

**So You Think You Know Everything**

**about**

**Drugs and Alcohol**

A survey of sixth form students in Oldham 2010

Oldham DAAT  
March 2010

## Introduction

This short briefing paper contains the results from a survey of Young People aged 16 to 18 years old attending Oldham Sixth Form College during February 2010. The survey involved the use of a short questionnaire with the following questions/themes:

- What is the most popular drug in the UK?
- How many units of alcohol are there in a bottle of wine?
- What is the legal status of cannabis?
- How much will you spend in a year if you smoke 20 cigarettes a day?
- A 10-part themed section regarding risks and experiences in relation to alcohol consumption
- Where to get more advice and information from [regarding drugs and/or alcohol]
- Where to go for support in Oldham for alcohol/drug related problems/issues
- Year group at Sixth Form.

Overall 1,076 questionnaires were completed of which 1,058 were deemed valid returns for coding and subsequent analysis – 98.3% valid return rate.

## The most popular drug in the UK

Participants were given the choice of three substances as possible answers to the question 'What is the most popular drug in the UK?'. Chart 1 below shows that almost six in ten (59.3% [n=627]) respondents opted for alcohol.

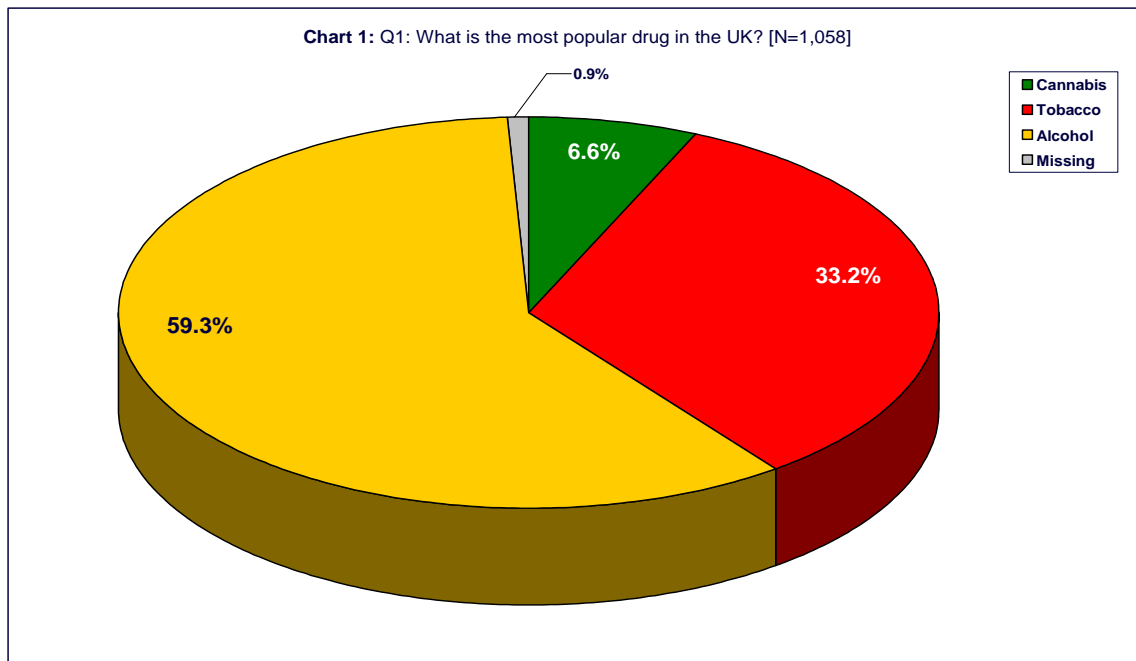
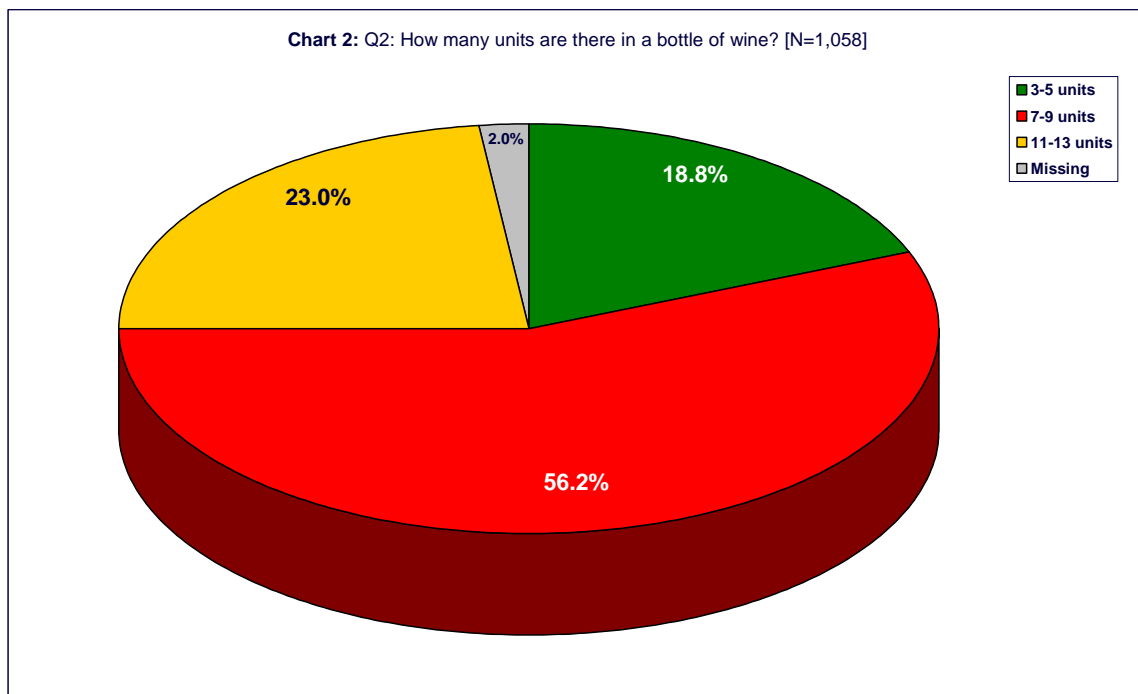


Chart 1 also shows that one-third of respondents (33.2% [n=351]) believed that tobacco was the UK's most popular substance, while the 70 individuals (6.6%) nominated cannabis.

### Number of units of alcohol in a bottle of wine

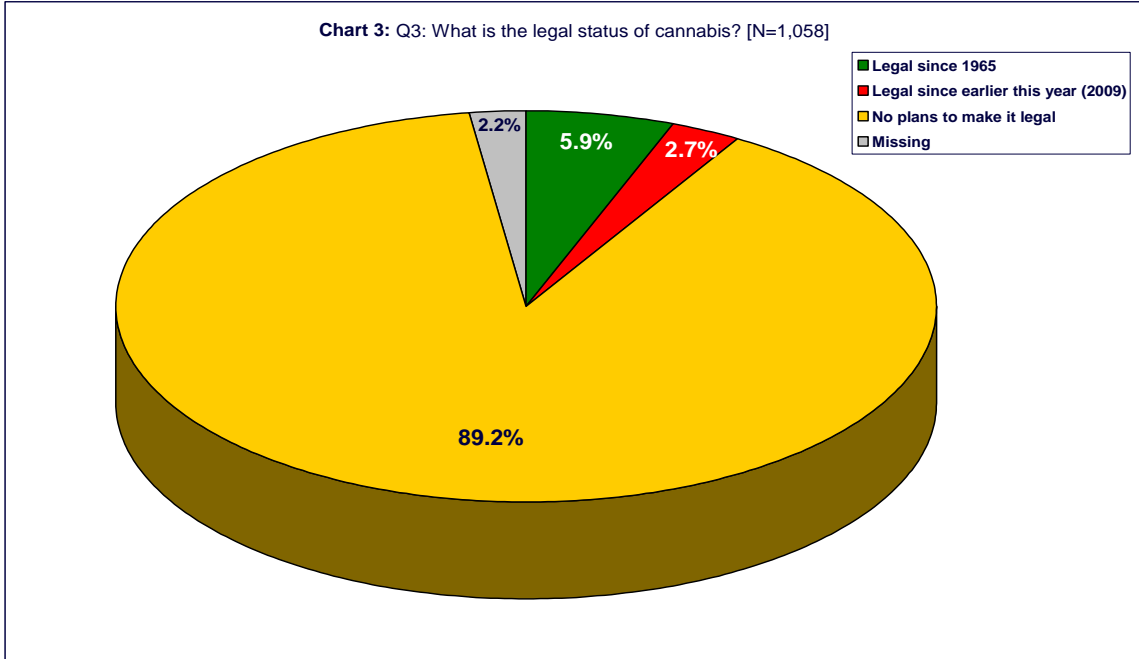
Three possible answers were listed for the question 'Roughly how many units of alcohol are there in a bottle of wine?' Chart 2 below shows the distribution of answers in this regard. Almost one-fifth (18.8% [n=199]) indicated 3-5 units of alcohol in a bottle of wine. The majority of respondents (56.2% [n=595]) opted for 7-9 units with almost one-quarter (23.0% [n=243]) indicating 11-13 units.



Responses to this question demonstrate a poor to moderate knowledge of the strength of wine. Given that the average bottle of wine available for sale in the UK consists of around 12 units, knowledge amongst this cohort is worryingly inaccurate and raises concerns for knowledge of alcohol volume in respect of other types of alcoholic drinks.

### The legal status of cannabis

Chart 3 below shows the distribution for responses to the question 'What is the legal status of cannabis?'. Of the 1,058 respondents almost nine in ten (89.2% [n=935]) correctly indicated that there were no plans to make it legal. Approximately 5.9% [n=62] believed that cannabis had been legal since 1965, while a smaller proportion of 2.7% [n=29] thought it had been legal since the early part of the year [2009].



Overall, Chart 3 demonstrates that participant on the whole have a good understanding of the legal status of cannabis.

**The annual cost of smoking 20 cigarettes per day**

As with the previous three questions three options were made available for the question ‘How much will you spend in a year if you smoke 20 cigs per day?’.

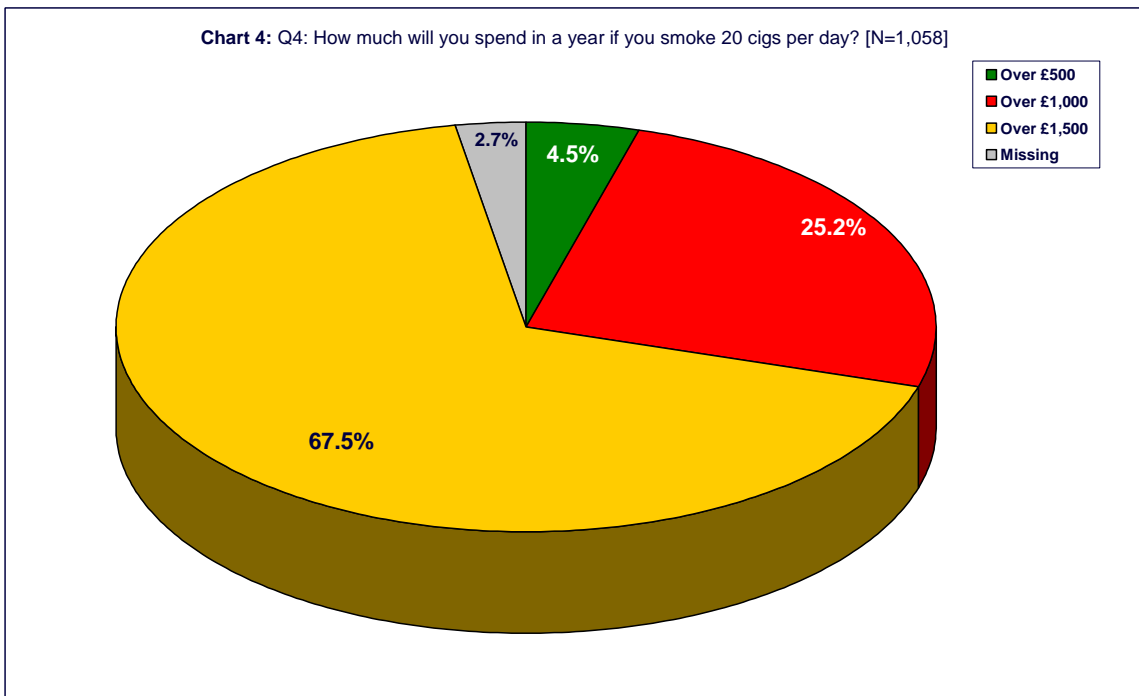


Chart 4 above shows the distribution of response to this question<sup>1</sup>. More than two-thirds of respondents (67.5% [n=714]) indicated that the annual cost would be 'over £1,500', while one-quarter (25.2% [n=267]) opted for 'over £1,000 and 4.5% [n=48] nominated 'over £500'. The remaining 29 participants (2.7%) failed to answer this question. The actual annual cost of smoking 20 cigarettes is in the region of £2,200.

### Concerns about self and others' drinking habits: Risks and dangers

The next part of the questionnaire attempts to capture information regarding risks and experiences around alcohol consumption. In all ten questions/scenarios were listed and respondents were asked to indicate whether they themselves had been affected or if they knew of others who had been in such situations.

The first question asked about whether respondents had ever missed work or school more than once due to hangover problems. Chart 5.1 below shows 4.2% [n=44] of respondents indicated this scenario applied to them with a further 5.6% [n=59] stating that this not only applied to themselves but also someone they knew.

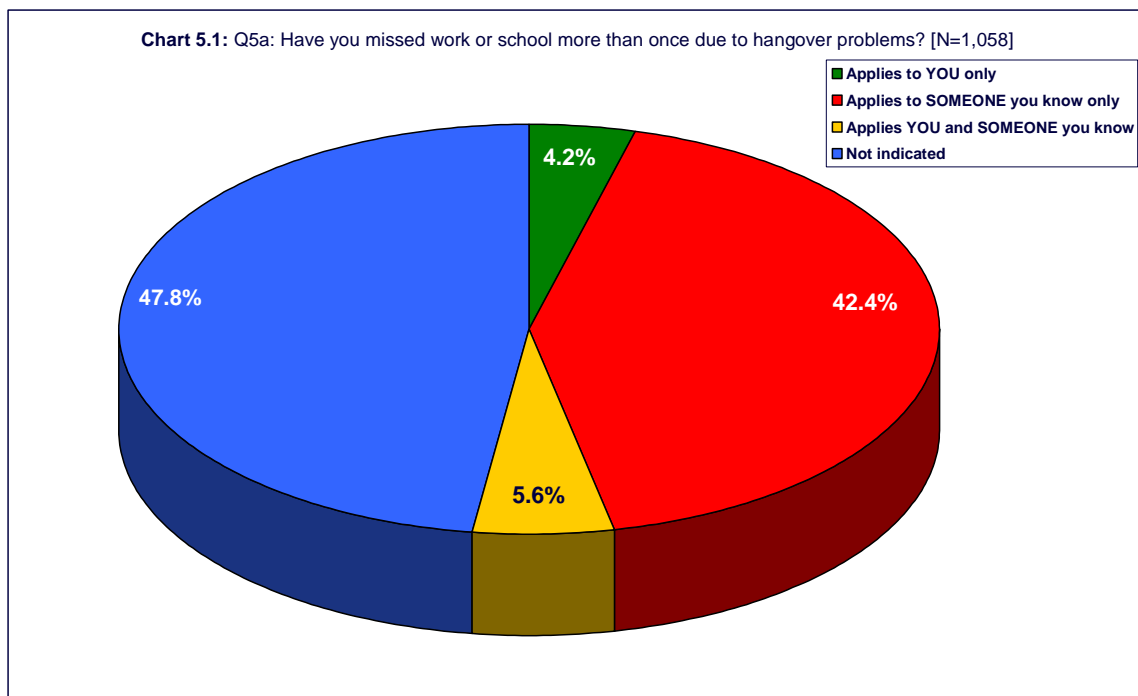


Chart 5.1 also shows that more than four in ten respondents (42.4% [n=449]) indicated that hangover problems had affected someone they knew. Almost half of those surveyed (47.8% [n=506]) made no indication in this regard.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the multiple choice answers for this question are fundamentally flawed as all answers, in essence, are correct. This issue may have impacted upon the reliability of the distribution of responses for this question.

The second question asked whether respondents had ever become angry when others commented or criticised their drinking habits. Chart 5.2 below shows that almost two-thirds of students (65.9% [n=697]) did not indicate that this scenario had affect either themselves or others they knew. Almost three in ten (28.4% [n=300]) stated they knew someone who had reacted angrily when others had questioned their drinking habits.

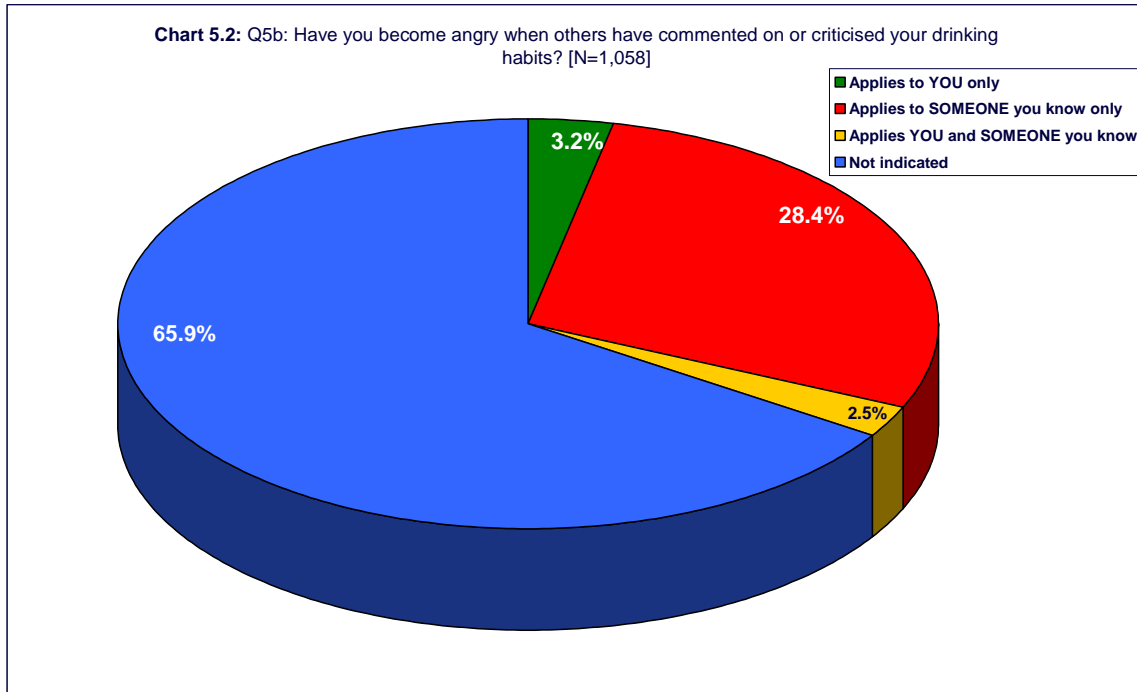
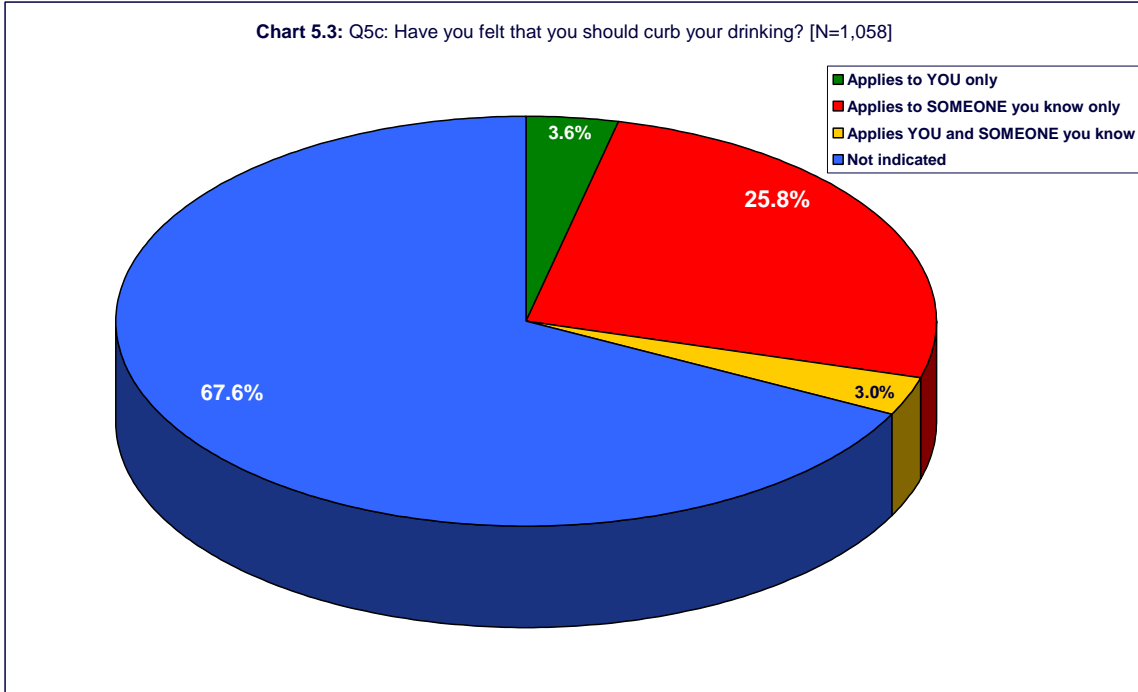


Chart 5.2 also illustrates that 3.2% [n=39] had reacted with anger in this scenario with a further 2.5% [n=26] indicating that both they and others they knew have had this experience.

For the third scenario students were asked if they had ever felt the need to curb their drinking. As with the previous scenario a large proportion made no indications (67.6% [n=715]) as shown in Chart 5.3 below.

More than one-quarter (25.8% [n=273]) indicated that they knew someone who had tried to reduce their alcohol consumption. Approximately 3.6% [n=38] stated that they had tried curb their drinking with a further 3.0% [n=32] indicating that both they and others they knew had tried this.



Next participants were asked if they had ever decided to reduce their drinking and then found that they could not do so. Chart 5.4 below shows that almost three-quarters of respondents (73.9% [n=782]) made no indication.

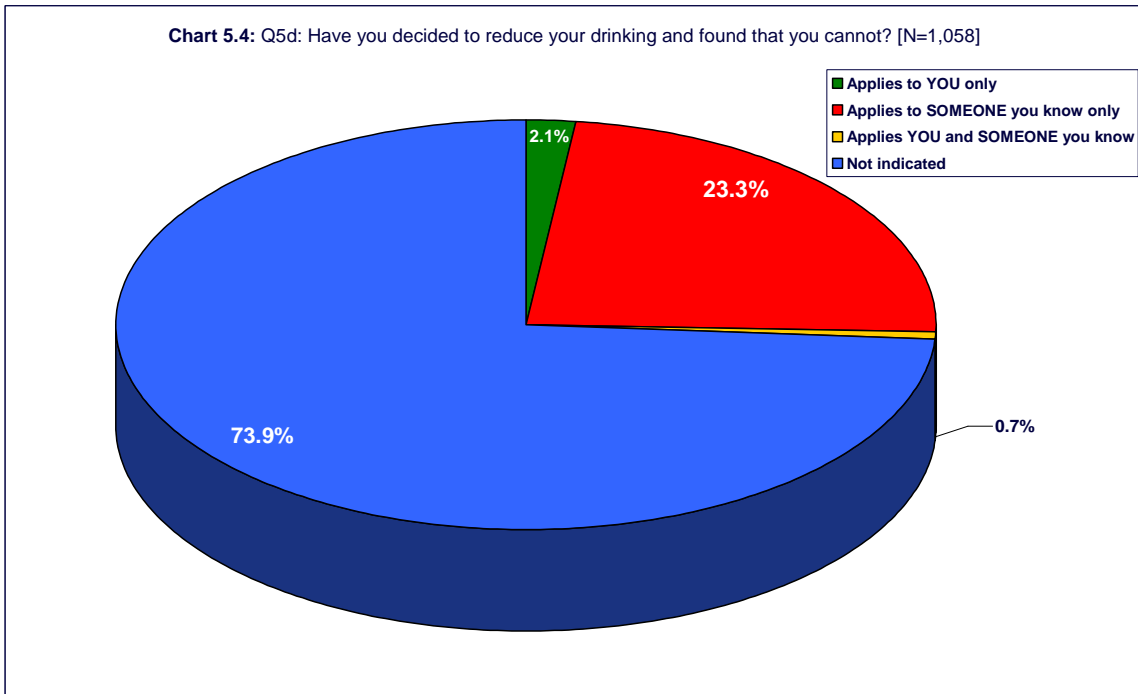


Chart 5.4 also shows that almost one-quarter of students (23.3% [n=274]) indicated they knew someone who had been affected by such a scenario. Only

2.1% [n=22] stated that they had tried to reduce their drinking but found they could not with 0.7% [n=7] indicating that both themselves and other they knew had experienced this problem.

The fifth scenario asked students if they had ever exhibited overly aggressive behaviour under the influence of alcohol (i.e. fighting). More than half (55.1% [n=583]) made no indication in this regard as can be seen in Chart 5.5 below. More than one-third of respondents (33.9% [n=359]) indicated that they knew of someone who had behaved in this manner.

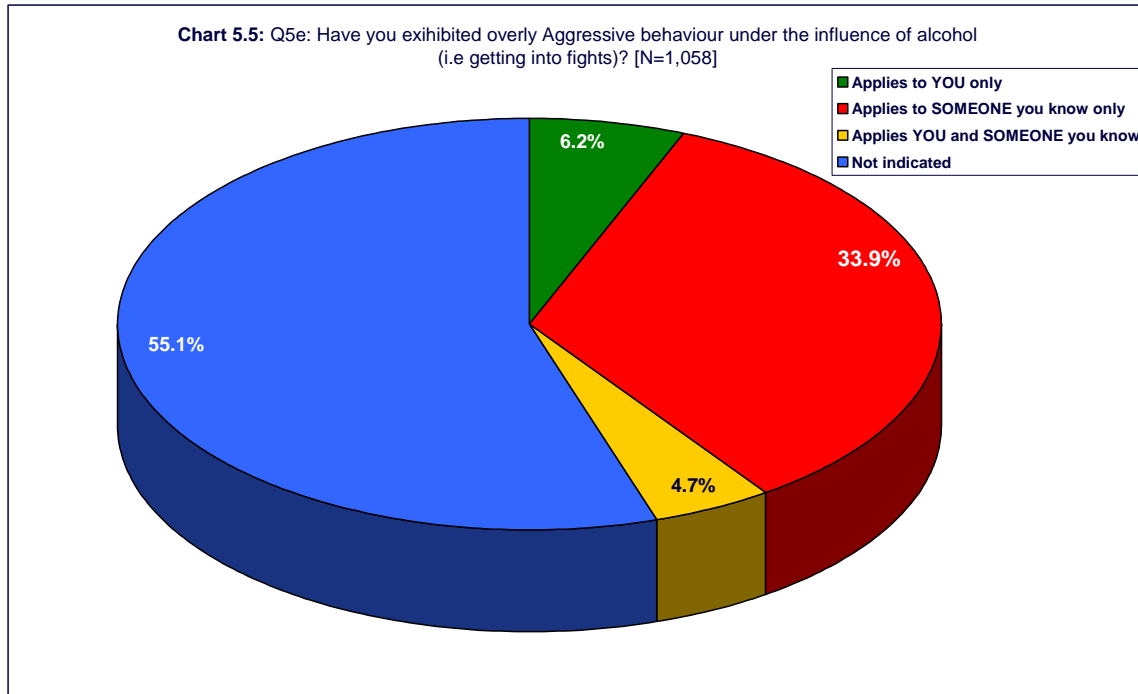
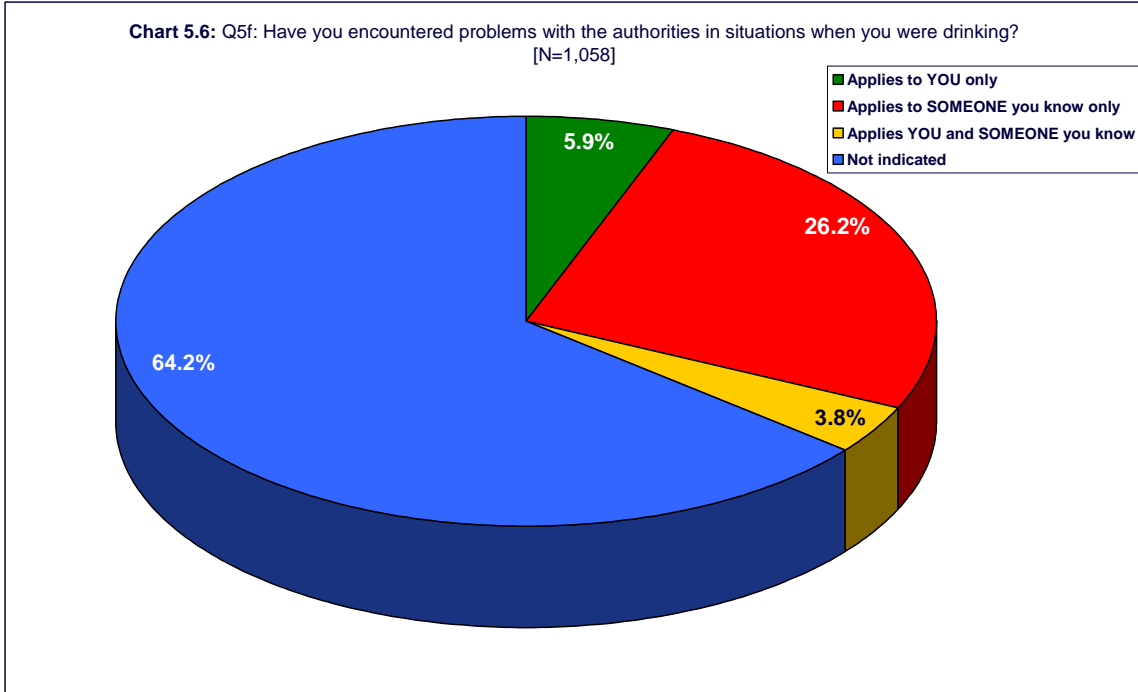


Chart 5.5 also shows that 6.2% [n=66] of participants stated that they themselves had behaved aggressive following the consumption of alcohol with a further 4.7% stating [n=50] both they and others they know had been influenced in such a way.

Next respondents were asked if they had ever encountered problems with the authorities in situations when they had been drinking. Almost two-thirds (64.2% [n=679]) made no indications in response to this question. Chart 5.6 below also shows that more than one-quarter (26.2% [n=277]) indicated that they knew some who had had problems with the authorities.



Overall 5.9% [n=62] of respondents indicated that they had been in this type of situation with a further 3.8% [n=40] stating that both they and someone they knew had been in trouble with the authorities.

For the seventh scenario participants were asked whether they had ever had sexual experiences while under the influence of alcohol that they later regretted.

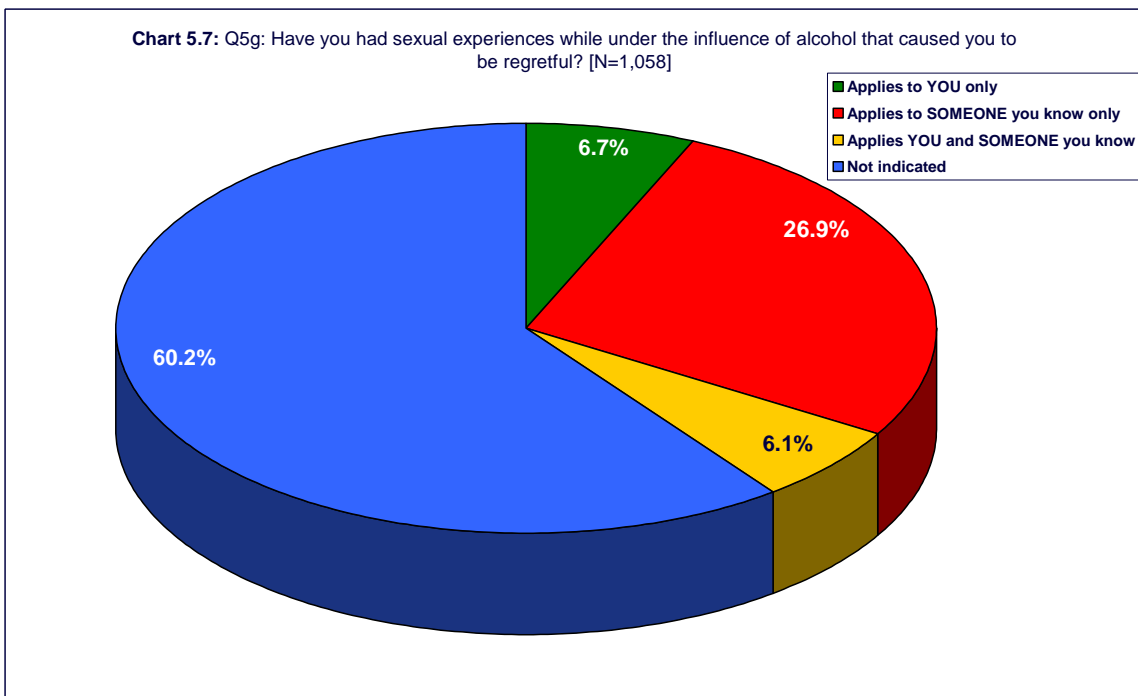


Chart 5.7 above shows that six in ten (60.2% [n=637]) made no indications in response to this question. More than one-quarter of students (26.9% [n=285]) indicated that they knew someone else who had been in this situation. One in sixteen (6.7% [n=71]) stated that they themselves had later regretted sexual encounters whilst under the influence with a further 6.1% [n=65] indicating that both they and others they knew had been in this position.

Next the students were asked if they engaged in binge drinking on a regular basis. More than half (56.2% [n=595]) made no indication as can be seen in Chart 5.8 below. More than one-quarter (26.9% [n=285]) of respondent indicated that they knew someone else who engaged in binge drinking.

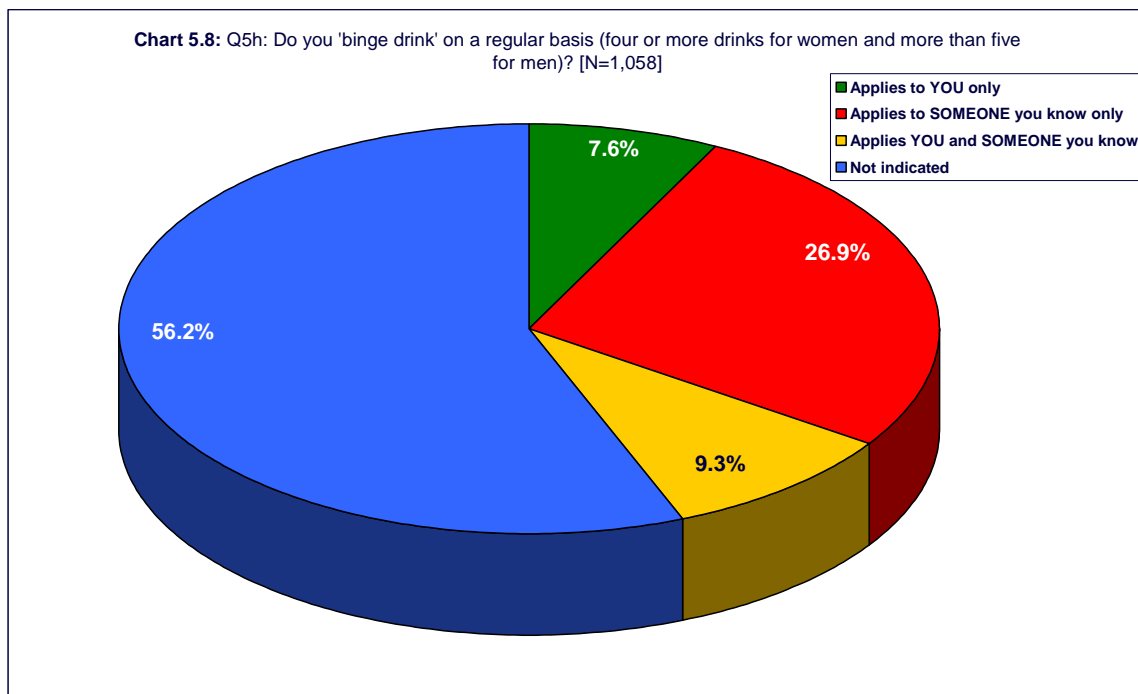


Chart 5.8 also shows that 7.6% [n=80] of individuals were regular binge drinkers themselves whilst one in eleven respondents (9.3% [n=98]) indicated that both they and other they knew were binge drinkers.

The penultimate scenario asked respondents if they had ever had blackouts whereby they could not remember anything as a result of drinking. Chart 5.9 below shows that more than half (54.4% [n=576]) of participants made no indication in response to this question. More than one-fifth of students (22.9% [n=242]) stated that they knew someone who had had blackouts during or after a drinking session.

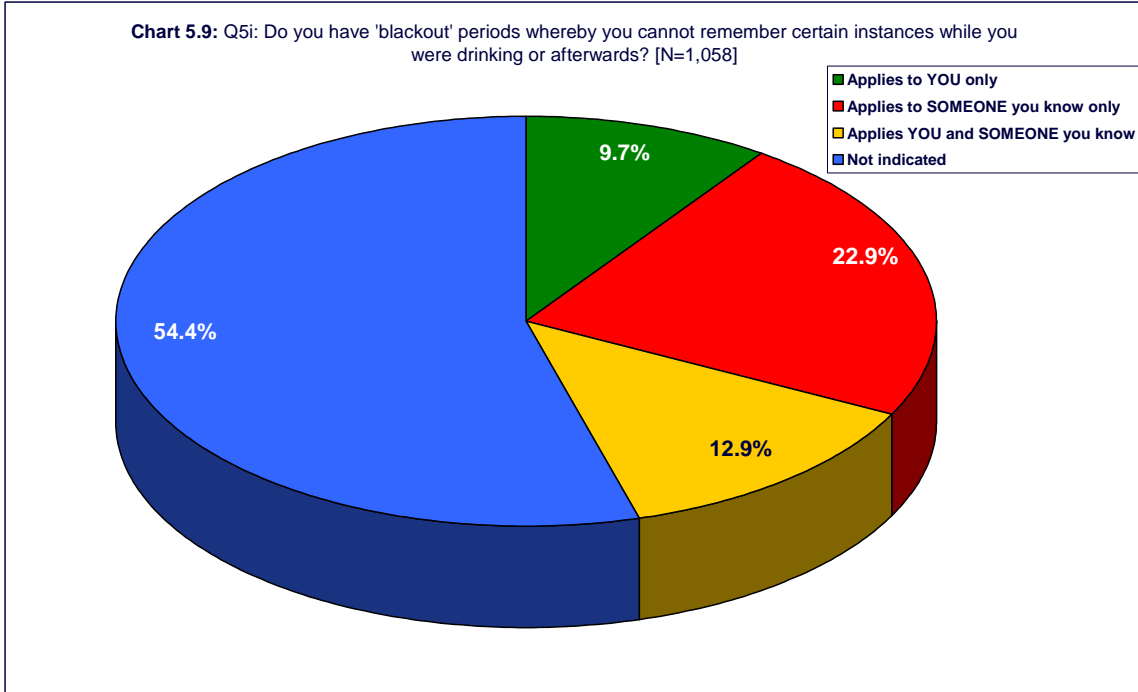


Chart 5.9 also shows that 9.7% [n=103] of individuals indicated that this scenario applied to themselves. More than one-eighth of participants (12.9% [n=136]) stated that both they and someone they knew had experienced a blackout episode.

The final scenario in this section off the questionnaire asks respondents if excessive drinking was a normal part of their weekly activities.

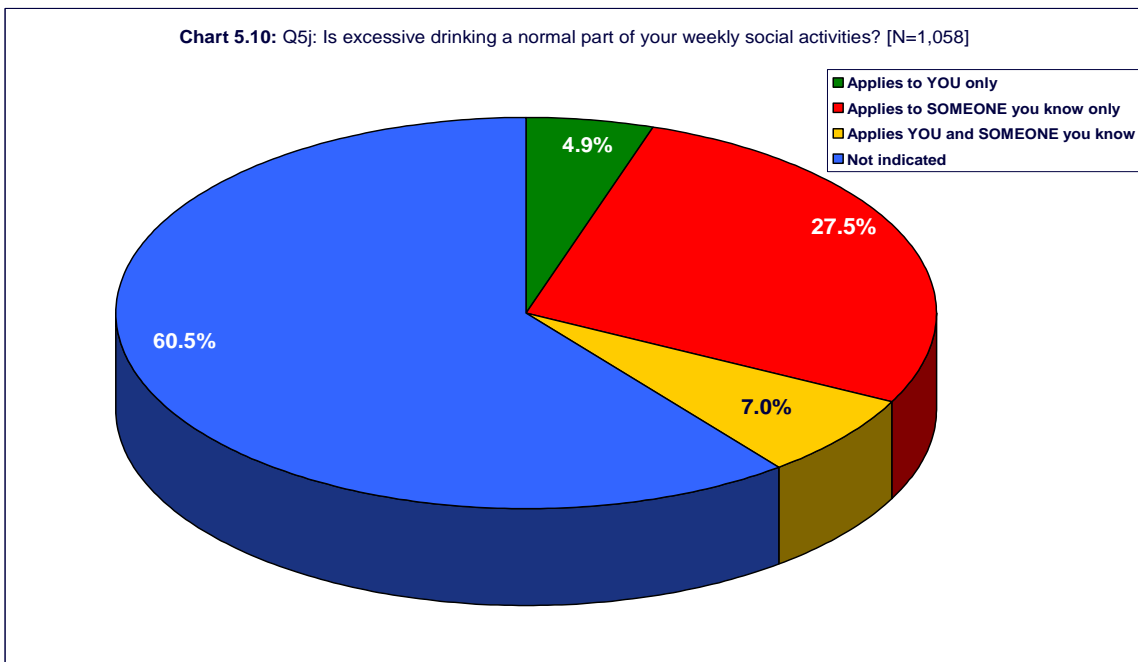


Chart 5.10 above shows that more than six in ten participants (60.5% [n=640]) made no indications in response to this question. More than one-quarter (27.5% [n=291]) of students stated that they knew others for whom excessive drinking was a normal part of the week. Almost one in twenty (4.9% [n=52]) respondents indicated that this scenario applied to themselves while a further 7.0% [n=74] stated that both they and others they knew engaged in excessive drinking on a weekly basis.

Amongst those who actually provided indications for the ten scenarios/questions summarised above, there does appear to be evidence of risk taking whilst under the influence of alcohol. We can see that there is a culture of excessive drinking which also includes numerous weekly episodes of binge drinking. These episodes undoubtedly lead to other problems which occasionally endanger this young cohort of adolescents, whether it be anger and/or aggressive behaviour, or the despair and regret in relation to sexual encounters, that if sober, would probably not have been countenanced. Overall, however, responses to these questions do provide a glimpse of *rites de passage* experienced by many young people in today's Britain.

Another issue that is apparent from the charts that illustrate the 10 scenarios is amongst those who provided indications the proportion of respondents who consistently reported that they knew someone else who had been involved in any given situation – anywhere from 20% to 45%. These proportions appear high when compared to the relatively low instances involving an element of self admission. The point being made here is to suggest that these scenarios appear to mainly affect 'someone else'. The suggestion that a degree of transference maybe at play here would require further investigation but it is founded on the fact that the cohort for this survey is relatively self-contained. This is not to suggest that students at the college only ever socialise with other students attending the same establishment but it would be reasonable to suppose that the proportions of individuals who applied the scenarios to themselves would be greater.

### **Where to get advice and information [on drinking and drugs]**

The next three charts summarise responses regarding sources of advice and information for drugs and alcohol. Chart 5.11 below shows that almost two-thirds of respondents (64.8% [n=686]) indicated they would access Talk to Frank and 4.0% [n=42] did not indicate this particular source.

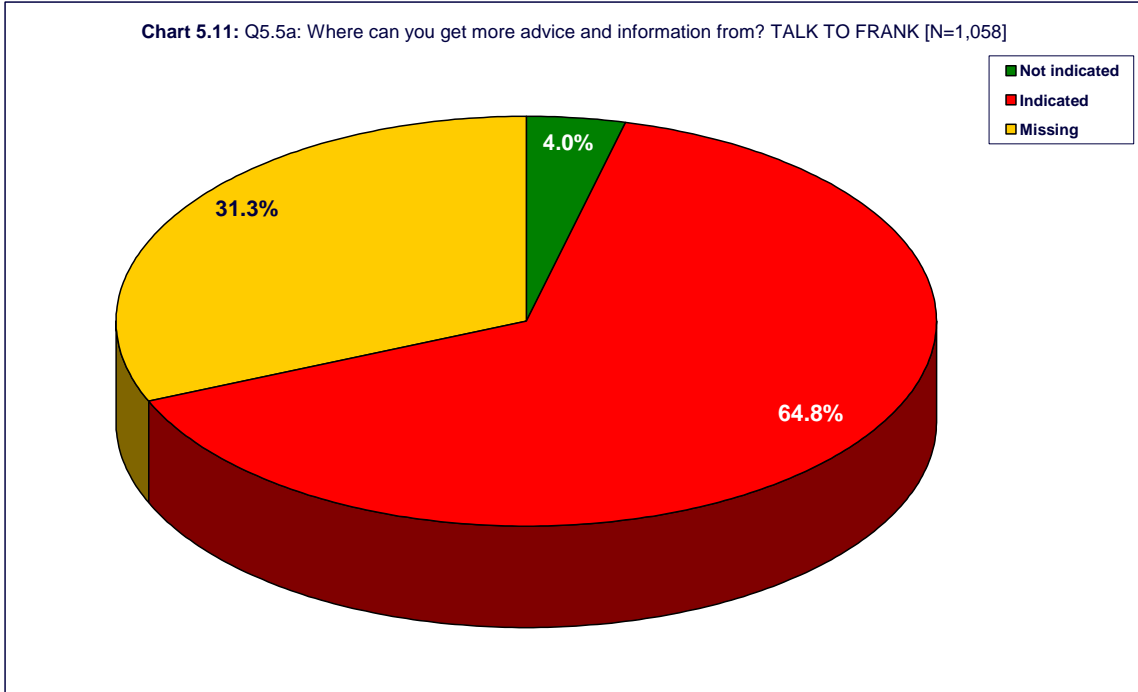
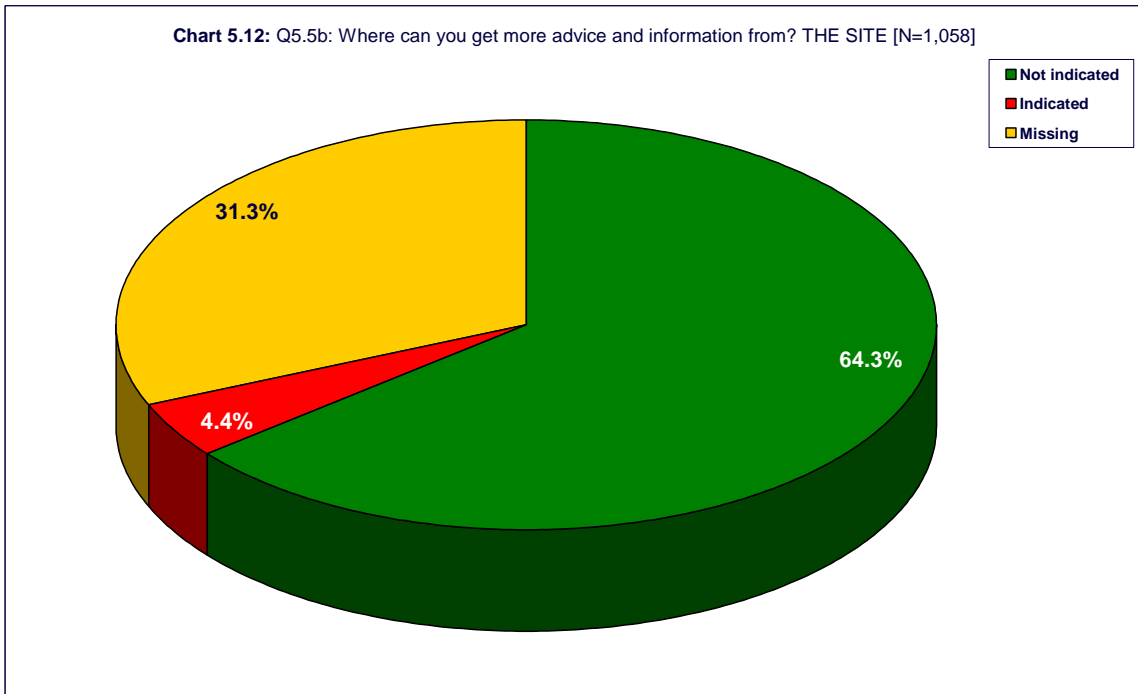
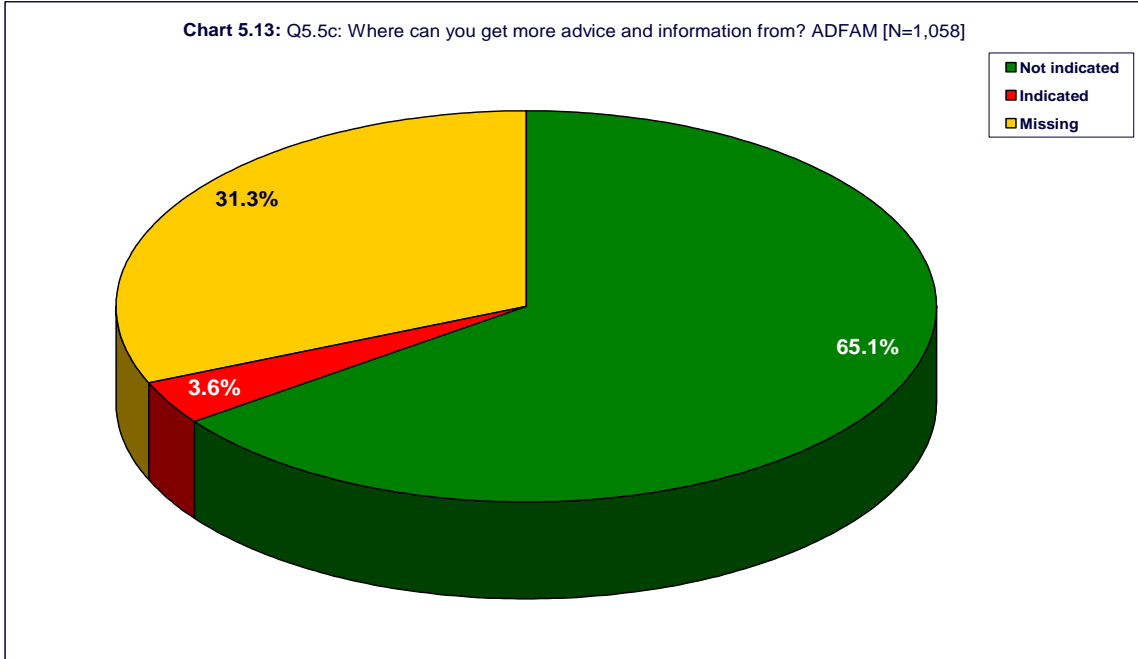


Chart 5.12 below shows that only 4.4% [n=47] of students indicated that they would access 'The Site' website for information on drugs and alcohol while 64.3% [n=680] did not indicate this source.



Even less respondents (3.6% [n=38] indicated that they would access ADFAM as Chart 5.13 below illustrates.



In each of the three tables above 31.3% [n=331] of respondents failed to make any indications for this question and thus categorised as 'missing'.

**Where to go for help in Oldham for alcohol and/or drug problems**

Charts 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 below summarise answers to the question 'If you are concerned about yours or someone else's drug or alcohol use where would you go for help in Oldham. Chart 6.1 shows that only 23.1% [n=244] of respondents indicated that they would approach OASIS.

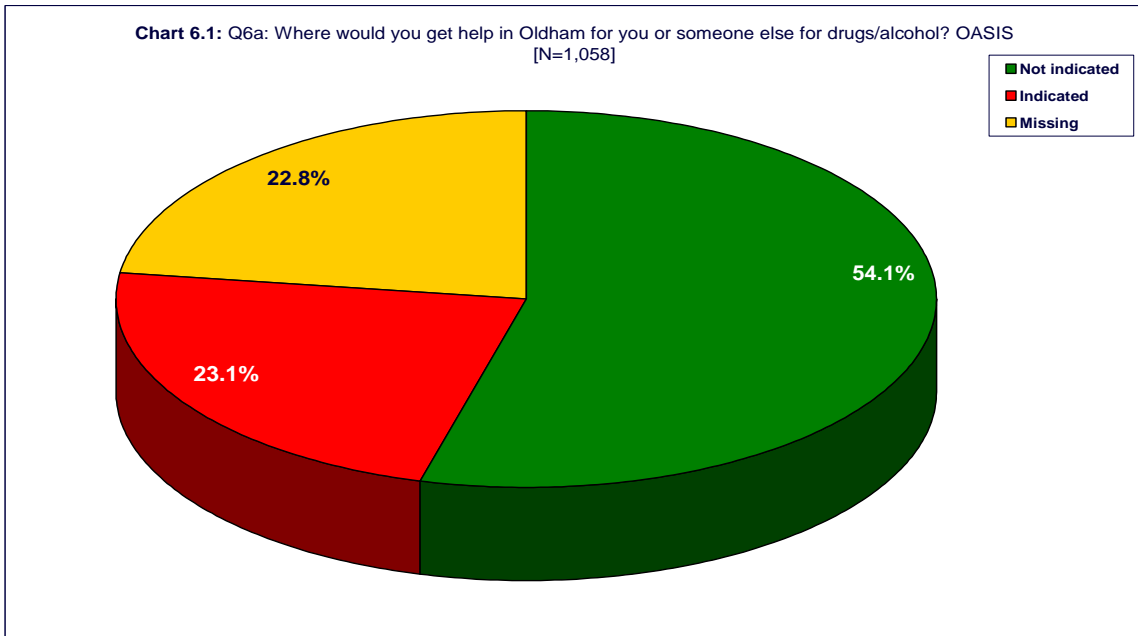
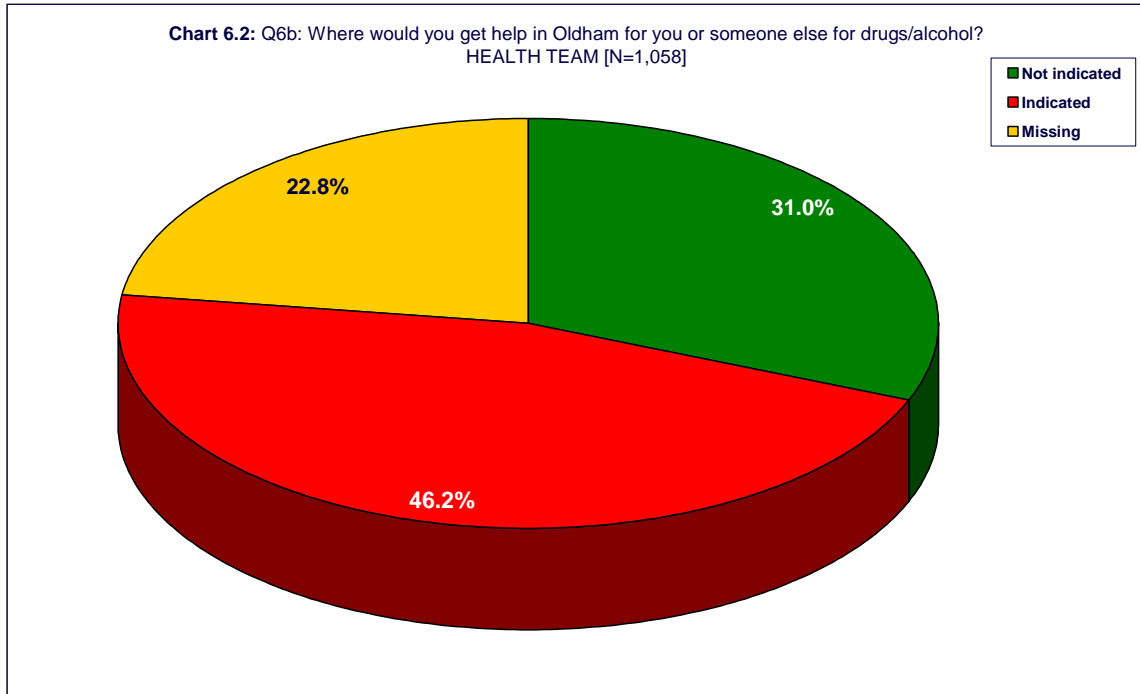
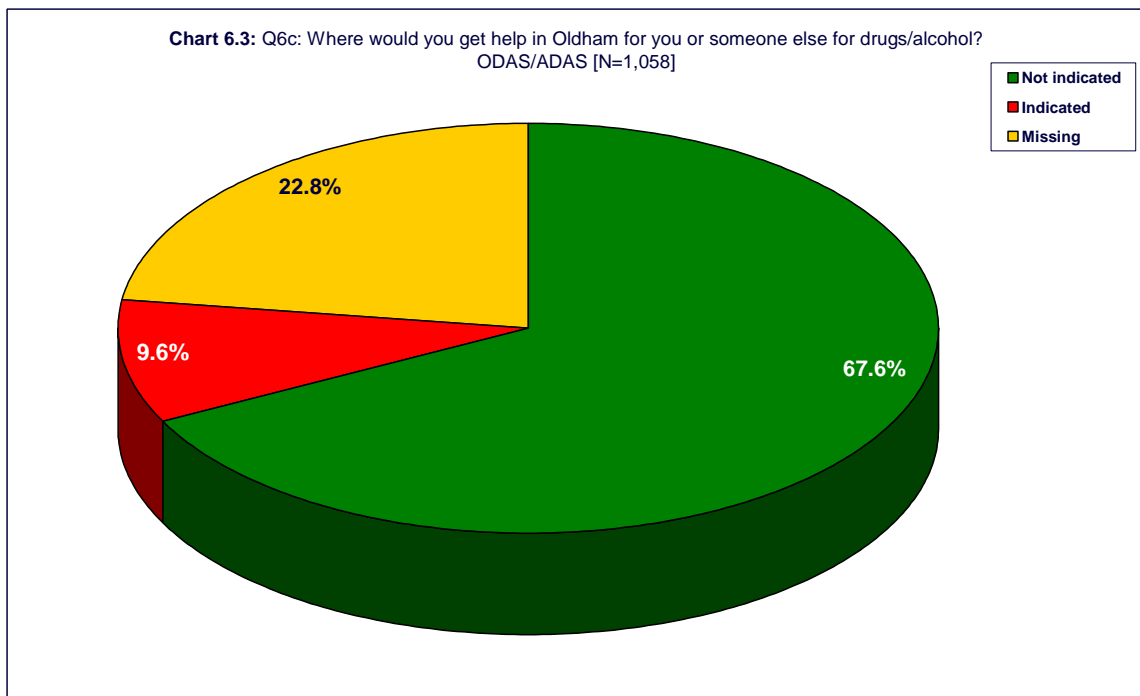


Chart 6.2 below shows that almost half of those surveyed (46.2% [n=489]) would go to the Health Team (at the Centre) for help with a drug or alcohol issue – this was the most nominated agency.



In Chart 6.3 below we can see that less than one in ten (9.6% [n=102]) nominated ODAS/ADAS.

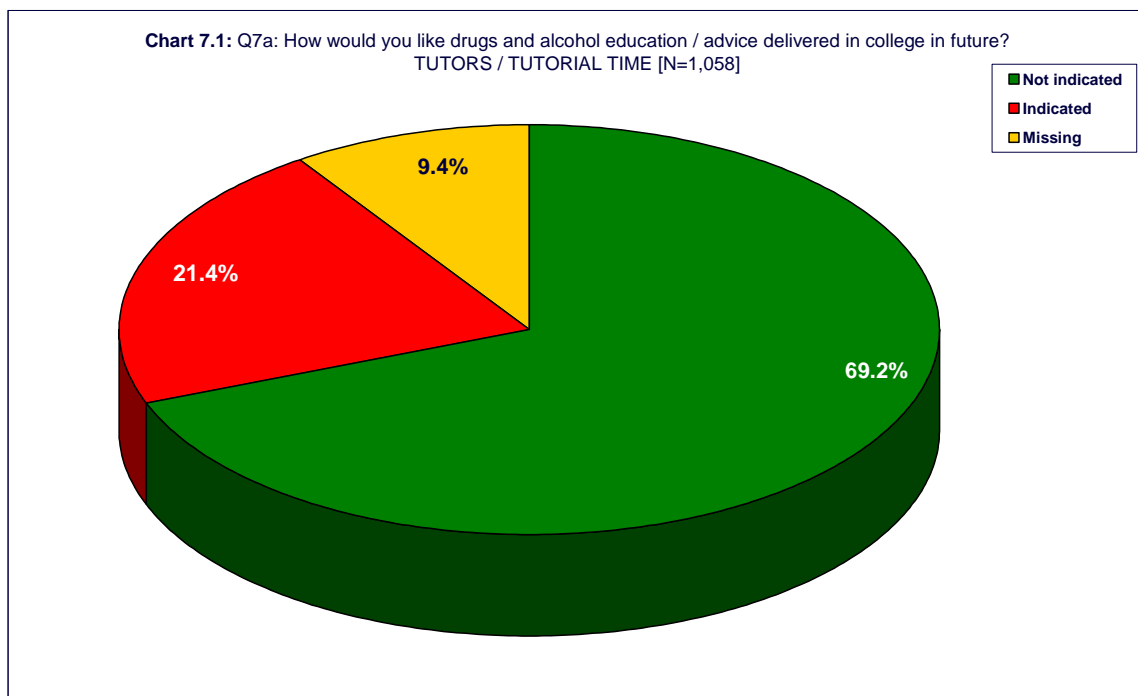


In each of the three tables above 22.8% [n=241] of respondents failed to make any indications for this question and thus categorised as 'missing'.

### Delivering drugs and alcohol education or advice at Oldham Sixth Form College

Charts 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 below summarise answers to the question 'How would you like drugs and alcohol education/advice delivered in college in the future?'

Chart 7.1 shows that only 21.4% [n=226] of respondents indicated that they would want drugs and alcohol education to be delivered by tutors during tutorial time.



More than four in ten (41.0% [n=434]) participants indicated that they would like drop-in sessions offering advice and information by a drugs service as can be seen in Chart 7.2 below.

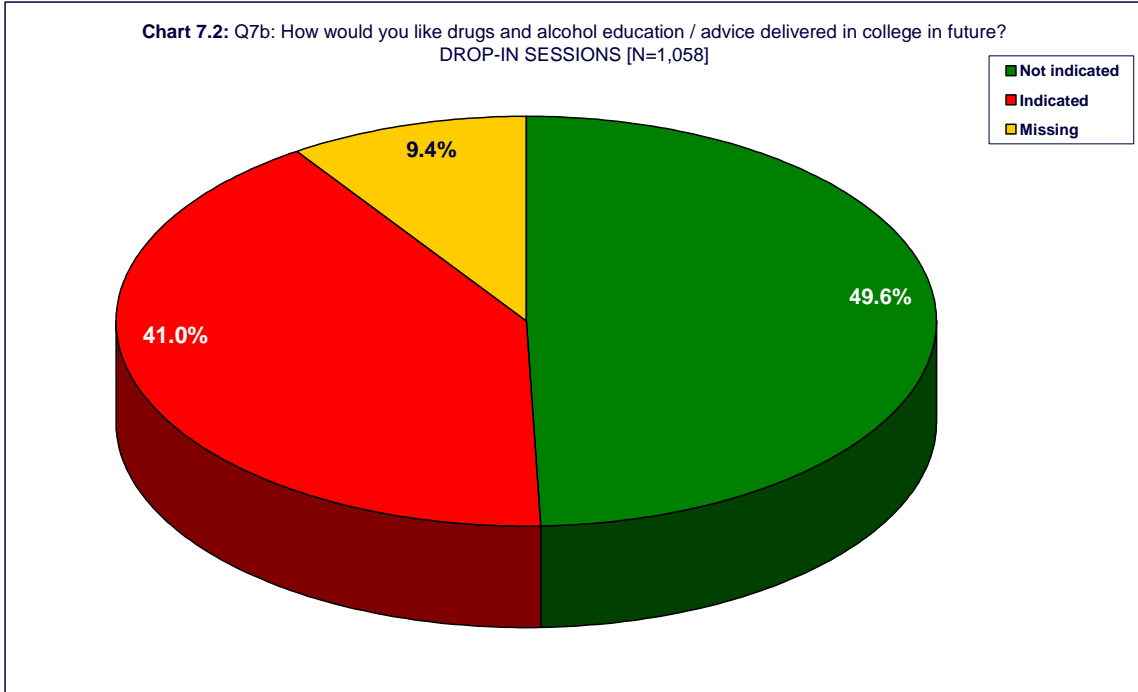
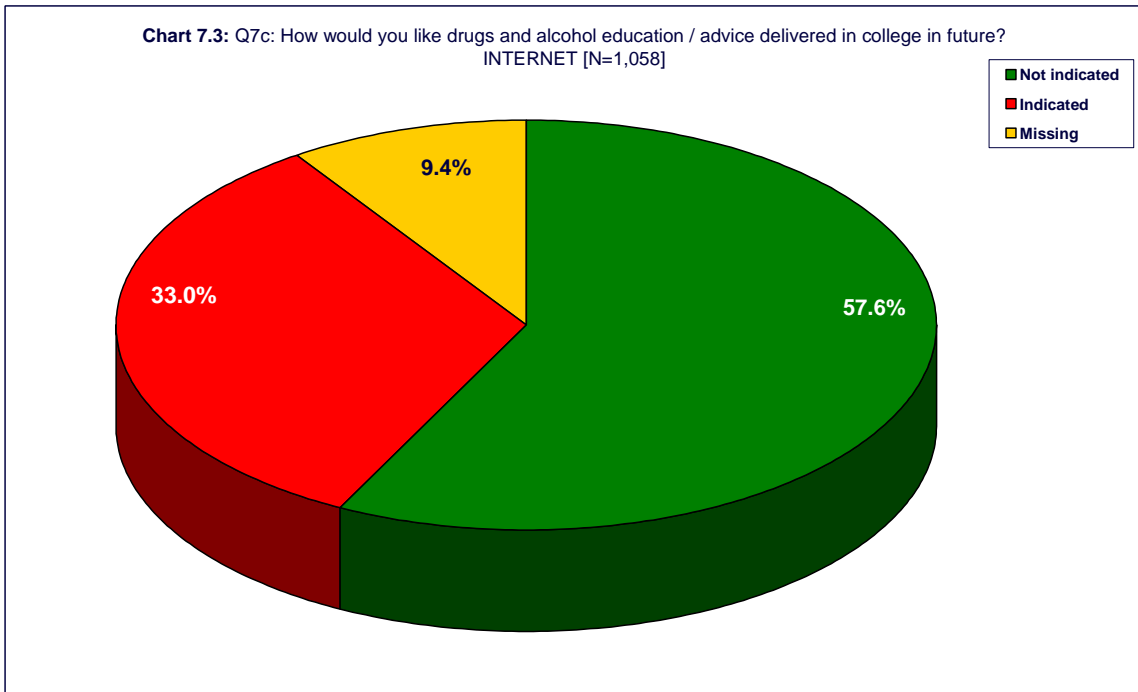


Chart 7.3 below shows that almost one-third of students (33.0% [n=349]) said they would prefer drug advice and information delivered via the internet.



In each of the three tables above 9.4% [n=99] of respondents failed to make any indications for this question and thus categorised as 'missing'.

## Year Group of respondents

The final chart shows the distribution of respondents by year group.

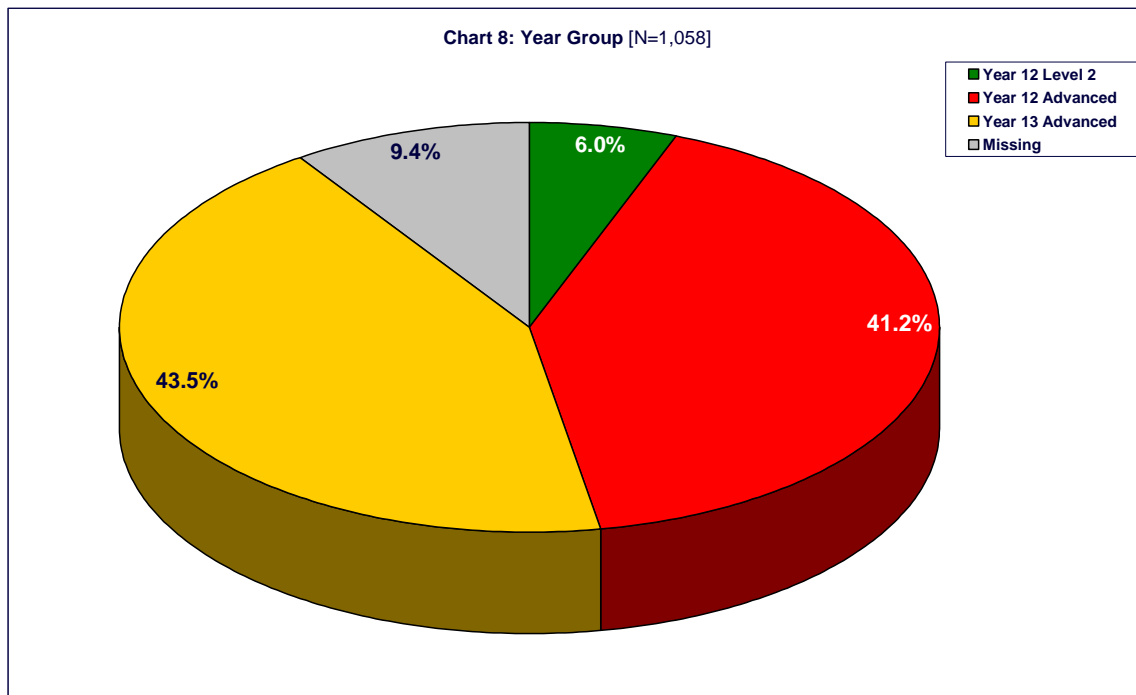


Chart 8 above shows that the largest contingent of respondent hailed from Year 13 (Advanced) (43.5% [n=460]) with a similar proportion belonging to Year 12 (Advanced) - 41.2% [n=436]. The smallest representation was found amongst students from Year 12 (Level2) who accounted for 6.0% [n=63] of respondents. Unfortunately 9.4% [n=99] either answered this question inappropriately or missed answering entirely.

### Some concluding comments and recommendations

Overall the return rate for this survey was very good with almost 1,100 completed questionnaires. Some of the indications made by respondents do highlight a deficit in knowledge, particularly with regards to alcohol consumption by volume/units as shown in Chart 2 above. The proportion of respondents who indicated the number of units in a bottle of wine to be nine or less was worryingly high. This finding ought to prompt further investigation and potentially education and awareness.

Discussion of the ten scenarios above has already raised the issue that too many respondents appear to be applying these situations to others or 'someone-they-know'. Again, and perhaps from a focus group exercise, it would be worth investigating this further in terms ascertaining who the 'someone else' is – are

they relatives, friends outside college, people they hear about but do not know, etc.

It appears that the agency respondents – or someone else they knew – would seek help [if they had a drug and/or alcohol problem] from the Health Team (at the Centre). This was nominated by approximately 46% of respondents, twice the rate for OASIS (23%). This is a key finding that could provide evidence to prompt a degree of re-configuration of provision for young people in Oldham.

Turning now to issues relating to questionnaire design, although this survey reached almost 1,100 young people aged 16 to 18 years old there is a feeling that some opportunities have been missed. It is recommended that this survey be undertaken on an annual basis however it is also advised that some important changes are made with regards to content and layout. In future this survey could ask for information about gender and ethnicity. This would enable cross-tabulations for all sections of the questionnaire and offer greater insight into any differences in answering between the sexes and different ethnic groups.

For any future surveys questions 2 and 4 would require a degree of re-adjustment to enable answering to truly reflect the opinions of its participants. In question 2 the choices for the number of units in a bottle of wine were 3-5 units, 7-9 units and 11-13 units. The choice ought to have been 0-5 units, 6-10 units and 11-14 units. In question 4, it has already been identified that each answer choice was correct – i.e. Over £500, Over £1,000 and Over £1,500. Again this would have been better presented as a choice of ranges such as £0-£500, £501-£1,000, £1,001-£1,500 and £1,501 or more.

Finally, in relation to questionnaire design, it may in future be worthwhile including clear instructions as to how each question should be answered. For instance questions where only one response is required' should include an instruction asking the respondent to only tick one box, this would reduce those opting for two or more responses inappropriately. Conversely, for questions which demand more than one answer an instruction asking respondents to tick more than one box if necessary would make responses more representative. For example, questions 6 and 7 could have prompted answering of this nature.

In conclusion findings from this survey provide some useful information and a relatively sound basis for informing the design and administration of future similar surveys.