

Young girls are falling over and smashing their faces. Walking out of clubs with their knickers half way down their legs, too drunk to even notice. Underage drinkers are risking more than just a telling off. Amanda Snow investigates.

Cheap, easy to access liquor, sweet alco-pops, and fake IDs are proving a cocktail of disaster for young girls in Auckland's central business district.

A former bouncer of a popular inner city night club warns that underage girls, gaining access to nightclubs and bars, are putting themselves at risk — and he has little sympathy.

Having spent more than two years on the door at Auckland waterfront's Coast Bar, John Penhale says it was common for 15 and 16-year-old girls to try to get access into the nightclub — looking for older men and free alcohol.

He describes scenes of young girls falling over and smashing their faces or walking out of clubs with their knickers half way down their legs — too drunk to even notice.

"I didn't like the state they got themselves into and seeing things get out of hand," says Penhale. "You've got to be able to look after yourself. There are sexual predators that go to these nightclubs, with a very different view on how things should come about."

Penhale says he would tell the drunken person's friends to get them home.

But he has no pity for the girls who, he says, brought it on themselves because they were somewhere they were not supposed to be.

While Penhale would accept only a driver's licence or passport as certifiable ID, he says other clubs would turn more of a blind eye.

"Club owners want people in there — if the girls are hot they are attracting more guys. My boss was quite strict and you'd pay the price because sometimes you'd end up with a half empty bar."

He says under-aged guys rarely tried or were able to get into clubs.

"It was especially common for young females because they doll themselves up and can pull the wool over people's eyes."

Sixteen-year-old Sally (not her real name) is one of those females. She says she and her friends hit the clubs about once a month using IDs borrowed from older friends.

They drink before heading into town but don't get "trashed" like third and fourth formers who, Sally says, abuse their drinking.

"It's too risky because of all the stories you hear about drinks getting spiked and there's creepy guys out there. Once a 60-year-old man came over to our car and asked for a ride. He said 'you can sit on my knee'. They're just creepy — you never know what they'll do."

But it's older people that get alcohol for them — either in bars or when drinking before



PARTY TIME: Under-age drinkers are choosing to go wild in the city, but are falling victim to male predators.

hand, Sally says.

"Usually Archers and things — nice and cheap!"

According to Senior Sergeant Shane Mulcahy, head of the tactical support group that polices licensed

premises in town and trawls Queen St looking for breaches of the liquor ban, the most serious problem lies not so much with the licensed premises, but with the people supplying alcohol to minors.

Relatives, older friends and

random people off the street are among those who get alcohol for minors enabling them to get "liquored up" before a night out.

Mulcahy says it is common for parents to supply alcohol to their teenagers in the suburbs and for the minors to then head

out "so they hit the town already in a state".

But too often those same adults aren't there to witness the consequences. Mulcahy says young girls, wandering the street completely smashed and who have somehow become isolated from their friends, are literally playing Russian roulette with their lives.

"When a young person plans to go out they have to have a plan to stick with their friends and carry cellphones."

Mulcahy says so much of our offending is attributed to the effects alcohol has on people, and our culture of binge drinking.

"We have a culture of drinking to excess and it's not a very intelligent thing to do. It's not just minors, you see business men walking around like that too."

As clinical director of Auckland City Hospital's emergency department, Tim Parke

"We have a culture of drinking to excess and it's not a very intelligent thing to do. It's not just minors, you see business men walking around like that too."

deals with the end result of the often dangerous and sometimes fatal mix of young people and alcohol.

He says while his unit deals with only a handful of 15 to 18-year-olds for whom alcohol intoxication is their sole problem, a vast amount of time is taken up with treating alcohol related injuries in the 15 to 25-year-old age group.

"Alcohol and drugs are my stock and trade — a big part of our work. The biggest tragedy is the mix of alcohol and injury where people become too drunk to assess a situation and lack the maturity to make good decisions."

He lists car accidents, pedestrian knock-downs, high falls, swimming accidents, and self harm as some of the unfortunate incidents young people find themselves in when intoxicated.

But Parke won't pass judgement and says he is not there to provide any "social corrections."

"You feel sorry for the individual. You feel sorry for their parents. You try to protect them but to make any judgement about any patient is unprofessional. You take each case on its merits."

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