friends who had purchased liquor from a licensed retail location.
- In discussion, the price of alcohol was noted as a factor facilitating use, the amount consumed and how it is consumed; “if you pay less you drink more”.
- Aside from price, packaging was also noted to improve accessibility and ease of drinking; “The coolers look and taste just like pop”, “Bottles, like Wisers, fit into a purse or bag perfect”, “Larger sizes, plastic bottles, easy to transport”.
- There was mention made by a few rural adolescents and parents about increased access to alcohol through local corner stores and gas bars that have qualified for NSLC licenses and concerns about this trend for making it easier to get alcohol.



## Advertising

- Participating adolescents and parents mentioned the role of advertising in shaping attitudes towards alcohol use among minors in Nova Scotia.
- Most of the youngest participants especially girls (13-15 years) taking part in the study believed teens learn about alcohol through commercials on television where they show individuals who are made to look as young as teenagers enjoying alcohol and having fun, generally people that they “want to look like and be like”.
- Older adolescents especially males 16-18 years noted the use of humour, young women, and “sex” to sell liquor; “It’s funny stuff with hot chicks. Yah I pay attention”.
- Some of the girls also related to the advertising noting that alcohol “loosens your inhibitions” and “makes you act and look sexier too”.
- Parents noted that the ads were not generally depicting the lifestyles of adults but instead glamourized drinking and, in particular overdrinking by teens and young adults; “These ads aren’t targeting any adults I know”.

## Type of Alcohol

- Adolescents, especially girls, were most likely to start out drinking coolers and “sweeter” alcoholic drinks whereas beer was mentioned more often by the boys, although it should be noted that beer was not a strongly preferred form of alcohol for most due to the fact that it has a lower alcohol content and “takes too long to get a good buzz”. “Chugging”, “caps”, “shooting” and other drinking games or variations were mentioned to enhance the speed of getting drunk.
- Among those adolescents who currently drink there was strong preference for “hard liquor like rum, vodka and whiskey” for a number of reasons including easy portability, higher alcohol content, low price, and speed of intoxication; “You can drink it straight, get faster effects, “Can conceal it in other drinks like pop or juice”.

## Impact of Alcohol (Risk and Harms)

- The primary concerns among all participants surrounding alcohol use by minors centered on the risk for injury or death especially due to drinking and driving. This was particularly relevant for older adolescents taking part in the study and those living in rural areas of the province.
- All participants recognized that they should not drive or be a passenger in a car with someone who has consumed alcohol. Everyone, parents and adolescents alike, cited personal awareness of incidents involving tragic outcomes for adolescents as well as adults and drunk driving especially in the rural communities.

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- There were also concerns about dependence with many noting dependence and alcohol use among family members such as a parent, uncle or grandparent.
- Among adolescents, in particular older participants and males, there was growing concern and intolerance for “date rape” and “taking advantage of someone when they are drunk”; “not at all cool” and a “good way for someone to find themselves getting hurt”. Adolescents reported that this topic had also been the subject of television programs geared towards adolescents and appears to resonate with them.
- Embarrassment associated with drunken behaviour and incidents that have occurred when drunk are heightened due to the use of technology to record incidents (e.g. cell phone) and post for public or private display (e.g. Face Book, YouTube).
- Adolescents and parents recognized that alcohol use could have other long and short-term health implications related to liver and brain development as well as injuries and death although for adolescents and parents these risks were not well understood.
- In contrast to drinking and driving and date rape there was little spontaneous mention of other alcohol induced injury or alcohol poisoning although once prompted most adolescents reported awareness of or first-hand exposure to a variety of incidents.
- Participating adolescents, especially the boys, mentioned the role of alcohol, aggression, and violence in the community. In fact adolescents felt that “fights tend to happen anyway with teenagers” but that for adults “alcohol is usually involved”. Given that adolescents are out on the streets or in and around locations where adults are drinking they reported high exposure to violence associated with alcohol use.
- Females also reported similar concerns about violence and alcohol use but mentioned other significant impacts surrounding pregnancy, unprotected sex followed by sexually transmitted diseases/infections.

***Factors Impacting Consumption of Alcohol by Minors***

- Adults and adolescents were asked to generate a list of reasons why kids drink or don’t drink. There were many similarities between the reasons generated by parents and adolescents particularly surrounding the impact of positive and negative peer pressure, boredom, involvement in other activities, parental attitudes, self-esteem, and accessibility.
- The influence of friends and parental attitudes towards drinking were reported to have a strong influence on adolescent drinking behaviour and played key roles in determining whether or not underage drinking was “cool” and acceptable or “pointless and stupid”.
- In contrast to parental response, adolescents uniformly reported underage drinking to cope with stress and escape problems and worries. These reasons for drinking were

spontaneously mentioned in only half of the parent groups falling fairly low on the list of reasons generated. The prevalence of this reason for drinking among adolescents was surprising and disturbing for many parents who considered it to be “a more adult type of reason for drinking”.

- Parties, occasions for celebrating and rewarding oneself as well as “relaxing or unwinding” were also cited by teens as key reasons for drinking reflecting the impact of adult cultural norms for adolescent alcohol use. Parents never mentioned these reasons for drinking and tended to over-estimate the role of curiosity. The youngest adolescents were more likely to cite curiosity and the desire to get drunk as motivating factors.
- High self-esteem, confidence, success in school, sports or other activities as well as engagement in something meaningful were all seen to counter alcohol use.
- Conversely, advertising, price, and easy accessibility were considered to normalize alcohol use and influence cultural attitudes toward alcohol use.

## 1.2 Recommendations - Finding Solutions

Participants generally agreed that in order to “truly” address underage drinking, resources likely need to be invested further “upstream” so that, by the time kids are in their teens, resiliency, physical activity, self-esteem, strong family and community relationships are already established. This means that other subsequent “downstream” solutions are more likely to be effective in dealing with the short and long-term goals for delaying or reducing underage drinking in Nova Scotia including education, prevention, policy, and practice.

- “Show kids there is a lot more to do than just drinking”. The primary recommendation emerging from the process was to provide varied, accessible, options to adolescents for entertainment, sport, recreation, and leisure that are age appropriate, affordable, engaging, relevant, and “gives [them] reasons not to drink”.
- Increased access to sports or physical activity was seen as another important area for “blowing off steam” and using excess physical energy in a positive way instead of being channeled into violence or aggression. Not only are organized sports expensive and limited for older adolescents but the average adolescent has little to no access to informal recreational or social sport and reported low levels of physical activity.
- The cost of entertainment and recreation options were also seen to be contributing to problems, with alcohol often perceived to be a cheaper choice for “having fun”. Adolescents argued that investment in other affordable options of entertainment for adolescents has practical benefits if “they don’t want us to drink and cause trouble for them”.

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- Transportation, especially in rural areas, was a significant issue for adolescents and needs to be considered to enhance involvement in recreational and social events. If parents do not provide transportation services most kids will be unable to take part in many extracurricular activities. Parents noted difficulties in scheduling children for various activities.
- Older adolescents, especially males in the rural areas, expressed strong interest in owning and maintaining a vehicle. The associated care, maintenance, and responsibility of the vehicle was seen to give them a vested interest in remaining drug and alcohol-free. However, insurance, liability, and lack of space or supervision for working on vehicles makes the acquisition and maintenance of a car “almost impossible”.
- Many adolescents reported feeling disenfranchised and isolated from the community. Finding ways to increase and encourage positive interaction between adolescents and their community was seen to foster the development of healthy connections for adolescents and counter community fears and prejudices surrounding teens; “Kids need to be seen as a valued part of the community because right now they don’t feel they are”.
- A critical factor identified as impacting solutions was the “ever-looming spectre of liability” that limits and, in many cases, obstructs proactive efforts to engage adolescents in any meaningful way in schools and communities. This has produced cynicism and apathy on the part of adolescents (“what is the point, whatever you come up with [they] find something wrong with it”) and growing concern from parents that this trend is further alienating and isolating adolescents, reducing leisure and recreation opportunities in the community.
- Adolescents need to be directly engaged and involved in creating solutions. Not only was this seen to be critical to ensuring relevancy and involvement of adolescents but parents and kids alike reported residual benefits such as increased confidence, the acquisition of new skills, development of positive relationships and creating a sense of ownership; “Kids should have say and input” or “it won’t work”.
- Adolescents want information on alcohol and associated risks but it needs to be non-judgmental, easy to pick up or access, and relevant; “You never hear what actually happens when someone drinks, you always hear don’t do it”.
- Peers and older adolescents were seen as most credible for educating, informing, and engaging younger teens on the issue of underage drinking. Not only can they “talk the talk” with adolescents, they have also “walked the walk” and faced the issues younger kids are having to deal with and adolescents felt they were more likely to engage in dialogue.
- In other cases though arguments were made to provide age appropriate or age segregated activities for adolescents so that younger kids are not exposed to the behaviors and

pressure of older adolescents; “need our own underage clubs, dances for younger and older kids” .

- Involvement and inclusion of adolescents in the community, in mentoring younger children and building, operating or maintaining facilities and programs was also perceived to foster a sense of stewardship toward their community; “If we feel some ownership we will take better care of it”, “starts to make us feel better about ourselves”.
- Parents and adolescents recognized that parents also need support and information not just on underage drinking but in supporting relationships and dialogue with their teens. There was a notable lack of outreach and proactive support of healthy family relations with most services and programs focused primarily on crisis intervention which was seen to perpetuate the stigma associated with seeking information on alcohol use.
- There was consensus that any efforts to specifically address underage drinking need to start at younger ages with junior high a key target group; “That is where it starts. No point waiting until it is too late to start talking to them”.
- Adolescents and especially parents expressed concerns about the impact of advertising that glamorizes drinking in particular by young people and had strong reservations about how alcohol is marketed suggesting current advertising is “dishonest and misleading” and needs to be restricted.
- There were also concerns that ads and marketing strategies were deliberately targeting adolescents and normalizing drinking by linking alcohol consumption with adolescent activities like sports, music, parties, foods and rewards. Given the hazards associated with alcohol use participants suggested alcohol advertising should be subject to similar restrictions for other high-risk products like tobacco, and include “warning labels” clearly defining risks.
- While limiting the advertising and marketing of alcohol was considered to offer benefits to all community members, there were strong opinions expressed that it should be countered with strong social marketing messages that introduce the realities of drinking among adolescents focusing on those issues, messaging, and impacts relevant to adolescents.
- Accessibility was also a concern, especially among parents, although adolescents also noted the role of easy access and cheap prices in supporting their underage drinking; “They have a drive-thru liquor store at Needs. It’s the same as a Wendy’s drive thru.” Some parents observed that “increases in underage drinking statistics seem to have occurred since alcohol has become more heavily promoted” and “widely available in our province”; “Started seeing the risks go up when the prices went down”.

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- There were also calls for more significant consequences for facilitating or engaging in underage drinking; “The only way to stop underage drinking is not to sell or give liquor to underage kids”.
- “Drinking at 14 was fun, now at 18 it has become something to do”. Adolescents acknowledged that there is a culture of drinking in the province that has normalized drinking at all levels and that needs to be addressed to support healthier lifestyles and communities but this requires “engagement with adolescents and families” and “investment of [funds and resources] that has not been there in the past”.
- Investment in aging or non-existent infrastructure was also recommended to provide, more “outdoor venues”, “indoor facilities”, “good places to go”, and recreational sites that reflect the interests of adolescents today and not the recreational interests of an aging population; “Need more exciting, up-to-date stuff that we like, not the stuff our parents do; “We have got nowhere to go right now”.
- Adolescents also mentioned the use of technology to deal with alcohol related issues such as using a card-based system for purchasing alcohol and installing breathalyzers on the cars.
- In closing, many participants, adolescents and adults, noted that underage drinking is not an isolated problem but rather indicative of other issues in society that need to be addressed in a more comprehensive and concerted manner; “Alcohol [use by adolescents] is a symptom of another bigger problem, we need to fix”.



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

The Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection Addiction Services has taken a leadership position and developed a provincial alcohol strategy to address alcohol-related harm in the context of best practices, including population health approaches (e.g. prevention programs, social marketing, public policy) and harm reduction interventions targeted at the most harmful patterns and contexts of alcohol consumption (e.g., drinking to the point of intoxication, drinking while pregnant, drinking and driving, etc).

Entrenched in the resulting strategy is the vision of broad cultural change – where Nova Scotia is a society in which individuals, families, and neighborhoods support responsibility and risk reduction in alcohol use. It is a community of communities in which alcohol-related harm has been eradicated through effective prevention and targeted interventions. If or when Nova Scotians choose to drink, they do so without harm to themselves, their families, or their communities, reflecting a culture of moderation.

### 2.1 The Need for Cultural Shifts

During the stakeholder consultations in the development of the alcohol strategy, several cultural shifts were identified that are of particular relevance to the current study. These include:

- **Denormalize underage drinking** - Shifting from a culture that views underage alcohol use as a normal and accepted rite of passage among adolescents to a culture that has meaningful rites of passage for adolescents that do not involve alcohol. For optimum strategies to target adolescent alcohol use, proven professional expertise in prevention and early intervention will be intrinsic in the adolescents culture's context and media.
- **Denormalize binge drinking and drinking to intoxication** - A shift to a culture is desired in which binge drinking and intoxication are no longer socially acceptable. Research commissioned by the Department of Health Promotion and Protection indicates that alcohol consumption among young adults (under 30 years of age) in Nova Scotia is supported by a sub-culture that normalizes and glamorizes drinking, intoxication, and alcohol-related consequences (Focal Research Consultants April 2005; June 2005).
- **Approaches to awareness and educational resources** - Alcohol-related educational resources are a necessary component of the collective initiatives to reduce alcohol-related harm. Resources should reflect balanced, factual information developed in collaboration with particular audiences. There must also be a shift from one-way communication to a model of sharing information and meaningful exchange to facilitate healthy action. This means shifting from "telling" people to meeting people where they are, and motivating them to take control of the message for themselves. To be effective in motivating positive action (including changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours), alcohol-education resources must incorporate factual and interactive messages developed for the target audiences.

- **Normalize help-seeking** - Currently there is a stigma associated with help-seeking that appears to be embedded in the belief that Addiction Services is only for those who are alcohol- and/or drug-dependent. A new culture is envisioned for any individuals and families seeking or needing help for alcohol-related issues. It is a culture in which the public understands that easily accessible and confidential services offer both early intervention and treatment options. Having Nova Scotians recognize that it is normal to seek help for alcohol-related issues is critical to removing the cultural barriers that keep many from accessing the programs and resources available through Addiction Services.
- **A balanced approach to alcohol policy** - A policy process that better balances the interests of health protection, harm prevention, the health benefits of moderation, and the Nova Scotia economy is essential to encourage a cultural change in alcohol-related social norms.

## 2.2 Underage Drinking In Nova Scotia

The latest Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey (2007) reported that 70% percent of students had consumed alcohol at some time during their lifetime, with the average age at first consumption being 13 years of age. When it comes to heavy or binge drinking, 28% of students reported they had consumed 5 or more drinks at a sitting in the month prior to completing the survey. The percentages of students who engaged in this drinking pattern ranged from 4% in grade 7 to 52% in grade 12. The majority of underage drinkers purchased their alcohol from friends (57%) or parents (20%), or took it from home without permission (13%).<sup>1</sup>

According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (2007), international comparisons of alcohol and cannabis use by young people indicate that Canada ranks among the leading countries for rates of prevalence and frequency, with alcohol being by far the most common substance used by adolescents. Binge drinking (typically defined as consuming five or more drinks on a single occasion) is common in adolescence and young adulthood. Nationally, over one-third of students in grades 7–9 have exhibited binge drinking behaviour (Health Canada, 2006). Other surveys showed that more than one-third of young drinkers drank at a hazardous level. (Flight, J., in press; Adlaf, Begin, & Sawka, 2005).

Based on the 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS) Substance Use by Canadian Adolescents report released in 2007, in contrast to adolescents from the rest of Canada, adolescents in the Atlantic region were found to be more likely to drink heavily, engage in binge-drinking, exceed low risk drinking guidelines and consume alcohol at hazardous levels.

### 2.2.1 Risk factors

Experts agree that a cumulative number of risk factors, rather than any one specific risk factor, increases the likelihood of substance use or abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Nova Scotia Student Drug Use 2007 Highlights Report (2007) Poulin, C and McDonald, W. Halifax: NS

Individual characteristics associated with a greater risk of use and abuse include age (with use increasing during adolescence and peaking in mid to late 20's); gender (with males more likely to use substances, but with a narrowing gender gap according to recent surveys); attitudes and beliefs about the risks of use; impulsivity and sensation seeking (see Comeau, Stewart and Loba, 2001); and other childhood psychological disorders (i.e., conduct disorder).

According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse's *Adolescents in Focus* report (CCSA, 2007), certain interpersonal factors also serve as risk factors for substance use and abuse. Poor parental practices such as inadequate monitoring and family conflict have been associated with children's use, and peer substance use is one of the strongest predictors of substance use by young people. Academic failure (beginning late in the elementary levels), lack of commitment to school, and low bonding with peers and teachers are also risk factors.

A significant amount of research in the environmental and cultural spheres shows that increased availability of a substance increases the likelihood of its use, especially among young people. Social norms and the way alcohol use is portrayed in the media also play an influential role (CCSA, 2007). Based on self reports of Canadian Addiction Survey respondents from Nova Scotia, it is estimated that 40% of the alcohol sold in Nova Scotia is consumed by those under 30 years of age.

While age of initiation is also considered an important risk factor, adolescents in Quebec tended to report earlier age of onset for drinking yet had lower rates of harmful or hazardous drinking especially compared to adolescents in Atlantic Canada (CAS 2004). Thus while age of initiation is one factor to target for prevention there is a need for greater understanding about the nature of other factors influencing drinking patterns among adolescents.

### **Key Findings 2007 Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey**

- 51.7% of Nova Scotia students (male and female) in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12 consumed alcohol in 2007.
- By the time students reach Grade 12, 80.5 % students report using alcohol at least once in the previous 12 months.
- According to the 2007 survey, the average age of first alcohol use was 12.9 years
- About 30% of Nova Scotia Students consume alcohol more than once a month (5.6% Grade 7, 24.6% Grade 9, 35.5% grade 10, and 53.3% Grade 12)
- 27% of students reported drinking to the point of drunkenness in the 30 days prior to the 2007 NS Student Drug Use Survey, unchanged from the 2002 survey.
- 28% drank 5 or more drinks in one sitting at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey
- Students not of legal age to purchase alcohol reported obtaining alcohol from friends (57%), or parents (20%), or from home *without* permission (13%).

## **2.3 Research Objectives**

While NSHPP has credible information about the scope and prevalence of alcohol use among adolescents in Nova Scotia, very little can be said of the context of such alcohol use and

influences that prevent, reduce, or promote alcohol use. In order to move forward in addressing the cultural shifts identified and exploring the context of risk factors identified, NSHPP commissioned Focal Research to undertake qualitative research with adolescents and adults across the province to inform the development process. Specifically NSHPP wished to obtain greater insight in the following areas:

- Where, when, and why drinking occurs
- How (and from whom and where) minors access alcohol
- The role of alcohol in the context of adolescent culture
- Perceptions about the risks associated with alcohol use
- Perceptions and experiences pertaining to underage drinking
- Parental influences and beliefs around adolescent alcohol use, including how their current or past use of alcohol factors into their approaches to adolescent alcohol use.
- Key influences in the Nova Scotia culture that may potentially impact adolescent alcohol use (such as availability of alcohol outlets across Nova Scotia communities, or promotion of alcohol, or perceptions about consequences)
- Whether or not adolescents and parents recognize signs of developing problems
- Whether or not adolescents and/or parents are able (or know where to) access information, resources, and help.

## 2.4 Research Design

The primary purpose of the study was to obtain insight regarding underage accessibility to alcohol and the context of alcohol use to inform related social marketing, communication and policy issues. To ensure findings would be relevant for these purposes, Focal worked cooperatively with the research team at NSHPP throughout the project.

A four phase qualitative design was used consisting of the following components:

1. **Development Phase** (January 2008)
  - a. Recruitment criteria and protocols
  - b. Project design and scheduling
  - c. Materials design (recruitment screener, in-session materials, discussion outline, follow-up survey)
2. **Recruitment Phase** (January 22-30, 2008)
  - a. Screener design and supervised recruiting (parents and adolescents)
  - b. Pre-session Survey
  - c. Group compositions, confirmations and re-screening
3. **Research Phase** (January 30 to March 30, 2008)
  - a. Individual Responses (In-session)
  - b. Discussion Groups
  - c. Follow-up Survey
4. **Analysis and Reporting Phase** (April – June, 2008)

- a. Transcripts of sessions (April 2008)
- b. Survey summaries (recruitment, in-session and follow-up surveys) (May 2008)
- c. Report preparation (triangulation method; sessions notes)

The study was conducted according to national and international research standards (*MRIA*, *ICC/ESOMAR*, *Canadian Tri-Council Policy: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*) and in accordance with *PIPEDA (Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act)* and client (NSHPP) specifications. Focal Research assures the confidentiality and security of all information collected during the course of the project and will not release such information without the express written consent of each participant and Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection.

### 2.4.1 Development Phase

The project team met with the Adolescents Alcohol Strategy Group to determine research design and participant characteristics. Based on the background research it was expected that accessibility to alcohol and contextual factors surrounding attitudes and alcohol use would vary by age, gender and urban versus rural area of residence. Therefore, the research was designed to optimize the information obtained during the project while accommodating potential differences among these key sub-segments in the population of adolescents and parents.

Project protocols, a pre-session questionnaire, and recruitment screener were designed in cooperation with the project team to ensure the selection of appropriate respondents, obtain general background information and to comply with various practical and ethical requirements:

- Demographic Profile (siblings, household composition, education)
- Recreational and leisure activity profiles (mixed activity levels)
- Attitudes, beliefs and motivations related to alcohol use and other substance use or high-risk activities
- Exposure to alcohol or other substance use their own use or use by others
- School performance (mixed grade outcomes)
- Siblings (mix with older and/or younger siblings, and no siblings)
- Access to public or personal transportation

Group	Age	Male		Female		Total Groups
		Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
Adolescents Group	13-15 years	1	1	1	1	4
Adolescents Group	16-18 years	1	1	1	1	4
<b>Subtotal Adolescents Groups</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
Parent Group	13-15 years	1	--	--	1	2
Parent Group	16-18 years	--	1	1	--	2
<b>Subtotal Parent Groups</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total Groups</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>

### 2.4.2 Recruitment Phase

All recruiting was conducted by supervised, fully trained, professional interviewers from Focal's centralized facility in Halifax Nova Scotia from January 22 to February 1, 2008.

In consultation with NSHPP and prevention staff at the District Health Authorities the following areas were selected for recruitment and included one parental group and two adolescents groups ( 1 group 13-15 years and 1 group 16-18 years; 1 group male and 1 group female).

- Urban Areas:
  - *Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)*
  - *Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM)*
- Rural Areas:
  - *Yarmouth, Shelburne, and Digby County area residents* (excluding Town of Yarmouth residents).
  - *Cumberland County area residents* (including Amherst and Springhill residents)

Qualified participants were recruited according to research industry standards (MRIA, ESOMAR/ICE), in accordance with Canadian Tri-council Ethics and client specifications using Focal's proprietary pre-screened database of randomly generated households and cold calling techniques.

Parental permission was obtained before speaking with qualified adolescents. Both eligible adolescents and a parent/guardian were screened to meet participant criteria. Anyone who had ever received treatment and/or support services for substance use or related issues was excluded from participation.

In total, 12 participants were recruited per group to ensure approximately 8 to 10 would attend each session. There were 144 qualified respondents (96 adolescents; 48 parents) recruited to take part in the research and 110 participated in the sessions (76 adolescents; 34 parents).

All recruited participants received a confirmation letter by mail approximately one week in advance of the sessions including a parental permission form that had to be signed and brought by the adolescent to the session. Signed parental consent was not required for respondents 18 years or older. Participants also received a confirmation and re-screening call the evening prior to the sessions. An independent interviewer (e.g. someone who did not recruit for the study) checked key participant criteria to verify respondent qualifications and reminded participants to bring all required materials (e.g. identification, signed parental permission form).



**Focus Group Schedule:**

Group	Location	Description	Gender	Number of Participants
Group 1 - Jan 30/08	Halifax	Adolescents age 13 - 15	Males	10
Group 2 - Jan 30/08	Halifax	Adolescents age 16 - 18	Females	10
Group 3 - Jan 30/08	Halifax	Parents of males age 13 - 15	Parents	8
Group 4 - Feb 1/08	Yarmouth	Adolescents age 13 - 15	Females	10
Group 5 - Feb 1/08	Yarmouth	Adolescents age 16 - 18	Males	9
Group 6 - Feb 1/08	Yarmouth	Parents of males age 16 - 18	Parents	9
Group 7 - Feb 5/08	CBRM	Adolescents age 13 - 15	Females	9
Group 8 - Feb 5/08	CBRM	Adolescents age 16 - 18	Males	9
Group 9 - Feb 5/08	CBRM	Parents of females age 13 - 15	Parents	9
Group 10- Feb 6/08	Amherst	Adolescents age 13 - 15	Males	9
Group 11- Feb 6/08	Amherst	Adolescents age 16 - 18	Females	10
Group 12- Feb 6/08	Amherst	Parents of females age 16 - 18	Parents	8

**2.4.3 Research Phase**

Group sessions in Halifax took place at Focal Research's focus room facilities and at a similar focus room venue in Cape Breton at the University of Cape Breton. The rural sessions were conducted at hotel facilities in Yarmouth (Rodd Inn) and Amherst (Wandalyn Inn).

All sessions were audio-taped. In addition to the professional moderator, a research assistant observed all sessions and took extensive notes detailing verbal and non-verbal participant responses.

Signed informed consent was obtained from participants prior to audio taping of the sessions. All confidentiality assurances were reiterated at the beginning of the sessions and strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

Group sessions lasted approximately 2 hours including completion of the pre-session and in-session questionnaire.

In cooperation with the research team at NSHPP the moderator (T. Schrans) developed a detailed discussion outline and in-session questionnaire.

In order to keep adolescents engaged throughout the research sessions, elicit verbal and non-verbal input, and control for the impact of various factors including peer pressure, confidentiality and information sensitivity, a variety of techniques were used during the sessions:

- An in-session questionnaire to record individual responses and information,

- Use of break-out groups in which 4-5 people worked together on an assignment to identify and present reasons “kids drink” or “kids don’t drink”;
- The use of scenario testing and problem solving in which participants were given unlimited resources and a mandate to delay the age of onset of underage drinking and reduce the amount and frequency of consumption by minors;
- Discussion of challenges facing adolescents, the social context of underage alcohol consumption and over-drinking, accessibility and attitudes towards alcohol and underage drinking, alcohol impacts and potential for addressing alcohol consumption by minors and related issues.

A debriefing was conducted with the key project personnel at the completion of each of the sessions to ensure all issues are adequately addressed and to discuss key findings emerging from the process.

Participants received a \$50.00 cash honorarium to offset any travel or other expenses in attending the sessions. All participants were also given Addiction Services support materials and referral information upon completion of the group sessions as well as alcohol fact sheets and information provided by NSHPP.

### **a) Individual Responses**

Both individual written responses and interactive group responses were included in the design of the session. The written responses captured the individual’s reaction, before it was open to “modification” by the group. It also protected personal privacy in gathering sensitive, private, information about the impact and use of restricted substances and activities. This dual response approach simulates the situation whereby individuals are presented with something to consider, form an opinion, discuss it with others, and retain or change the initial opinion. It also ensures that adolescents are able to express his or her personal opinions without fear of censure by other group members.

### **b) Discussion Groups**

Discussion outlines were prepared for the adolescent and parental groups (Refer to the discussion outline for details)

The discussion groups were 1.5 hours in length and focused on five main areas:

- Personal Context
  - Current challenges facing adolescents
  - Pressures (home, school, community)
  - Leisure activities
  - Access to money
- Context of Alcohol Consumption
  - Social versus personal consumption
  - Reasons kid drink or don’t drink
  - Accessibility
- Context of Over-drinking
  - Underage consumption versus adult consumption

- Contributing factors
- Impacts of Alcohol Consumption
  - Personal, family, peers and community
  - Risks associated with drinking underage drinking
  - Exposure to overdrinking and outcomes
  - Facts and figures
- Solutions
  - How do we delay the age of onset for underage drinking?
  - How do we reduce amounts consumed by underage drinkers?

### c) Follow-up Survey

All participants (n=110) were re-contacted approximately 6 to 8 weeks after taking part in the sessions to complete a follow-up survey to ensure that they were not negatively impacted by participating in the study. All participating adolescents and parents were asked, if since taking part in the research he/she:

- *has changed any of their, behaviours, attitudes or beliefs about underage drinking?*
- *has discussed underage drinking with a parent/child or someone else?*
- *has any other ideas, suggestions for addressing underage drinking?*
- *wishes to talk to someone else or receive additional information about underage drinking or anything else?*

The information from the follow-up was incorporated in the report.

### 2.4.4 Analysis Phase

Focus group tapes and notes were transcribed by an independent research assistant who had not been in attendance during the group sessions.

In-session and post-session surveys were edited, coded and entered into SPSS and excel (open-ended comments) data files. Survey data were linked to pre-session surveys (recruitment screeners) and analyzed to provide contextual background for participants as well as profiles of independent responses for individuals in each target group.

In-session group assignments were combined, summarized, and compared among the various groups:

- *Reasons Kids Drink*
- *Reasons Kids Don't Drink*
- *Recommendations for Delaying and/or Reducing Underage Drinking*

Report tables were produced summarizing demographic characteristics of participants, exposure to alcohol, and attitudes towards alcohol and beliefs.

Individual survey responses and group discussion obtained from the transcripts and in-session note-taking were grouped according to the discussion outline.

A triangulation method was used to produce the report based on the project transcripts, in-session notes, flipcharts, and survey results (pre-session, in-session and follow-up surveys). A summary for each group was produced by the in-session observer (L. MacRae). The audio tapes for the session and in-session materials were transcribed by a research assistant who had not attended the group sessions. An independent senior research associate reviewed all materials and produced an overall summary of key findings and observations (C. Wolfe Stewart). The moderator and principal investigator then used these resources to prepare the report, verify and confirm findings and incorporate participant verbatim responses and survey responses (T. Schrans).

A draft summary report was produced for client review that included the results for the in-sessions questionnaires and evaluations as well as discussion outcomes and recommendations.

## **2.5 Limitations**

Qualitative research is used to obtain more detailed, richer information from a specific group of the population of interest. This information is particularly helpful in identifying contextual background and cues as well as determining more in-depth responses to specific issues or areas of inquiry. As with all qualitative research, the findings are neither representative nor generalizable to the populations of interest. Nonetheless, this method provided an appropriate forum for engaging adolescents and parents in discussion about underage drinking and various factors impacting adolescents in Nova Scotia.

It should be noted that participation was restricted to those adolescents that were comfortable participating in a group situation and were able to express responses orally and in writing. In order to relate findings to the most recent quantitative data from the Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey (Poulin & MacDonald, 2007), participation was restricted to adolescents currently attending junior high or high school. Given the methodology (e.g. parental permission requirements, household sampling, current enrollment in school) high-risk adolescents living outside of conventional households and/or “drop-outs” were excluded from participation. Thus, assessment of high-risk adolescents is beyond the scope of the current study.

While findings for the current study should be considered suggestive and not conclusive in nature, this study provides important contextual insight as to the factors underlying underage alcohol consumption in Nova Scotia and in evaluating recent quantitative results for alcohol use among adolescents in the province.

## **2.6 Future Considerations (Informing Best Practices)**

It is always challenging in designing qualitative research to optimize group compositions within desired budget and time frames. This often requires a balance between group diversity and homogeneity in order to stimulate discussion yet ensure relevance for participants.

In qualitative studies with adolescents, sex is generally recognized as an important variable for segmentation; not only in response to recognized differences between males and females but also due to the potential impact of participant sensitivity to these differences in a group setting. Age

is also a factor that due to rapid developmental changes is even more of an issue for adolescents aged 13-18 years than for adults.

Given these understandings, discussion groups in the current study were broken out by both age and sex. However, over the course of the project a number of potential opportunities for design improvement were identified that are likely relevant for other qualitative research involving adolescents in Nova Scotia.

Based on the results of this study the following recommendations when conducting qualitative research with adolescents in Nova Scotia are submitted for consideration:

- **Break the sessions into narrower age groups** (e.g. 13-14 years; 15-16 years; 17-18 years)

*There were strong differences observed in life experiences and responses depending upon age and grade. In the current study participants were grouped over a three year age span. Younger participants in each grouping tended to defer to the older adolescents in the session requiring moderator time and effort to minimize or negate. There was also concern in exposing younger participants to 'older' experiences and opinions.*

- **Ensure all group participants are at the same education level** (e.g. 13-14 years in Jr. High only; 15-16 years in High School only; 17-18 years in High School only)

*As noted above, while age was an important discriminator, school level also distinguished participant experiences. Therefore, when conducting groups with adolescents it is likely important, for discussion and protective purposes, to ensure that respondents are all in the same level and 'type' of school (e.g. elementary, junior high or high school).*

- **Ideally, when exploring the use of a controlled or prohibited substance or activity among adolescents, participants should be split by level of use** (e.g. no use; low use; heavy use)

*Initially the groups were mixed in order to address the study objectives most efficiently. Specific protocols were developed and applied during the sessions to counter any potential normalization or endorsement of use arising from discussion in the groups. Moreover, all participants were followed up individually to continue to assess and address any issues. However, in the future, when dealing with the use of controlled or prohibited substances or activities, we would advise that groups dealing with adolescents are segmented based on use patterns to allow for more open discussion that is not influenced by social desirability or other group dynamics. Such an approach also ensures adolescents are not exposed to inappropriate information or situations that are not relevant to their experience.*

## 3.0 REPORT

### 3.1 Profile Of Participants

Participants were selected to represent adolescents and parents of adolescents that were fairly typical of males and females, age 13-18 years living in family households and currently attending either junior high or high school in Nova Scotia.

Adolescents were selected from both rural and urban areas throughout Nova Scotia to include assessment of differences associated with area of residence. For purposes of the current study, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM Groups) and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM Groups) were considered to represent urban areas whereas those residing in Yarmouth, Shelburne, and Digby counties (i.e. Yarmouth Groups) or in Cumberland County (i.e. Amherst Groups) were considered to represent rural areas of the province.

Adolescent participants were also grouped according to age (13-15 year versus 16-18 years) and sex (male versus female adolescents) for a total of 8 sessions conducted (two in each geographic area; four for each sex and four for each age group).

For parental sessions, participation was limited to those who had a child taking part in the study in order to link parental attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours to adolescent responses.

Due to project considerations, only one parental group per area was possible. Therefore, to facilitate discussion and enhance homogeneity within each group the parental sessions were selected to match one of the two adolescents groups conducted in each area ensuring that over the course of the study discussion occurred among parents for each of the primary adolescents groups. There were four parental sessions conducted in total comprised of one session in each geographic area:

- 1 group of parents of young males age 13-15 years living in an urban area
- 1 group of parents of young females age 13-15 years living in a rural area
- 1 group of parents of young males age 16-18 years living in a rural area
- 1 group of parents of young females age 16-18 years living in an urban area

#### 3.1.1 Adolescents

To facilitate discussion, attempts were made to ensure each adolescents group was fairly homogeneous in terms of experience and life stage (e.g. age, sex, grade level, maturity, ability to communicate). However, within each group there was some diversity sought in terms of school performance, involvement levels in various extra-curricular activities and household composition.

Overall 76 adolescents participated in the discussion groups with a total of 39 females and 37 males, evenly divided between those aged 13-15 years (n=38) and 16-18 years (n=38) and those living in urban (n=38) and rural (n=38) areas of the province.



Table 1: Profile of Adolescents Groups

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>Having Own Bedroom</b>	34	35	34	35	<b>69</b>	<b>90.8%</b>
<b>Current Living Situation</b>						
Live with Mother & Father	24	25	25	24	<b>49</b>	<b>64.5%</b>
Live with Mother	9	8	11	6	<b>17</b>	<b>22.4%</b>
Live with Father	---	2	1	1	<b>2</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
Live with Mother & Step Father	2	2	1	3	<b>4</b>	<b>5.3%</b>
Live with Father & Step Mother	1	1	---	2	<b>2</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
Live Alone or with other Legal Guardian/ Friends	1	1	---	2	<b>2</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
<b>Number of Siblings</b>						
No Sibling	4	3	3	4	<b>7</b>	<b>9.2%</b>
One	20	16	18	18	<b>36</b>	<b>47.4%</b>
Two	9	11	10	10	<b>20</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
Three or More	4	9	7	6	<b>13</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
<b>Sibling Composition</b>						
No Adult Sibling	28	25	29	24	<b>53</b>	<b>69.7%</b>
Adult Sibling (19 years+)	9	14	9	14	<b>23</b>	<b>30.3%</b>
<b>Average Grade on all Courses at School</b>						
80%+	17	22	19	20	<b>39</b>	<b>51.3%</b>
70-79%	12	14	12	14	<b>26</b>	<b>34.2%</b>
60-69%	8	3	7	4	<b>11</b>	<b>14.5%</b>
Below 60%	---	---	---	---	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>

- The majority of adolescent participants (64%) were currently living with both parents, while one-quarter indicated living in single-parent families, mostly with mothers (22%).
- Over 90% of the adolescents had their own bedroom suggesting some access to privacy.
- Almost all had access to a computer at home, most often located in their room although about one-third had a “family computer” with shared access in a common area. Cell phones were also the norm especially for girls taking part in the study.
- Most adolescents in the study had at least one sibling (91%), with 30% having older brothers or sisters over 19 years of age.
- Just over half of adolescent participants (51%) self-reported average grades of 80% or higher in school, with about one-third (34%) reporting average grades of 70% to 79%.

## 3.0 Summary Report

## 3.1.2 Parents

Overall 34 parents took part in the study evenly divided between being the parents of girls (n=17) or boys (n=17). Parents were also evenly divided between having children aged 13-15 years (n=17) or 16 to 18 years (n=17) and residing in urban (n=17) or rural (n=17) areas of the province.

Table 2: Profile of Parent Groups (n=34)

	Gender Group		Total (n=33)	
	Male (n=16)	Female (n=17)	(n)	%
<b>Age Category</b>				
35-44 years	6	12	18	54.5%
45-54 years	8	5	13	39.4%
55+ years	2	---	2	6.1%
<b>Number of Children</b>				
One child	2	2	4	12.1%
Two children	9	8	17	51.5%
Three children	3	6	9	27.3%
Four or more children	2	1	3	9.1%
<b>Mother Tongue</b>				
English	16	16	32	97.0%
French	---	---	---	---
Bilingual Always	---	---	---	---
Other Language	---	1	1	3.0%
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Single/Never Married	---	3	3	9.1%
Married/Common-law	14	11	25	75.8%
Separated/Divorced	2	3	3	15.2%
Widowed	---	---	---	---
<b>Work Status</b>				
Full time	14	10	24	72.7%
Part time	1	4	5	15.2%
Seasonal Employed	1	1	2	6.1%
Unemployed	---	1	1	3.0%
Homemaker	---	1	1	3.0%
<b>Occupation Category</b>				
White Collar	7	3	10	30.3%
Grey Collar	6	6	12	36.4%
Blue Collar	3	6	9	27.3%
Income Supported	---	2	2	6.1%

Note: One parent did not complete the pre-session questionnaire

- Parent participants were evenly split between mothers (n=17) and fathers (n=16). Their median age was 44 years, with female parents skewed slightly younger.
- All but one of the participating parents reported English as their first language.
- The majority (76%) were married or living in a common-law relationships.

**3.0 Summary Report**

- About half (52%) had two children in household, and over one-third reported having three or more children (36%), some of which included blended families and step-children (n=6).
- Almost three-quarters of parents (73%) in the discussion groups were working in a full time capacity, with similar proportions in each occupational category (blue-collar: 27%; grey-collar: 36% and white-collar: 30%).
- Only about one in every ten had one parent at home full-time, with two parents working full-time in more than half of all the households represented.

**3.2 Challenges Facing Adolescents**

The first part of the focus group centered on the challenges/issues facing adolescents today at school, home, in the community and with friends. Specifically, discussion centered on the kinds of decisions and accompanying stresses that adolescents encounter today, how they deal with challenges and identification of ‘what’ is important to them.

Key pressures identified across all groups included pressure to perform well academically; pressure to find and hold down a job; coping with parent’s expectations and changing relationships with parents; dealing with personal image issues; peer pressure; alcohol, drugs and sex; and coping with violence and bullying.

Adolescents reported using a number of coping mechanisms to deal with the pressures of school, friends and at-home stress, including: being with friends, sports and extra-curricular activities and drinking alcohol or doing drugs.

**3.2.1 Pressures at School**

Grades, peer pressure around image, and being in the “right crowd”, verbal and physical bullying, and alcohol and drug use were consistently mentioned as school pressures across all groups, all ages, and both sexes.

- Participating adolescents and parents acknowledged that adolescents are under increasing pressure to perform well academically. This tended to be the first pressure mentioned among those aged 16-18 years, although adolescents in all the groups reported anxiety about school performance and the impact it has for their future.
  - *You have got to get good grades to go to University and be successful;*
  - *Can’t get anywhere anymore without good marks;*
  - *It is really hard if you are stupid or struggling;*
  - *You are going nowhere if you are stupid;*
  - *Can’t get a good job without an education.*

## 3.0 Summary Report

- Living up to sibling's performance or parental expectations and pressures to do well often creates stress and self-esteem issues for both sexes, and was mentioned most often by the girls taking part in the study; "I'm never going to be as good as my sister".
  - *I can never live up to my older [siblings]. I am just not as smart or as good.*
- Consistently, adolescents 13-15 years found the transition from elementary school to junior high school to be particularly difficult and stressful; they are expected to be more independent with little preparation or support.
  - *Nobody cares about you anymore;*
  - *Suddenly expect you to take care of everything yourself and you screw up;*
  - *Different teachers, different classes, they don't know you;*
  - *In elementary everything is calm, everyone are friends, get along but in junior high you are labeled in groups; you're always trying to fit in.*
- This finding was confirmed by older adolescents who indicated that changes from elementary to junior high were more dramatic and negative than going from junior high to high school.
  - *I think it was the biggest change going from elementary to junior high;*
  - *Switching classes, teachers, lockers;*
  - *When I was in elementary school I never thought I would face drugs and alcohol in junior high;*
  - *Everything changes. Very scary;*
  - *Going to elementary school I remember playing GameCube and then a year later in junior high I started drinking on weekends;*
  - *We are signed up for D.A.R.E. in elementary and were so proud we weren't going to drink, smoke or do drugs then hit junior high and did it all.*
- Starting in junior high participants in all age groups found violence and bullying to be more prevalent than was the case in elementary school. This was reported to be stressful for males and females alike with the perception that there is little that can be done to address the issue.
  - *At school there is a lot bullying, fights, more than in elementary school;*
  - *Very common, people get in your face for no reason, just to intimidate you;*
  - *This is a regular thing, average of 2 to 3 fights per week;*
  - *You don't have to do anything, just get in someone's way;*
  - *I try not to draw any attention to myself;*
  - *Everybody knows someone who gets picked on and if you try to do anything about it they just turn on you;*
  - *Teachers, parents can't do anything. Maybe make it worse;*
  - *I feel bad sometimes[about people being bullied] but I don't do anything about it;*

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- Regardless of age or gender most participants, especially in the urban areas, agreed there was a need to be tough in school; “Toughness is how you can stand up to people, challenge people by yelling in their faces, intimidation”.
  - *People try to pick on people. Fights don’t involve two people anymore, more like groups;*
  - *They get whoever they can [together] and the other [group] gets who they can, like gangs;*
  - *They will use brass knuckles and stuff. Just beat the crap out of them and push them into lockers.*
  
- There is very strong pressure on adolescents of all ages regarding “the way [they] look” or “how [they] dress”. Adolescent girls were most inclined to mention appearance especially in regard to weight issues. Boys also mentioned problems with body self-image.
  - *Girls are supposed to be skinny and guys are supposed to be bulked up;*
  - *I never got picked on cause I was big but little or mouthy guys can take a beating;*
  - *Anyone who [looks] different is gonna suffer.*
  
- Many of the parents cited peer pressure as the predominant issue adolescents currently face at school, mainly pressure to “fit it”, “wear the right clothes”, “have the right accessories” and “be thin”. Most parents were frustrated and felt helpless to protect their children from this type of pressure or know how to counter negative body image especially for their daughters.
  - *My daughter checks 10 times before she goes out the door for school;*
  - *They are trying to look like Paris Hilton;*
  - *School can’t do anything; doesn’t do anything.*
  
- Gossiping was also seen to have become more malicious than in the past, especially among the girls. Most of this was attributed to technology, allowing bullying to extend beyond school and reach adolescents at home or in the community.
  - *Instant messaging means everyone can know what’s going on;*
  - *It can be pretty vicious and you can’t get away from it;*
  - *Follows you.*
  
- Parents generally expressed discomfort with the heavy computer and technology involvement of adolescents; “[instant widespread on-line communication] has changed how kids interact leading to increased isolation bullying and intimidation” and “decreased activity levels”.
  
- This ease of communication was also considered instrumental by both adults and adolescents in organizing groups in response “to real or imagined insults” or slights inside and outside of school.

**3.0 Summary Report**

- *Somebody's having a thing and next thing you know they have texted their [friends, family] and five guys show up with bats or something.*
- There was little mention of influence from or connection with teachers, although in a few cases adolescents noted that “good teachers” could really make a difference and any extra attention or help seemed to be valued; “There is a teacher in our school that will help you [if you get behind]”.
- In contrast coaches and other adult mentors seemed to garner a lot of respect, influence and appreciation from those adolescents involved in extracurricular activities; [Coach] is awesome; he really cares about us and what is going on and expects us to stay clean or you're gone”.
- Alcohol and drug use were reported as being common in both junior high school and high school.
  - *It is normal to drink or be high at school, this is how people live their lives, the high gets them through the day;*
  - *Peer pressure which includes drinking drugs, smoking, appearance, weight, how tough you are;*
  - *Sure, people have shown up drunk while attending classes, parties.*

**3.2.2 Pressures At Home**

Coping with changing relationships with parents and in some cases siblings, increased expectations and responsibilities surrounding school, household responsibilities and getting a job were all seen to contribute to pressure and stress experienced by adolescents. Parents also reported feeling pressured to help their children maximize their potential and develop responsibility yet keep them safe.

- Adolescents felt that their parents pressured them to do well in school to prepare for university and to ensure their future success but that there were also expectations that they must work making it difficult to balance jobs and school with other responsibilities.
- Older adolescents especially felt there was pressure both personally and from parents to have a job to support their on-going education as well as finance their own interests. There were also beliefs expressed that a job gives adolescents more independence “to do what [they] want” without parental interference.
  - *My parent's think I should have a job;*
  - *I am saving for my university education;*
  - *I need a job so I can have my own money;*
  - *Not easy finding a job in Sydney.*



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- The demands and responsibilities of working sometimes conflicted with school and other home responsibilities further adding to pressures for adolescents in balancing expanded expectations and priorities.
  - *Sometimes I don't know what I should be doing first because [school work and household chores] are all important.*
  - *Nobody showed up at work so I had to work a double shift, didn't get my homework done. I was tired and got in trouble from my parents.*
- Adolescents are starting to clash with parents and trying to establish independence, chaffing at any efforts by parents to exert control. However, there was a high degree of vulnerability expressed about parental opinions and approval as well as acknowledgement that parents continue to have a strong influence over adolescents, their self-image, and confidence.
  - *My dad and I were always close now all we do is fight when I really could use his advice;*
  - *My parents have high expectations and I don't want to disappoint them;*
  - *They just want me to be popular and everything and I can't even tell them what's going on;*
  - *You get in trouble for having your own opinions;*
  - *Can't be too open with them any more;*
  - *Parent's are creating images for you but its not you.*
- Adolescents reported that at the same time they are going through “major changes” personally, physically and at school things are changing at home making it all “even more confusing and shaky”. There are also expectations that adolescents will take on additional responsibilities around the house, which adds tension.
  - *I'm tired so I sleep a lot and my parents just think I am lazy slug;*
  - *Now that I am working more, have more homework and starting to have a social life my parents suddenly are dumping more work on me at home;*
  - *They keep me so busy that I have no time just for myself;*
  - *I never do things the way they like, its like why bother.*
- Challenges revolved around following the rules of the household and being able to schedule household responsibilities, school work and personal priorities; “You need to prove to parents why [your] own [tasks] are more important”.
- Parents recognize that there are additional academic, professional, and social pressures being placed on adolescents that they did not have to cope with when they were young including the need for higher education, increased skills sets and inter-personal skills, if they want to succeed in the future. Most parents felt that they have a role in helping prepare their children to meet these challenges.
  - *Kids have to grow up faster in terms of getting a good foundation and education;*

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- *Constant competition and it is a pressure if you aren't able to do well;*
  - *If they don't perform well then they will not get a job in the market;*
  - *Volunteering, because it looks on University applications;*
  - *Need scholarships to get to University;*
  - *The system doesn't work for [anyone] who falls behind;*
  - *They are exposed to things that they shouldn't be. The time to just be a kid isn't there anymore.*
- Many tended to see their children as very capable, more organized, more knowledgeable and responsible than they were or are themselves.
    - *My son holds down three jobs, plays high-level hockey and is a straight A student. I don't know how he does it;*
    - *My daughter has a good head on her shoulders, very mature balancing sports, school, and good marks.*
    - *They are more knowledgeable about what is going on;*
    - *They get so much more information, and the threshold gets higher and higher.*
  - Parents and adolescents reported trouble communicating. From a parent's perspective "not just using a different language we can't read but also different technology that we just aren't familiar with" (e.g. Face Book, MSN messaging, texting, and access to information). This often makes adolescents feel superior to parents "who have no idea of how this stuff works" and more sophisticated in their involvement on-line. However, parents also worry that because they don't understand what their children are doing, this makes their children vulnerable to exploitation or other predatory situations.
    - *I think the problems today with kids have a lot to do with communication.*
    - *Can't understand what they are sending each other;*
    - *They know way more than we do; information and technology are taking over;*
    - *Tougher to talk to them now or to know what they are doing;*
    - *They know it all and are pulling away.*
  - While parents indicated that they generally trust their children and encourage responsibility at school, work, and home, given concerns about personal safety, parents often were reluctant to give too much social freedom to their adolescents preferring to keep them close.
    - *When we were younger everybody knew everybody and we'd go out and play and come home for supper. Now we are too afraid to let our kids go out;*
    - *My daughter and I are really close. We are like mother daughter best friends;*
    - *We always know who they are with and what they are doing;*
    - *It is a lot more violent out there for girls as well as the boys.*

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- Parents sometimes felt helpless in exercising control over their children and worry that if they impose too many rules their children are “going to take off” or withdraw further; I don’t want to alienate her any more than I have”.
- In other cases, children felt stifled or smothered by parental attention and have hidden things that they think parents will not approve of or will react badly towards.
  - *I don’t want to hurt her feelings but sometimes I want some time for myself or with my friends;*
  - *My parents are great but I don’t want them to worry over stuff that isn’t really that bad;*
  - *My mom would freak if she knew what we were doing so I tell her what she wants [to hear]; works out for everybody.*

**3.2.3 Pressures in the Community**

All groups reported there were only a few areas where adolescents were able to go in the community to spend their free time other than “hanging out” on the streets. Some believed that there was “a real lack of support when you are not mainstream” and that it was hard because “certain age groups are looked upon by adults as trouble”. The community is interested in the “younger kids” but [adolescents] “seem to scare them”. As a result, many adolescents reported experiencing discrimination and feeling isolated from their community with limited involvement or connection with other members of the community or each other limited options for socializing within the community. Exposure to violence, aggression, alcohol, and drugs were other negative community impacts.

- Few places in the province were reported to welcome adolescents. Adolescents were discouraged from congregating in public with restricted access to malls, stores or other public places primarily in response to fears of bad behaviour including “sex, drugs, and alcohol use”, violence and stealing.
  - *A lot of age discrimination. My school is around Sobeys and other businesses. There are different rules for students than for the rest of the general public;*
  - *We are put under a lot of stereotypes;*
  - *When you go to the dollar store they only allow one student in at a time and we are watched like hawks;*
  - *Followed in the stores;*
  - *Even outside we get in trouble for playing around with the carts [in parking lots].*
- There was recognition of truth in some of the stereotypes and acknowledgement that a few kids or incidents can “wreck it for everyone”.
  - *Some kids have caused a lot of trouble, drinking, swarming, and drugs.*
  - *The dollar store has been robbed several times and they can’t afford to happen again.*

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- Dances or clubs geared toward adolescents have typically been eliminated or curtailed for similar reasons. Sometimes when dances are offered they are poorly attended due to apparent lack of interest, over-policing and lack of relevance or adolescent involvement. Bad behavior by a minority of adolescents ends up having negative consequences for everyone.
  - *They used to have dances every month. Alcohol became a problem. People used to be drunk before the dances or bring [alcohol] to the dances. Police are there now.*
  - *Don't play the kind of music we like. [The dances] suck, so lame and teachers don't want to be there either.*
  - *Some people were drinking and having sex at the dances so they stopped having them;*
  - *Grade 7 [dances] are new and exciting but by Grade 8 excitement wears off cause they are boring.*
  - *Think everybody likes the same kind of music or clubs so there is no variety. People who don't like it come in and trash it and then [adults] use it as an excuse to shut it down or take it away.*
  
- Sports activities or other organized groups or activities tended to fall off as children get into their teens except for the elite or “higher level athletics” who few qualify for or can afford.
  - *Unless you're good at sports [getting access] to anything costs too much money or it just isn't available;*
  - *I used to play ball but there is isn't anything going on for people my age;*
  - *Got to join a gym if you want any exercise. There is nothing else and nowhere to go.*
  
- In one rural community, efforts were made to fundraise to build a skateboard park but “plans fell through because people were worried about insurance and stuff like that”
  - *Can't even skateboard in the parking lots or they call the police.*
  
- Adolescents reported limited opportunities for socializing with friends outside of school with little to no access to community centres, or other non-organized or organized recreational activities for their peer group. In many rural areas, the only place adolescents can go are places that serve alcohol to adults. Adolescents report frequent exposure to alcohol and drug use by older kids or young adults.
  - *We can go to the tavern before 11:30 and play pool. Everybody else is drinking.*
  - *No place just for kids, for us;*
  - *Older kids come in and take over everything;*
  - *Older guys get the liquor for others who are there. It's just there.*

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- It was noted that movies or other commercial entertainment options were too expensive to do very often; “It costs about twenty or thirty bucks to go to the movies. It is cheaper to get some coolers and stay home and get drunk in your basement.”
- In combination with boredom was exposure to violence and aggression in the community. Especially among the boys, fighting was commonplace and “even the girls are getting into it” although adolescents living in the urban areas cited greater exposure to violence. Often the lack of facilities for adolescents meant they found themselves in situations where they were exposed to adult violence and aggression .
  - *[We’ve] got nothing to do. Once people start drinking stuff happens;*
  - *People get in each others faces;*
  - *Fights every weekend are pretty normal, especially when there is drinking.*
- In the rural groups, because of challenges with transportation, the variety of things to do was considered to be more limited than in the cities and as a result, “there tends to be an increase in the use of alcohol and drugs”.
  - *Got no way of getting to events in town;*
  - *Nothing to do and no where to go so a lot of kids end up getting in trouble;*
  - *Kids are bored so they get drunk or do drugs.*

**3.3 Access to Money**

Adolescents have access to money primarily through allowance and parents as well as part-time jobs. There were many competing interests for their resources but “most cash goes towards social activities” and “parties and fun” were seen to get in the way of saving money. A few of the older adolescents noted that they had accumulated money set aside for higher education or to buy a vehicle. Adolescents reported access to about \$25 to \$60 per week as disposable income but have to “spread that around because everything costs money”. Some of the older adolescents were generating \$400-\$600 per month from jobs. Most felt that they were always short of money but “if they need something they can get the money [from Mom and Dad] if it’s important”. Parents noted that it has become very expensive and sometimes difficult to finance adolescents’ needs especially given costs associated with higher education, extracurricular activities, insurance, marketing to adolescents (e.g. clothes, brand names) and technology requirements (e.g. cell phone, ipods, video games).

- In most cases, parents were seen to finance basic needs or “things that they want you to do” or “want you to have”. In other cases, including financial constraints at home, there was a need for adolescents to have an income to finance the things that they feel they needed or wanted to do but would not necessarily be supported by parents; “I have to get a job so I can get the stuff I want like junk food or video games”.
- Many adolescents and parents reported arguments over costs for items like cell phones and text messaging; “I still owe my Mom money for my text messages”.

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- For older adolescents, especially young males and those living in rural areas there was a heavy emphasis on getting money to buy and operate a vehicle.
  - *My parents got me a car but I have to pay for the gas and insurance*
  - *Got to have wheels so I got to have money to pay for it;*
  - *I spend a lot of time working on my car and finding ways to get parts and keep gas in it.*
- Parents noted that “teenagers are expensive” and in many cases it is difficult for some families to “keep up” and consequently there are adolescents who don’t have the same advantages or opportunities.
  - *I’m a single mom and I just can’t manage the extra things my daughter should have, that other kids have. Makes you feel bad sometimes;*
  - *Sports are expensive. Can’t always swing it;*
  - *Living on the farm my kids are very cheaply entertained, no choice.*
- Most of the adolescents make their own money through babysitting (girls) and part time jobs but some still get allowance which “is essential to their social life”. The majority depended on Mom and Dad to provide money when they need it for entertainment, sports and so on and often “trade off doing chores around the house” for cash.
  - *Use my money for social activities, food, entertainment and clothes;.*
  - *I spend extra money on fast food, music, movies and video games;*
  - *Most of my money is spent on girls or hockey;*
  - *Gas, lunch money, clothes.*

**3.4 Recreation & Leisure Profiles**

To gain insight on how adolescents were spending their leisure time participants completed a series of survey questions before taking part in unstructured discussion.

**3.4.1 Individual Responses (Recreation and Leisure)**

- The most common daily leisure activities for participating adolescents were *listening to music* (91%), *watching television* (80%), *using a computer or the internet* (78%) and spending time “*hanging out with friends*” (71%).
- Over half usually go out to a *movie* (71%) or *restaurant* (62%) each month. Although, only one in five reported going to a movie on a regular weekly basis as compared to one-third who eat out once a week or more.
- About one in four *played cards or other games* every week with most playing at least once a month (78%).



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- Other popular activities in a typical month were going to *parties with friends* (49%). One in five adolescents partied every week especially those aged 16-18 years (33%) with the vast majority (four out of five) of older adolescents going to parties at least once a month. However, it is noteworthy that more than half of the junior high aged adolescents were attending parties every month as well.
- In contrast, the majority of participants rarely or never spend their free time attending *cultural events* (88%) or attending other *community events* (82%) or *visiting outdoor cultural sites* (87%).
- The majority of adolescents were also unlikely to be involved in *organized sport*; two-thirds of the participants said they rarely or never played on a sports team organized by school (67%) or by other community agencies (63%). Boys were more inclined to take part in sports than girls and younger adolescents aged 13-15 were twice as likely to be involved in sports outside school than older adolescents.
- About three-quarters of participating adolescents reported watching live sporting events at least once a month or more and there was no difference in this tendency by gender although again younger adolescents (aged 13-15 years) watched sporting events on a more regular weekly basis.
- Physical activity levels were generally low with less than half of adolescents taking part in the study *walking outdoors* for exercise on a daily basis (43%), although most (78%) walked at least once a week. Only one in every ten *jogged or ran* daily with just under half (41%) running each week. There were only 6 adolescents who *worked out* daily at a fitness centre with about one-third reporting use of an indoor fitness facility each week.
- About half of adolescents indicated that they took part in some type of *extracurricular activity* outside of the classroom (55%) each week with a similar proportion *reading* for pleasure (49%) on at least a weekly basis.

Table 3: Adolescents participation in recreational and leisure activities

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>Watch TV</b>						
Daily	32	29	31	30	61	80.3%
Weekly	4	9	6	7	13	17.1%
Monthly	1	1	1	1	2	2.6%
Rarely / Not at All	---	---	---	---	---	---
<b>Listen to music</b>						
Daily	32	37	31	38	69	90.8%
Weekly	5	2	7	---	7	9.2%
Monthly	---	---	---	---	---	---
Rarely / Not at All	---	---	---	---	---	---
<b>Use computer/Internet for personal use</b>						
Daily	28	31	27	32	59	77.6%
Weekly	6	8	8	6	14	18.4%
Monthly	2	---	2	---	2	2.6%
Rarely / Not at All	1	---	1	---	1	1.3%
<b>Play cards or board games</b>						
Daily	2	---	---	2	2	2.6%
Weekly	14	2	8	8	16	21.1%
Monthly	15	26	21	20	41	53.9%
Rarely / Not at All	6	11	9	8	17	22.4%
<b>Reading for pleasure</b>						
Daily	8	13	13	8	21	27.6%
Weekly	6	10	8	8	16	21.1%
Monthly	8	9	8	9	17	22.4%
Rarely / Not at All	15	7	9	13	22	28.9%
<b>Hang out with friends</b>						
Daily	33	21	27	27	54	71.1%
Weekly	4	17	11	10	21	27.6%
Monthly	---	1	---	1	1	1.3%
Rarely / Not at All	---	---	---	---	---	---
<b>Go to an extra-curricular activity (e.g. Band, Art Class)</b>						
Daily	5	5	7	3	10	13.2%
Weekly	15	17	17	15	32	42.1%
Monthly	5	6	4	7	11	14.5%
Rarely / Not at All	12	11	10	13	23	30.3%
<b>Go to a movie</b>						
Daily	---	---	---	---	---	---
Weekly	8	6	9	5	14	18.4%
Monthly	23	31	25	29	54	71.1%
Rarely / Not at All	6	2	4	4	8	10.5%
<b>Go to a party with friends</b>						
Daily	---	---	---	---	---	---
Weekly	6	10	4	12	16	21.1%
Monthly	20	17	19	18	37	48.7%
Rarely / Not at All	11	12	15	8	23	30.3%

Table 3 Continued: Adolescents participation in recreational and leisure activities

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>Go to an indoor cultural event (e.g. Live Theatre or Music)</b>						
Daily	---	---	---	---	---	---
Weekly	---	---	---	---	---	---
Monthly	5	4	5	4	9	11.8%
Rarely / Not at All	32	35	33	34	67	88.2%
<b>Play on a school organized sports</b>						
Daily	2	2	4	---	4	5.3%
Weekly	8	7	7	8	15	19.7%
Monthly	3	3	5	1	6	7.9%
Rarely / Not at All	24	27	22	29	51	67.1%
<b>Play on a organized sports team outside of school</b>						
Daily	3	3	6	---	6	7.9%
Weekly	11	4	8	7	15	19.7%
Monthly	3	4	4	3	7	9.2%
Rarely / Not at All	20	28	20	28	48	63.2%
<b>Go to a restaurant</b>						
Daily	3	---	2	1	3	3.9%
Weekly	14	9	8	15	23	30.3%
Monthly	18	29	27	20	47	61.8%
Rarely / Not at All	2	1	1	2	3	3.9%
<b>Indoor fitness facility</b>						
Daily	5	1	3	3	6	7.9%
Weekly	10	7	8	9	17	22.4%
Monthly	3	12	10	5	15	19.7%
Rarely / Not at All	19	19	17	21	38	50.0%
<b>Walking outdoors for exercise</b>						
Daily	17	16	19	14	33	43.4%
Weekly	11	15	12	14	26	34.2%
Monthly	5	5	5	5	10	13.2%
Rarely / Not at All	4	3	2	5	7	9.2%
<b>Running/Jogging outdoors</b>						
Daily	7	---	5	2	7	9.2%
Weekly	11	13	13	11	24	31.6%
Monthly	8	11	10	9	19	25.0%
Rarely / Not at All	11	15	10	16	26	34.2%
<b>Visit outdoor cultural sites</b>						
Daily	---	---	---	---	---	---
Weekly	1	---	1	---	1	1.3%
Monthly	6	3	4	5	9	11.8%
Rarely / Not at All	30	36	33	33	66	86.8%
<b>Go to an community event or festival</b>						
Daily	---	---	---	---	---	---
Weekly	1	---	---	1	1	1.3%
Monthly	8	5	5	8	13	17.1%
Rarely / Not at All	28	34	33	29	62	81.6%
<b>Go to watch a team sports or other regular, structured adolescents activities</b>						
Daily	2	---	1	1	2	2.6%

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Weekly	9	10	14	5	19	25.0%
Monthly	18	16	16	18	34	44.7%
Rarely / Not at All	8	13	7	14	21	27.6%

## 3.4.2 Group Discussion (Recreation and Leisure)

Free time varied considerably depending on the involvement levels of adolescents in structured activities, school and work, but was most often reported to be after school and the hour or two before bed. Weekends, in particular Friday and Saturday nights, tended to be designated for social activities.

- “Getting out of the house” was a major incentive but adolescents felt that “there are few places we can go” or “nothing going on” for kids in their age range and that they have to create their own events.
  - *Nothing to do in Cape Breton;*
  - *Nothing to do. No where we can skateboard or even hangout.*
- The primary leisure activity mentioned by all adolescents is “hanging out with friends”, “at home, the mall, friend’s house or even street corners”.
  - *We hang out in the basement, play music, video games, Guitar Hero;*
  - *Play cards, videos;*
  - *Watch movies, play Super Nintendo, drink.*
- The free time after school was generally spent at home, with friends or taking part in some kind of organized activity; “Generally I spend my free time sleeping, going out with friends, playing pool or billiards.”
- In terms of structured or formal locations, for younger kids, the rink, soccer field, and movies were mentioned more often while older adolescents were more inclined to mention going to restaurants or parties.
- In Amherst, it was mentioned that a place had just opened where kids could go and play games on-line for a low fixed price and this was greeted with some interest.
  - *There is the Gamers Lair just out of town [where you] can buy three hours of time to play Rockband and other stuff on the computers.*
  - *Not too expensive; like \$5 can buy you a few hours of play*
  - *I haven’t been there yet but it seems good.*
- School dances were mentioned but due to heavy policing, violence, alcohol and how the dances are organized there was low involvement levels and/or interest.
  - *School dances happen about once a month. Everyone gets breathalysed, same songs played over and over again;*

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- *Sort of suck. Last year they all got cancelled because too many people were drinking and stuff;*
  - *There are cops and about 20 teachers there;*
  - *They're boring [although] the fights are a source of entertainment;*
  - *Not a lot of activity at these dances. Guys don't dance. It's embarrassing.*
  - *Used to have dances every month but alcohol became a problem;*
  - *Older kids crash them and bring booze or drugs;*
  - *Sometimes the teachers are drunk too.*
- House parties were mentioned by adolescents of all ages but in particular for those aged 16-18 years whereas younger kids often tended to congregate in the parks, playgrounds, parking lots, or street. Alcohol is often involved in these situations although parents did not appear to be aware that this is the case.
    - *Always booze at parties; can easily get it;*
    - *Couple of friends coming together and drinking [then] it can get out of hand sometimes. People hear about a party word of mouth;*
    - *Sometimes posted on Face Book. 15 people get together but it can increase up to 100 people and that's when it starts to get out of control;*
    - *Can always find a party. Say you are going to stay over at a friend's then go to a party, drink, whatever. Parents don't know. Text them on the phone, everything's cool.*
  - Groups of about “6 to 10 kids” were considered the normal size of the “main groups [kids] hang out with”; “10 people is not a large group”. Otherwise, adolescents were getting together with a couple of friends.
  - Many of the female participants aged 16 to 18 years old reported having very little unsupervised free time.
  - Parents agreed that “kids often do not have appropriate down time” but for many “too much time on their hands” was seen to lead to trouble for this age group. There is also recognition that most parents were working so children have “a lot of unsupervised time”.
    - *When they have nothing to do and no one around that's when the bad decisions can get made;*
    - *Most parents both work now;*
    - *When I was growing up my mother was always home;*
    - *At 15 or 16 you can't really get a babysitter [for them].*
  - Parents also recognized the limited options available to adolescents due either to lack of access or lack of opportunity.
    - *I think that there are a lot of things for kids to do but most of those things cost money;*

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- *My stepson is really into skateboarding and we have to take him all the way to Moncton to skate board;*
- *When we were young downtown there were garages everywhere, everyone had a certain part of town where they would park their cars and we all cruise. We all knew where everyone was. When they took that away everyone started to drive on the back streets and the vandalism went up;*
- *They aren't allowed to congregate in front of the stores now, so going to back alleys;*
- *Sports for kids are pretty much done by age 15, no recreational sports anymore for kids this age.*

**3.5 Driving**

About one-third of adolescents in the study (n=25) indicated the possession of a valid driver's license. This represents two-thirds of those aged 16-18 years (25 out of 38). There were no differences observed between males and females.

- Overall, 8 adolescents self-reported having been involved in a motor vehicle accident in which they had been the driver, again evenly divided between males and females. It was notable that two of those who self-reported accidents were driving while under the legal age limit (< 16 years).
- Among those with valid licenses, about one in three adolescents drivers had experienced an accident.
- Driving for adolescents in rural areas of the province was a very important consideration. Both girls and boys equated driving with freedom, and usually cars were shared with parents.
- For older adolescents, especially males 16-18 years, there was strong interest in owning and maintaining a car although this is recognized as a costly undertaking requiring responsibility and sacrifice.
  - *I'll go without [other things] to have a car;*
  - *When I am working on my car, I need to be focused, can't drink or do drugs.*



Table 4: Driving status and self-reported accident involvement

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>The status of a driver's license</b>						
Do not have a license	22	29	38	13	51	67.1%
Have a beginner's license or a temporary license	5	2	---	7	7	9.2%
Have had a license less than one year	5	6	---	11	11	14.5%
Have had a license one to two years	4	2	---	6	6	7.9%
Have had a license more than two years	1	---	---	1	1	1.3%
<b>Have been involved in a motor vehicle accident as the driver</b>	4	4	2	6	8	10.5%

### 3.6 Adolescents Use of Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Substance

To preserve personal privacy adolescents were asked to report personal access and use of alcohol, tobacco and other substance use during the in-session survey. During the group sessions, discussion centered on personal exposure to substance use through peers rather than focusing on personal use.

Almost half of adolescents taking part in the study had consumed alcohol in the last year, a rate twice that noted for tobacco or drugs. Girls and those age 16 to 18 years had higher rates of past year consumption. Almost one in ten adolescents indicated they had used fake ID to purchase alcohol. Alcohol consumption among peers and friends was also common especially for those 16 years or older. About 70% of adolescent participants reported that most of their friends consumed alcohol. Levels of exposure to tobacco and cannabis use through friends were substantially lower with only about one-third of participating adolescents reporting use by 50% or more of their friends. In fact, about one-third said that they had no friends who smoked cigarettes or cannabis as compared to only 9% for alcohol.

Table 5: Access to Alcohol, Tobacco, &amp; Gambling Products Using Fake Id Or Lying About Age

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>In the past 12 months, have you used fake identification or lied about your age in order to... (1+response allowed)</b>						
Get Alcohol	2	5	1	6	7	9.2%
Buy Cigarettes	2	2	1	3	4	5.3%
Buy Lottery tickets, Scratch tickets or Break opens	---	1	---	1	1	1.3%
Play Video Gambling Machines	---	---	---	---	---	---

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- Adolescents taking part in the study were more likely to have lied or used fake id to access alcohol than to have purchased either cigarettes or lottery tickets.
- Almost one in ten of those taking part indicated that they had tried to obtain alcohol during the past 12 months by using fake identification or lying about their age. This behaviour was mentioned more often by older adolescents and by those in the female groups.
- There were four adolescents in the discussion groups who reported having tried to buy cigarettes and only one having attempted to purchase lottery tickets through deceitful means.

Table 6: Overall Use of Alcohol, Tobacco and other Substance (Adolescents Group)

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b><i>In the past 12 months, have you, your friends or any other kids you know... (1+ response allowed)</i></b>						
<b><i>Drunk alcohol</i></b>						
Self	14	24	13	25	38	50.0%
Friends	20	23	22	21	43	56.6%
Other Kids	21	23	24	20	44	57.9%
<b><i>Smoked a cigarette</i></b>						
Self	7	12	6	13	19	25.0%
Friends	18	24	21	21	42	55.3%
Other Kids	23	21	24	20	44	57.9%
<b><i>Used any drugs</i></b>						
Self	8	10	6	12	18	23.7%
Friends	12	23	17	18	35	46.1%
Other Kids	23	25	24	24	48	63.2%

- Reported use of alcohol was twice as high as use of drugs or nicotine. Overall, half of the adolescents in the focus group (n=38) had consumed alcohol during the 12-month period preceding the study, while about one in four indicated they had smoked a cigarette (n=19) or used any drugs (n=18).
- Not surprisingly, own use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances was reported more often by older adolescents aged 16-18 years. Girls in the study were also more likely to mention personal use of alcohol and tobacco compared to their male peers (Alcohol females: n=24 vs. males: n=14; Tobacco: n=12 vs. n=7).
- Over half of participating adolescents indicated that they had been exposed to alcohol use through friends (57%) or other kids they know of (58%), with similar proportions reporting having first-hand knowledge of peers smoking cigarettes (friends: 55%, other kids: 58%).

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- Adolescents taking part in the current study were less inclined to report exposure to drug use through their personal friends (46%) but almost two-thirds were aware of drug use by other kids they knew (63%).
- The girls taking part in the study were more likely to have friends who used other substances especially tobacco (females: n=24 vs. males: 18) and other drugs (n=23 vs. n=12).

Table 7: Number of Friends Using Alcohol, Tobacco or Cannabis

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>How many of your friends use...</b>						
<b>Alcohol</b>						
None	5	2	6	1	7	9.2%
A Few	11	4	12	3	15	19.7%
About Half	6	5	5	6	11	14.5%
More than Half	12	18	11	19	30	39.5%
All	3	10	4	9	13	17.1%
<b>Tobacco</b>						
None	10	11	14	7	21	27.6%
A Few	16	15	14	17	31	40.8%
About Half	7	6	5	8	13	17.1%
More than Half	4	6	5	5	10	13.2%
All	---	1	---	1	1	1.3%
<b>Cannabis</b>						
None	16	10	16	10	26	34.2%
A Few	12	13	14	11	25	32.9%
About Half	3	10	5	8	13	17.1%
More than Half	5	5	3	7	10	13.2%
All	1	1	---	2	2	2.6%

- Over two-thirds (n=54) of adolescents taking part in the study noted that the majority, (50%+) of their friends consumed alcohol
- Only seven adolescents reported that none of their friends drank, primarily those under age 16 (n=6). In contrast, almost all of the adolescents aged 16-18 years (90%) said that half or more of their friends were consuming alcohol. The proportion of friends using alcohol tended to be higher in the female groups as well.
- Levels of exposure to tobacco and cannabis use through friends were substantially lower with only about one-third of participating adolescents reporting use by 50% or more of their friends. In fact, about one-third said that they had no friends who smoked cigarettes or cannabis as compared to only 9% for alcohol.

Table 8: Own Use of Tobacco

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>How old were you when you smoked your first whole cigarette?</b>						
12 years or younger	2	6	2	6	8	10.5%
13-14 years	2	6	5	3	8	10.5%
15-16 years	2	7	1	8	9	11.8%
17-18 years	1	---	---	1	1	1.3%
Never smoked a whole cigarette	30	20	30	20	50	65.8%
<b>In the past 12 months, how many cigarettes did you usually smoke per day?</b>						
More than 20 a day	---	2	---	2	2	2.6%
16 to 20 a day	1	---	---	1	1	1.3%
11 to 15 a day	---	2	1	1	2	2.6%
6 to 10 a day	---	1	---	1	1	1.3%
3 to 5 a day	1	1	1	1	2	2.6%
1 or 2 a day	---	2	1	1	2	2.6%
Less than one a day	2	4	2	4	6	7.9%
Tried one in the past 12 months	2	4	2	4	6	7.9%
Did <u>not</u> smoke in the past 12 months	2	5	3	4	7	9.2%
Never smoked	29	18	28	19	47	61.8%
<b>Ever smoked 100 or more cigarettes</b>	2	6	1	7	8	10.5%
<b>In the past 6 months, have you tried to quit smoking?</b>						
Yes	1	2	---	3	3	3.9%
No	3	8	3	8	11	14.5%
Never Smoked/Only Smoked a few	33	29	35	27	62	81.6%

- Overall, the vast majority of those taking part in the study had never smoked a cigarette (66%) and/or had only tried smoking on a limited basis (82%).
- About one out of every five adolescents in the discussion groups had first smoked a whole cigarette when they were 14 years of age or younger (n=16).
- There were 10 adolescents taking part in the study who were daily smokers, with half (n=5) smoking 10 or more cigarettes per day in the past 12 months. Of those who had ever smoked over 100 cigarettes (n=8), three-quarters were females and one was under 16 years old.
- Only a minority of adolescent smokers who participated in the focus group had attempted to quit during the past 6 months (n=3).
- In discussion, adolescents expressed strong negative statements surrounding smoking that in many cases was consistent with messaging from social marketing campaigns targeting smoking in the province. Even among the smokers, there was acknowledgement that smoking was no longer considered desirable; “so not cool”. Participants also noted that

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changes in social attitudes and regulations make it difficult to smoke. There were also health impacts mentioned especially among the boys and athletes in the sessions.

- *It's gross;*
- *It stinks;*
- *Smoking is bad for you;*
- *It makes you get sores in you mouth;*
- *No where to smoke on school property any more.*

**3.7 Social Context of Alcohol and Underage Drinking**

Discussion surrounding pressures, challenges, access to money, leisure, and recreation activities allowed underage alcohol use to be positioned among other issues relevant to adolescents. Following this general discussion participants were introduced to the primary purpose of the groups and asked to focus specifically on opinions and thoughts around alcohol and drinking among adolescents in general, in addition to the personal opinions of the participants in respect to underage alcohol consumption.

**3.7.1 Exposure and Trial of Alcohol**

- Participants in the groups consistently reported exposure to alcohol and alcohol use was commonplace in their lives with most citing personal exposure on a regular weekly basis. When asked how often they were in a situation involving alcohol the consensus was “a lot”.
  - *Whenever, you go to any kind of party, probably every week;*
  - *Start seeing it [involved in own social situations] in junior high;*
  - *Normal to see people drinking at sporting events, hockey and stuff*
  - *There is a big change going from elementary to high school because you are introduced to drugs and alcohol;*
  - *It's everywhere, grocery store, at home, parties, any social event has liquor at it.*
- The level of exposure varied depending upon where the individuals lived. Those living in smaller communities (rural areas) tended to report greater exposure levels through use outside the home and through siblings whereas adolescents living in urban centers were exposed more often at home or at a friend's home.
  - *There are more things to do in the city and they keep you occupied;*
  - *There is nothing to do in the country;*
  - *After school you go to friend's places or hang out at home and nobody [else] is home so you can drink or whatever.*
- Most often, adolescents reported exposure and first trial through adults and functions that included adults especially when “they are distracted and not paying attention to kids”. Family weddings and other family or community social events were typically reported as the locale for first personal exposure to or taste of alcohol.

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- *Camping with a bunch of other families;*
  - *Family weddings - got drunk at a wedding off little boxes of champagne;*
  - *We were at a family thing and kept drinking the [adult's] drinks and got plastered. We were only about 11 or 12. Nobody even noticed;*
- In some cases, parents introduced children to alcohol but other adolescents noted that parents did not drink and/or disapproved of alcohol.
    - *My first [experience] occurred when I was 13 year old at home;*
    - *My parents don't drink so there is never liquor in our house. I have never tried it;*
    - *My parents offered me a sample because my Dad knew I wouldn't like it.*
  - Exposure through friends and siblings, primarily opportunistic and motivated by boredom and curiosity, were also cited as sources of first contact, although there were a few instances whereby adolescents had planned their first exposure to alcohol.
    - *I got drunk with my friends. We had nothing to do. There was brandy in the fridge and we all started drinking and my parents came home and caught us;*
    - *Friends parents went away and we had some people over and I was setting up to get drunk.*
  - The type of alcohol consumed also was noted to have an impact on first exposure and early drinking. The taste of alcohol like wine and spirits like rum, rye were initially considered unpleasant but coolers “taste like candy”.
    - *Wine, it tasted horrible;*
    - *I went wine tasting in France and I almost threw up;*
    - *Drank what I thought was Pepsi and it had rum in; it nearly made me sick;*
    - *When I first tried it I had a weird taste in my mouth and I didn't like it.*
    - *Coolers taste like sugar, just like pop;*
    - *Coolers are targeting beginners, females;*
    - *The low alcohol content beer in stores. Its like .5% but we could get a buzz off it when we were little.*
  - Adolescents reported being exposed to alcohol more frequently and at earlier ages (10-13 years) than most parents felt was the case.
  - When asked if there were occasions when their children would be served alcohol two parents mentioned “every Sunday, small tastes through church”. However, “being exposed and being desensitized” were seen as different things among parents. Many parents felt fine with having alcohol in the home provided that they taught their children to drink responsibly. In some case parents were conflicted as to whether it was “better to teach children how to drink responsibility” or have them “learn by trial and error” on their own outside supervision.



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- *Its OK to have alcohol at home as long as you are teaching them to drink responsibly;*
  - *My guys are exposed to alcohol all the time, its in the fridge , when we go to the tavern for lunch;*
  - *When we went to Montreal wine was a part of the meal, part of the education process;*
  - *I [Dad] sat down and did a demonstration, how to mix drinks and drink responsibly.*
- Parents also mentioned children’s exposure to alcohol through older siblings in the house and the need for different rules for younger children. In some cases exposure to experiences of older siblings involving alcohol were viewed as providing both negative and positive impacts for younger children in the household
    - *Yes there are different rules for the 14 and 17 year old; I am focusing on my 14 year old and trying to keep the older one in line;*
    - *The oldest one drives and has his own car, drinking has occurred and there have been consequences put in place;*
    - *My daughters are close but I worry that because they do so much together [younger daughter] is doing things she shouldn’t do yet, including drinking.*

Table 9: Age of First Drink

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>How old were you when you first drank alcohol?</b>						
10 years or younger	2	2	2	2	4	5.3%
11 years	1	1	1	1	2	2.6%
12 years	5	6	3	8	11	14.5%
13 years	2	3	4	1	5	6.6%
14 years	6	10	10	6	16	21.1%
15 years	5	7	4	8	12	15.8%
16 years	5	2	---	7	7	9.2%
17 years	---	1	---	1	1	1.3%
18 years	---	---	---	---	---	---
Never drunk alcohol	11	7	14	4	18	23.7%

- Participants were asked to indicate their age at the time of their first drink during the in-session survey, in order to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of their responses. The median age of first drink for all adolescents participants was 14 years, with no difference by gender. This age range was due to the fact that 36% of the youngest participants (aged 13-15 years) had not yet tried alcohol.
- Among those who had consumed alcohol (n=58), nearly 30% had tried their first drink at age 12 years or younger. This is consistent with discussion in the focus groups where they reported their first taste of alcohol to be between 10 to 13 years of age.

### 3.7.2 Kid's Attitudes towards Alcohol and Underage Drinking

- For many of the adolescents taking part in the study underage drinking was “not a big deal” and was “OK as long as it is done responsibly”. However, for others, especially those who are involved in sports or other activities, drinking was “off limits” and deliberately avoided.
  - *Everybody is drinking because it's a cool thing to do;*
  - *It's fun;*
  - *[The community] doesn't think it is a big deal;*
  - *I can't drink if I want to play hockey at a high level;*
  - *I could go drinking and skateboarding but that's not the right thing to do;*
  - *[Drinking] messes up your concentration.*
- Adolescents felt that the likelihood of drinking was dependent “upon where you live and who you hang out with” and “how often you go to parties”.
- Adolescents reported hearing about “the evils of drinking” starting in elementary school and by late junior high and high school they were “tuning it out”.
  - *You'd rather hear about something else instead of hearing it over and over again;*
  - *We'd rather be drinking;*
  - *I find if they tell you not to drink you are going to rebel and go against them;*
  - *You really don't care [what they think any more].*
- There was some hypocrisy noted by adolescents whereby they are not supposed to drink and yet they see drinking encouraged everywhere around them on TV, at sporting events, restaurants, family events; “Drinking is OK as long as it is done responsibly”.
  - *Normal to see people drink at sporting events. At hockey games they have a bar there and all they do is sit around screaming;*
  - *I would be on the bus and there would be drunk people on the bus coming back from stuff;*
  - *I want to join in with my parent's drinking.*
- Most of the adolescents taking part in the study mentioned “responsible drinking” and when asked tended to feel that responsible drinking primarily referred to “not drinking and driving” or doing other things while under the influence of alcohol although a few adolescents mentioned the amount and type of alcohol consumed.
  - *There are drinking and driving rules established by parents;*
  - *If you drink responsibly you are drinking at home, not driving and not power drinking or chugging;*
  - *[Responsible] drinking could be a beer, and getting drunk could not.*

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- In contrast to this understanding of responsible drinking, adolescents associated underage drinking with getting drunk, especially among the younger and junior high aged kids although others noted that they “drink just as much now [17 years] as they did when they were 15 years old”
  - *The whole point of drinking when you are little is to get drunk;*
  - *My younger sister is going out to drink at her friend’s house and then they roam around town half-cut;*
  - *I don’t get drunk as often now as I did when I was younger.*
- Adolescents noted there were minimal consequences associated with drinking or over-drinking from the police or other members of society.
  - *If you are caught drinking they tell you to stop or take your booze. If you are drunk they call your parents or take you home;*
  - *If the cops see you drinking they just pour your liquor out;*
  - *In New Waterford you can drink and the cops just drive on.*
- Adolescents reported mixed parental responses and attitudes towards drinking and over-drinking with varied impact. In many cases the teen cared about their parent’s approval and would not drink “out of respect” for their opinion and authority but in other cases poor parental relationships were cited as precipitating drinking and in others parental permission meant they could drink at home.
  - *My parents don’t mind as long as I am at home;*
  - *My parents don’t want me drinking at all, not even touch it and I respect that;*
  - *When I am 16 I can drink at home;*
  - *If Mom caught me I would be disciplined but Dad would be more laid back;*
  - *I recently got caught for drinking because I had vodka in my room. They made me feel guilty on purpose. It doesn’t help because I can go back and do it [drinking] again;*
  - *Stressed out fighting with my parents so I drink more.*
- Adolescents in the current study rarely if ever recalled formally talking to parents about drinking with most reported conversations fairly one-sided and brief; “They tell me what I can and can’t do, there is no discussion about it”. As a result understanding about parental attitudes was often inferred from observing behaviour and past experience.
  - *[Friend] drinks in front of her Mom so I do too;*
  - *We have never talked about it but I know my mom would be upset and disappointed if she knew I had a drink.*
- There was a general consensus that attitudes about underage drinking differ “depending upon the age of the kid” as well as gender.
  - *They respond to underage drinking depending on your age;*

- *When my brother was 18 they didn't really care about his underage drinking. It is also different for me because he is a guy and I am a girl;*
- *Girls are more likely to get taken advantage of when they are drinking.*
- There was also a culture of drinking noted by some adolescents that accepts underage drinking in part because adolescents are in situations with adults who are drinking. Given the lack of things to do especially in rural areas drinking becomes the specific pastime.
- Participating adolescents noted that “kids who are drinking seem to be getting younger” and there were concerns expressed about “seeing little kids walking around drunk”.
  - *My sister and her friends are drinking. It worries me;*
  - *They are drinking a lot earlier than we were.*

### 3.7.3 Parent Attitudes towards Alcohol and Underage Drinking

- The majority of parents expressed negative views of drinking by adolescents but considered alcohol a normal part of society that needs to be treated with responsibility.
  - *Yes it [underage drinking] is a serious issue;*
  - *A lot of kids are turning to alcohol and drugs;*
  - *I would be unhappy if [my child] drinks;*
  - *[Alcohol] is everywhere and kids need to learn how to handle liquor in a responsible way.*
- Generally, parents had stronger concerns about drug use by adolescents than alcohol use although, when prompted, participating parents acknowledged there were more negative impacts for adolescents arising from alcohol use.
  - *Alcohol is one thing but there is zero tolerance for drugs. Drugs are really dangerous for our kids;*
  - *Alcohol comes with pressures but the worry about drugs is higher;*
  - *We all agree drugs are bad but alcohol is part of society;*
  - *Drugs were standard but now they are mixed with harder drugs;*
  - *My top concern for kids is drugs and violence.*
- There was surprise expressed when parents heard facts about alcohol and drug use from the Student Drug Use Survey; “I didn’t realize just how much alcohol use was going on. Makes sense but didn’t seem so bad until you hear it”.
- While parents referred to responsible drinking as a desired outcome there was some lack of clarity about what responsible drinking entails for minors. Similar to adolescents, parents referred to not drinking and driving and not drinking to the point of intoxication although no one spontaneously equated responsible drinking with only drinking once you had reached the legal drinking age.

- While parents were generally opposed to underage drinking they knew that it is happening and were often conflicted or uncertain about how to respond. Views range from beliefs that adolescents “are going to drink regardless” so “it is better to provide them with the facts”; to completely prohibiting drinking. There were feelings of helplessness in that “supervised drinking” by adolescents was safer than “drinking in the woods on their own” and efforts included being more vigilant in monitoring behaviors and friends.
  - *The first time my son told me he had a drink it upset me. I wasn't sure what to do;*
  - *When they are attending parties I am very cautious about who and what their surroundings are. There could be drugs and alcohol there.*
  
- There were some strong divisions within the groups of parents regarding permissiveness of alcohol use by minors especially for younger teens aged 13-15 years with experimentation by older adolescents considered normal. In some cases, parents noted that they allowed underage adolescents to drink at home in order to teach them about the effects of alcohol in a safe environment, to ensure they were drinking in a safe supervised environment or because, philosophically, they believe it is better to introduce adolescents to liquor gradually rather than prohibiting use until a certain age. There was concern prohibition means “kids hide their drinking” and “get into bad situations they can't get out of”.
  - *I have friends who don't allow their kids to drink and they are just doing it behind their backs;*
  - *I want to keep my kid alive;*
  - *They are learning by trial and error. Better to teach them responsible drinking;*
  - *Sat down and did a demonstration; how to mix drinks and drink responsibly;*
  - *They have less problems in Europe where alcohol is introduced earlier. Kids learn how to drink instead of going out and getting drunk.*
  
- In contrast others felt such parental behaviour endorses or encourages drinking by adolescents and felt parents need to establish and enforce standards for their children for health and safety reasons.
  - *Their bodies are not ready to drink; they can't handle it yet;*
  - *They are still growing and their livers are still developing;*
  - *Depends on what parents attitudes are towards drinking;*
  - *What parents think can make a difference;*
  - *I believe underage drinking is happening but I don't accept it.*
  
- Few parents had formally spoken to their children about drinking and some felt such conversations were premature “I don't want him to drink at this age, but when he can I want to sit down and talk to him about it. I don't want him sneaking off with his friends and drinking I want him to be comfortable about it.”

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- While few formal discussions about alcohol were reported almost all participating parents had reassured their children about drinking and driving. In almost all cases, kids “can call [home] no questions asked” and a parent will come and get them if they or another driver have been drinking or if they “are in a situation that makes them feel uncomfortable”.
- There was consensus that despite efforts to discourage consumption by minors “kids are going to drink” and that efforts need to focus on “keeping them safe” and not in prohibiting the activity “which just makes it more attractive to kids”. However, there was little consensus on “what” constitutes safe drinking for adolescents.
- There was acknowledgement that society as a whole is fairly accepting of drinking by minors with few consequences for the adolescents involved or adults facilitating underage consumption. Most often the problem is “dumped back on the parents” with little or no support provided;
  - *The police don't want to deal with anyone who is under the young offenders act because they don't want the hassle;*
  - *Cops they pick up kids and drop them off at the door and say here's your kid;*
  - *No consequences for anyone involved, the kids or the people making the money selling to them;*
  - *If you go to groups or anything everyone knows your business or thinks there is a problem;*
  - *I tried to get help and there was nothing.*

**3.7.4 Where and When Drinking Occurs**

Adolescents rarely if ever reported drinking alone with underage alcohol use usually involving at least one other friend. Drinking by adolescents typically occurs at home or at friends' homes or anywhere adolescents congregate including “in the woods”, “on the street”, “in parking lots” “camping” and “mainly on weekends” during the school year. Adolescent drinking is more often to get drunk than to be social and this balance shifts as adolescents get older.

- Participating adolescents reported that most drinking occurs in private homes “when parents aren't around”. Lack of supervision, boredom, curiosity, and access to alcohol creates opportunity to experiment.
  - *A lot of parents let the drinking go on;*
  - *Some parents aren't even home when you do it;*
  - *When parent's go out is the prime time;*
  - *When parents go away for the weekend, that's when the drinking goes on.*
- Non-drinking adolescents also “hang out with friends” at home or at friend's but without alcohol involved.
  - *My friends and I just don't drink, wouldn't even think of it;*



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- *We are doing other things and alcohol is not part of it;*
- *I have friends I drink with and friends I don't.*
- For younger drinkers the intent is to “get drunk as quickly as possible” so liquor tends to be consumed quickly on a trial and error basis. In fact, for many taking part in the study, early teens and junior high were characterized as key times for experimentation with drinking.
  - *When I am going to drink I am going to get drunk*
  - *The normal outcome of drinking is getting drunk;*
  - *I used to drink and then I stopped in Grade 9:*
  - *Did most of my drinking in junior high;*
  - *Every weekend in junior high. Getting high and drinking;*
  - *I was intoxicated for three years it was really bad;*
  - *It was just because you saw all the other kids doing it.*
- In contrast, many adolescents claimed that as they got older they settled down with their drinking. In most cases, they were still drinking but less likely to drink to excess.
  - *Grow up and not into getting drunk anymore;*
  - *You don't get the rush of drinking anymore when you are older;*
  - *Once you pass 20 it is different. As you get older it is more of a social thing to drink.*
  - *Older guys they will take their time, learn to space [their drinks] and take shots. Younger kids just chug their drinks.*
  - *I don't even hang out with the friends I used to drink with anymore; I have a new crowd of friends.*
- Adolescents thought that the principal difference between how kids and adults drink is that “teenagers drink to get drunk and older people are drinking to be social”.
- Drinking and overdrinking were associated with dances, parties and times when larger groups of kids congregate primarily due to the availability of alcohol in this context often through older kids or adults.
  - *At dances you get drunk there, before and after;*
  - *People arrive at parties or dances with booze;*
  - *Other [adults] don't think it is a big deal;*
  - *We are going to dances drunk; [adults] are walking around drunk too. What do you expect, its Cape Breton;*
- Although drinking sometimes happens during a party or event adolescents report that pre-drinking is more the norm, with kids drinking beforehand and arriving at an event intoxicated or drinking early at the event “so they can sober up before they go home” or are exposed to parents.

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- Adolescents arranged to be away from home such as “staying at a friend’s house over night”, camping or other arrangements so parents would not see them drunk.
- Among younger adolescents who drank, there were few differences reported in drinking patterns or amounts consumed between the sexes. Younger adolescents often drank segregated by sex as drinking was opportunistic and occurring with friends.
- Boys and girls tend to drink differently as they start to get older. Boys tended to report higher alcohol consumption when they were “drinking with their buddies” but as they took on more responsibilities and were involved in relationships with girls they tended to reduce their consumption. There was also a shift to a more protective role in looking out for girl friends while drinking.
  - *Got a girlfriend, car other things to spend my money on;*
  - *I have to concentrate on school now, need good grades;*
  - *I am driving and got to take care of my car.*
- In contrast, girls who consumed alcohol often indicated they drank more around males to reduce inhibitions and get attention; “Relaxes me, makes you feel sexier, adventurous, like, “look at me”. However, girls universally found drunk males to be a “turn-off” and “kinda gross”, “sometimes funny but mostly embarrassing”. Males tended to be aware of this although some thought drinking especially by girls improved their chances of “getting laid”.

**3.7.5 Accessibility**

- Methods for obtaining alcohol were many and simple including having others purchase it such as older people, cab drivers, “runners” who are paid to obtain alcohol, siblings and other family members, friends and through the use of fake ideas. Even parents acknowledged that “if they wanted the liquor they could get it easy”.
  - *Access to alcohol is not a problem;*
  - *You can get alcohol anywhere;*
  - *Somebody can get it for you;*
  - *Drive downtown and find somebody who is 19 and they buy the liquor;*
  - *Pretty much open all the time in the house.*
- In addition, there were specific locations such as drive-thrus and smaller retail outlets that were perceived as easy locations to obtain alcohol, although almost all of the older adolescents 16-18 years had been in a liquor store and most personally knew underage friends who had purchased liquor from a licensed retail location.
  - *I know kids who have walked to the liquor store and buy alcohol. They don’t get IDed, security doesn’t check them;*
  - *You can’t be sketchy about it. Have to remain calm and make eye contact;*

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- Grocery store on the base, there is alcohol right on the shelf;
- Easier at the corner store, just buy a bunch of other stuff;
- At the drive thru it is easy. Some of my friends don't even look 19 years old but they are still able to buy at the drive thru or cold beer store.

Table 10: Adolescents Access to Alcohol

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>The LAST TIME you drank alcohol, how did you get it?</b>						
I bought it myself.	---	2	---	2	2	2.6%
I had a friend bought it for me.	11	16	7	20	27	35.5%
My friend/friends offered it to me.	8	9	10	7	17	22.4%
My parents offered it to me.	3	2	3	2	5	6.6%
Other adults offered it to me.	2	---	1	1	2	2.6%
I got it from home without permission.	1	2	2	1	3	3.9%
I do <u>not</u> drink alcohol.	12	8	15	5	20	26.3%

- The most common source of obtaining alcohol for both boys and girls in the focus group was through older friends. Almost 60% of participants (n=44) noted that they were given alcohol by their friends the last time they drank, with only a few mentioning their own parents (n=5) or other adults (n=2) providing alcohol.
  - Hanging out with older kids makes alcohol easy to get to;
  - Older friends and older brother and sisters usually get it for us;
  - Older friends and boyfriends.
- Very few minors reported that the last time they drank they purchased alcohol (n=2) for themselves or got it from home without parental consent (n=3). However, some noted that drinking occurs with parents consent and sometimes parents or the parents of friends were supplying the liquor.
  - A lot of parents let the drinking go on, they just don't care;
  - Some parents are pretty cool and let us drink.
- In discussion, the price of alcohol was noted as a factor facilitating use, the amount consumed and how it is consumed; "if you pay less you drink more".
  - Its cheap, so it is easy to get together [pool money] and buy a lot of it;
  - Alcohol is at a decent price. It is not too expensive;
  - The cheaper it is the less significant it is and the more you drink;
  - Cheaper, more consumption;
  - It depends on what you drink and how you drink it. If you are buying a \$100 bottle of wine, you are going to want to sit there and drink that slowly, really experience

*it. However, if you are buying a pint of Smirnoff that costs \$15 it doesn't really matter.*

- Aside from price, packaging was also noted to improve accessibility and ease of drinking.
  - *The coolers look and taste just like pop;*
  - *Bottles, like Wisers, fit into a purse or bag perfect;*
  - *Larger sizes, plastic bottles, easy to transport.*
- There was mention made by a few rural adolescents and parents about increased access to alcohol through local corner stores and gas bars that have qualified for NSLC licenses and concerns about this trend for making it easier to get alcohol.
  - *The store down the road now sells liquor. You don't have to go into town. There will be even more drinking and driving now;*
  - *You can see it right on the shelves, right in front of kids;*
  - *Easy to shoplift;*
  - *It was just there one day;*
  - *What is wrong with our government? Do they want to turn us into a bunch of drunks and problem gamblers? Got to make sure everyone can gamble and drink everywhere in the province every day of the week including Sunday. We all got to be within a few feet of a VLT and a liquor store.*

### 3.7.6 Advertising

- Participating adolescents and parents mentioned the role of advertising in shaping attitudes towards alcohol use among minors in Nova Scotia.
- Most of the youngest participants especially girls (13-15 years) taking part in the study believed that teens learn about alcohol through commercials on television where they show individuals who are made to look as young as teenagers enjoying alcohol and having fun, generally people that they “want to look like and be like”.
- Older adolescents especially males 16-18 years noted the use of humour, young women, and “sex” to sell liquor.
  - *Always gorgeous women, dancing and guys who look regular but get to be with these beautiful girls because they are drinking Bud or something;*
  - *It's funny stuff with hot chicks. Yah I pay attention.*
- Some of the girls also related to the advertising noting that alcohol “loosens your inhibitions” and “makes you act and look sexier too”.
- Parents noted that the ads are not generally depicting the lifestyles of adults but instead glamourize drinking and, in particular overdrinking by teens and young adults.

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- *These ads aren't targeting any adults I know;*
- *They make it seem normal to for kids to drink at every [get-together];*
- *They got these perfect young guys and girls having fun. Looks pretty appealing;*
- *Kids are the only ones that have keg parties; it's all about drinking large amounts.*

**3.7.7 Type of Alcohol**

- Adolescents, especially girls were most likely to start out drinking coolers and “sweeter” alcoholic drinks whereas beer was mentioned more often by the boys, although it should be noted that beer was not a strongly preferred form of alcohol for most due to the fact that it has a lower alcohol content and “takes too long to get a good buzz”. Chugging, caps, and other drinking games or variations were mentioned to enhance the speed of getting drunk.
  - *Kids drink coolers and beer;*
  - *I have seen kids put holes in cans of beers and then pop the lid so it shoots down their throats.*
  - *If you drink beer, you have to sit down and have a 24 and you still don't feel drunk*
- Among those adolescents who were drinking there was strong preference for “hard liquor like rum, vodka and whiskey” for a number of reasons including easy portability, higher alcohol content, low price, and speed of intoxication.
  - *Not beer, hard liquor;*
  - *Straight out of the bottle;*
  - *You can drink it straight, get faster effects;*
  - *Kids chase it with pepsi or cola but just take it straight;*
  - *Can conceal it in other drinks like pop or juice;*
  - *Not as likely to get sick and don't have to drink as much.*

**3.8 Impact of Alcohol (Risk and Harms)**

Alcohol was associated with various negative outcomes including injury, violence, lack of control, heightened emotions, unplanned sex, alcohol poisoning, and death. Awareness of and/or exposure to these incidents were high and drinking and driving was a primary focus followed by growing concern and intolerance for “date rape” or predatory non-consensual sex with someone under the influence. Embarrassment was another key negative outcome cited by adolescents as well as loss of events and privileges due to underage drinking by self or others. There was limited understanding, relevance, or apparent concern among adults or adolescents about the impact of alcohol on the development of the adolescent body or brain.

- The primary concerns among all participants surrounding alcohol use by minors centered on the risk for injury or death especially due to drinking and driving. This was particularly relevant for older adolescents taking part in the study and those living in rural areas of the province.

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- All participants knew that they should not drive or be a passenger in a car with someone that has consumed alcohol. Everyone, parents and adolescents alike, could cite instances that they were personally aware of that involved tragic outcomes for adolescents as well as adults and drunk driving especially in the rural communities.
  - *My dad was in an accident with a drunk driver. I know what can happen. I don't even drink [because of it];*
  - *Every year in and around Yarmouth there are kids killed or hurt because they were drinking and driving;*
  - *There were four guys who were supposed to graduate this year.*
- Concerns about dependence were also noted with many noting addiction and alcoholism among family members such as a parent, uncle or grandparent.
- Among adolescents, in particular older participants and males, there was growing concern and intolerance for “date rape” and “taking advantage of someone when they are drunk”; “not at all cool” and a “good way for someone to find themselves getting hurt”. Adolescents reported that this topic has also been the subject of television programs geared towards adolescents and appears to resonate with them.
- Embarrassment associated with drunken behaviour and incidents that have occurred when drunk are heightened due to the use of technology to record (e.g. cell phone) and post for public or private display (e.g. Face Book or Youtube).
- Adolescents and parents recognized that underage alcohol use could have other long and short-term health implications related to liver and brain development as well as injuries and death although for adolescents and parents this was not well understood.
- In contrast to drinking and driving and date rape there was little spontaneous mention of other alcohol induced injury or alcohol poisoning although once prompted most adolescents reported awareness of or first-hand exposure to a variety of incidents
  - *I ended up falling and getting stitches;*
  - *I know a girl who fell into a ravine and broke her collarbone;*
  - *I've had alcohol poisoning;*
  - *There was the kid who died of exposure after passing out.*
- Participating adolescents, especially the boys taking part in the study mentioned the role of alcohol, aggression, and violence in the community. In fact adolescents felt that “fights tend to happen anyway with teenagers” but that for adults “alcohol is usually involved”. Given that adolescents are out on the streets or in and around locations where adults are drinking they reported high exposure to violence associated with alcohol use.



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- Females also reported similar concerns about violence and alcohol use but mentioned other significant impacts surrounding pregnancy, unprotected sex followed by sexually transmitted diseases/infections.
  - *Girls are more likely to be taken advantage of when they are drinking;*
  - *Girls can get pregnant;*
  - *When you are drunk, things can happen. You don't know what you can pick up. It can be dangerous.*

Table 11: Risky/Harmful Behaviours of Underage Drinking

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>Have you, your friends or any other kids you know or have heard about... (1+ response allowed)</b>						
<b>Operated a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol</b>						
Self	2	3	2	3	5	6.6%
Friends	4	6	3	7	10	13.2%
Other Kids	18	27	20	25	45	59.2%
<b>Operated a vehicle while under the influence of drugs</b>						
Self	4	2	1	5	6	7.9%
Friends	8	12	7	13	20	26.3%
Other Kids	16	23	17	22	39	51.3%
<b>Ever been injured while under the influence of alcohol</b>						
Self	---	3	---	3	3	3.9%
Friends	4	9	4	9	13	17.1%
Other Kids	21	26	20	27	47	61.8%
<b>Passed out while under the influence of alcohol</b>						
Self	1	11	3	9	12	15.8%
Friends	12	21	14	19	33	43.4%
Other Kids	17	22	15	24	39	51.3%
<b>Thrown up while under the influence of alcohol</b>						
Self	5	13	6	12	18	23.7%
Friends	17	27	19	25	44	57.9%
Other Kids	18	20	16	22	38	50.0%

- Although everyone recognized that “drinking and driving is wrong” some had still engaged in this behaviour with five adolescents indicating on the personal survey that they had operated a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol and six while under the influence of other drugs. The majority had personal first-hand knowledge of drinking and driving by other kids. It is notable that two adolescents who had driven while under the influence of alcohol were also under the legal driving age.
- Despite the fact that only three minors had experienced some type of injury related to their own alcohol consumption, exposure to drinking injuries through friends or other kids was also common (62%).
- There were 12 adolescents who indicated that they had “passed out” from drinking, and almost one-in-four of those taking part had experienced alcohol-induced vomiting at

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some time. A similar proportion mentioned their friends and other kids who had experienced negative physical effects from alcohol intoxication. Yet, despite these relatively high rates of experience with alcohol related consequences adolescents did not necessarily spontaneously mention vomiting and passing out as significant side-effects from over-drinking.

Table 12: Negative Impacts of Own Alcohol Use

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<i>In the past 12 months, has your drinking... (1+ response allowed)</i>						
<i>Affected your school work/exams</i>	---	3	1	2	3	3.9%
<i>Caused tension or disagreement with family or friends</i>	4	9	6	7	13	17.1%
<i>Gotten you in trouble with the police</i>	1	2	---	3	3	3.9%
<i>Cost you so much you gave up buying other things</i>	---	6	3	3	6	7.9%

- Among adolescents taking part in the study, about one in every six had experienced tension or disagreement with family and/or friends during the past 12 months associated with their drinking. Underage drinking problems or risks were endorsed more often by female adolescents but there were no appreciable differences observed for younger versus older adolescents.
- There were three 16-18 year olds in the study reporting their drinking had gotten them in trouble with the police sometime over the past 12 months.
- Again adolescents were unlikely to spontaneously mention these types of impacts when asked about the risks and harms of alcohol use.

Table 13: Perceived Seriousness of Negative Consequences of Alcohol Use

	Gender Group		Age Category		Total (n=76)	
	Male (n=37)	Female (n=39)	13-15 yrs (n=38)	16-18 yrs (n=38)	(n)	%
<b>How serious of a situation do you think it is ...</b>						
<b>If someone drives after they have been drinking</b>						
Very Serious	37	39	38	38	76	100%
Somewhat Serious	---	---	---	---	---	---
Not at All Serious	---	---	---	---	---	---
<b>If someone has had too much to drink</b>						
Very Serious	20	21	20	21	41	53.9%
Somewhat Serious	15	18	17	16	33	43.4%
Not at All Serious	2	---	1	1	2	2.6%
<b>If someone is physically ill (vomits) from alcohol</b>						
Very Serious	30	32	34	28	62	81.6%
Somewhat Serious	7	7	4	10	14	18.4%
Not at All Serious	---	---	---	---	---	---
<b>If someone passes out from drinking</b>						
Very Serious	32	35	36	31	67	88.2%
Somewhat Serious	5	3	2	6	8	10.5%
Not at All Serious	---	1	---	1	1	1.3%

- All adolescent participants felt that driving after drinking was a very serious situation.
- Participating adolescents were also likely to perceive passing out from drinking too much and being physically ill and vomiting because of drinking to be a very serious situation, although the rate of concern tended to decline as adolescents got older and these outcomes presumably become more normalized.
- Concerns surrounding over-drinking in general were not as high. Only about half of all adolescents taking part in the study considered ‘drinking too much’ or getting drunk to be a “very serious” situation.

### 3.9 Factors Impacting Consumption of Alcohol by Minors

In order to gain understanding and insight about the factors impacting alcohol use by underage adolescents participants in each group were divided evenly into two smaller groups of four to five people. Using a flip chart each break-out group was collectively assigned a task; one group identified the *key reasons why kids drink* and the other group was asked to identify the *key reasons kids don't drink*. Participants then came together to discuss the items, add or delete items from the list and rank items in order of impact. The lists were coded and summarized for adults versus adolescents and presented for each group in a summary table.

**3.0 Summary Report**

- There were many similarities between the reasons generated by parents and adolescents particularly surrounding the impact of positive and negative peer pressure, boredom, involvement in other activities, impact of parental attitudes, self-esteem and accessibility.
- The influence of friends and parental attitudes towards drinking were reported to have a strong influence on adolescent drinking behaviour and played key roles in determining whether or not underage drinking was “cool” and acceptable or “pointless and stupid”.
- In contrast to parental response, adolescents uniformly reported underage drinking to cope with stress and escape problems and worries. These reasons for drinking were spontaneously mentioned in only half of the parent groups falling fairly low on the list of reasons generated. This prevalence of this reason among adolescents was surprising and disturbing for many parents who considered these to be “more adult types of reasons for drinking”.
- Parties, occasions for celebrating and rewarding oneself as well as “relaxing or unwinding” were also cited by teens as key reasons for drinking reflecting the impact of adult culture norms for adolescents alcohol use. Parents never mentioned this as reasons for drinking and tended to over-estimate the role of curiosity. The youngest teens were more likely to cite curiosity and the desire to get drunk as motivating factors.
- High self-esteem, confidence, success in school, sports or other activities as well as engagement in something meaningful were all seen to counter alcohol use.
- Conversely, advertising, price and easy accessibility were considered to normalize alcohol use and cultural attitudes.

## 3.9.1 Reasons Kids Drink

	Adolescents Groups									Parent Groups				Total
	Halifax		Yarmouth		CBRM		Amherst		Total	Halifax	Yarmouth	CBRM	Amherst	
	Males 13-15 yrs	Females 16-18 yrs	Males 16-18 yrs	Females 13-15 yrs	Males 16-18 yrs	Females 13-15 yrs	Males 13-15 yrs	Females 16-18 yrs		Parents of 13-15 year olds	Parents of 16-18 year olds	Parents of 13-15 year olds	Parents of 16-18 year olds	
<b>Top Reasons Kids Drink (Among Adolescents)</b>														
<i>Boredom ( nothing else to do)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8	✓	✓	✓		3
<i>Pressure and Stress (to cope, escape)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8		✓	✓		2
<i>Peer Pressure (friend's are drinking)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
<i>Parental Attitudes &amp; Approval (allowed to drink)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	7	✓	✓		✓	3
<i>Easy Access Opportunity</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
<i>To Celebrate (special events, occasions)</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7					0
<b>Other Reasons</b>														
<i>Curiosity (to try it, see what it is like)</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓		5	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
<i>To Rebel (go against authority, break rules),</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
<i>Lack of Supervision (no one around)</i>			✓			✓			2	✓	✓	✓		3
<i>To loosen inhibitions (sexual attention)</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓			4		✓			1
<i>To be cool (bragging rights, fit in)</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	5		✓	✓		2
<i>As a Reward</i>		✓				✓			2				✓	1
<i>To Get Drunk</i>	✓			✓			✓		3					0
<i>Advertising, marketing</i>						✓	✓		2	✓		✓		2
<i>Like the Taste</i>	✓					✓			2					0

*Reasons Kids Drink - Listed Responses (Verbatim)*

- Peer pressure (9)
- Coping with stress (3)
- Problem solving | Problems/emotional escape | Get away from reality | Coping /escape emotional problem
- Everyone else is doing it
- Pressure to achieve
- To have fun | Having fun with your friends (4)
- To be cool (3) | Amusing | Funning | To have fun because of bored
- Boredom (6)
- Rebelling | To rebel (2) | Because they were told not to
- Depression (3) | Stressed (2)
- Fitting in (5)
- Parties (2) |
- Celebrate/drinking parties
- To celebrate | Celebrate festival
- Making Friends | Socialize | Social | Nice out | Just to hang out | Meet new people
- Friends are drinking (2) | Friends do it
- The Feeling/ Curiosity (4) | To get the experience | To taste what it feels like | Try new things | To see what it taste like | Just to try | To see if they can handle it (not get sick)
- Parents are drinking (Monkey see, monkey do) (4) | Parental attitude
- Parents let them drink | Acceptable
- Environment
- To get drunk | Feeling of being drunk (loaded)
- To get loose
- Relax (2)
- To get laid | In order to meet girls
- To become more sexual
- Sexual pressure
- Taste | Like the taste
- Like people on TV | Saw it on TV | Commercials
- Like the feeling | Like it
- A thrill, danger
- To get attention
- Easy to get it (2) | Access | They can get it | Easy Access
- No problem with alcohol
- Advertising
- To be mature grown up
- Give you status , seem cool



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- Take Advantage
- As a reward
- “Because everyone else is” | Because other people do
- “Because it makes me feel good”
- “Because I deserve it”
- Have money to get it
- No adult around
- Get offered it
- Nothing better to do | Nothing Else to do
- School dance
- After exam
- A fight with family/friends
- Confidence | Boost confidence
- Spend some money
- Taking after our parents
- Trouble at home
- Why not?
- Feels good
- Risk taking
- Right of passage
- Doing poorly at school
- Because it’s there

## 3.9.2 Reasons Kids Don't Drink

	Adolescents Groups									Parent Groups				Total
	Halifax		Yarmouth		CBRM		Amherst		Total	Halifax	Yarmouth	CBRM	Amherst	
	Males 13-15 yrs	Females 16-18 yrs	Males 16-18 yrs	Females 13-15 yrs	Males 16-18 yrs	Females 13-15 yrs	Males 13-15 yrs	Females 16-18 yrs		Parents of 13-15 year olds	Parents of 16-18 year olds	Parents of 13-15 year olds	Parents of 16-18 year olds	
<b>Top Reasons Kids Don't Drink</b>														
Lifestyle (Involvement in other things)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Fear of Consequences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Parental Attitudes		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Do not like the taste or after-effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Cost (can't afford it)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Positive peer pressure (Friend's don't drink)		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	5	✓	✓	✓		3
Lack of Access		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		5				✓	1
Sport, physical activity	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		5	✓		✓		2
<b>- Other Reasons</b>														
Bad experiences	✓				✓	✓	✓		4		✓		✓	2
Religion		✓	✓			✓	✓		4		✓			1
School/Education				✓	✓	✓			3		✓	✓		2
Not interested in drinking	✓			✓		✓		✓	4			✓	✓	2
Get violent/out of character			✓		✓		✓		3					0
Law/Regulation		✓		✓					2		✓			1
Do not want to drink & drive	✓								1		✓			1
Family lifestyle									0			✓	✓	1
Work									0		✓			1
Drinking social stigma									0		✓			1
Fear of Addiction (exposure though others)									0	✓				1
Set a good example									0	✓			✓	2

*Reasons Kid Don't Drink - Listed Responses (Verbatim)*

- Having better things to do | Something else to do
- if you are in school sport | Active in sports or other activities
- School | Education (2)
- Self respect/ Self image
- Work
- Had a bad experience of drinking (2) | Unpleasant feeling | afraid to have a bad experience | Past experience
- Religion (5)
- Money (4) | Cost (2) | Expensive | Cannot afford it | Don't have money
- Obey parents | What will happen when parents find out
- Parents (2) | Parental consequence (2) | Family influence | Parent's attitudes
- Family lifestyle
- Getting caught (2) | Bad if you get caught | Scared of getting caught | Afraid to get caught | Don't want to get in trouble
- Consequences | Consequence (law) | Consequences (legal and physical) | Fear of law
- Fear | Scared
- Take away privileges | Take away cells etc.
- Loss of trust
- Friends don't drink (2) | Hang out with non-drinking friends | Good peer pressure (2)
- Not Socially active, stay at home
- Side effect of drinking | Healthy reasons | Cause liver problems | Health/sports impact | Don't want to get sick /dangerous
- Don't like the taste of alcohol (3) | Unpleasant taste | Don't like it (3)
- Don't like after affects of it | Don't like it (Taste/effects)
- Don't see point of drinking | Not interested in drinking
- Act Stupid (2)
- Gets violent
- Not available (2)
- Availability (getting ID's and workers might know the kids) | Hard for someone to get it | Don't have access to it | No access | Cannot get it
- Goody good | Be a good role model
- Seeing other people setting good examples of not drinking
- Seeing unacceptable behaviour (Drunk uncle) | Alcoholism runs in the family | Experience (What they see)
- Addiction
- Friends killed by drinking and driving or by drunken drivers | Dangerous (2) | Knew someone who died because of it
- Recent death from alcohol poisoning
- Kill People
- Scared

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- Drinking and Driving | Drive
- Need to keep your mind straight
- It makes people do things they normally wouldn't
- If it is a school night
- If diabetic
- If on medication
- if trying to quit
- Embarrassment
- Social Stigma
- Anti-drinking advertisements

**3.10 Information and Assistance**

- Adolescents cited a number of information access points i.e., listening to others, parents, internet, the liquor corporation, community organizations that hold drug and information sessions such as churches, schools etc.
- Parents were considered a good starting point but adolescents and adults felt that parents need better information and support to open a dialogue with their kids. Adolescents noted that discussions were usually one sided; “parents do most of the talking”. The information provided was not always considered factual and primarily consisted of statements that offered kids little insight or understanding about alcohol: “Don't drink”, “don't go behind our back”, “don't drink so much you injure yourself”.
- Adolescents also indicated that they would be unlikely to voluntarily share information about their drinking or exposure to alcohol with parents due to fears about how parents may react or act on the information. This was seen to constrain open-discussion.
- School and teachers were more credible sources of information as long as they “didn't preach” but again these sources were not seen to promote dialogue or open discussion given fears surrounding consequences associated with disclosure and cynicism about motives and responses.
  - *Can't tell them anything or there could be problems;*
  - *Could lose even more of our privileges or things to do if they knew what was going on.*
- Adolescents mentioned opportunities for making learning more engaging for adolescents by using credible outside sources; “They had this band in and between sets they talked about problems they had with alcohol and drug use and how to deal with it, not get involved”.

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- One of the male 16-18 age groups suggested Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD) Canada should also target the Junior High School group of students in the 13-15 year old range, in addition to the High School target market.
- Providing forums for kids to candidly discuss alcohol and other relevant issues for adolescents ( e.g. drugs, sex, violence or bullying) was considered challenging but worthwhile as adolescents often have a lot of insight to contribute and questions but will “clam up and say nothing” if there is any suspicion or lack of trust about the motive or people involved.
- Older adolescents were perceived to be a good source of information for younger teens. This group is already influential in introducing and facilitating alcohol use among their younger peers and therefore would be a credible source for providing information on risks, and how to deal with peer pressure and the opportunities that can arise.
- Kids wanted more information so “we can make better decisions and decide for ourselves” but the material needs to be easily accessible because they are unlikely “to go out of [their] way to find it”.
  - *Facts about alcohol can be useful;*
  - *There is stuff we need to know , like why we should care about it;*
  - *Can't just tell us not to drink; we need to know why.*
- The Department of Health was seen to be the most reasonable body for providing information although some parents expressed cynicism about government's conflict of interest in both promoting and preventing alcohol use in the province.
  - *You are asking governments who make money from alcohol to campaign against it. It's a conflict of interest.*
- Uniformly the alcohol industry was dismissed as a credible source of information.
  - *Liquor stores should not tell kids about drinking because they are trying to make a profit from kids;*
  - *They want to sell their products , they wouldn't be credible;*
  - *It would be biased;*
  - *It's a conflict of interest.*
- Parents also felt that peers should be educating younger students through presentations and discussion groups.
- There was evidence that there was a strong stigma attached to seeking help for an alcohol problem. Hesitation was expressed about attending community and or other organized groups for fear that attempting to obtain information openly may suggest an alcohol issue with their child.

### 3.11 Recommendations - Finding Solutions

At the end of each group participants were asked to offer potential solutions for mitigating underage drinking in Nova Scotia. To stimulate the discussion process each adolescent and parent group was asked to imagine that they were a special committee with unlimited funding and resources, formed to advise the government on how to best delay or reduce underage drinking in the province.

Participants generally agreed that to truly address underage drinking resources likely need to be invested further ‘upstream’ so that by the time kids are in their teens, resiliency, physical activity, self-esteem, strong family and community relationships are already established. This means that other “downstream” solutions are more likely to be effective in dealing with the short and long-term goals for delaying or reducing underage drinking in Nova Scotia including education, prevention, policy, and practice.

- “Show kids there is a lot more to do than just drinking”. The primary recommendation emerging from the process was to provide varied, accessible, options to adolescents for entertainment, sport, recreation, and leisure that are age appropriate, affordable, engaging, relevant, and “gives [them] reasons not to drink”.
  - *We need places to go, things to do;*
  - *Where we aren’t exposed to older kids and drinking;*
  - *Places we can hang out and do things we like, pool, music, video games;*
  - *Somewhere safe;*
  - *Different places for different interests; not just one place that everyone has to go. We aren’t all the same and that will just cause tension.*
- Increased access to sports or physical activity was seen as another important area for “blowing off steam” and using excess physical energy in a positive way instead of violence or aggression. Not only are organized sports expensive and limited for older adolescents but the average teen has little to no access to informal recreational or social sport and reported low levels of physical activity.
  - *Can’t afford to have my kids in sports;*
  - *Intramural sports, pick up games just aren’t there anymore;*
  - *They close the parks. The basketball nets are destroyed and the older kids are down there drinking;*
  - *Its fun to be active, to do stuff, to have somewhere to go.*
  - *Need facilities, equipment and chance to just play games now; no where to go like local rec centers.*
- The cost of entertainment and recreation options was also seen to be contributing to problems, with alcohol often a cheaper choice for “having fun”. Adolescents argued that investment in other affordable options of entertainment for adolescents has practical benefits if “they don’t want us to drink and cause trouble for them”.



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- *If entertainment was cheaper then there would be more things to do;*
  - *Liquor turns a basement into a whole party;*
  - *More community activities [but] not something you have to pay for;*
  - *People need places you can go*
- Transportation especially in rural areas was a significant issue for adolescents and needs to be considered to enhance involvement in recreational and social events. If parents do not provide transportation services for kids most will be unable to take part in many extracurricular activities. Parents noted it could be difficult scheduling children and various activities. At a time when adolescents are seeking more independence from parents, they tend to take advantage of other riskier options for getting around including “riding with other older kids”, “young adults” or “hitching rides” that may put them in situations where they have limited control and/or experience.
  - Older adolescents, especially males in the rural areas, expressed strong interest in owning and maintaining a vehicle. The associated care, maintenance, and responsibility of the vehicle was seen to give them a vested interest in remaining drug and alcohol-free. However, insurance, liability, and lack of space or supervision for working on vehicles makes the acquisition and maintenance of a car “almost impossible”.
  - Many adolescents felt disenfranchised and isolated from the community. Finding ways to increase and encourage positive interaction between adolescents and their community was seen to foster the development of healthy connections for adolescents and counter community fears and prejudices surrounding teens.
    - *Kids need to be seen as a valued part of the community because right now they don't feel they are;*
    - *Need to develop trust and respect, thank them for their business;*
    - *There is nothing for us here [in the community]. Just waiting to leave.*
  - A critical factor identified as impacting solutions was the ‘ever-looming spectre of liability’ that limits and, in many cases, obstructs proactive efforts to engage adolescents in any meaningful way in schools and communities. This has produced cynicism and apathy on the part of adolescents (“what is the point, whatever you come up with [they] find something wrong with it”) and growing concern from parents that this trend is further alienating and isolating teens.
    - *Can't play games at school, no contact [allowed];*
    - *Raised money for a skateboarding facility but never happened because the council was concerned over liability;*
    - *Kids put bike jumps in but they were torn down because it could cause insurance problems;*
    - *Liability is a big factor. No one will step up to take responsibility so it is easier to stop offering it [activity].*

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- Adolescents needed to be directly engaged and involved in creating solutions. Not only was this seen to be critical to ensuring relevancy and involvement of adolescents but parents and kids alike reported residual benefits such as increased confidence, the acquisition of new skills, development of positive relationships and creating a sense of ownership.
  - *The idea of having kids input is excellent;*
  - *Might teach them to run their own businesses;*
  - *Kids need a sense of responsibility;*
  - *If kids are involved , they may have more reason not to drink;*
  - *We need to be involved if it is going to work.*
  
- Teens want information on alcohol and the risks but it needs to be non-judgmental, easy to pick up or access, and relevant;
  - *You never hear what actually happens when someone drinks, you always hear don't do it”.*
  
- Peers and older adolescents were seen as most credible for educating, informing, and engaging younger teens on the issue of underage drinking. Not only can they “talk the talk” with adolescents, they have also “walked the walk” and faced the issues younger kids are having to deal with.
  - *Get teens talking to younger kids;*
  - *More likely to open up to [them];*
  - *Will tell them stuff we won't say to adults.*
  
- In other cases though arguments were made to provide age appropriate or age segregated activities for adolescents so that younger kids are not exposed to behaviors and of older adolescents; “need our own underage clubs, dances for younger and older kids” .
  - *We need places where bands play, but no older kids, alcohol free.*
  
- Involvement and inclusion of adolescents in the community, in mentoring younger children and building, operating or maintaining facilities and programs was also perceived to foster a sense of stewardship toward their community; “If we feel some ownership we will take better care of it”.
  
- Parent and adolescents recognized that parents also need support and information not just on underage drinking but in supporting relationships and dialogue with their teens. There was a notable lack of outreach and proactive support of healthy family relations with most services and programs focused primarily on crisis intervention which was seen to perpetuate the stigma associated with seeking information on alcohol use.
  - *As parents we have few opportunities to come together about our teens like we used to when they were younger;*

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- *Kids don't have to tell us anything and the system doesn't either but it comes back to us when there is a problem;*
  - *A lot of times you don't know what to do but don't want to go to help groups because people will think you have a problem;*
  - *If you go to those type of groups it is like your child has a problem.*
- There was consensus that any efforts to specifically address underage drinking need to start at younger ages with junior high a key target group; “That is where it starts. No point waiting until it is too late to start talking to them”.
  - Adolescents and especially parents expressed concerns about the impact of advertising that glamorizes drinking especially by young people and had strong reservations about how alcohol is marketed suggesting current advertising is “dishonest and misleading” and needs to be restricted
    - *That type of advertising we don't need;*
    - *Dishonest. Trying to sell booze by selling a lifestyle, a lie;*
    - *Makes everything look good, fun and people are happy, popular and sharp looking if you drink. Not realistic. Why don't they show [the scene] after the party ends;*
    - *How about making them have to list the side-effects of alcohol like they do with drug ads on T.V. That would be more honest.*
  - There were also concerns that the ads and marketing strategies were deliberately targeting adolescents and normalizing drinking by linking alcohol consumption with adolescents activities like sports, music, parties, foods and rewards. Given the hazards associated with alcohol use participants suggested alcohol advertising should be subject to similar restrictions for other high-risk products like tobacco.
    - *At sporting events and concerts, shouldn't be able to sponsor all these things;*
    - *If you are watching hockey games, a lot of the advertising is geared to young boys;*
    - *Baileys with ice-cream, stuff like that makes you feel like they are targeting kids;*
    - *Don't like the taste? You can make a cappuccino and frothy drink out of it;*
  - While limiting the advertising and marketing of alcohol was considered to offer benefits to all community members there were strong opinions expressed that it should be countered with strong social marketing messages that introduce the realities of drinking among adolescents focusing on those issues messaging and impacts relevant to adolescents;
    - *As a nurse working in emergency start showing them the effects of alcohol; not just gory stuff but real stuff;*
    - *There are pictures of the effects of smoking on the lungs but you don't see a picture of the liver. It is very gross looking;*
    - *Show what drinking really does;*
    - *Drunk is not cool;*

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- *Show them what you look like if you keep drinking; makes you fat and ugly;*
- *Commercials would be efficient because of a lot of viewers.*
- Accessibility was also a concern especially among parents although adolescents also noted the role of easy access and cheap prices in supporting their underage drinking. Some parents observed that “increases in underage drinking statistics seem to have occurred since alcohol has become more heavily promoted” and “widely available in our province”.
  - *They have a drive-thru liquor store at Needs. It's the same as a Wendy's drive thru;*
  - *It is so easy. You are buying liquor in the car. Kind of ironic;*
  - *There are liquor stores in every community and gambling machines all over;*
  - *Start seeing the risks go up when the prices went down;*
- There were also calls for more significant consequences for facilitating or engaging in underage drinking.
  - *The only way to stop underage drinking is not to sell or give liquor to underage kids*
  - *More serious consequences for underage drinking*
  - *There has to be consequences for people who give alcohol to kids.*
  - *System, police have to help parents with how to deal with their kids if they are caught drinking. Don't just dump them at home.*
- “Drinking at 14 was fun, now at 18 it has become something to do”. Adolescents acknowledged there is a culture of drinking in the province that has normalized drinking at all levels and that needs to be addressed to support a healthier lifestyles and communities.
  - *In Nova Scotia there has always been drinking; When you've got nothing else to do you fall back on this so you don't think about other stuff;*
  - *Here in Cape Breton the popular culture down here is drinking.*
- Investment in aging or non-existent infrastructure was also recommended to provide, more “outdoor venues”, “indoor facilities”, “good places to go”, and recreational sites that reflect the interests of adolescents today and not the recreational interests of an aging population; “Need more exciting, up-to-date stuff that we like not the stuff our parents do”.
- Adolescents also mentioned the use of technology to deal with alcohol related issues such as using a card-based system for purchasing alcohol and installing breathalyzers on the cars.

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- Should have a system with a card for alcohol similar to what they have in the casinos. Basically it swipes how much you have gambled and once you have gone past your limit it stops you for 24 hours;
  - Put a breathalyzer on the steering wheel and every time you start the car you have to breathe into it.
- In closing many participants, adolescents and adults, noted that underage drinking is not an isolated problem but rather indicative of other issues in society that need to be addressed in a more comprehensive and concerted manner; “Alcohol [use by adolescents] is a symptom of another bigger problem, we need to fix”.

## 3.12 Follow-up Survey

All those taking part in the study had been provided with information on alcohol use by adolescents, and Addiction Services in their area at the end of the sessions. In addition, a follow-up survey was conducted with all study participants approximately six to eight weeks after the research sessions to monitor and assess impact arising from participation in the research. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide additional input following their experience.

## 3.12.1 Changes in Drinking Behaviours and Attitudes

Table 14: Changes in drinking behaviours and thoughts about underage drinking

	Adolescents Group (n=75)		Parent Group (n=32)	
	(n)	%	(n)	%
<b>Since taking part in the discussion group.....</b>				
<i>There has been some change in how you think about underage drinking.</i>	25	33.3%	12	37.5%
<b>Consumed Alcohol in the last month</b>	22	29.3%	23	71.9%
<b>Has there been any change in the amount of your drinking?</b>				
Less	12	16.0%	1	3.1%
Same	63	84.0%	29	90.6%
More	---	---	2	6.3%
<b>How serious of a problem do you think drinking is among kids your age? – Adolescents Group</b>				
Very Serious	35	46.7%	N/A	N/A
Somewhat Serious	38	50.6%	N/A	N/A
Not at all Serious	2	2.7%	N/A	N/A
<b>How concerned are you about underage drinking in your community/province? – Parent Group</b>				
Very concerned	N/A	N/A	20	62.5%
Somewhat concerned	N/A	N/A	12	37.5%
Not at all concerned	N/A	N/A	---	---

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- One-third of adolescents participants (n=25) said that they had different thoughts about underage drinking after participating in the focus group, with a similar proportion (38%) of parent participants having changed some opinions on adolescents alcohol use since attending the discussion session.
- Although the majority of the participants in both the adolescents and parent groups did not change their drinking behaviours after taking part in the study, 12 adolescents specifically indicated a decrease in the amount of their drinking.
- Just under half of the young participants (47%) saw underage drinking as a “very serious” issue, with a few more rating it as “somewhat serious” (51%).
- While all the parents taking part in the study were at least somewhat concerned about underage drinking in their community or province, almost two-thirds (62%) indicated high levels of concern.

## 3.12.2 Impact of Participation in the Study

Table 15: Interest in Referral or Additional Information or Support

	Adolescents Group (n=75)		Parent Group (n=32)	
	(n)	%	(n)	%
<b>Participation in the research made you...</b>				
<i>Feel uncomfortable or concerned about any aspect of your own or someone else's drinking</i>	10	13.3%	2	6.3%
<i>Want to go out and drink</i>	---	---	---	---
<b>Have any interest in...</b>				
<i>Speaking to a trained counselor or professional about your own or someone else's drinking</i>	2	2.7%	---	---
<i>Knowing more information about drinking in Nova Scotia</i>	9	12.0%	2	6.3%

- At follow-up, 10 adolescents and two adults indicated that taking part in the study made them feel uncomfortable about their own or someone else's drinking.
- All but one adolescents expressed interest in additional information which was provided. Two adolescents were directly referred to Addiction Services in their respective areas with additional follow-up undertaken two weeks later.



### 3.12.3 Changes in Thoughts about Underage Drinking

Adolescents and parents were asked what, if anything, had changed about their thoughts on underage drinking following participation in the study. Most had comments to share that are recorded verbatim in the following tables.

For many parents and adolescents participation in the study provided a forum for discussing the issue of drinking with peers and stimulated re-evaluation of previous beliefs or formulation of new opinions about drinking and options for delaying or reducing underage alcohol consumption.

#### *Adolescents Participants*

- It's not suitable for kids my age to be drinking because they can become alcoholics later in life and get into a lot of trouble by drinking.
- It changes your perspective a bit. I learned about the consequences of underage drinking and all the problems that can cause you now, and then it could maybe lead to alcoholism later.
- It made it more obvious to the fact that it happens a lot with kids from all over the [urban]. I didn't realize how many kids really did drink and that the younger ages were doing it often.
- There are different reasons why kids start in the first place, such as problems in their life, with their families or just because they are bored. My thinking is that the reasons for them starting needs to be addressed.
- It is better for kids my age to wait until they are older before they start to drink and to do it with responsible adults. A lot of kids don't know the consequences of drinking at a young age. That's what I think.
- I've been thinking more about underage drinking since the groups. I think it's more serious than kids my age thought.
- Even making the legal drinking age higher, I don't think would make a difference. Kids who want to drink are going to no matter what the legal age is.
- Alcohol causes trouble and danger for kids my age and I didn't know how much trouble before I went to the group.
- The fact that junior high school students as early as grade 7 were drinking surprised me. I thought it was the older kids only, the ones in senior high.
- I think about drinking and driving more now especially when people say they are going to a party.
- It opened my eyes a little bit because I didn't know that underage drinking was that bad or abundant.
- It turned me off from drinking a little and I'm able to say no to drinking sometimes. I am also able to put more thought into whether I'll have a drink or not.
- I realize how many kids do underage drinking and it's a big issue because 14 year olds should not be doing it because it's bad for underage kids.
- I dislike drinking more than I did before and I hadn't thought about the effects of drinking before the group.
- It's now easier to discuss underage drinking with my parents and friends, especially the risks of drinking.
- I would think more about it before I start to drink and I learned about the effects of drinking.
- I've started to think more about the seriousness of drinking and driving.
- I feel strongly about not drinking. I always did, but I feel even more strongly now since attending the

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group.

- I realize it's not a personal or private matter and I'm more open now to discuss drinking.
- It's a serious problem and I didn't think about that before.
- Too many kids drink today and the younger kids are doing it more and more. They're bored or just want to be cool.
- I don't show my little sister alcohol anymore. Things have changed so much and there is a lot of exposure lately on underage drinking.
- Just about all of the things that could happen like passing out or going to places you shouldn't be going to.
- I have cut back my drinking.
- I decided not to drink until I get older.
- Kids drinking is not cool at all is what I learned the most.

***Parent Participants***

- I am more educated to the possibilities of it happening in my own family.
- I'm trying to be more aware of what my kids are doing. It was important for me to learn about the problems we have with underage drinking in the province.
- I didn't realize how young the kids were that were drinking and I was surprised how many parents said they didn't talk about drinking with their kids.
- I have changed the way I think about kids drinking. Prior to the discussion, I didn't know that kids drank as young as they did.
- It's made me more aware that drinking is a problem. I always knew about it, but I didn't know about the extent of the problem.
- There is more underage drinking than I was aware of.
- I'm aware how drinking has become a cheaper pass time for the kids rather than going out to the movies or playing sports. Everything for kids and their families is priced out of range.
- I think I'm more aware of the problem.
- It surprised me about the statistics on how young the kids are that drink and how big of a problem underage drinking is in our province. It has opened my eyes for sure.
- I'm more aware of the problem and I'll be keeping a closer tab on my daughter and her friends and will talk to them if needed.
- I was surprised by the reasons why kids said they drink like because they're bored. I really didn't know it was as bad as what it really was to be truthful.
- I'm more aware of it now and the extent of underage drinking in our province.

### **3.12.4 Reasons for Changes in Drinking Behaviour**

#### *Adolescents Participants*

- I think I'm more aware of the consequences now so I have cut down on drinking.
- I just haven't felt like drinking.
- I haven't been out much lately.
- I haven't been drinking because I've been thinking about the problems it causes.
- I didn't have time to drink much because I've been going to school and working full time as well.
- I've been thinking about the bad effects of drinking and I don't want to get in trouble.
- I'm not a big drinker so I haven't had too much drink at all.
- I'm just getting away from the people I was hanging around with at the time.
- I just don't feel like drinking right now.
- I just haven't been to a party.

#### *Parent Participants*

- Stress and other circumstances going on in my life. I couldn't be bothered with drinking when I'm stressed.
- I went on vacation. I drank a little more than I usually do.
- I went out of town for a week and I had more opportunities to have a drink. Now that I'm back home my drinking consumption is back to normal and that means very little.
- I've discussed the issue with friends.

### 3.12.5 Additional Ideas or Suggestions for Addressing Underage Drinking

#### *Adolescents Participants*

- Reduce drinking in front of the kids. If kids don't see the adults drinking then they won't know about it and maybe they won't start drinking.
- There could be more information about the consequences of drinking available to kids.
- The police should be stricter because they just send the person home instead of locking them up if they are drinking underage.
- Perhaps the parents could take a bigger part in their kids' life and teach them not to drink if they are underage.
- Have an all ages' club so kids can get together and talk or just hang out. Now we don't have a lot of things to do and drinking is cheap.
- Having a place where kids can hang out if they want to.
- I think it would be better if kids appeared in the advertising campaigns instead of the adults. I think kids would listen more to other kids.
- I think there should be more organized events, school activities, programs and people who come to the school to talk about the bad things about underage drinking.
- Make punishment harsher for underage drinking.
- Warn people of the consequences like accidents from drinking and driving and becoming addicted to alcohol.
- Alcohol is glamorized by the media and they need to put the truth in the ads like how people died from underage drinking or how you could kill someone or ruin someone's life if you drink and drive at the same time.
- Alcohol is in candy sold at the store and the kids buy them, but it should only be sold in liquor stores. It's not cool to drink and the advertising should be controlled so kids won't think it's cool.
- I think classes should be given in grade 7 to educate the kids early about the dangers of underage drinking. They should have them for the parents too.
- Maybe addressing and talking about it in the schools. More information and frequent talks should be given to kids from junior high right until they finish high school. Everything negative about drinking should be discussed.
- Have an establishment something like a Dooley's, but for kids only and there should be no alcohol around either. We need more arcades for kids here in [rural].
- We need more activities for kids like a recreation center. Maybe if kids had something safe to do they might not drink.
- A large fine for the first offence and the second time you're caught a night in a juvenile home and that can only help if the police could catch them.
- Kids need more stuff to do around here because they hang around in groups and there's something's some kids can do and not others.
- I'd like to see more activities for kids to do. There is nothing here that's good for kids to do and have fun with.
- There should be things to do for kids so kids wouldn't get into trouble.
- There needs to be better ID checks at the liquor stores. There should also be more police on the streets then kids drinking on the streets would be picked up.
- I think the driving age should be increased. There's a relationship between being able to drive and kids starting to drink.

**3.0 Summary Report**

- I think that everyone should have the chance to hear young people talk about their experiences with drugs or alcohol. We had a band come to our school and they played music and in between the music they talked about their experiences.
- Have a pool hall or a place where kids can hang out.
- I don't think the stores should be able to sell beer under the counter and they should check and see if ID's are real.
- I think the age limit should be raised and people should ask for ID's more.
- Put more things in the town for kids to do.
- Drinking is always going to be a problem. I don't think it can be fixed.
- There needs to be more things for the kids to do that is affordable and there also needs to be more education on alcohol available in the middle schools for grades 7 and 8.
- We need more activities in the small towns. All people do around here is drink.
- The sports center should open up all year round and the sports should be not just for the athletic kids, but everyone.
- Have dances and stuff like that to keep the kids from drinking. Our school is bringing back dances now.
- Have harder consequences when they get caught drinking. We get away with a lot of stuff these days.
- I think there should be more activities for kids.
- There should be activities in town for us to do.

**Parent Participants**

- More advertising and more shock value like the statistics of kids who die etc.
- Harsher laws for young offenders and re-write the young offenders act so that it makes it harder for kids to get away with things, alcohol included.
- There need to be more public awareness campaigns about drinking too much in general, but especially amongst minors.
- More education about the negative effects of underage drinking. Also finding sports that are affordable for both the kids and the parents because this can keep the kids occupied and prevent underage substance abuse or use.
- Talk to the town counselor to see if he/she can come up with something.
- I still think there needs to be after school activities for the kids that won't cost anything. Most people can't afford to pay for sports equipment.
- I'm concerned about the behavior that drinking causes like driving under the influence.
- Someone should go to the schools and have talks with the kids about the bad things that can happen when you drink and using extreme examples so the kids can really see the bad things with visual pictures.
- I think the kids become bored and then become attracted to drinking as something to do. Many people can't afford to have their kids participate in activities like sports and no other good activities either. Something must be done about this.
- Information needs to be given to very young kids even 6 to 7 years old because they must be aware of the effects of alcohol. Also kids need more things to do.
- Parents and kids need to be more aware. I don't know how this can be done, except that parents need access somehow to more information.

**3.0 Summary Report**

- Education is important, but I fear that the prevalence of advertising on TV, in magazines and also drinking in the movies makes kids think that it is okay to drink.
- Something must be done to make parents more aware of the problem. I know where my daughters, but some parents let their kids run wild.
- Keeping the kids active with activities and have a place for them to hang out.
- Young people today in [rural area] have little to no resources available to them that are affordable and we need more community based clubs and programs that are free and run by the town for kids.
- Have stiffer laws for people who buy alcohol for minors.
- Let the kids know at an early age about alcohol poisoning and other negative effects of drinking. Basically, more education within the community and the schools.
- Change the drinking age to 21 years old and then educate the kids on the realities of drinking and driving by taking them to a hospital or a morgue for that matter so they visually see what drinking can do.
- Help keep the kids busy and the parents should be more involved and aware as to what their children are doing, who they hang around with and talk to their kids about everything.
- More media coverage like on the news, in the schools and have teens who have had bad experiences share their stories.

**General Comments*****Adolescents Participants***

- Stores should be closed that sell alcohol to minors. I don't know of any that do sell to minors, but the kids who drink are getting it from somewhere and I don't know how.
- It has been instilled inside you that if you grow up with parents who don't believe in underage drinking then you are more likely not to drink. I know better.
- If kids are going to drink they are going to do it anyway. That's what I think.
- The group was better than I thought it would be. I thought it would be boring, but it was really interesting.
- I live in a small town and there is nothing else to do but drink and there's a party every weekend. Someone has to find something else for us bored people to do.
- There should be a lot more education like in the classes in school and just for the talk to warn kids about how dangerous alcohol is.
- The study was good and I think more kids should take part in these things, the groups.
- I was really impressed that people are trying to fix the problem of underage drinking.

***Parent Participants***

- I really enjoyed the focus group and I learned a lot more than I thought I would.
- There is not enough advertising that spells out the dire consequences of underage drinking.
- I think it's ironic that I just received a call from the liquor commission a half hour ago asking me about drinking. I think it was about marketing and maybe they are going to let other stores sell liquor.
- I was surprised to hear some of the group members sat that they were unaware of their kids' behavior and where they were at times.
- I find that it would be difficult to stop underage drinking because the kids always seem to find a way to get alcohol. I really enjoyed the group and I found that I opened up more than I thought I would.

**3.0 Summary Report**

- I really enjoyed the session and I learned a lot.
- Our home has become the place where children gather because kids get bored. That way we see what they are doing and who they are with and we keep them busy.
- Awareness is critical and underage drinking needs to be discussed in schools.
- It is important to provide adolescents with affordable alternatives than drinking.
- I enjoyed the discussion group and I learned things that as a parent I wasn't aware of.
- Hold the person(s) legally accountable for purchasing alcohol for teens in the first place.
- Although there seemed to be a good cross section of kids in the discussion groups, I'm not sure you reached the one you needed to talk to. I also think that the moderator gave them so much information about Addiction Services that some people (kids) might conclude that there was the assumption that they all drank.
- I think it's sometimes a self esteem issue for kids and they want to fit in. There should be more activities for the kids and they should be affordable for the parents. Thanks for including me in the group. It was helpful to hear what other parents had to say.