

Angela Mollard

Parents of teens must make a stand



It's time the authorities stepped in to stop teenage drinking – that's you, mums and dads

Among parents of teens, talk has been of nothing else this week. A 15-year-old boy allegedly filming another 15-year-old boy allegedly raping a girl who had passed out drunk. Apparently she wasn't aware of what had happened until video emerged of the attack.

The response has been predictable: shock, horror, revulsion, fear, incredulity and blame.

The fact is teenage girls are being sexually assaulted every weekend at parties, according to drug and alcohol campaigner Paul Dillon.

"It literally happens every single weekend and the saddest part is that girls very rarely report it because they think it's part of the alcohol experience," he told me this week.

"I can't tell you the number of girls who've told me they've blacked out and only found out there's been a guy on top of them or having sex with them when they've been shown a photograph."

Consent, alcohol, morality, social media – all are at the heart of this growing social problem but the issue none of us are willing to discuss is this: parental meekness.

Parents have become like mice, scurrying around trying to keep their children happy yet willing to disappear into a hole when their lion-like teens demand it. "Can I have a party?" inquires the teen.

"There's 80 people coming. Some will sleepover. Don't worry about food. Oh, and can you and Dad stay upstairs all night?"

And what do parents say? "Well, OK, but make sure things don't get out of hand."

But things do get "out of hand" because, as Paul Dillon tells me, in teenage brains the desire for reward outweighs the sense of risk.

We talk about parental neglect in Aboriginal communities and yet in

metropolitan suburbs all over the country parents – including the wealthiest – are turning a blind eye to what their kids are doing. Dillon tells me about the rise of the "mixed sleepover"; of parents hiring security guards for a party then thinking they can go out themselves; of a teenager being encouraged to drink by her parent even though she doesn't want to.

He tells me of an incident he couldn't believe "didn't make the papers". A 13-year-old girl had 20 friends to stay for a sleepover and the parents went out to the movies. Apparently they came home to find an ambulance in their driveway and other parents in uproar because one of the kids had slipped over and badly smashed her head on the concrete. Fortunately the girls had the wherewithal to contact emergency services.

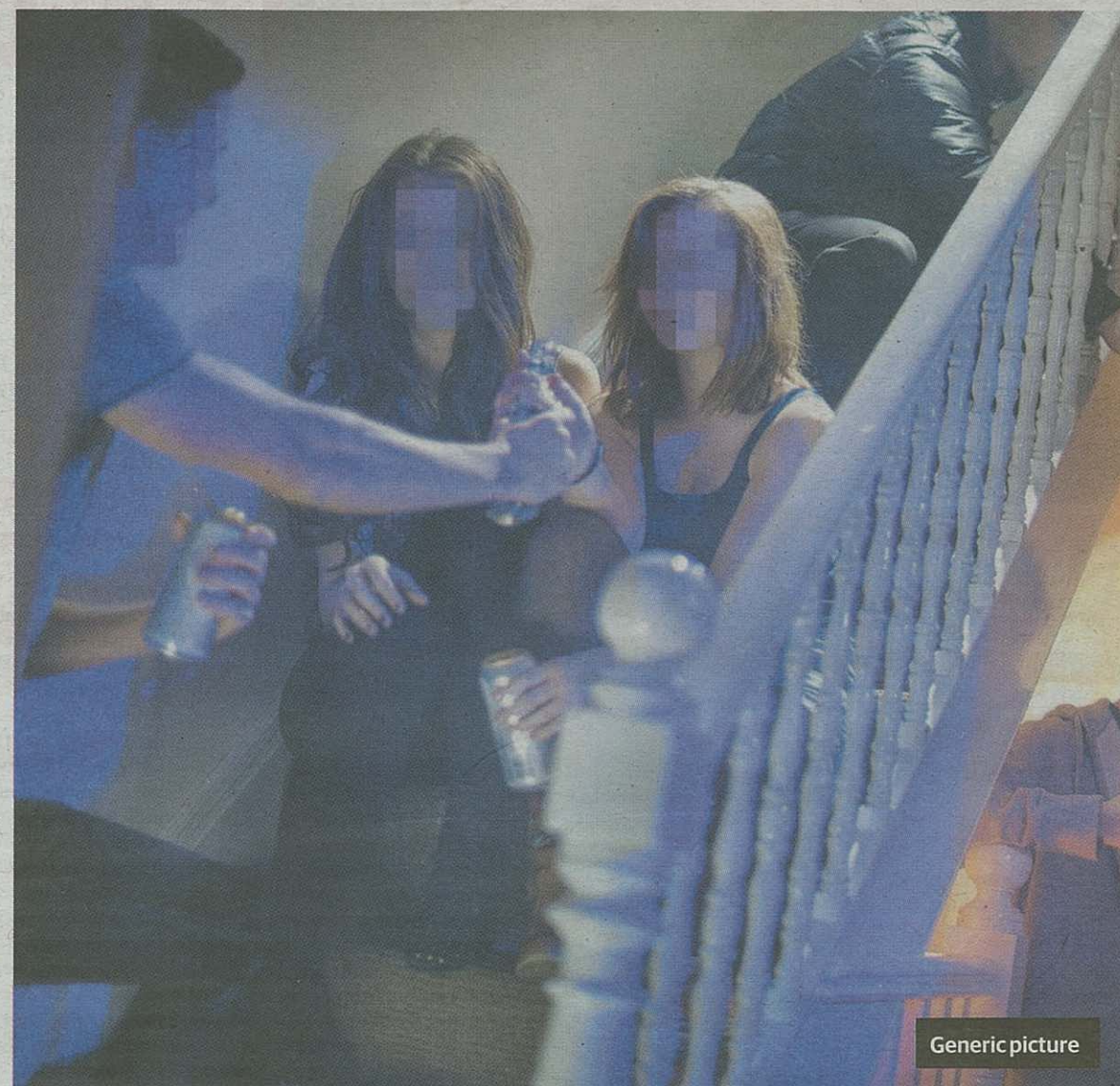
Another mum contacted him beside herself after her daughter had been sexually assaulted at a mixed 14th birthday sleepover.

"The mum had dutifully rung the parents to check they would be home, how many kids would be staying and to leave her contact number. The one question she'd neglected to ask was if boys would be staying. Her daughter had woken in the night to find herself being sexually assaulted. She was mortified, so said nothing until she got home."

When I was a teen parents were a tribe. They'd call each other and if one said "no" they'd all say "no". Nobody gave their own teen alcohol let alone anyone else's. And no one let school-age boyfriends or girlfriends sleepover.

On one occasion when I wasn't home at 11pm, aged 16, my Dad drove over to my boyfriend's house where we were standing outside kissing. He shone the car lights on us, yelled at me to get home and told me I was grounded for a fortnight.

Now, as a mother of two girls aged



Generic picture

16 and 13, I – along with my friends – are dealing most weekends with parties, sleepovers, alcohol and how to keep our kids safe. A friend who had a successful 15th party for her son – no alcohol, everyone checked off at the door, all bags locked in the spare bedroom, extra parents for security, and a finish time of 10.30pm, told me she recently agreed to a small "gatho" a year later.

Big mistake. There were only 15 kids but some brought alcohol, a couple disappeared into a bedroom and, monitoring alone, she spent the even-

ing feeling as if she barely had control.

As Dillon, who heads up Drug and Alcohol Training Australia (DARTA) tells me: "A trained publican finds it difficult to effectively monitor a room full of drinkers so how can parents expect to control 40, 60 or 80 teens when alcohol is tolerated."

Dillon advises making it as "bloody difficult as humanly possible" for teens to drink.

If you won't supply alcohol or let them drink at home and they threaten to go and drink in the park, don't cave. As he says, most won't.

Likewise, I believe parents need to lose our meekness and work together like the mafia.

We have the mature brains so we make the rules.

We need to monitor, to shine torches into the dark recesses of the garden, to tell groping teens to cut it out, to alert the parents if a teen we've collected from a party is drunk.

We need to be there as a deterrent and a sounding board. We need to have each other's backs as we strive to teach kids to protect their own.

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