

Adolescents and 'risk taking': Why do teens do the things they do and what can you do about it?

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Outline of presentation

- ❑ history of 'teenagers', rebellion and 'temptations'
- ❑ are today's temptations more dangerous?
- ❑ why is adolescence such a risky time?
- ❑ how many young Australians are using illicit drugs and what drugs are likely to be used?
- ❑ how many young Australians are drinking alcohol?
- ❑ **so what should parents be doing to keep their teens safe?**
- ❑ **three parenting tips that prevent or delay early drinking and illicit drug use**

History of teenagers

1900 – 'teenagers' did not exist

- ❑ *"no culture or institution that united them or fostered peer group development on a societal scale"* (Schrum, 2008)
- ❑ legislation began to separate adults and children – e.g., minimum age requirements for sexual consent, marriage, school attendance and work
- ❑ later – voting, driving and drinking

Dramatic rise in high school attendance – single most important factor in creating teenage culture

- ❑ high school, based on biological age, reshaped experiences of 13-18 year olds
- ❑ US between 1910-1930 – enrolment rose almost 400%
- ❑ high schools promoted *"unsupervised peer interaction"*





The 'teenage' identity

During the 1920s, 30s and 40s companies began to recognize high schoolers as consumers

The term 'teenager'

Advertisers and marketers saw a new market ...

"Celebrating the notion of carefree, high school bobby soxers ... they began to promote a new social type they dubbed 'teeners,' 'teensters,' and, in 1941, 'teenagers.' ... tied to the new high school world of dating, driving, music, and enjoyment. Although it would take a few years for the term 'teenager' to catch on in the popular mind, the concept was spreading rapidly, particularly as a marketing tool" (Palladino, 1996)

Growing media technology (e.g., development of TV and FM radio) linked to teenage culture

Lots of leisure time, more independence from families

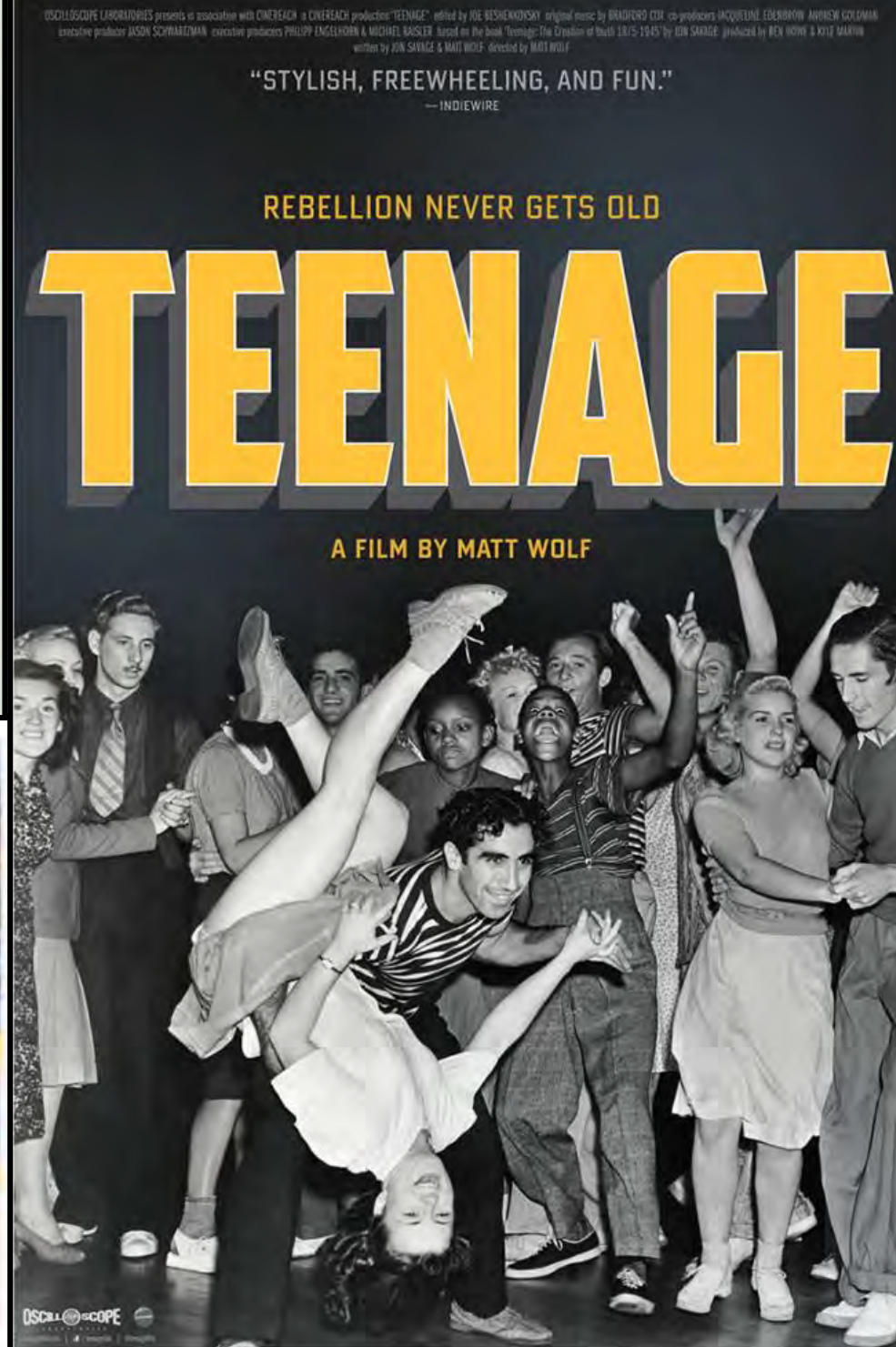
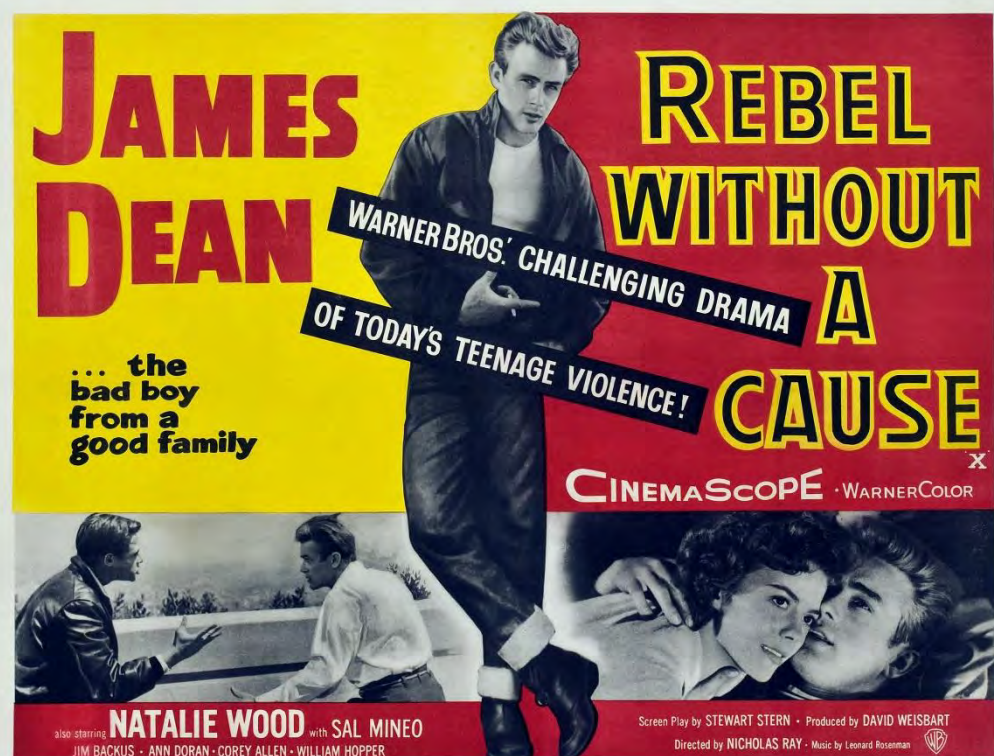
"peer groups and market advertising became as influential as families once were ... ideology of 'youth as fun' also began to be read by many adults as 'youth as trouble'" (Abbowitz & Rees)





Teenage rebellion

With an identity established, teens began to imitate adults, at the same time rejecting adult rules



Teenage rebellion and the 1950s

Teens hit 'mainstream' in the 50s - distinctive dress, habits and culture fuelled by popular media

'Temptations'

Since the 20s 'temptations' have caused parental (adult) concern

- ❑ pool halls (1920s)
- ❑ music – jazz (40s), rock and roll (50s), punk (70s)
 - ❑ make-up and clothing
 - ❑ alcohol and other drugs

New temptations now exist

- ❑ new range of drugs
- ❑ the Internet and social media
 - ❑ internet porn and gambling
 - ❑ 'sexting' and online bullying

Also now know more about 'older' problems

- ❑ body image
- ❑ mental health issues





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Are they worse than in the past?



Adolescence always been a dangerous time - most get through relatively unscathed ... why worry?

There are differences ...

- ❑ adolescents **exposed to issues much earlier**
- ❑ very young teens are now **specifically targeted** by advertisers
- ❑ **exposure is relentless**
- ❑ information communicated immediately - **no 'wait-time'**
- ❑ **trends and fads spread fast** – worldwide
- ❑ often **linked to technology** that is constantly changing – difficult for adults to track

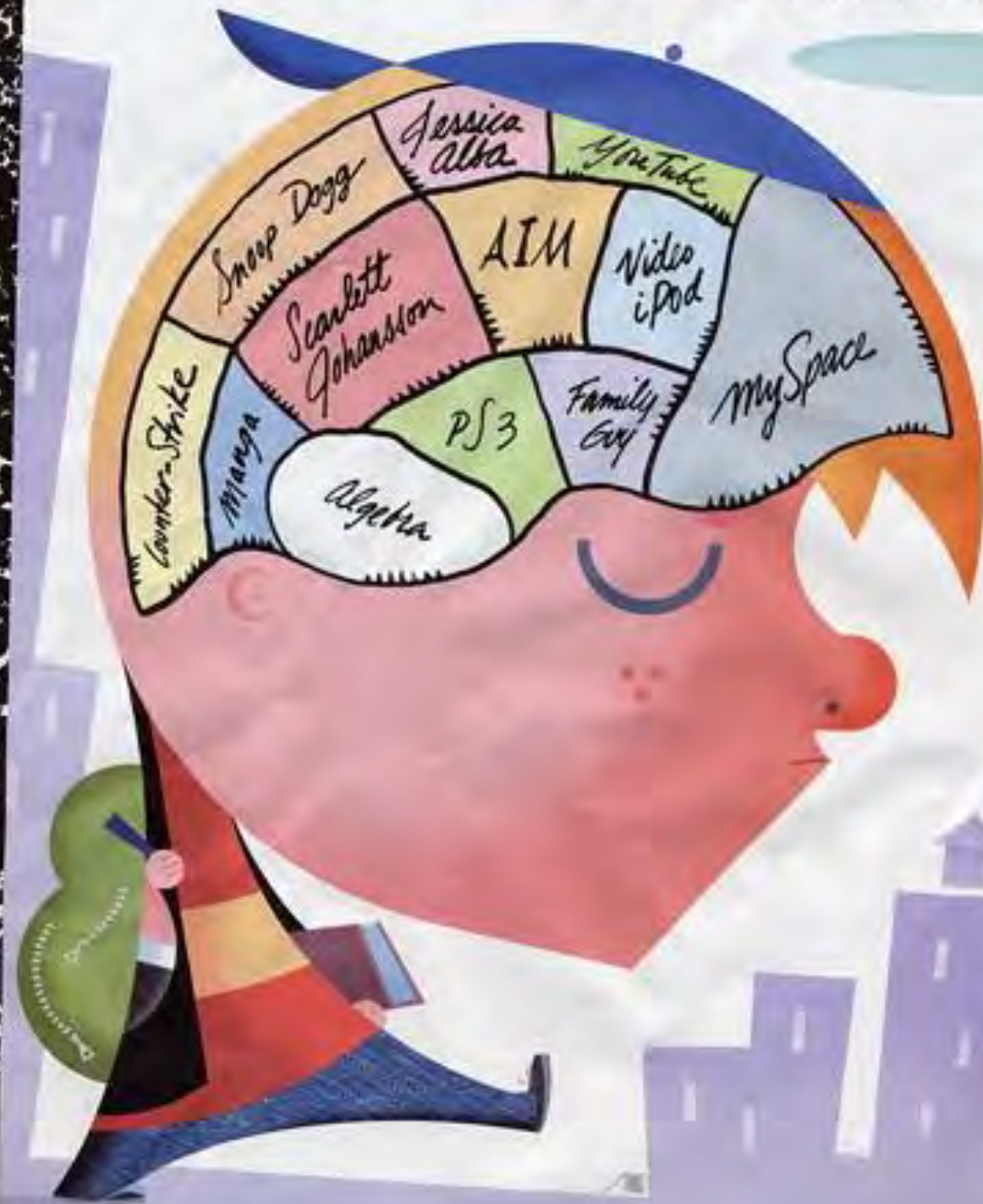


Why are young people more prone to risky behaviour during this time?

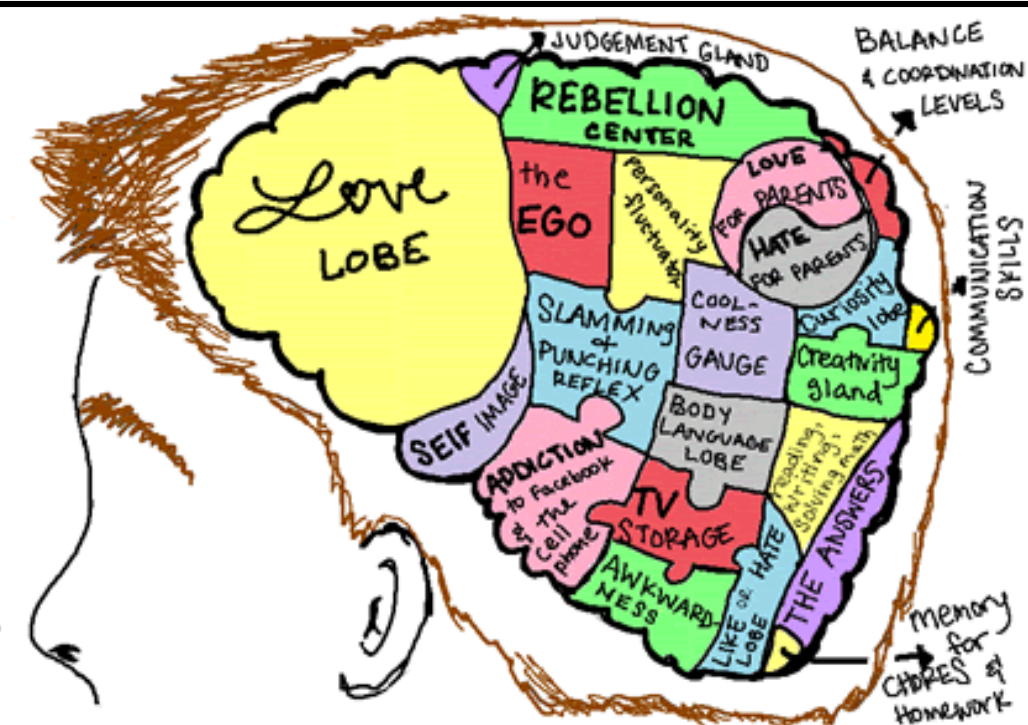
PRICE \$4.99

SEPT. 4, 2006

THE NEW YORKER



THE AVERAGE TEENAGE BRAIN



INSIDE THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

The brain undergoes two major developmental spurts, one in the womb and the second from childhood through the teen years, when the organ matures by fits and starts in a sequence that moves from the back of the brain to the front.

Corpus Callosum

Though it is a small structure, the corpus callosum is a critical part of the brain's wiring. It connects the two halves of the brain, allowing them to communicate with each other. In the adolescent brain, the corpus callosum is still developing, which can lead to a lack of coordination and a tendency to be impulsive.

Prefrontal Cortex

The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that is responsible for planning, decision-making, and impulse control. In the adolescent brain, the prefrontal cortex is still developing, which can lead to a lack of impulse control and a tendency to be impulsive.

Basal Ganglia

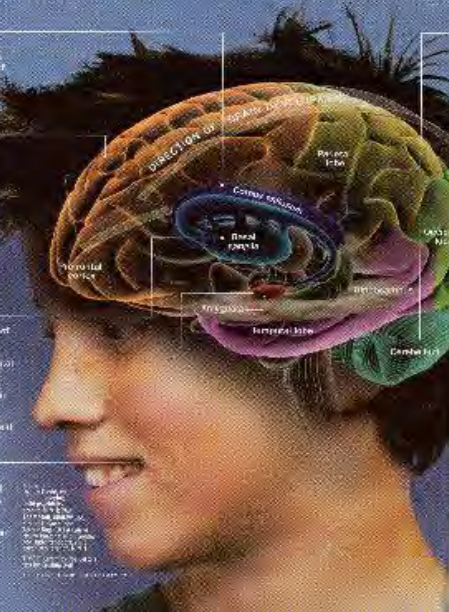
The basal ganglia is a part of the brain that is responsible for movement, learning, and habit formation. In the adolescent brain, the basal ganglia is still developing, which can lead to a lack of impulse control and a tendency to be impulsive.

Amygdala

The amygdala is a part of the brain that is responsible for emotion, memory, and decision-making. In the adolescent brain, the amygdala is still developing, which can lead to a lack of impulse control and a tendency to be impulsive.



By age 25, the brain has 100 billion nerve cells. The number of nerve cells in the brain is not fixed, but it can change. Nerve growth factor (NGF) is a protein that helps nerve cells grow and survive. It is found in the brain and in the blood. NGF is also found in some foods, such as fish and eggs.



It's all due to the adolescent brain ...

Understand what is happening here and it can have a significant impact on your relationship with your teen?



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Adolescents have less developed brains than adults



Far less developed than we once thought – males developing much later than females

- ❑ **adults** rely on prefrontal, hippocampus, premotor cortex – reasoning, judgment and other functions more likely to be used
- ❑ **adolescents** use the amygdala (emotions) to process information
 - ❑ respond with 'gut reactions', rather than think through possible consequences
 - ❑ **a decrease in reasoned thinking and an increase in impulsiveness**
 - ❑ **adolescence – a period of 'increased risk taking'**

What does 'increased risk taking' actually mean?

They weigh risk reward differently – they know the dangers but value the reward more than adults

- ❑ **reward increases if around their peers**
- ❑ "don't downgrade the risk, they give more weight to the payoff"
- ❑ contradicts basic human behavior – why does it happen?

Teens "engage in high-risk behavior to leave the village and find a mate" – an **evolutionary feature**

- ❑ not only humans – rodents, primates and some birds seek out same-age peers and fight with parents – "all help get the adolescent away from home territory"
- ❑ difficult to fight this biology of risk taking – it's part of growing up and is necessary



Are young men more vulnerable?

Teenage Brains: Think Different (2014) Casey, Kosofsky & Bhide (eds)

19 studies across range of research areas including brain imaging, psychology and neurobiology

As far as teenage boys were concerned ...

- ❑ greater activity in areas that control emotions when confronted with threat. Different response to that of children – strikingly different to that of adult men
- ❑ mostly impervious to threat of punishment but heightened sensitivity to possibility of large gains from gambling – **when faced with decision, likely to understate the risks and overstate the gains**
- ❑ a molecule critical for developing fear of risky situations is less active in this group

Once again, makes perfect sense from an evolutionary perspective ...





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So what do we need to remember about young people?



We must remember their brains have not fully developed. They're '**missing a part of their brain**' ... therefore they ...

- ❑ feel they will live forever and take risks without consequences
- ❑ don't believe what happens to others will happen to them
- ❑ have limited attention spans and a different concept of time
- ❑ lack experience in communal responsibility
- ❑ **young men potentially even more difficult** – respond emotionally, understate risks and overstate gains and can be impervious to punishment

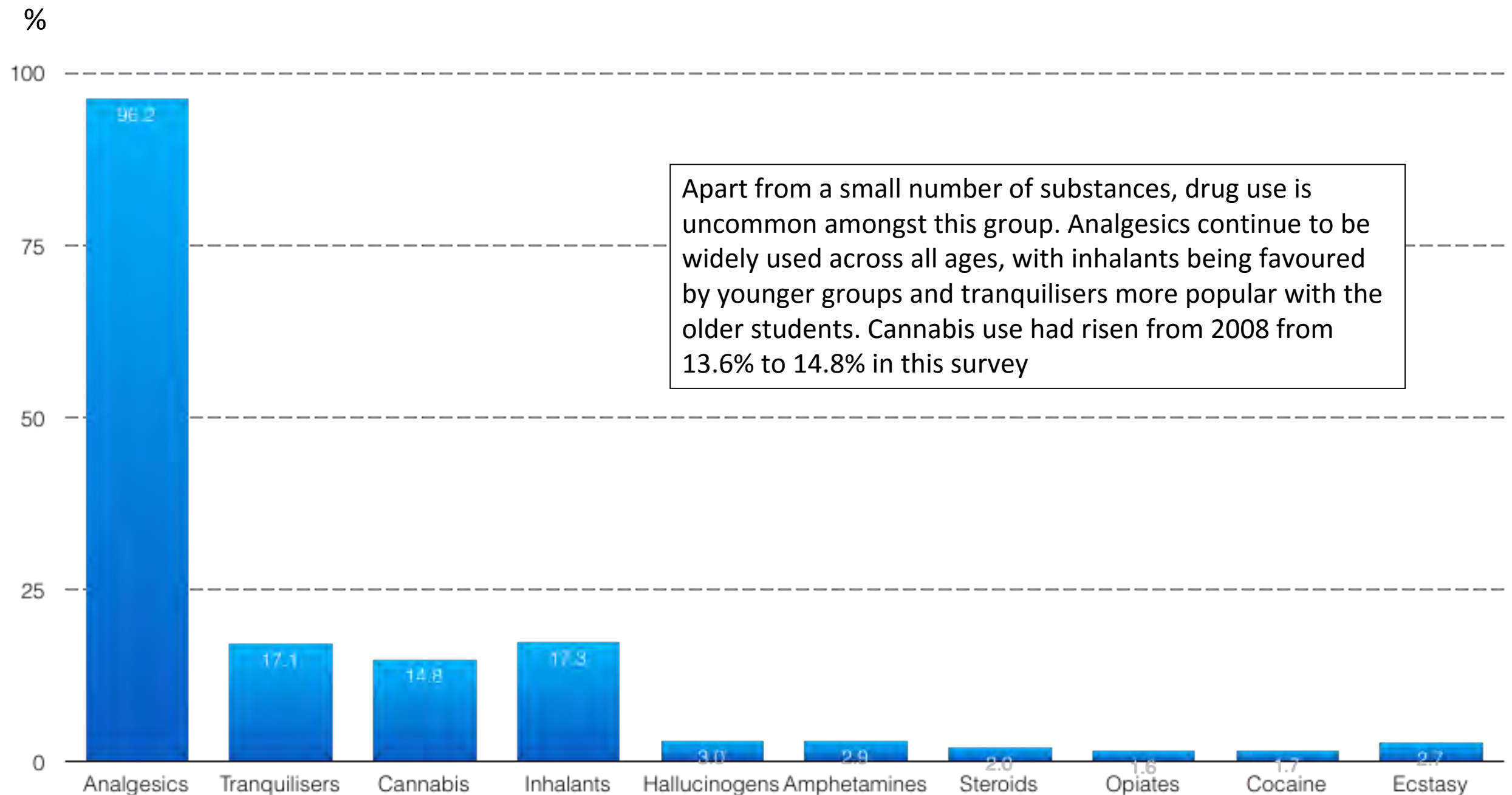


Australian drug use

How many school-based young people have ever used drugs?

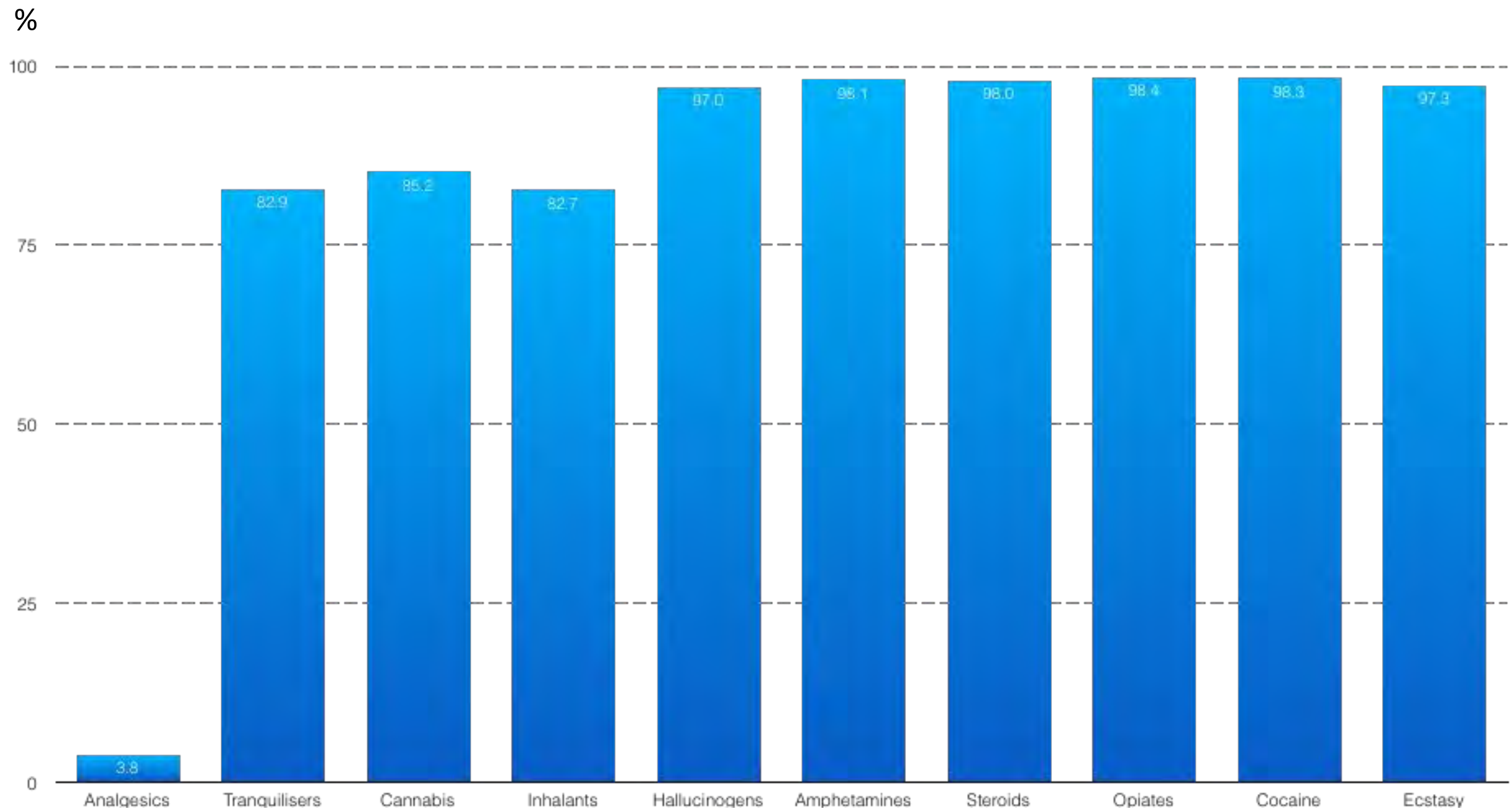
Prevalence (%) of lifetime drug use (excluding tobacco, and alcohol) among 12-17 year old students

White & Bariola (2012) 2011 ASSAD Survey



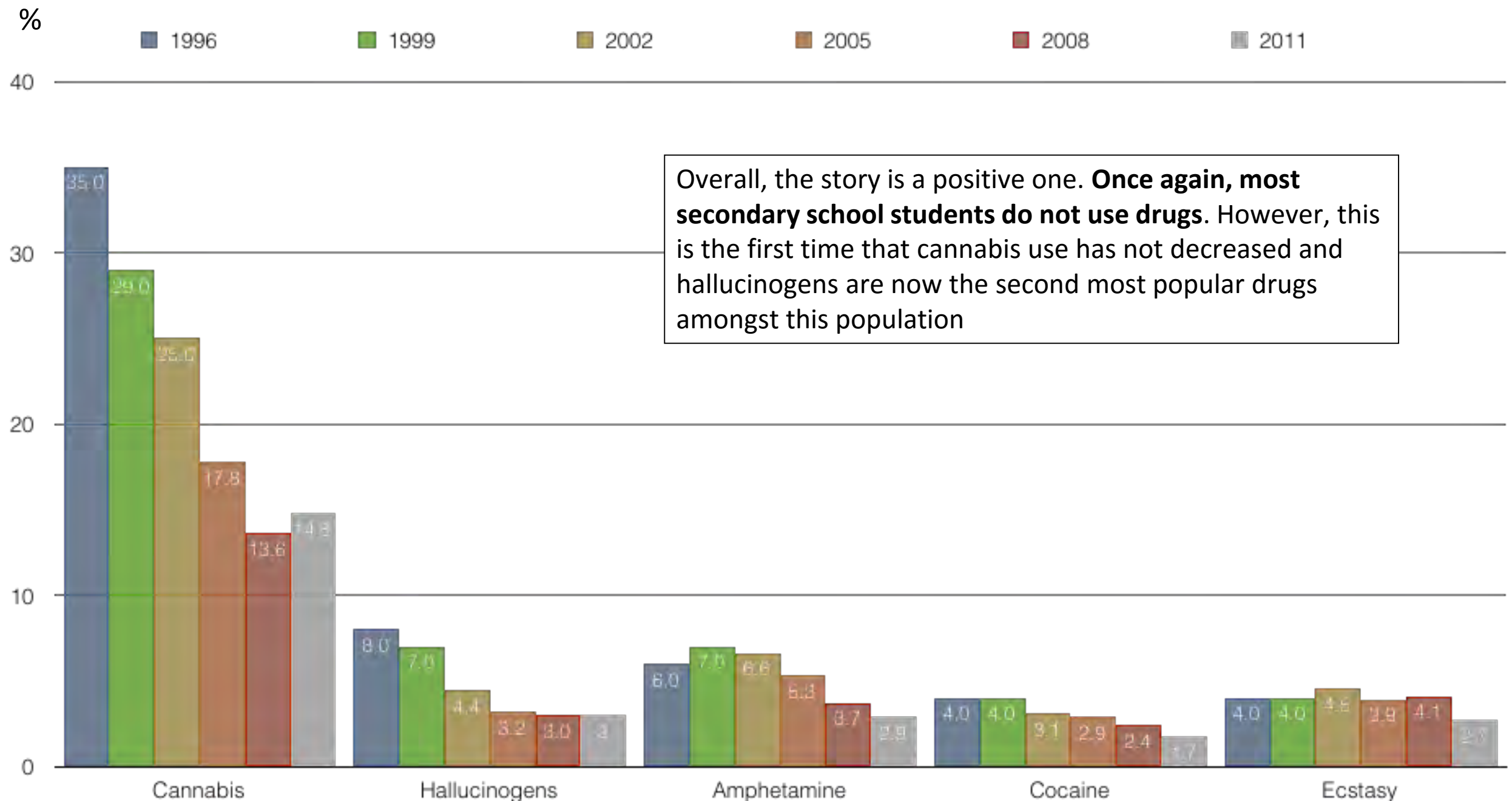
Prevalence (%) of 12-17 year old students who have never drugs (excluding tobacco and alcohol)

White & Bariola (2012) 2011 ASSAD Survey



Prevalence (%) of last year drug use among 12-17 year old students, 1996-2011

White & Bariola (2012) 2011 ASSAD Survey



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If they do use drugs, which are they likely to use?

Range of substances - legal, illegal and pharmaceutical ...

- ❑ tobacco
- ❑ cannabis
- ❑ ecstasy
- ❑ amphetamines – 'speed' and 'ice', as well as medications like Ritalin and dexamphetamine
- ❑ LSD and other hallucinogens, synthetic and naturally occurring ('magic mushrooms', DMT, and peyote)
- ❑ other dance drugs – GHB and ketamine ('Special K')
- ❑ amyl nitrite ('Jungle Juice')
- ❑ inhalants – paint, glue, petrol
- ❑ a range of pharmaceuticals or medications
- ❑ 'emerging psychoactive substances' (EPS)

But for most school-based young people it's **alcohol, alcohol, alcohol ...**



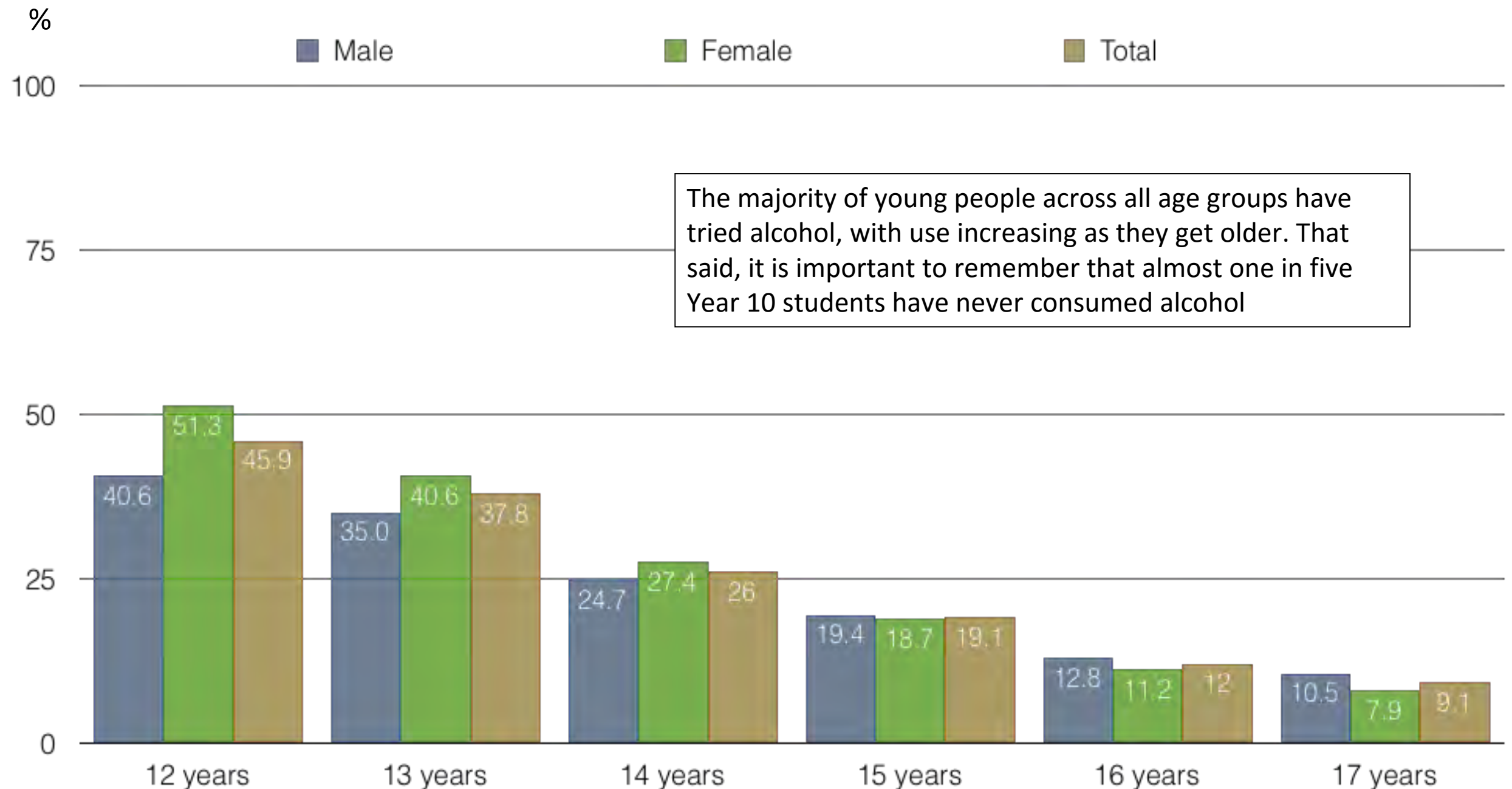


Alcohol

How about school-based young people? At what age does drinking start?

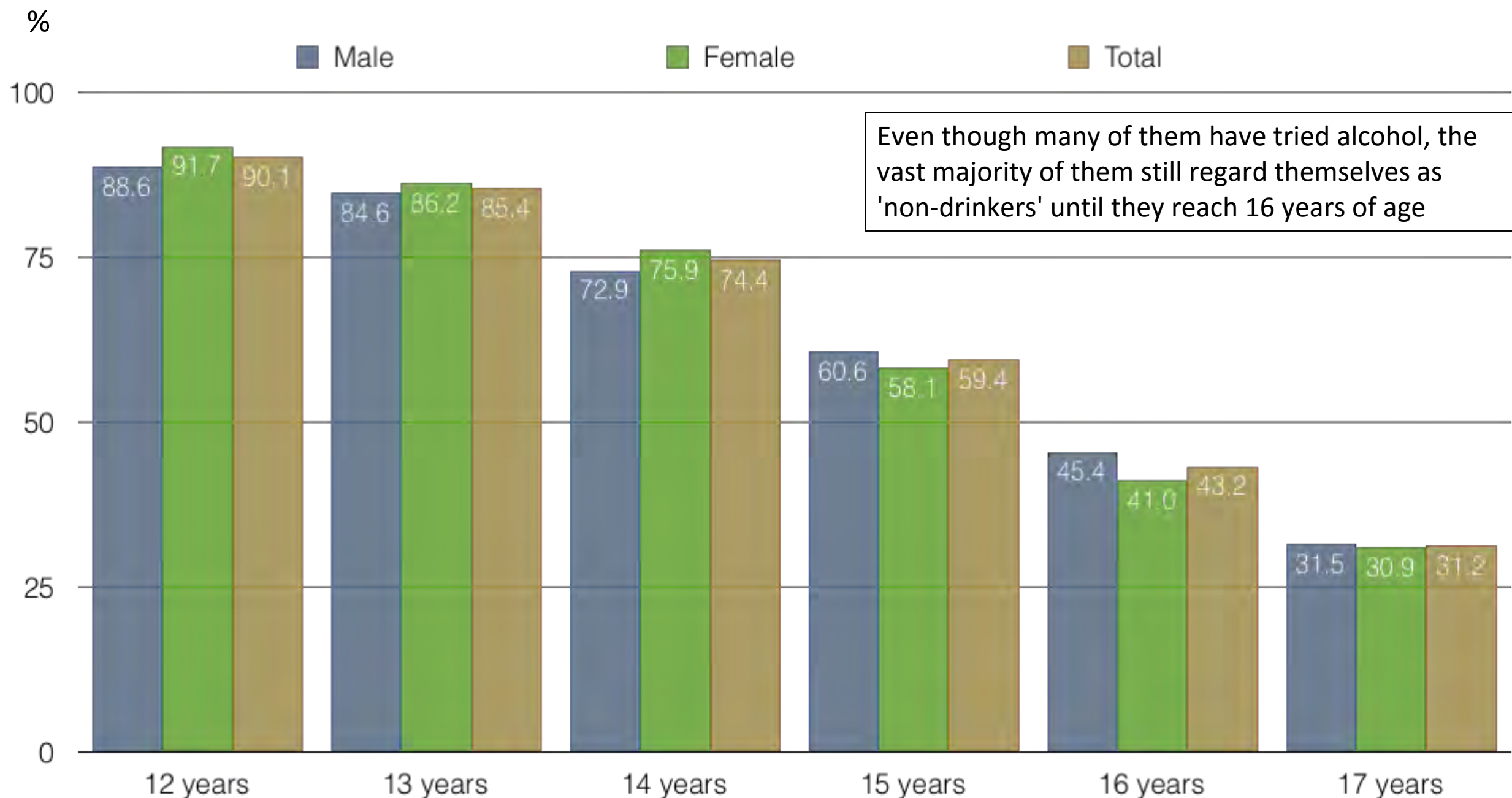
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 2011

White & Bariola (2012) 2011 ASSAD Survey



Australian secondary school students who describe themselves as non-drinkers (%), 2011

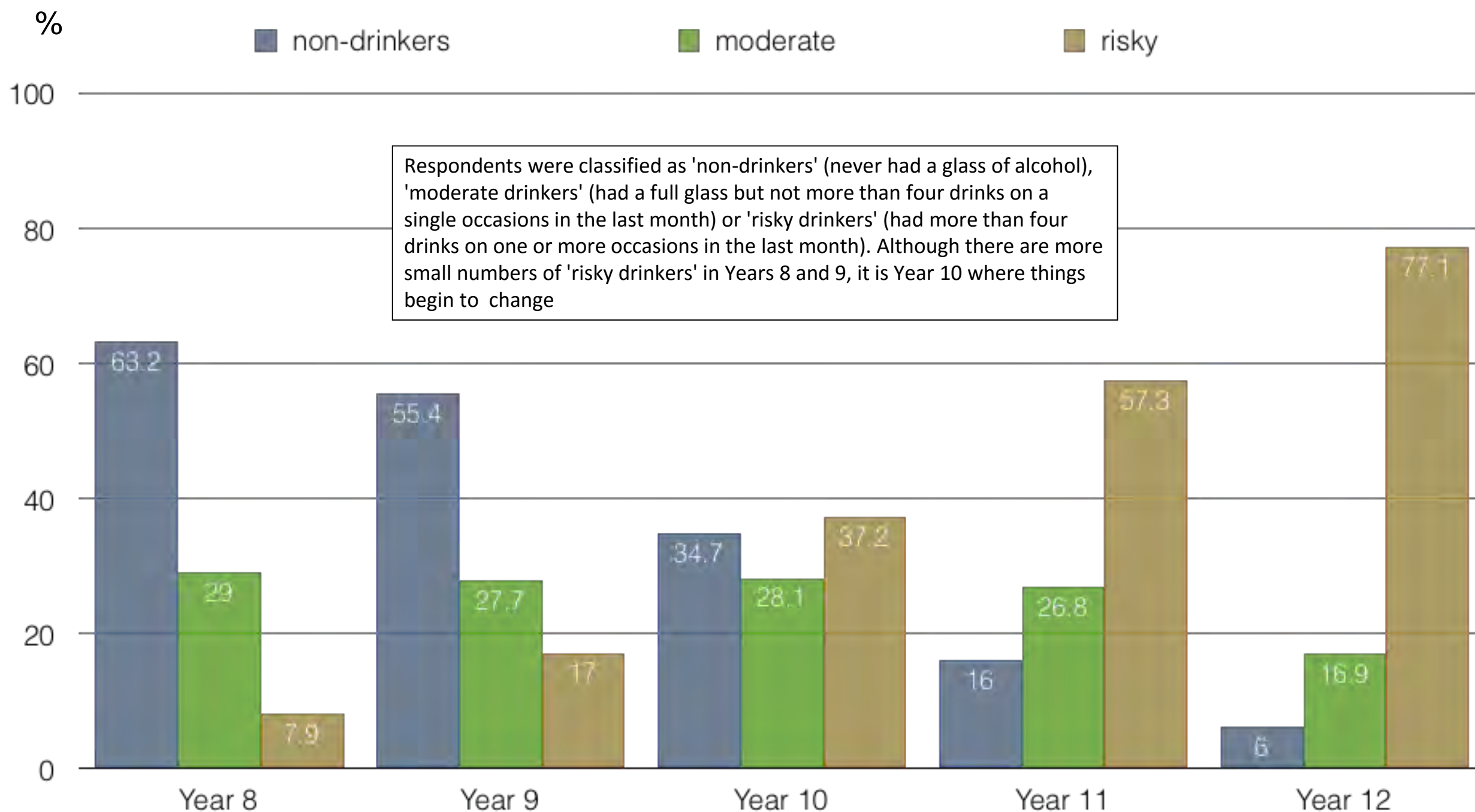
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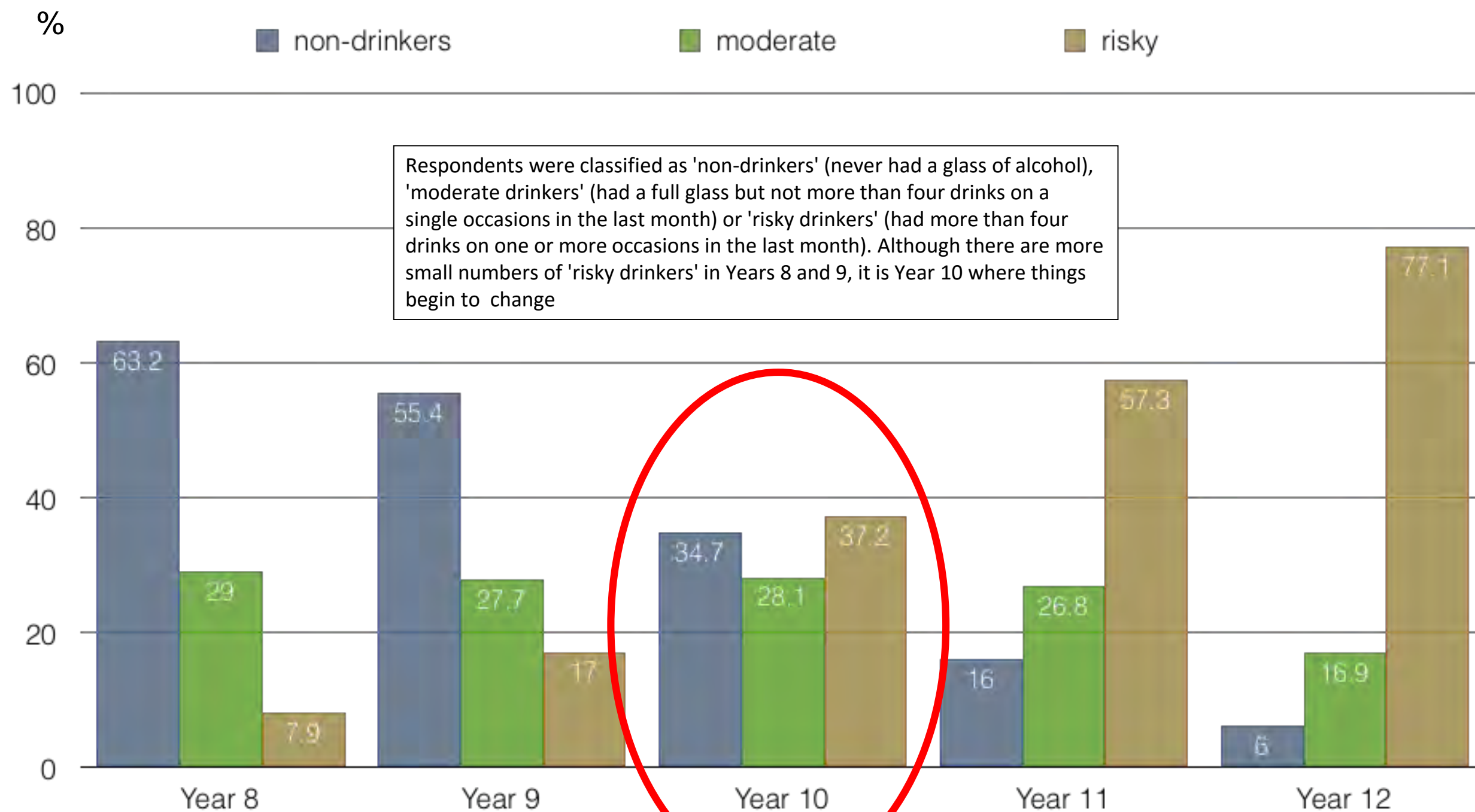
Drinking status by school year

Gilligan, Kypri, Johnson, Lynagh & Love, (2012) Parental supply of alcohol and adolescent risky drinking, *Drug Alcohol Review* 31, 754–762



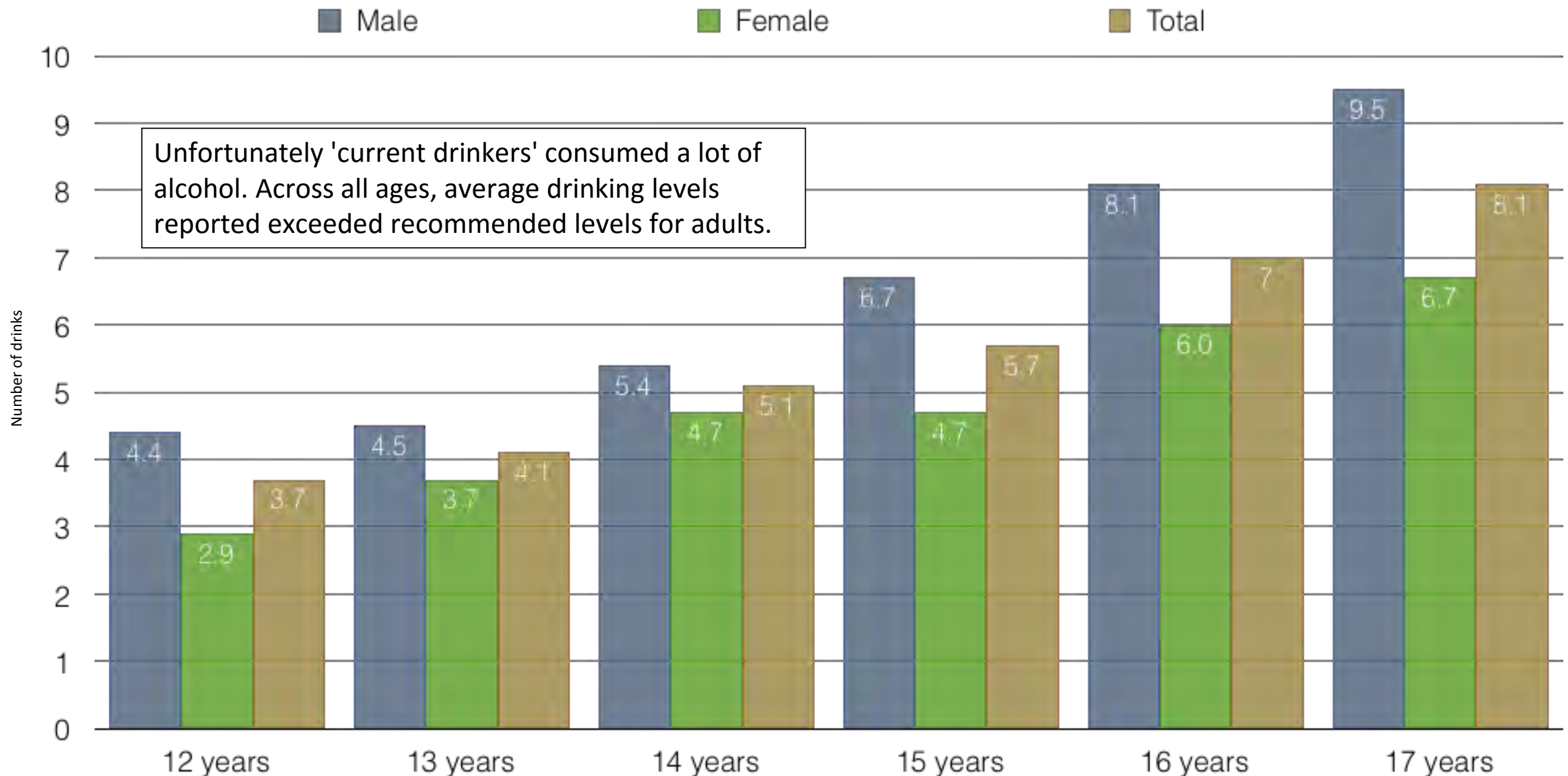
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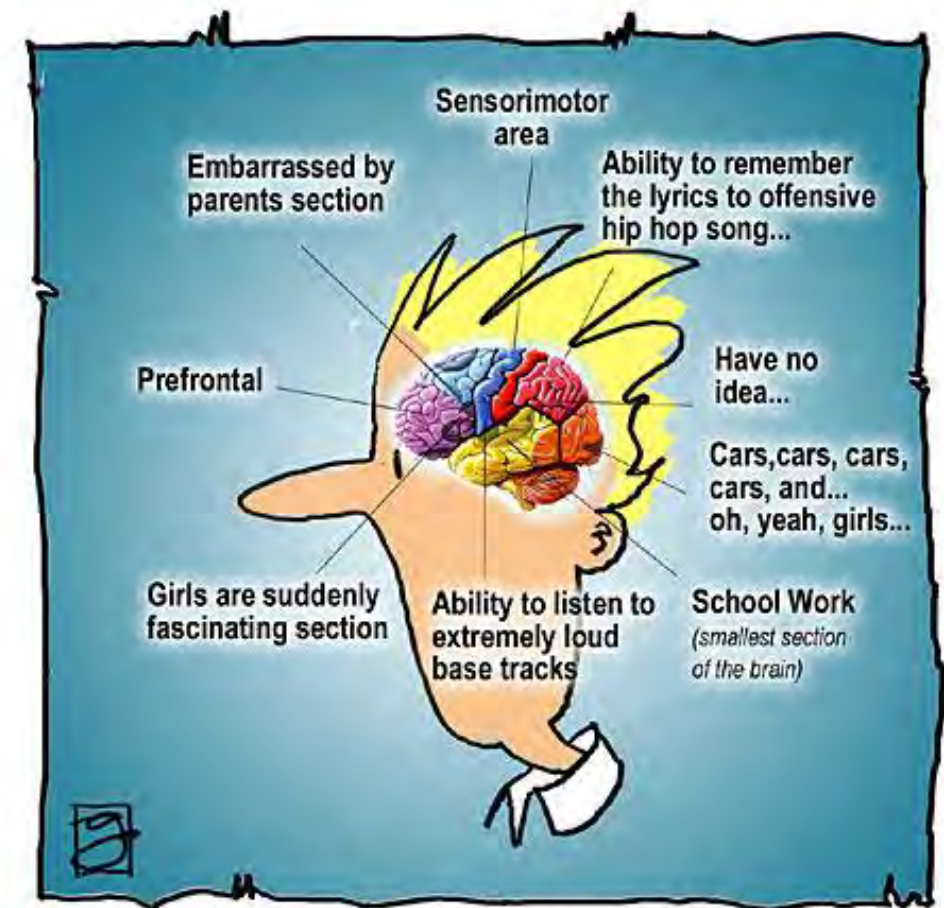


Average number of drinks consumed by current drinkers in past seven days, by age and gender, 2011

White & Bariola (2012) 2011 ASSAD Survey



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Anatomy of a Teenager's Brain



What can parents do to keep their teens safe?

What does the research say is the best way to keep teens safe around alcohol and other drugs?



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Adolescent brain: implications for parents



Young people are not 'little adults' – they're a different breed!

- ❑ they're going to fight with parents and seek greater acceptance from peers - **nothing is going to stop this process!**
- ❑ your relationship will change – **it has to for them to become an adult**

So, do you give up and let them do what they want? **Absolutely not!**

- ❑ try to maintain a positive relationship and be involved in their life
- ❑ **rules and consequences are vital** – but make them fair and age-appropriate

But remember ... they're going to break rules to get what they want – that doesn't make them a terrible person or you a bad parent

What about alcohol and other drugs?

Some worry so much about illicit drugs - forget about alcohol

No guarantees but get alcohol right and there's a good chance other things will follow ...

Some barriers that prevent parents dealing with alcohol ...

- ❑ they drink - **hypocrites** if they '**get tough**' in that area
- ❑ they drank when they were young – "**there's nothing wrong with me!**"
- ❑ '**everybody does it**' – it's just too hard to set rules here when it seems you're the only one that does
- ❑ we live in an alcohol-soaked culture – "**what hope do we have of making a difference?**"

So can you make a difference in the alcohol area?





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Why do young people drink?

Bremner, Burnett, Nunney, Ravat & Mistral (2011)



Teens more likely to drink, to drink frequently and to drink to excess if they:

- ❑ receive less supervision from a parent or other close adult
- ❑ spend more than two evenings a week with friends or have friends who drink
- ❑ are exposed to close family member, especially a parent, drinking or getting drunk
- ❑ have positive attitudes towards and expectations of alcohol
- ❑ have very easy access to alcohol

**Effective parenting plays an important role – there are other influences –
but get the parenting right and you're halfway there!**



It's no wonder parents are confused
– lots of theories on what works

Also lots of critics telling you what you
shouldn't be doing ... some really
practical ideas too ...



The art of authoritative parenting

The three rules for raising happy, healthy and successful children.

The single most important thing parents can do to raise healthy, happy and successful kids is to practice authoritative parenting," writes developmental psychologist Laurence Steinberg in his latest book, *Age of Opportunity*. This parenting style can be broken down into three basic elements: warmth, firmness and support. Steinberg emphasizes that it's crucial parents excel in all three.

BE WARM
You can't spoil a child with love. So don't hold back: say that you love them often and show plenty of physical affection. Older children might start to shy away but that doesn't mean you should - just get more subtle, perhaps patting them on the shoulder or ruffling their hair rather than always going for the full-on cuddle. Try to make your home a haven and limit your child's exposure to stress and arguments. Above all, you want to build your child's sense of feeling loved, valued and protected.

BE FIRM
Set rules that are grounded in logic and purpose - not just a desire to assert your authority - and be consistent in enforcing them. Be clear in your own mind about why you've set a rule and explain your reasoning to your child. If your child is old enough, ask for and listen to his or her opinion. Make adjustments as circumstances change or as your child demonstrates responsibility.

When explaining expectations to your child, be as specific as you can. For example, if you're asking a teen to clean her room once a week, detail what that means. Do you want her to vacuum, put away her clean clothes and put dirty clothes in the laundry? Tell her so. Even better if you can use a specific number in spelling out your expectations: the number of minutes you want her to practice piano, the time you expect her home.

BE SUPPORTIVE
It's all about balance. Children need to know that you are there for them - but also that there are plenty of situations they can handle alone. Aim to tolerate and encourage your child's growing sense of mastery and self-sufficiency. "Scaffolding" is an excellent technique for this. Force yourself to step back. Don't actually write your teen's essay - instead, check the first draft and make suggestions. Don't get on the phone to the sports coach to demand more game time. Instead, rehearse with your teen how he or she can have that conversation. When your child has a decision to make, suggest factors that could be considered. But the decision should be your child's. Gradually relinquish control and try to permit - rather than protect - when you can.

"Ask yourself whether the activity is dangerous, unhealthy, illegal, unethical or likely to close some doors that are better left open," advises Steinberg. If you decide to say "no," explain why.

Gradually relinquish control and try to permit - rather than protect - when you can.



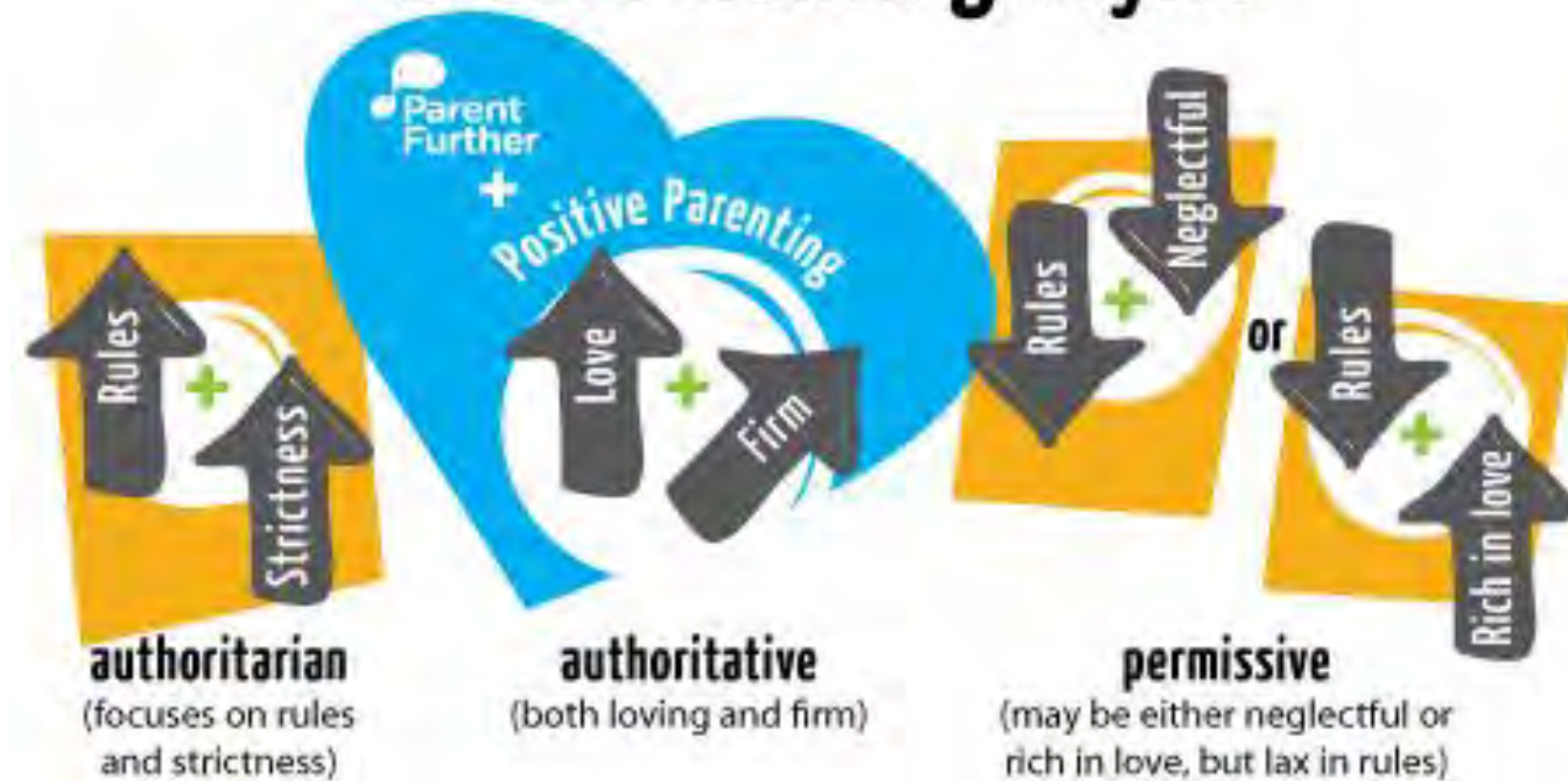
Parenting style

What type of parent are you and what do we know about the influence of particular parenting styles?



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Basic Parenting Styles



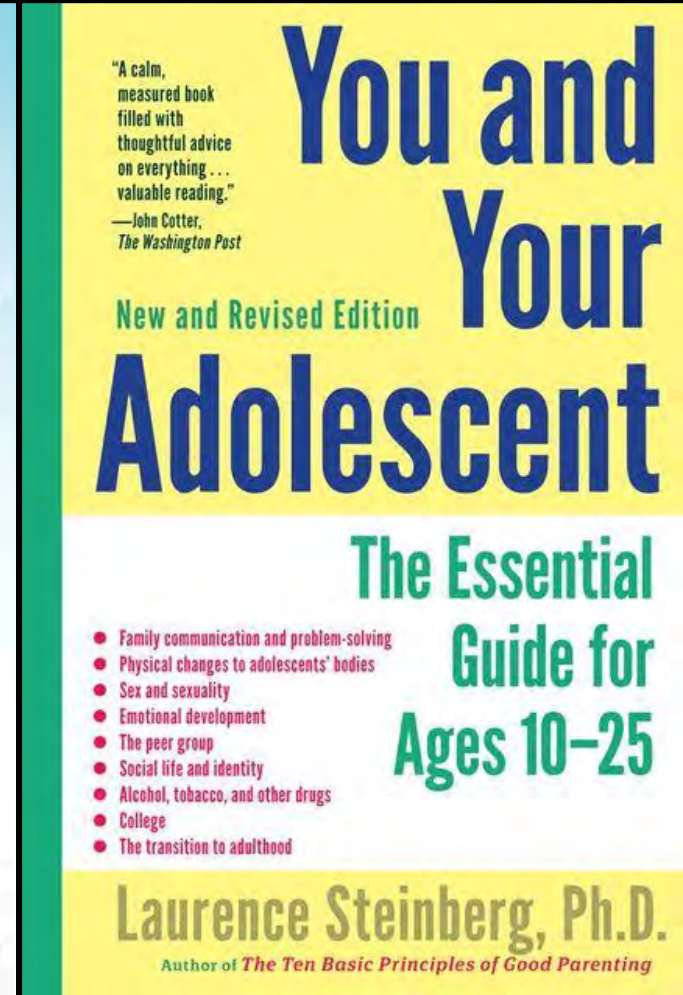
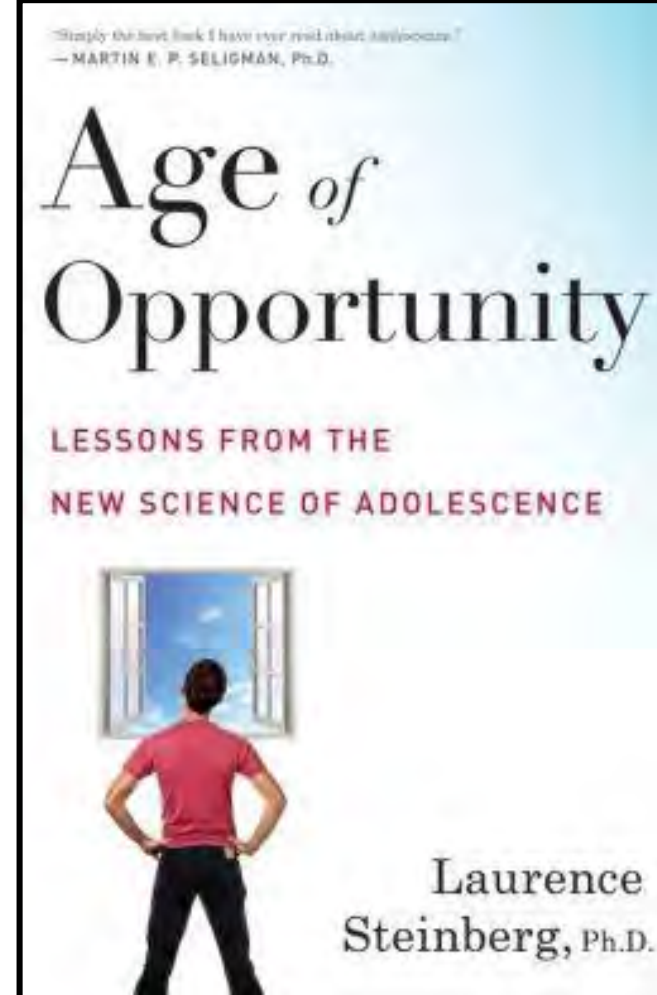
Parenting styles

Different types of parenting styles have been identified:

- ❑ **authoritarian** (strictness but not warmth)
- ❑ **authoritative** (warmth and strictness)
- ❑ **indulgent** (warmth but not strictness)
- ❑ **neglectful** (neither warmth nor strictness)

Authoritative parenting

Steinberg, L. (2014) *Age of Opportunity*



"The single most important thing parents can do to raise healthy, happy and successful kids is to practice authoritative parenting"

Steinberg says it's crucial that parents excel in **three** areas:

- ❑ **be warm** – "you can't spoil a child with love" – you want to build your child's sense of feeling loved, valued and protected
- ❑ **be firm** – "set rules that are grounded in logic and purpose" and make adjustments as they get older and reward good behaviour
- ❑ **be supportive** – "gradually relinquish control and try to permit – rather than protect – when you can". If you decide to say 'no', explain why

Keep connected ...

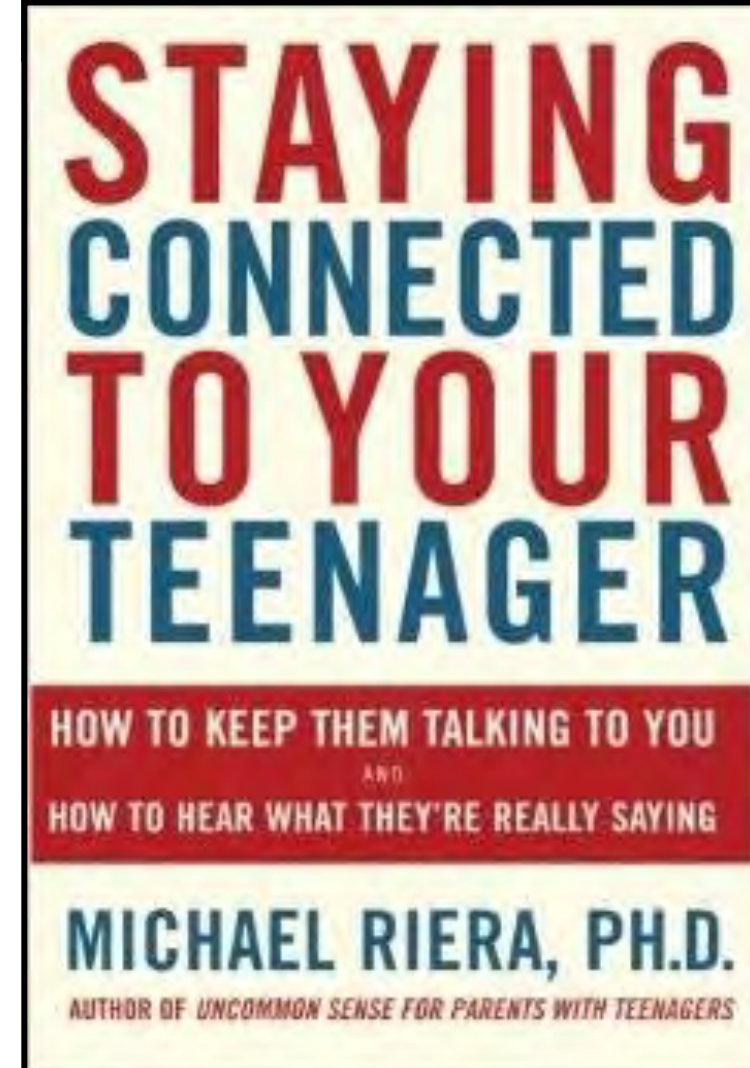
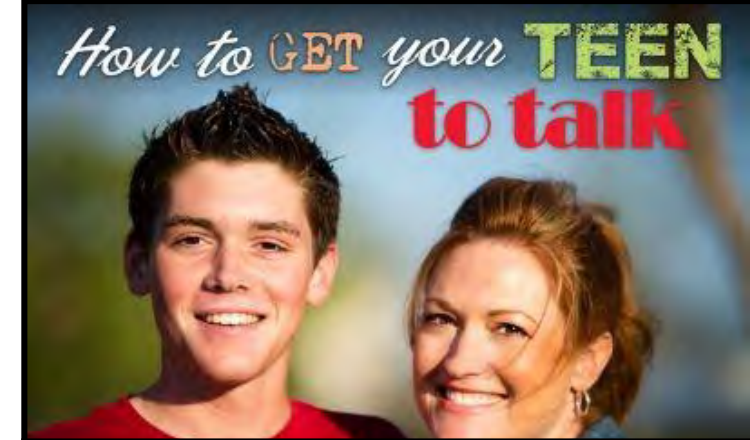
Keeping 'connected' is so important but can be very difficult, particularly if you're saying 'no' all the time - going to be 'butting heads'

Always be on the lookout for opportunities to say 'yes'

Michael Riera talks about **moving from a 'managing' role to a 'consulting' one** during their teens

His book provides practical strategies to get you talking

- ❑ use the car
- ❑ talk late at night, very late!
- ❑ taking them to a restaurant for dinner
- ❑ use of indirect communication – notes, emails, texts
- ❑ how to use the dinner table and how not to!



The final word ...

Tell your children they're great, all the time!

- ❑ there is always something positive you can find to say about your child - find it and say it!

Really listen to your child and 'connect'

- ❑ when did you last 'connect' with your child? Try to find the time at least once a week for a few minutes to really talk and listen to your child – it'll be worth it in so many ways!

Three simple golden rules ...

- ❑ **know where your child is**
- ❑ **know who they're with**
- ❑ **know when they'll be home**



For further information or you are interested in more of what I have to say ...

For a PDF copy of this presentation or a list of references and supporting information, please go to my website - www.darta.net.au

Please feel free to contact me by email - p.dillon@darta.net.au or follow me on Facebook or Twitter (**Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia**) or go to my blogs – 'Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon' or 'The Real Deal on Drugs'



DOING DRUGS WITH PAUL DILLON

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2012

The 'Schoolies' Week phenomenon

It's that time of year that many parents dread - the lead-up to 'Schoolies' Week' (or 'Leavers' Week' as it is known in WA). Last week Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr issued a warning to Schoolies travelling overseas that if they break the law consular staff can't "rescue them if they are arrested". It was a great move by the Australian Government in my opinion but I doubt very much if it will have any great effect on those young people who choose to go overseas for Schoolies' celebrations.

You only need to take a look at a story that ran on Channel Ten's 'The Project' in response to the DFA's warning to realize what we are up against. If you go to the following link the story on Schoolies travelling overseas begins at 2min.20sec. The interview with the two young women who are planning to travel to Bali is quite disturbing. When asked why they chose to go overseas they make it clear that it is to avoid the laws around alcohol as they will be underage and that the purpose of the trip is to get drunk ... I know that it is extremely difficult to stop young people from attending Schoolies' Week events but any parent who believes that it is safer for their child to travel overseas to party rather than make the pilgrimage to the Gold Coast, Byron, Rottneest or Victor Harbour truly have their heads in the sand!

Of course you have to let your child experience life and they are going to make mistakes. Some parents have said to me that their child is planning to take a 'gap year' and that they see the overseas Schoolies' Week as a 'controlled' introduction to that experience. Are they nuts? The attraction for many young people to travel overseas for Schoolies is that they are not subject to laws

ABOUT ME



Paul Dillon has been working in the area of drug education for the past 25 years. Through his own business, Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia (DART) he has been contracted by many organisations to give regular updates on current drug trends. He has also worked with many school communities to ensure that they have access to good quality information and best practice drug education. His book 'Teenagers, Alcohol and Drugs' was released nationally in February 2009. With a broad knowledge of a range of content areas, Paul regularly appears in the media and is regarded as a key social commentator, with interviews on television programs such as Sunrise, TODAY and The Project.

[View my complete profile](#)



TEENAGERS, ALCOHOL and DRUGS

What your kids really
want and need to know
about alcohol and drugs

PAUL DILLON