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National Centre *for* Social Research

Learning to drink: 11 to 15 year olds and alcohol

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Britain's leading independent social research institute

11 to 15 year olds and alcohol

CMO's guidance published December 2009

“Children and their parents and carers are advised that an alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option. However, if children drink alcohol, it should not be until at least the age of 15 years.”

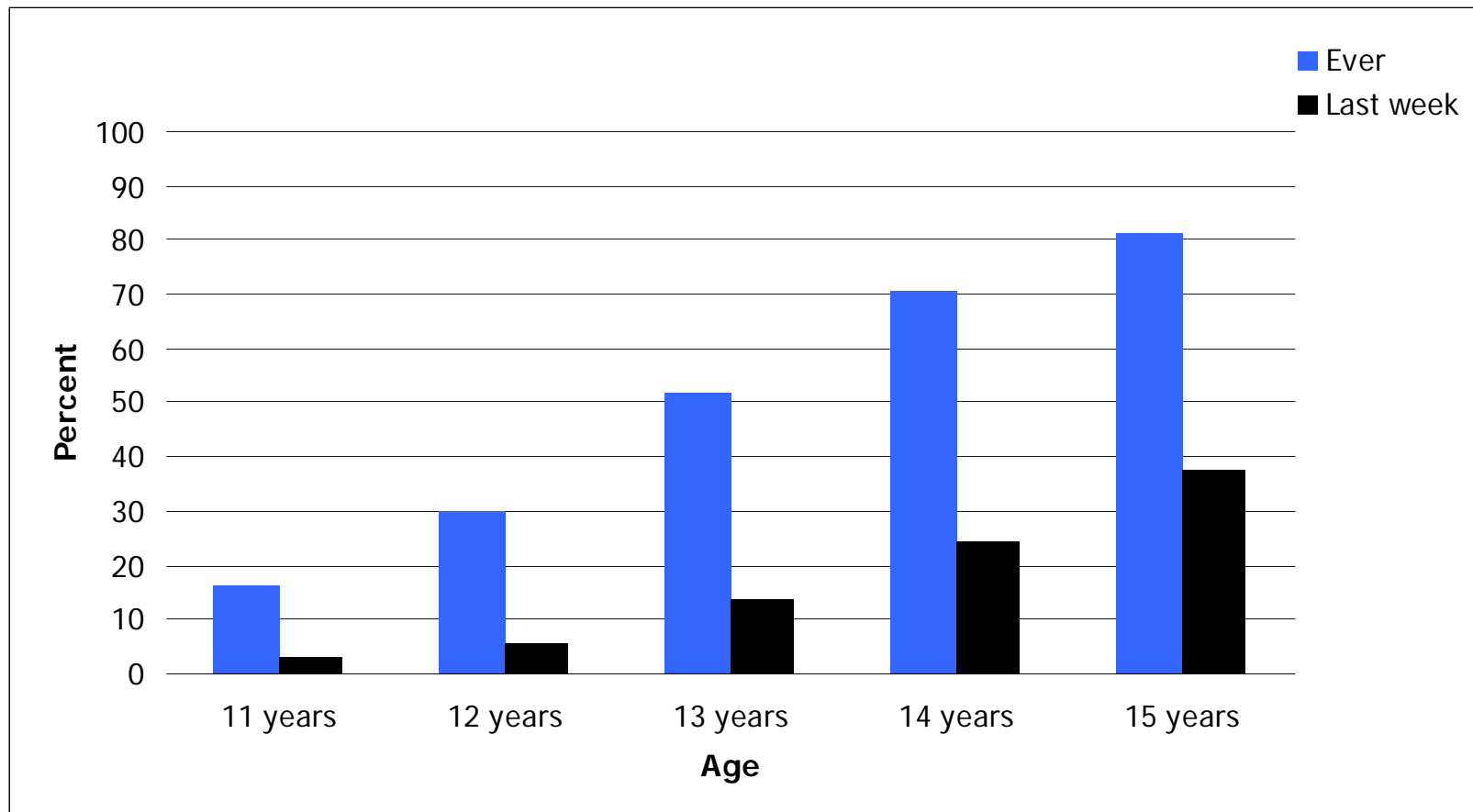
“If young people aged 15 to 17 consume alcohol, it should always be with the guidance of a parent or carer or in a supervised environment.”

(Source: Donaldson L (2009) *Guidance on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people*. DH, London)

11 to 15 year olds and alcohol

- 52% of 11 to 15 year olds have had at least one alcoholic drink
 - Similar proportions of boys and girls
 - Increase with age from 16% of 11 year olds to 81% of 15 year olds
 - By the age of 13, half (52%) of young teenagers have tried alcohol
- 18% drink alcohol in an average week
 - Similar proportions of boys and girls
 - Increase with age from 3% of 11 year olds to 38% of 15 year olds

Experience of drinking alcohol by age



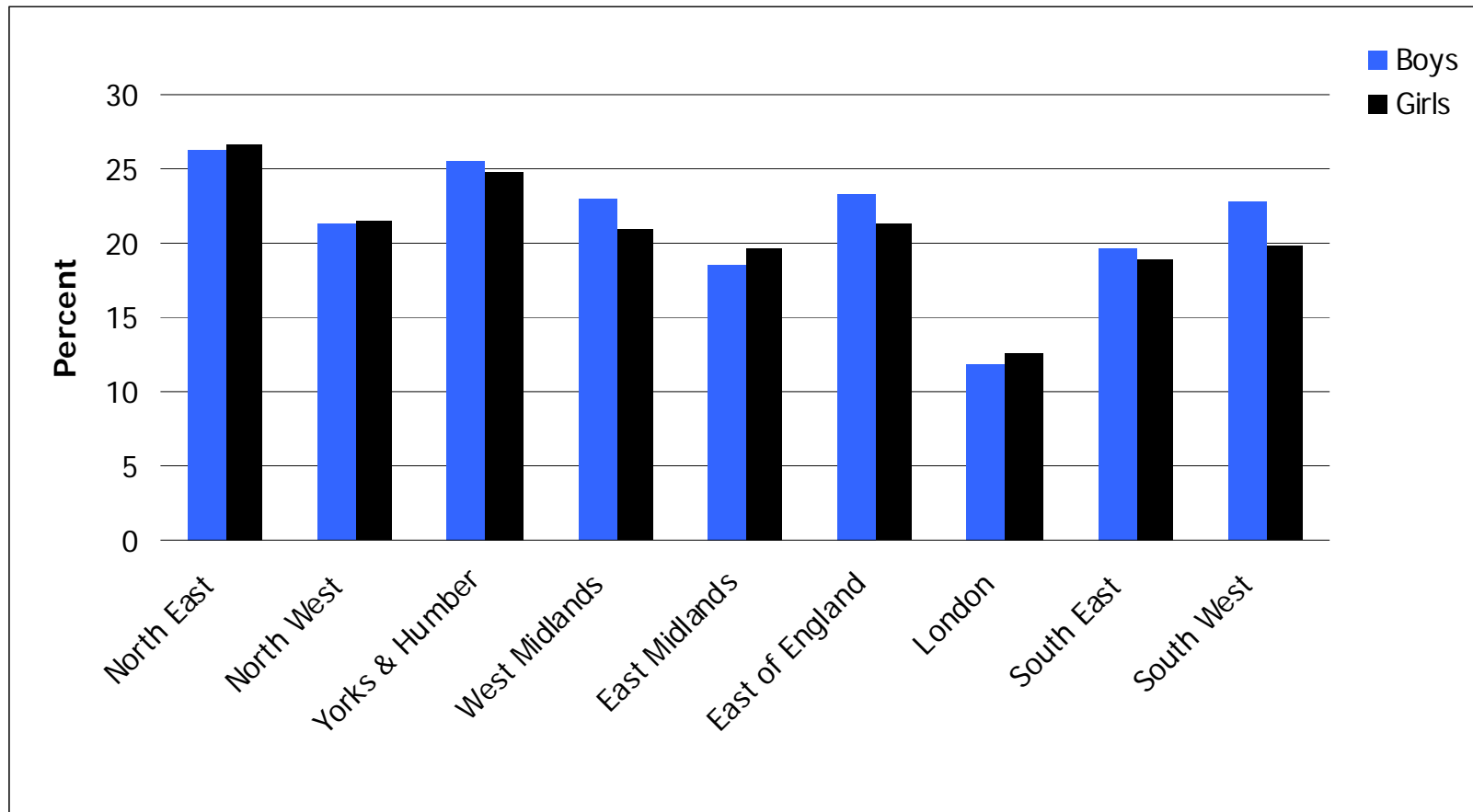
Drinking in the last week

- Not every day
- Median consumption = 8.5 units in a week
 - Boys drink more than girls (9.8 units vs. 8.0 units)
 - Increase with age (11-13s: 5.8 units; 15 year olds: 10.5 units)
 - 36% of boys, 27% of girls reported 15+ units in a week
- Different types of drink
 - Boys: 65% beer, lager, cider, 16% alcopops, 11% spirits
 - Girls: 35% beer etc., 24% alcopops, 20% wine, 19% spirits

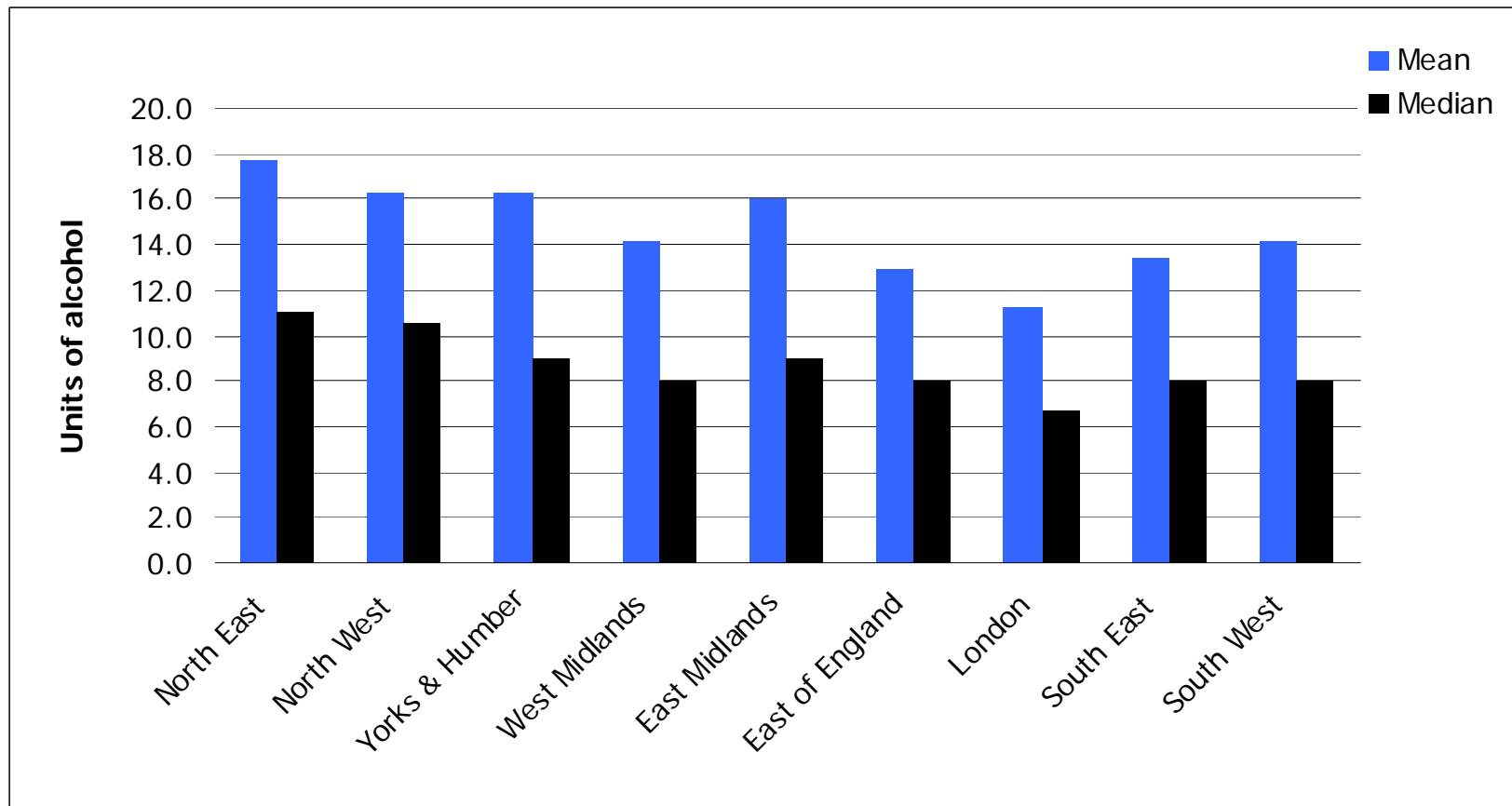
Regional pattern: prevalence of drinking in average week

- **Varies between regions**
 - 'London effect' – much lower than elsewhere (12% in last week)
 - Elsewhere between 19% and 26%
 - Highest in North East
- **Average consumption varies**
 - Mean between 11.3 units (London) and 17.7 units (NE)
 - Median between 6.8 units (London) and 11.0 units (NE)

Prevalence of drinking in average week, by region



Mean and median amounts drunk in average week, by region



Family influences (1)

- Most 11 to 15 year olds say that their families allow them to drink
 - 53% say families don't mind as long as they don't drink too much – from 28% of 11 year olds to 73% of 15 year olds
 - 2% say families let them drink as much as they like
- Strong relationship between reported family attitudes and drinking
 - Family doesn't mind (if not too much): 76% have ever drunk alcohol, 28% in last week
 - Family doesn't approve: 20% have ever drunk alcohol, 5% in last week

Family influences (2)

- Children who drink usually do so with friends of their own age (52%) rather than with their parents (41%)
 - Younger children more likely to drink with parents (from 64% of 11 year old drinkers to 30% of 15 year old drinkers)
 - Older children more likely to drink with friends (from 14% of 11 year olds to 69% of 15 year olds)
 - (Overlap between the two)

Children's drinking: drinking places and exposure to harm

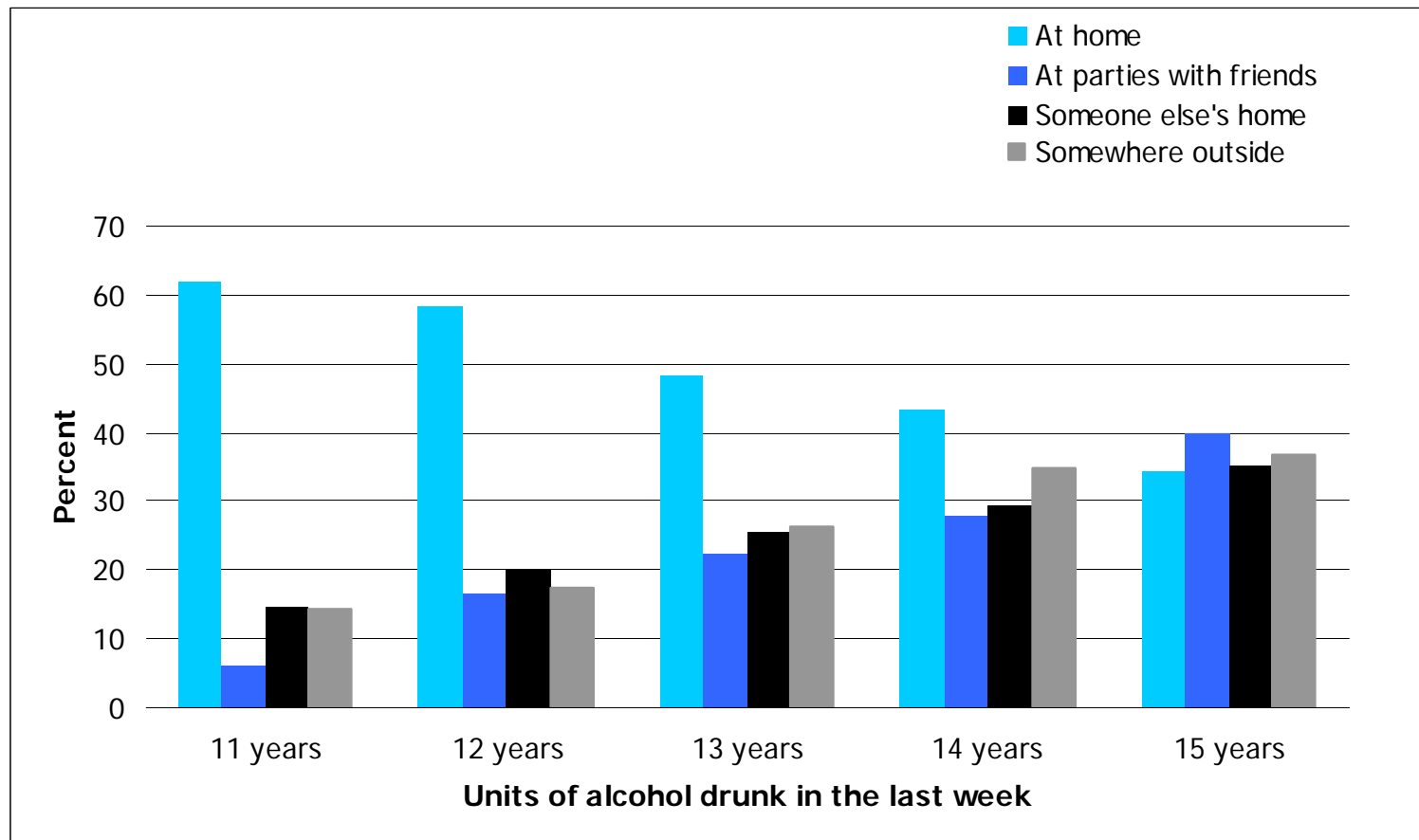
“Young people may suffer high levels of harm if they begin drinking in parks, streets or other unsupervised settings. In the home and other supervised settings, parents and carers can monitor the amounts of alcohol consumed.”

(Source: Donaldson L (2009) *op cit*, p.ix)

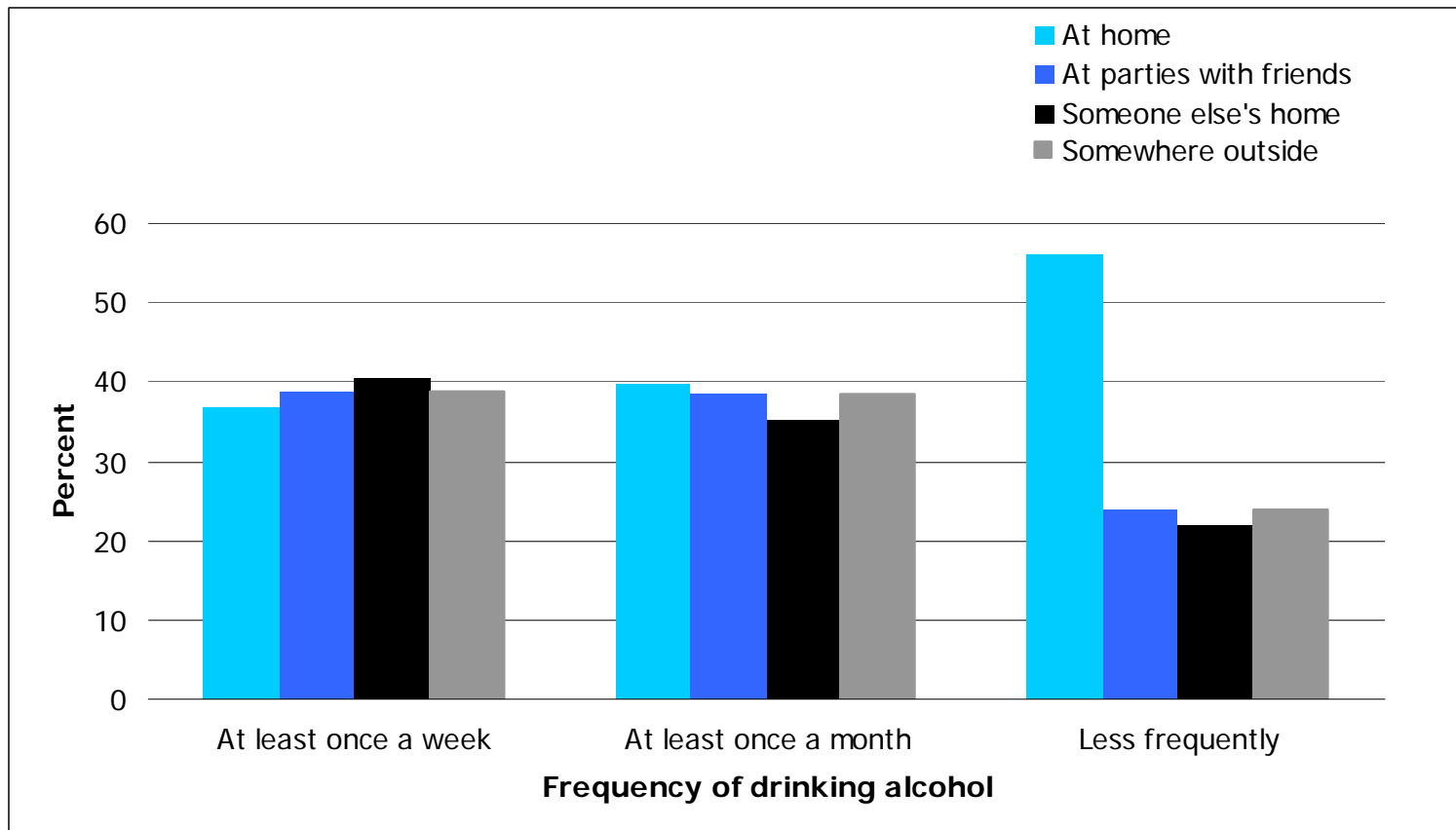
Where do 11 to 15 year olds usually drink?

- Mixture of locations
 - At home: 45% of current drinkers
 - Someone else's home: 31%
 - Parties with friends: 33%
 - Out of doors (e.g. streets, parks): 27%
 - Pub or bar: 7%
- Differences with age, amount drunk

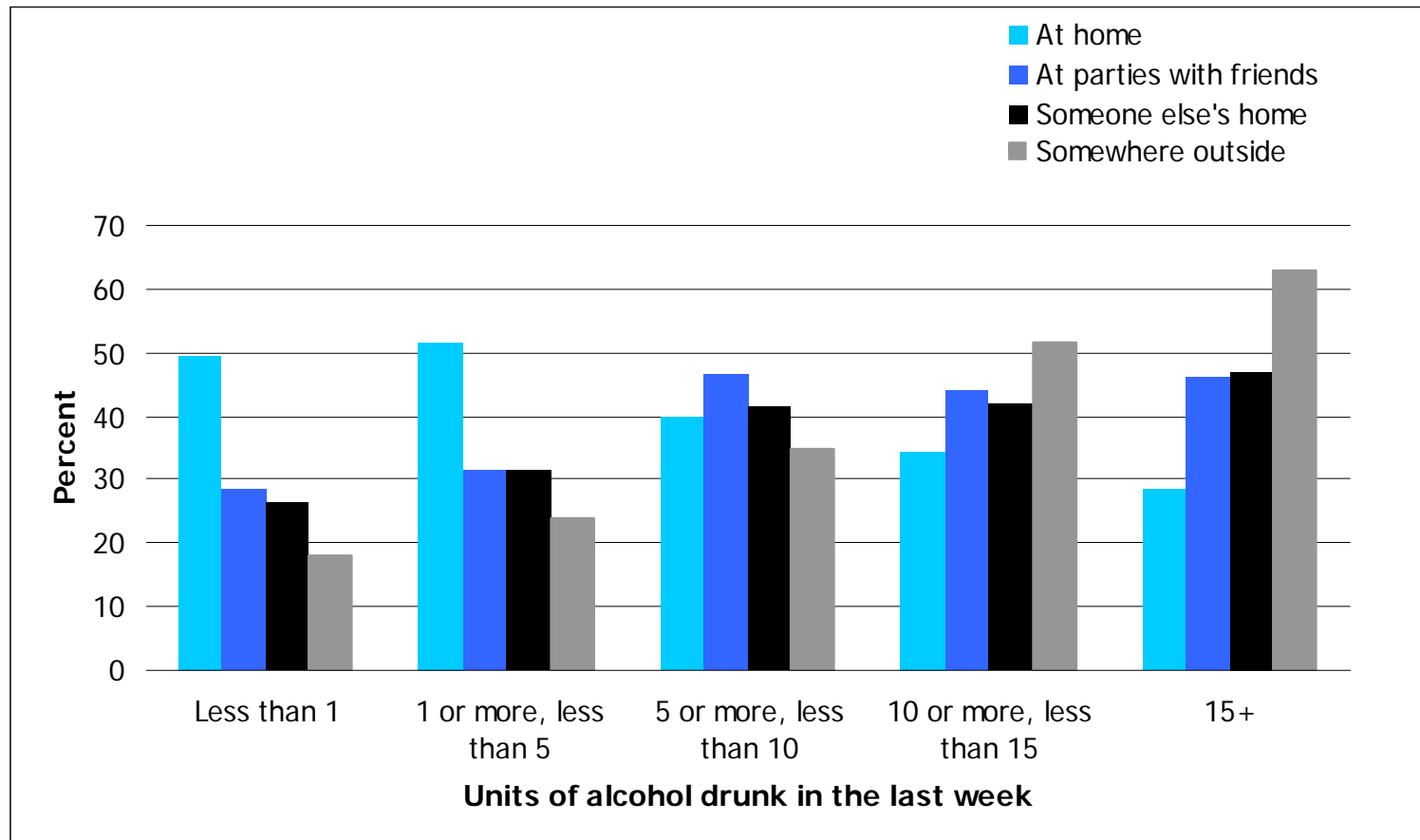
Where children usually drink, by age



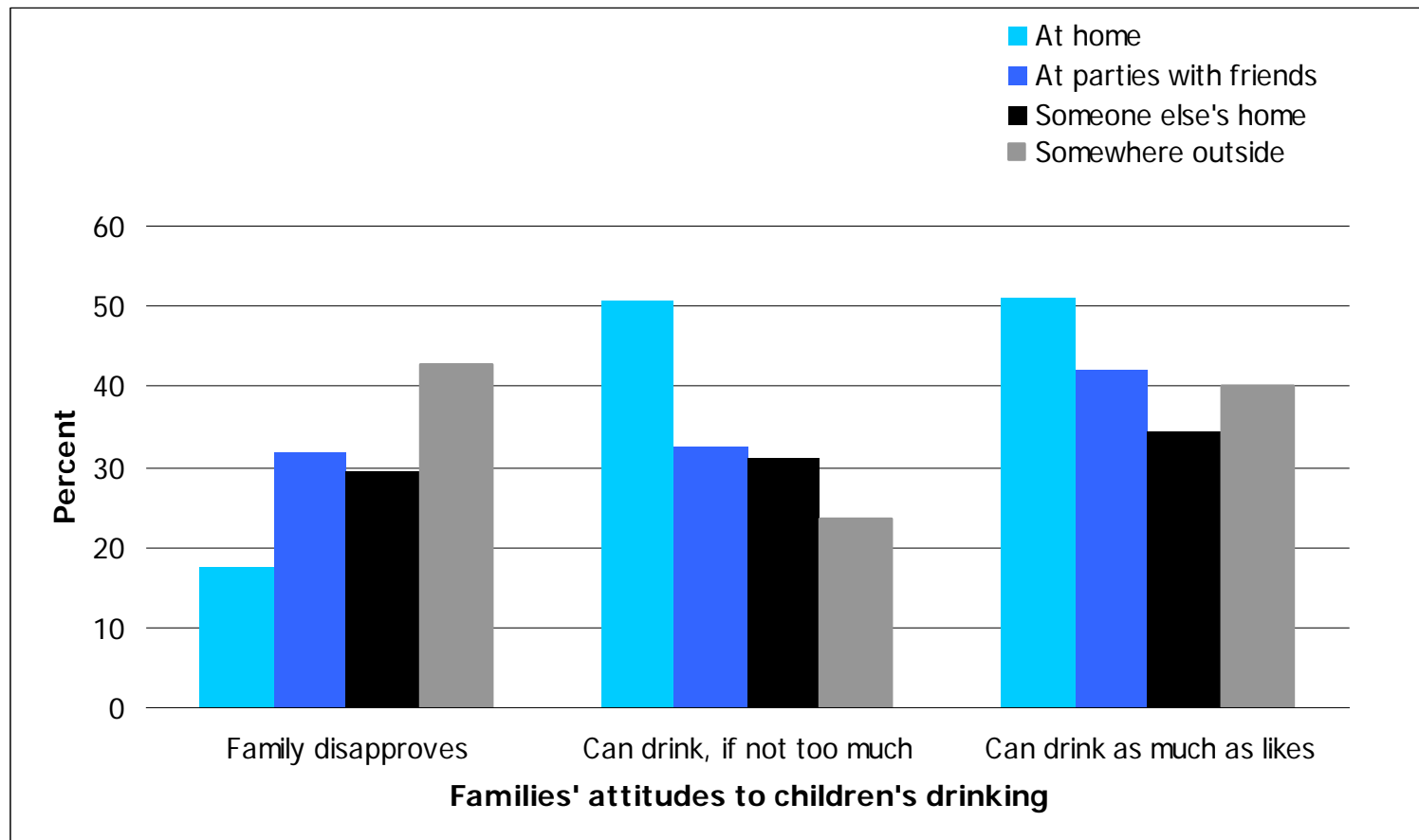
Where children usually drink, by frequency of drinking



Where children usually drink, by amount drunk in previous week



Where children usually drink, by families' attitudes (15 year olds)



Usual drinking places and risk-taking behaviours (15 year olds)

- **Smoking**
 - Current smokers: 30% drink at home, 55% out of doors
 - Non-smokers: 40% drink at home, 25% out of doors
- **Drug taking**
 - Taken drugs in last year: 28% drink at home, 53% out of doors
 - Not taken drugs in the last year: 42% drink at home, 23% out of doors
- **Truancy**
 - Played truant in last year: 34% drink at home, 51% out of doors
 - Not played truant in the last year: 29% drink at home, 41% out of doors

Usual drinking places and impact of drinking (15 year olds)

- Usually drink at home (and not out of doors)
 - 36% said they had been drunk in the last four weeks
 - 9% had vomited
 - 3% had a fight
 - 2% had trouble with the police
 - <1% were taken to hospital
- Usually drink out of doors (and not at home)
 - 82% said they had been drunk in the last four weeks
 - 22% had vomited
 - 9% had a fight
 - 12% had trouble with the police
 - 1% were taken to hospital

In conclusion

- Large gap between CMO's advice and present situation
 - Significant amount of drinking among under 15s
 - All age groups drinking away from supervised contexts
 - (Qualified) family approval of children's drinking
- Where young people drink is linked to how they drink. Specifically, drinking out of doors is linked to:
 - Higher consumption of alcohol
 - Other risk-taking behaviour
 - Binge-style behaviour



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