

Shocking figures reveal more than 3,000 schoolchildren as young as 12 were treated for alcohol problems last year

- **Lancashire named worst area with 173 children in treatment in 2011**
- **East Sussex and Nottinghamshire named second and third with 145 and 94 under-16 cases**
- **In total, 369 of the 3,205 children were under 14**
- **3.5 million children are affected by the drinking of their parents**

By Sara Malm

More than **3,200 school children received treatment for alcohol misuse** last year out of which nearly 400 were under the age of 14.

The shocking figures reveal that 18 local authorities in Britain cared for more than ten children aged 12 or 13 for their alcohol abuse last year.

The new data comes after British teenage girls were named as the worst binge drinkers in the western world by a Government think-tank.

Underage drinking: Thousands of school-aged children received treatment for alcohol misuse last year, as figures show British girls are the worst binge drinkers in the west (picture posed by models)

Statistics from the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) show that thousands of children have such major alcohol problems that they have to be enrolled into substance misuse programs.

Health professionals blame poor celebrity role models and cheap alcohol for the high numbers which saw 369 under-14s in treatment and 2,836 who are aged 14 and 15.

The data show that some areas are dealing with more than one school-aged child every week needing attention for their excessive drinking.

Price hike: Tory MP Tracey Crouch hopes higher alcohol prices will help prevent underage drinking

Lancashire had the worst problem last year, with 173 under-16s needing to be put into alcohol misuse programmes.

It is followed by East Sussex, which treated 145 children, and Nottinghamshire and Liverpool with 94 and 92 cases respectively

Tracey Crouch, Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford, and Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Alcohol Misuse Group said she was saddened by the figures, which she called a worrying sign.

She said: 'There is a clear difference between experimentation by young people and the concerning situation here where children are having treatment because of their misuse.'

'At 12 I was out playing hide and seek.'

'I know the world has changed in the last 25 years, but alcohol just didn't feature in my life at that age.'

She added that minimum pricing of alcohol would be one way to tackle the problem.

'At the moment alcohol is incredibly cheap. Kids don't have a lot of cash and so if you increase the price of alcohol it should help to price them out of drinking.'



Cheap booze: Low prices on alcohol could be a cause of underage drinking and alcohol abuse among under-16s

NTA Director of Delivery, Rosanna O'Connor said: 'More young people than ever are overcoming their problems with alcohol misuse.

'Any substance misuse among young people is cause for concern.

UNDER-16s IN TREATMENT FOR ALCOHOL MISUSE

Local Authority: No. of children

Lancashire: 173

East Sussex: 145

Nottinghamshire: 94

Liverpool: 92

Staffordshire: 80

Walsall: 71

North Yorkshire: 63

Rochdale: 57

County Durham: 57

Barking and Dagenham: 56

Cambridgeshire: 50

Stoke-on-Trent: 50

Bolton: 49

Stockport: 46

Knowsley: 46

Tower Hamlets: 45

Bromley: 45

Peterborough: 44

Cumbria: 44

Northumberland: 42

'The good news is that those young people who do need help can get it quickly, before problems become entrenched, and they respond well to support.'

A recent report by Government think tank found that one in three British 13-year-olds having been drunk at least twice and levels of damaging binge drinking among 15- to 16-year-olds in the UK compares poorly with other European countries.

Hospital data shows that almost **six children every day are being admitted to hospital with alcohol related illnesses** and the numbers seeking treatment for their problems has increased by 12 per cent over the last eight years. A Government Alcohol Strategy was launched last year which outlined action to be taken to improve alcohol education for children and young people.

The Government has also doubled the maximum fine for persistently selling alcohol to people under legal drinking age to £20,000, and made it easier to close down premises found to be persistently selling alcohol to young people.