

Adult drinking patterns in Northern Ireland



Health
Promotion
Agency

Adult drinking patterns in Northern Ireland



Health
Promotion
Agency

Contents

PAGE

List of tables	4
List of figures	5
Executive summary	6
Introduction	10
Drinking patterns and health	10
Northern Ireland's drinking patterns	10
The survey	12
Methodology	12
Who drinks?	14
Age	14
Socioeconomic and educational characteristics	14
Other characteristics	15
How often do we drink?	16
Sex	16
Age	16
Socioeconomic status	17
Income	17
Education	18
Other personal characteristics	18
When do we drink?	19
Days when drinking occurs	19
Sex	19
Age	19
Socioeconomic status and income	21
Education	21
Marital status	21
Community background	21
What do we drink?	22
Men	22
Women	23
Does our choice of drink vary by day of the week?	24
Where do we drink?	25
Men	25
Women	26
Does setting vary by day of the week?	26

Who do we drink with?	28
Men	28
Women	29
Does who we drink with vary by day of the week?	29
How much do we drink?	31
Daily drinking limits	31
Weekly drinking limits	32
Men	33
Women	34
Patterns of drinking	35
Binge drinking	36
Who is binge drinking?	36
Frequency of bingeing over the week	38
When is binge drinking most likely to occur?	39
In which setting is binge drinking most likely to occur?	40
Is binge drinking related to our drinking company?	41
Do binge drinkers drink certain types of drink?	42
Comparing binge drinkers with weekly consumption	42
CAGE - screening for problems	43
CAGE positive drinkers	43
Analysing CAGE by drinker types	44
Self-perception versus reality	45
Discussion	47
Implications	47
Issues	48
Recommendations	49
References	50
Appendix 1: Response rate and profile of respondents	51
Appendix 2: Presentation of results	55

List of tables

PAGE

Table 1:	Men and women who ever drank by socioeconomic group, household income and educational characteristics	15
Table 2:	Where drinking takes place throughout the week (men)	27
Table 3:	Where drinking takes place throughout the week (women)	27
Table 4:	Variation in drinking company during the week (men)	29
Table 5:	Variation in drinking company during the week (women)	30
Table 6:	Number of days per week men and women reached or exceeded the recommended daily limit	31
Table 7:	Units of alcohol consumed in the week prior to the study	33
Table 8:	Number of times per week that men and women exceeded binge limits	39
Table 9:	Binge drinking by setting	41
Table 10:	Binge drinking by company	41
Table 11:	Binge drinking by the drink of choice	42
Table 12:	Male binge drinking by type of drinker	42
Table 13:	Female binge drinking by type of drinker	42
Table 14:	Percentage of those who completed the diary who answered positively to each CAGE question	43
Table 15:	CAGE by binge - men	44
Table 16:	Self-perception compared with weekly level, binge and CAGE for men	46
Table 17:	Self-perception compared with weekly level, binge and CAGE for women	46
Table 18:	Response rate (households) to the survey	51
Table 19:	Demographic and socioeconomic profile of the respondents to the survey	52
Table 20:	The age and sex profile of respondents in the sample compared with the Northern Ireland population estimates (1998)	53
Table 21:	The socioeconomic grouping of respondents to the alcohol survey compared to the CHS	54
Table 22:	Comparison of drinker types	54
Table 23:	Drinking status of the respondents to the alcohol survey by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	55
Table 24:	Demographic and socioeconomic circumstances of the drinking respondents to the survey by sex	56
Table 25:	Respondents' estimate of how often they usually drank alcohol by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	57
Table 26:	Male respondents' estimate of how often they usually drank alcohol by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	58
Table 27:	Female respondents' estimate of how often they usually drank alcohol by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	59
Table 28:	Male daily drinking patterns by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	60
Table 29:	Female daily drinking patterns by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	61
Table 30:	Drink of choice for males by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	62
Table 31:	Drink of choice for females by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	63
Table 32:	The drink of choice for male respondents during the week	64
Table 33:	Drink ranking through the week - top three for males	64
Table 34:	The drink of choice for female respondents during the week	64
Table 35:	Drink ranking through the week - top three for females	64
Table 36:	The number of different drinks respondents consumed in the week	65
Table 37:	Most frequent setting for male drinking by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	66

Table 38: Most frequent setting for female drinking by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	67
Table 39: Where male respondents reported drinking throughout the week	68
Table 40: Where female respondents reported drinking throughout the week	68
Table 41: Drinking company by sex	68
Table 42: Drinking partners for males by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	69
Table 43: Drinking partners for females by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	70
Table 44: Who male respondents reported drinking with during the week	71
Table 45: Who female respondents reported drinking with during the week	71
Table 46: Units of alcohol consumed per week for males by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	72
Table 47: Units of alcohol consumed per week for females by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	73
Table 48: Those with one or more binge sessions per week by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	74
Table 49: Frequency of male binge sessions during the week by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	75
Table 50: Frequency of female binge sessions during the week by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances	76
Table 51: Profile of males indicating alcohol problems according to CAGE	77
Table 52: Profile of females indicating alcohol problems according to CAGE	78

List of figures

Figure 1: Drinking prevalence by sex and age group	14
Figure 2: Frequency of drinking by sex	16
Figure 3: Proportion drinking every day by age	17
Figure 4: Incidence of daily drinking by sex	19
Figure 5: Incidence of daily drinking for men by age group	20
Figure 6: Incidence of daily drinking for women by age group	20
Figure 7: Drink of choice analysed by sex	22
Figure 8: Setting where drinking alcohol most frequently took place analysed by sex	25
Figure 9: Drinking company by sex	28
Figure 10: Percentage of men and women exceeding recommended daily limits per day	32
Figure 11: Percentage of men exceeding weekly limit by age group	33
Figure 12: Percentage of men exceeding weekly limit by socioeconomic group	34
Figure 13: Percentage of women exceeding weekly limit by age group	35
Figure 14: Proportion of binge drinkers in each age group by sex	36
Figure 15: Proportion of binge drinkers in each socioeconomic group by sex	37
Figure 16: Proportion of binge drinkers in each income group by sex	38
Figure 17: Incidence of binge drinking per day - men	40
Figure 18: Incidence of binge drinking per day - women	40
Figure 19: Proportion of respondents who answered positively to CAGE questions	43
Figure 20: CAGE by type of drinker - men	44
Figure 21: Self-perception of drinking habits by sex	45

Executive summary

An individual's pattern of alcohol consumption varies according to a range of personal characteristics, such as sex, age and socioeconomic status. However, variation by a number of these personal characteristics, such as socioeconomic characteristics, marital status, and community background is more significant for women than men in Northern Ireland.

Who drinks?

Seventy percent of adults in Northern Ireland drink alcohol - 75% of men and 67% of women. Younger people are more likely to drink than older people. Those of both sexes from higher income households are more likely to drink, but socioeconomic group and marital status are significant only for women.

How often do we drink?

Over half (56%) of drinkers in Northern Ireland drink at least once a week, just over a third drink less often than weekly. One in ten drinks almost daily. Drinking frequency also varies by personal characteristics.

For example, twice as many men as women drink on a daily basis. Daily drinking is more common in older people of both sexes. Those on a higher household income and those in the professional/intermediate socioeconomic group are more likely to drink daily than people in the semi-skilled/unskilled group or those on a low income.

Household income has a significant effect on women's drinking. Women on the lowest household income are the least frequent drinkers, with over half of them (51%) drinking less than once a week. By contrast, men on the lowest household income have a similar prevalence for daily drinking (18%) as men on the highest household income (19%).

When do we drink?

Analysis of drinking events for all drinkers over a seven day period confirms that most drinking occurs at weekends. This general pattern of low weekday drinking with a steep increase at weekends peaking on Saturday is consistent for men and women, regardless of age group, socioeconomic group, marital status, level of education or community background.

Men are more likely to drink on weekdays than women. Around one in five men drink on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) compared to around one in ten women. Higher proportions of older drinkers drink during weekdays compared to their younger counterparts.

Age has a significant impact on what day of the week men drink. Men aged 60-75 years are twice as likely to drink on a Monday as 18-29 year old men. The youngest age groups have the lowest drinking incidence on weekdays and the highest on Saturdays. For example, the majority (71%) of younger men (aged 18-44) drink at least once a week, with 22% drinking less often than this. The rise in drinking incidence from weekday to weekend (from Thursday to Saturday) for the oldest age group is 25 percentage points, compared to a dramatic 47 percentage point rise for the youngest group.

This pattern suggests that the majority of Northern Ireland drinkers are concentrating their drinking into a small number of sessions at the weekend. Analysis of consumption will reveal if these few sessions are heavy sessions, which would indicate a 'binge' culture.

What do we drink?

The main drink of choice for men is beer (including beer/lager/cider/stout), followed by wine and spirits. For women, the main drink of choice is wine, followed closely by spirits then beer. The overall proportion reporting drinking alcopops and coolers was very low (1% to 2%) and is age related.

There is a highly significant variation between age group and type of drink chosen for men. The older a man is, the less likely he is to choose beer, and the more likely he is to choose wine or spirits. There is a statistical variation between socioeconomic groups for drinking beer and wine. Beer is the drink usually chosen by the manual socioeconomic group, while wine is drunk mostly by the non-manual group.

Fewer women in the youngest and oldest groups drink wine compared to those aged 30-44 and 45-59 years. Spirits are clearly preferred by older women; alcopops and coolers are mainly chosen by 18-29 year old women; 20% of them drink alcopops/coolers compared to just 3% of women in the other age groups.

Other significant habits to note: significantly more women in the manual group prefer beer (29%) compared with non-manual women (18%). Beer drinking for women in general increases on a Friday and Saturday. More non-manual women drink wine compared with women in the manual group. The pattern is similar for income, but spirit drinking increases significantly among the lower income groups.

Where do we drink?

The main setting for drinking is in our own home (55%), followed by the pub (33%) and then someone else's home (19%). It is important to note the prevalence of drinking at home or in someone else's home. Underreporting is expected in all alcohol studies but it may be higher than usual for Northern Ireland studies where home drinking is common.¹

The pub is the preferred place to drink for the youngest men. Only men in the youngest age group go to a nightclub. Drinking in their own home is more common for those aged 30 or over, whereas drinking in someone else's home is more popular for those aged 18-29, in addition to pub drinking.

Drinking in their own home is most popular for men in the non-manual socioeconomic group and least popular with those on the lowest household income. Men from the manual group show equal likelihood to drink at home and the pub, while higher income men go to a pub least often.

Women of all ages are most likely to drink in their own home. For younger women drinking in a pub is the next most popular option. Both men and women in the manual group are more likely to go to a social club to drink than their non-manual counterparts.

Drinking at home was always the most popular option for any day of the week, but the proportion of people drinking at home decreases at the weekend, when the proportion drinking in a pub and someone else's home starts to increase. It is worth noting the prevalence of drinking in one's own home or in someone else's home, especially on a weekend when this may be in addition to drinking somewhere else, such as in a pub or social club, and may contribute to binge drinking.

How much do we drink?

Daily drinking limits were not regularly exceeded by Northern Ireland drinkers but analysis of daily drinking limits reveals the tendency to concentrate drinking into one or two days of the week.

Weekly drinking limits

Thirty seven percent of male drinkers and 20% of female drinkers who completed the diary for the week prior to the survey had exceeded their weekly sensible drinking limit and could be referred to as risk drinkers (over 21 units for men, over 14 units for women).

Those in the youngest age group are more likely to be risk drinkers. Those in the professional/intermediate group, although more likely to drink and to drink most often, were least likely to be risk drinkers. More single and widowed men were risk drinkers compared to married, cohabiting or separated/divorced men. There was no statistical variation in the likelihood of risk drinking for men with regard to income, education or community background.

For women, the same pattern with age applies; however, there was no significant pattern for women with regard to socioeconomic group, income, education or community background. Although statistical analysis by marital status wasn't possible because of low numbers, the findings would suggest that single women are more likely to be risk drinkers than women of any other marital status.

Binge drinking

Forty eight percent of men and 35% of women who had completed the diary had participated in at least one heavy drinking session or binge in the week prior to the survey. For the purpose of this report, 'binge' drinking is defined as the consumption of roughly half the recommended weekly limit in a single drinking session (ie ten units for men and seven units for women). Analysis revealed that binge drinking is more common in younger age groups: incidence drops sharply with age.

There was significant variation in the incidence of binge drinking between men in different socioeconomic groups. Men from semi-skilled/unskilled socioeconomic groups were more likely to binge drink.

Single men and women were more likely to binge than any other marital status group. There is no significant difference in binge likelihood associated with income, education, or community background for men.

For women, levels of binge drinking vary significantly according to socioeconomic group (as for men) and income. Professional/intermediate women were least likely to binge, and incidence was highest among the semi-skilled/unskilled manual group. Women in the lowest income group, while least likely to drink overall, are most likely to binge when they do drink.

Bingeing was most likely to occur on Friday and Saturday nights. The rate more than doubles between mid-week and Saturday. Analysis of binge drinking and setting shows that bingeing was most likely to take place in the pub. This finding was highly significant for both men and women. The social club also has significant impact on consumption.

Those who drink with their partners are least likely to binge drink. Analysis showed that bingeing was more likely to occur when people drink in groups. This association is stronger for groups of men than for groups of women.

Binge drinkers are more likely to drink beer/lager/cider/stout than any other drink, but this may be related to age and socioeconomic group. Wine drinkers were least likely to binge. For women, spirits contribute to the female binge as do alcopops and coolers drunk by young women, and again this is probably age related.

Obviously the likelihood of a binge and the frequency of bingeing increases with increasing consumption. However, 27% of men and 25% of women who remained within the sensible drinking limits for the week had participated in a binge, which suggests that they have a sensible weekly consumption but not a sensible drinking pattern.

CAGE - screening for problems

Seven percent of those who had drunk in the week prior to the survey answered 'yes' to at least two of the four CAGE screening questions, indicating a possible alcohol problem (see page 43). Significantly more men than women screened positive using CAGE. For men, there was a statistical significance by socioeconomic group, those least likely to show a problem are in the professional/intermediate group, and those most likely were semi-skilled/unskilled workers. Analysis revealed the same pattern with income.

Self perception versus reality

When drinkers' own perception of their drinking was compared with their actual weekly consumption, 11% of men who described themselves as light drinkers were actually risk or heavy risk drinkers.

A substantial proportion of those men who described themselves as light drinkers (23%) were classified as having engaged in a binge session and 3% of them screened CAGE positive, suggesting a problem with alcohol.

Fifty four percent of those men who described themselves as moderate drinkers proved to have drunk to risk level or dangerous level in the week prior to the survey. Two thirds of them had engaged in a binge session, and a relatively high proportion (14%) screened positive for alcohol problems.

More women accurately described their levels when compared to consumption over the week. Ninety two percent of those women who described themselves as light drinkers were classified as sensible drinkers according to consumption, although almost a quarter of them had engaged in a binge session. However, four in ten (41%) women who described themselves as moderate drinkers drank above the weekly sensible drinking limit and could be described as risk drinkers. Over half (54%) had engaged in a binge session and 7% of them screened positive for CAGE.

The results of this survey provide a helpful baseline against which future changes in drinking patterns and consumption can be measured. This report outlines variations in drinking patterns and consumption associated with age, sex, socioeconomic group and other personal characteristics where relevant and highlights areas for discussion and future strategic work.

Introduction

When considering the issue of alcohol misuse, it is necessary to look at not just the amount people drink, but also how they drink. The term 'drinking patterns' can be interpreted in a number of ways: it may refer to temporal variations in drinking, the number and characteristics of heavy drinking sessions, the settings where drinking takes place, or the activities associated with drinking. It may also refer to differences in drinking behaviour between demographic or socioeconomic groups, or between men and women, or to the choice of time, place and drinking companions (drinking contexts), the types of beverage consumed (beer/lager/cider/stout, wine, spirits), and the clusters of drinking norms and behaviours often referred to as 'drinking cultures'.²

Drinking patterns and health

For those working in health promotion and public health, the most significant issue is the link between drinking patterns and health. The way we drink is an important determinant of both the positive and negative consequences of drinking. Preliminary evidence indicates that patterns of drinking may be more important than levels of consumption in predicting whether people will experience problems with their drinking.³ It has been argued that some aspects of drinking patterns may be more relevant for chronic disease (such as choice of drink, whether it is drunk with a meal or not, and sustained versus intermittent consumption) while others may be more relevant for accidental injury (such as drinking during the day at work, drinking and driving, and 'binge' or session drinking).⁴

The pattern of drinking that is probably most relevant for health outcome is the distinction between binge drinking and sustained drinking. By this we mean the difference between the person who goes out once or twice a week, but drinks to excess on these occasions, and the person who drinks heavily throughout the week, but not necessarily as excessively as the 'binge drinker'. Both types of drinker are putting their own health at risk, but both types of drinker are impacting on society's health and wellbeing in addition. Therefore, how people drink is significant in terms of individual and societal health, ie certain patterns of drinking are linked with particular types of harm. The significance of this is that there is currently a debate regarding whether alcohol policies should aim to control the level of total alcohol consumption, or whether they should be targeted at weakening harmful patterns of drinking. This issue will be further examined in the discussion section on page 47.

Northern Ireland's drinking patterns

With increasing interest being placed in recent years on the relationship between drinking patterns and harm, it seemed appropriate to carry out a study into drinking patterns within Northern Ireland. This is a path that has been trod before but not in recent years, and certainly not since the change in licensing laws in 1996 and the seeming rapid growth in the leisure sector since the peace process began.^{5,6,7}

Describing Northern Ireland's drinking culture is not without its difficulties. It is well documented that it has one of the highest levels of abstinence in Europe. However, research would suggest that the proportion of the population who chooses not to drink has been getting smaller in recent years, and in addition, a large number of drinkers, between 25-30%, drink infrequently.⁸

On the other hand, drinking for many people in Northern Ireland is synonymous with heavy drinking; a substantial proportion drink well in excess of the previous low-risk guidelines of 21 units per week for men and 14 units per week for women. Research conducted in 1999-2000 suggested that 22% of males and 9% of females drink above these levels.⁸

Earlier research in the 1980s indicated that one in three male drinkers in Northern Ireland was more likely to concentrate their drinking into fewer, heavier sessions than drinkers in England, Scotland or Wales. Over 66% of all drinking took place at the weekend.⁶

Research in the mid 1990s identified a new generation of drinkers, suggesting that the level of abstinence is decreasing and that the number of drinkers, particularly young female drinkers, is increasing.⁹

The new challenge to public health was to develop a health promotion approach that addresses the actual levels of alcohol use in Northern Ireland as well as taking account of the binge drinking culture. At the same time, a new Alcohol Strategy for Northern Ireland was being developed that was going to be set within the context of the current drinking patterns of Northern Ireland. However, the previous research had become somewhat dated and was based on weekly sensible drinking limits rather than daily drinking levels, making it difficult to assess drinking patterns, particularly levels of binge drinking.

It was therefore against this background that the Agency commissioned a quantitative study of the patterns of drinking in Northern Ireland.

The survey

The data presented in this report were based on a household survey that was carried out on a sample of the Northern Ireland population. This section provides an outline of the methodology used, including the sampling frame and study design, and a guide to the presentation of the results.

Methodology

The sample and sampling frame

The Valuation and Lands Agency list of addresses was used as a sampling frame. The complete list of private addresses was stratified into three regions: Belfast; east Northern Ireland; and west Northern Ireland. A random sample of 2,050 addresses was drawn from the individual regions in order to reflect the characteristics of those areas.

The Valuation and Lands Agency list provides a good sampling frame of addresses, but contains no details about the characteristics of households in terms of number of members. Interviewers were instructed to call at each address issued in their assignments and then list all members of the households who were eligible for inclusion in the sample, ie all persons aged 18 to 75 years. Each eligible adult within the household was asked to complete an interview.

Study design and data collection

Addresses were issued to a panel of 102 interviewers in early October 1999. The fieldwork period was 26 October to 26 November 1999. The interviewers used a questionnaire that was developed specifically for use on a computer, and responses were recorded directly onto computer. The questionnaire was made up of standardised questions relating to household details, questions relating to drinking practices and a seven day diary recall of drinking events where questions focus on the seven days prior to the day of interview. Respondents were asked to recount their drinking activities over this time focusing on what, how much, where, when and with whom they drank. The survey ends with more questions about respondents' perceptions of their own drinking habits, ie whether they consider themselves to be a heavy, moderate or light drinker, and the CAGE questions.¹⁰ The CAGE questions are used as an assessment instrument to identify problems with alcohol. The final data set achieved for the study was cleaned and validated.

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists). Detailed information on response rate and profile of respondents is included in Appendix 1.

The survey sample has been shown to be representative of the population (see Appendix 1), therefore the results can be extrapolated to the general population.

Presentation of results

Results for this survey are presented as follows. Most of the information has been presented through the use of tables contained in Appendix 2. These tables are based on percentages that have been rounded up to the nearest whole number. Therefore, because of rounding, some column or row percentages may not exactly equal 100. Base numbers have been included in all tables to indicate the number (N) of respondents on which percentages are based.

Some short tables and figures have been added into the main body of the report for illustration purposes and percentages are presented in these tables and figures. The chi-square statistical test was employed to test for associations between groups in the data. Statistically significant findings are shown on all tables where appropriate and three levels of significance are present (ie $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.001$). For instance, if a finding is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level for this study then this finding would be expected in a similar

population 95 times out of 100. Levels of significance are denoted in the tables by asterisks. NS on tables denotes that the results of statistical analysis were not significant, whereas ‡ denotes that the cell numbers involved were too small for statistical tests to be carried out.

The information in the tables has also been analysed by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances. The main demographic circumstances considered were sex and age. Socioeconomic indicators used were socioeconomic group, and total household income per annum. Other background variables used were highest level of education attained, marital status and religion (or community background). Most analysis is presented separately for males and females as drinking patterns are known to vary by sex and the maximum number of units recommended daily or weekly also depends on sex.

Respondents were grouped into four age bands for analysis and presentation purposes. The resulting age bands were 18-29 years, 30-44 years, 45-59 years and 60-75 years. Throughout this report the 18-29 year old age group is referred to as the youngest age group and the 60-75 year old age group referred to as the oldest age group.

Household income was based on the total gross income from all sources in the household. Adults from households with incomes of less than £10,000 per annum are referred to as low income households and those from households with incomes of £25,000 or more are referred to as high income households throughout the following text.

Education was based on the highest level of education attained and grouped into the following categories: no qualifications; qualifications of O level and equivalent standard, including CSE, Commercial and Apprenticeship qualifications; and A level and equivalent or above.

Data on prevalence of drinking are taken from all those who completed the survey (N=1,752). Those who drank in the week prior to the survey were taken through the seven day diary recall of drinking events (N=922). Incidence of drinking through the week is taken from diary information but the base used is that of all drinkers (N=1,233). A small number of respondents did not complete the full diary, therefore for information pertaining to actual amounts consumed (units), the base used is those who completed all sections of the diary (N=915).

Who drinks?

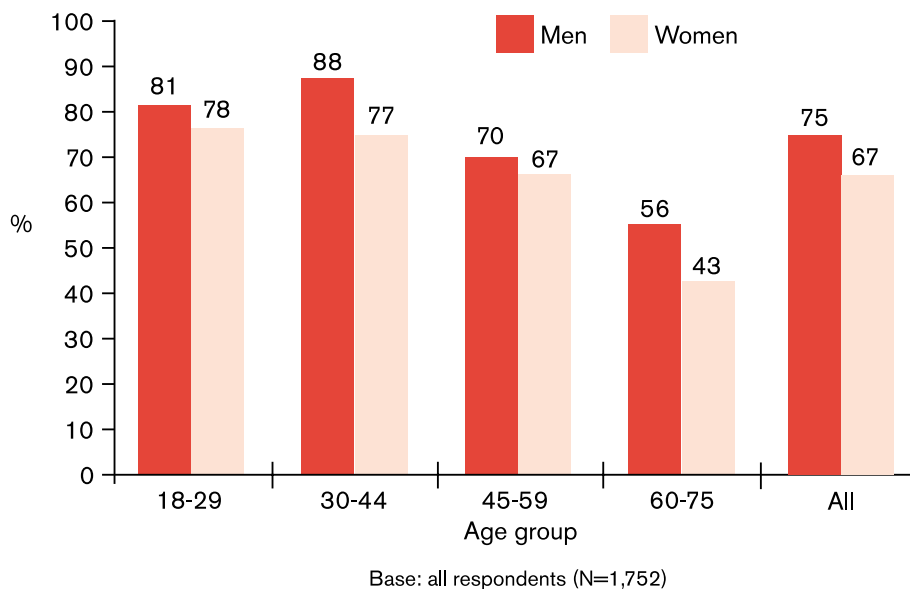
Overall, 70% of adults in Northern Ireland drink alcohol - 75% of men and 67% of women.

Table 23 in Appendix 2 provides details of drinking prevalence by personal characteristics. Table 24 provides the same details by sex.

Age

Younger people of either sex are more likely to drink than older ones (see Figure 1). Almost eight out of ten (79%) 18-29 year olds drink compared to just under half (49%) of 60-75 year olds. This variation with age is statistically significant for both men and women ($p < 0.001$).

Figure 1: Drinking prevalence by sex and age group



Socioeconomic and educational characteristics

Adults from higher income households are more likely to drink, although this is more significant for women ($p < 0.001$) than men ($p < 0.01$). Drinking is also more common among those who have achieved a higher level of education ($p < 0.001$). Variation by socioeconomic group is only noticeable for women. Women in the professional/intermediate socioeconomic group are more likely to drink than those from other groups. Table 1 (opposite) details these findings.

Table 1: Men and women who ever drank by socioeconomic group, household income and educational characteristics

	Males who ever drank alcohol (%)	Females who ever drank alcohol (%)	All
Socioeconomic group	NS	***	
Professional/intermediate	78	76	77
Junior non-manual	83	71	73
Skilled manual	72	51	68
Semi-skilled/unskilled	75	66	69
Household income	**	***	
£25,000 or over	81	78	79
£15-24,999	80	74	76
£10-14,999	76	67	71
under £10,000	66	58	61
Education status	***	***	
A Level/higher education	85	80	82
O Level/commercial	79	73	76
No qualifications	62	56	58
Overall	75	67	70

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (**p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant.

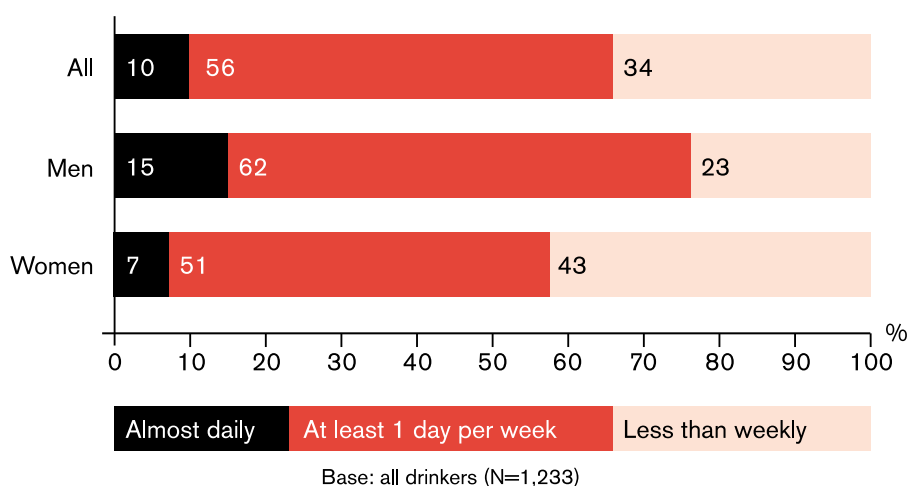
Other characteristics

In relation to marital status, more separated and divorced people drink than others, while those who are widowed are least likely to drink. However, the effect of marital status is more significant for women than men (p<0.001 for women, p<0.05 for men). More Catholics (76%) than Protestants (67%) drink (p<0.01), and this is true for both men and women.

How often do we drink?

Over half (56%) of drinkers in Northern Ireland drink at least once a week and just over a third drink less often than weekly. One in ten drinks almost daily. Figure 2 below presents drinking frequency for all drinkers and by sex.

Figure 2: Frequency of drinking by sex



Drinking frequency varies by personal characteristics. Tables 25 to 27 in Appendix 2 present full results for how often people drink and how this relates to personal characteristics for all drinkers and then for men and women separately.

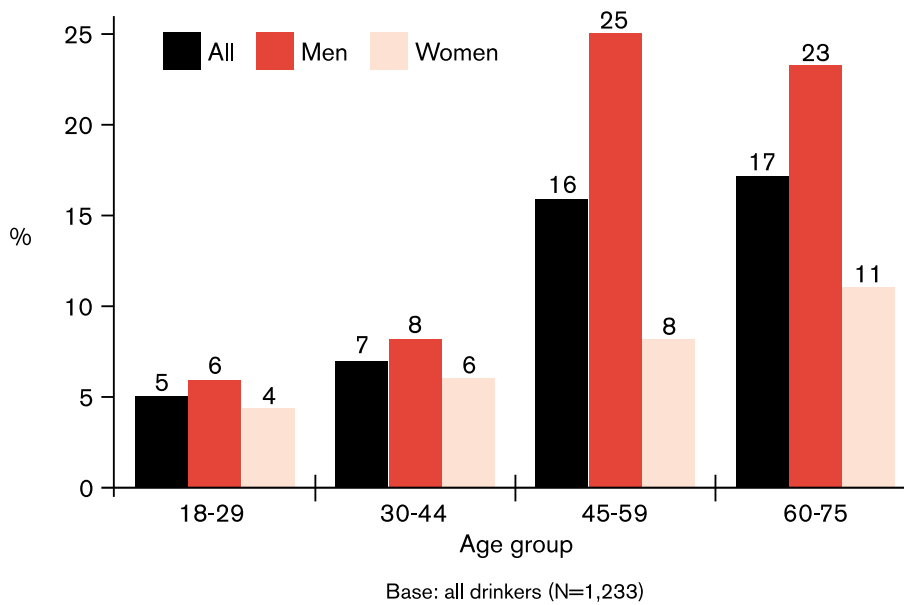
Sex

There is a highly significant association between drinking frequency and the sex of the drinker ($p < 0.001$). Figure 2 (above) shows that twice as many men (15%) as women (7%) drink on a daily basis. Around half of all women drink at least once a week and a large proportion (43%) drink less than once a week.

Age

There is a significant variation in how often people in different age groups drink ($p < 0.001$) for both men and women (see Figure 3). Daily drinking is more common in older people of both sexes. A quarter of men aged 45-59 and 23% of men aged 60-75 drink almost every day, compared with only 6% of 18-29 year old men.

Figure 3: Proportion drinking every day by age



The majority (71%) of younger men (aged 18-44) drink at least once a week, with 22% drinking less often than this. While the older age groups are more likely to drink every day, a significant proportion of them also drink less frequently. Almost a third (32%) of 60-75 year old men and 59% of 60-75 year old women drink less than once a week.

Socioeconomic status

Overall, those on a higher household income and those in the professional/intermediate socioeconomic group are more likely to drink daily than people in the semi-skilled/unskilled group or on a low household income. However, socioeconomic group does not have a significant effect on how often men drink (see Table 26). The professional/intermediate group has the highest proportion of men who drink almost every day (17%), followed by semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers at 16%. However, the professional/intermediate group also has the highest proportion of men drinking least often (27% drink less than once a week).

Income

Household income has a significant effect on women's drinking ($p < 0.05$). Women on the lowest household income are the least frequent drinkers, with over half of them (51%) drinking less than once a week. By contrast, men on the lowest household income have a similar prevalence for daily drinking (18%) as men on the highest household income (19%).

Education

How often men drink is not affected by their level of education, but education is significant for women ($p < 0.001$). Women who have attained a higher level of education seem more likely to drink on more days of the week. One in ten women educated to A-level standard or above drinks almost daily, compared to 6% of those with no qualifications. Over half (52%) of those with no qualifications drink less often than once a week, compared to 36-38% of those who do have qualifications.

Other personal characteristics

There are more regular drinkers (ie drinking at least once a week) among the Catholic community. However, this difference between the two communities is only statistically significant for women; 62% of Catholic women drink at least once a week compared to 53% of Protestant women.

Due to low numbers in some categories, it was not possible to calculate statistical significance. However, it appears that separated/divorced respondents are more regular drinkers (drinking at least once a week) than other groups. Seventy two percent of this group drink at least once a week compared to 66% of married/cohabiting respondents.

When do we drink?

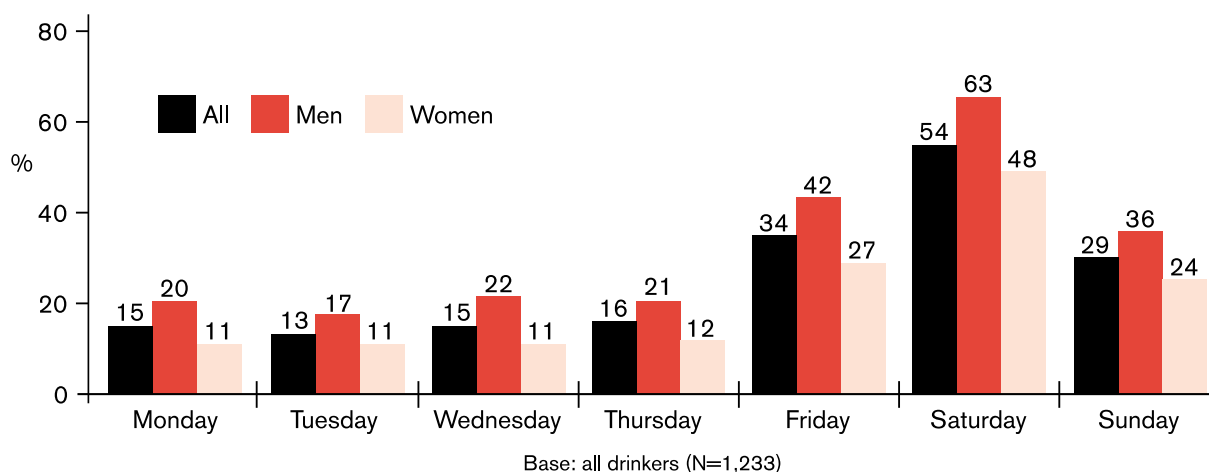
Tables 28 and 29 in Appendix 2 show the proportions of men and women drinking on each day of the week, analysed by personal circumstances.

Days when drinking occurs

Analysis of drinking events for all drinkers (N=1,233) over a seven day period reveals that most drinking occurs at weekends. For the purposes of this report, weekdays were categorised as Monday to Thursday inclusive and weekend as Friday to Sunday inclusive. Figure 4 demonstrates a clear pattern of low incidence of weekday drinking, rising sharply at the weekends, with the highest proportion of people drinking on a Saturday.

From Monday to Thursday, the proportion of people drinking ranges between 13% and 16%. By Friday this figure rises to just over one third (34%) and by Saturday well over half of all drinkers reported having a drink (54%). The proportion of people drinking falls again on Sunday to just less than three in ten (29%).

Figure 4: Incidence of daily drinking by sex



This general pattern of low weekday drinking with a steep increase at weekends, peaking on Saturday, is consistent for men and women, regardless of age group, socioeconomic group, marital status, level of education or community background (see Tables 28 and 29, Appendix 2).

Sex

In line with the previous analysis of drinking frequency, men are more likely to drink on weekdays than women. Around one in five men drink on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) compared to around one in ten women.

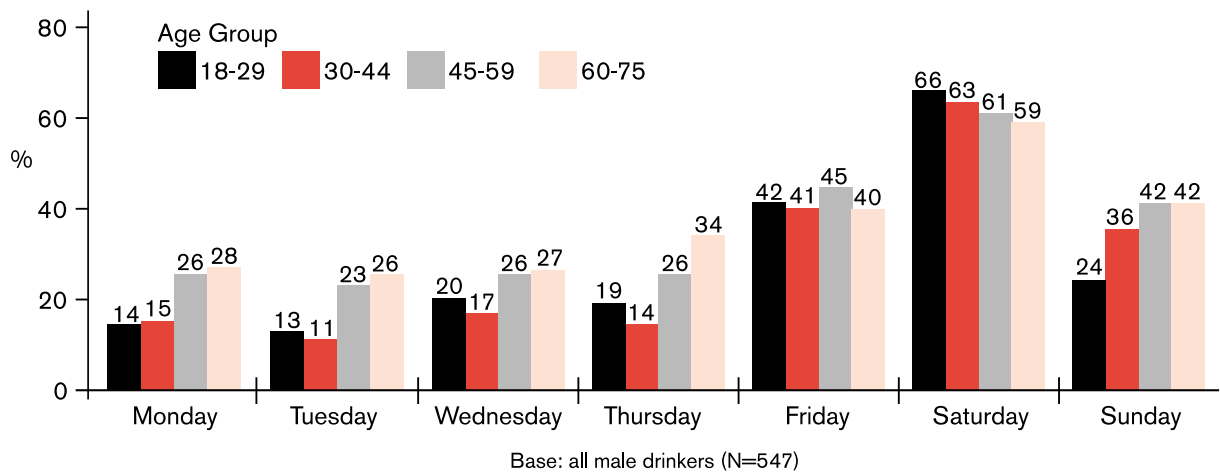
Age

Analysis by age group reveals that a higher proportion of older drinkers is drinking during the week compared to their younger counterparts.

Men

Age has a significant impact ($p < 0.001$) on when men drink. Men aged 60-75 years are twice as likely to drink on a Monday as 18-29 year old men (28% compared with 14%). The rise in drinking incidence from weekday to weekend (from Thursday to Saturday) for the oldest age group is 25 percentage points, compared to a dramatic 47 percentage point rise for the youngest group (see Figure 5 below). The two youngest age groups (18-29 and 30-44) have the lowest drinking occurrence at weekdays and the highest on Saturdays.

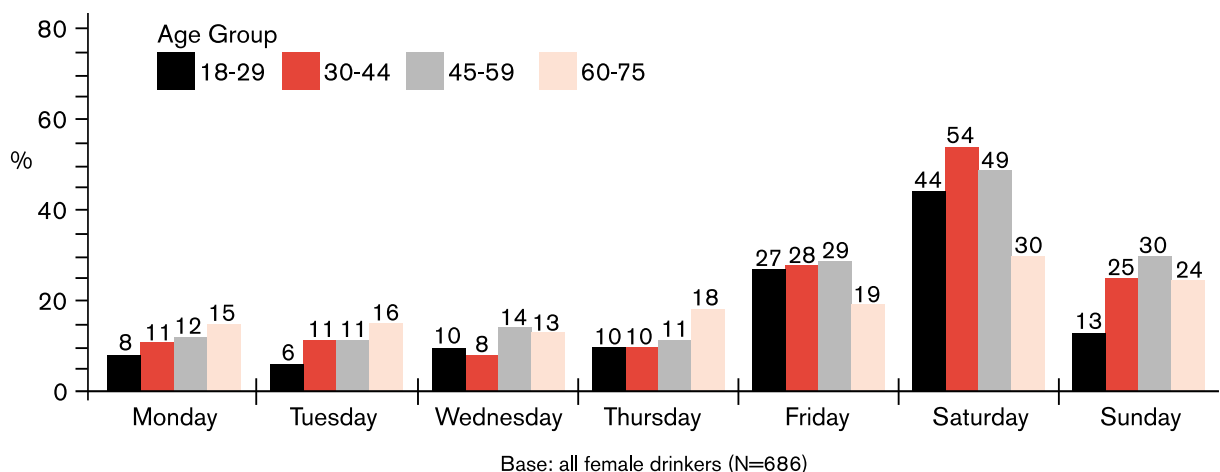
Figure 5: Incidence of daily drinking for men by age group



Women

For women, prevalence is low for all groups during weekdays with no statistically significant variation between the age groups. At weekends, however, there is a statistical variation between age groups ($p < 0.01$), due to the increase in the incidence of drinking from weekday to weekend (Thursday to Saturday) of between 34 and 44 percentage points among the three younger age groups, compared to the more limited rise of 12 percentage points for the oldest group.

Figure 6: Incidence of daily drinking for women by age group



Socioeconomic status and income

Men

There is no statistical variation in the incidence of daily drinking during the week for men in different income groups. Those in the lowest household income band (under £10,000) display similar incidence of drinking throughout the week as those in the highest band (£25,000 and over).

There is also no statistical variation in weekday drinking between men in different socioeconomic groups. However, the professional/intermediate group has the lowest increase between weekday and weekend drinking of 32 percentage points, compared to 48 percentage points for the semi-skilled/unskilled group.

Women

Higher income women are more likely than women on lower household incomes to drink on weekdays, with between 13% and 16% of women in the highest household income band drinking midweek compared to approximately 10% of those on the lowest household incomes. There is a significant statistical variation between different income groups on Friday ($p < 0.01$) and Sunday ($p < 0.001$), when women on the lowest household income have the lowest drinking incidence; for example, on Sundays 16% of women in the lowest household income group drank, compared to 33% of those in the highest household income group.

For women, there is also a statistically significant variation ($p < 0.001$) between socioeconomic groups for Sunday drinking. Just over a third (34%) of those in the professional/intermediate group drink on a Sunday, compared to 15% of those in the semi-skilled/unskilled group. This may be related to income.

Education

Level of education had no impact on whether or not men drank on weekdays, but for women, there was a significant variation ($p < 0.001$) on Saturdays and Sundays, with women who had a higher level of education more likely to drink than those without qualifications.

Marital status

For men, marital status had no significant impact on the likelihood of drinking through the week. It had no significant impact on women's weekday drinking, but had a strong effect ($p < 0.01$) on incidence of drinking on Saturday and Sunday. Single women (50%) and women who were separated or divorced (53%) were most likely to drink on a Saturday, whereas married/cohabiting women were the group most likely to drink on a Sunday (28% compared to 13% of single women).

Community background

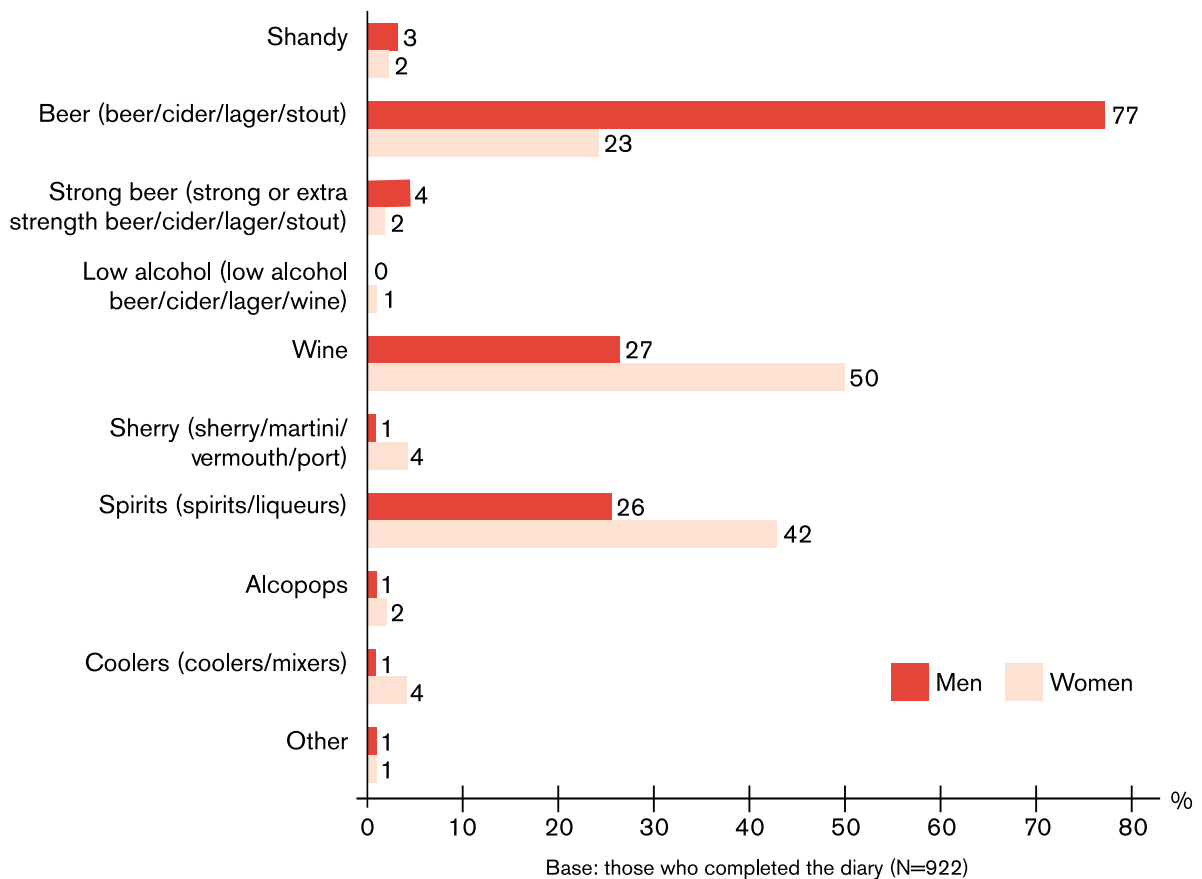
Analysis by community background shows no statistical variation in weekday and weekend drinking for either men or women.

Overall, this pattern of drinking suggests that the majority of Northern Ireland drinkers are concentrating their drinking into a small number of sessions at the weekend. Analysis of consumption will reveal if these few sessions are heavy sessions, which would indicate a binge culture.

What do we drink?

Figure 7 presents choice of drink by sex. The main drink of choice for men is beer/lager/cider/stout (77%), followed by wine (27%) and spirits (26%). Note that all ordinary strength beer/lager/cider/stout are categorised together as they are all equivalent strength (two units per pint). For women the main drink of choice is wine (50%), followed closely by spirits (42%), then beer/lager/cider/stout (23%). The proportion of the overall sample reporting drinking alcopops and coolers was very low (1 to 2%).

Figure 7: Drink of choice analysed by sex



There is variation in drink of choice by personal characteristics. As there is a notable difference between choice of drink for men and women, these were analysed separately, and Tables 30 and 31 in Appendix 2 present this analysis.

Men

Age

Men's choice of drink was analysed by age. There is a highly significant variation between age group and type of drink chosen. The older a man is, the less likely he is to choose beer/lager/cider/stout ($p < 0.001$), and the more likely he is to choose wine or spirits ($p < 0.01$).

Socioeconomic group

The original four socioeconomic groups were combined to give two - manual and non-manual - as cell numbers were low. There is a statistical variation between socioeconomic groups for drinking beer and wine. Beer/lager/cider/stout is the drink usually chosen by the manual socioeconomic group, while wine is mostly drunk by the non-manual group. In the non-manual group 68% of men drink beer/lager/cider/stout compared to 83% of those in the manual group ($p<0.01$). The relationship is even stronger for wine drinking: 45% of the non-manual group drink wine compared to 13% of the manual group ($p<0.001$).

Income

Analysis by household income shows a similar pattern to that of socioeconomic group. Men in the lower household income groups are more likely to drink beer/lager/cider/stout ($p<0.05$). For example, 83% of those in the lowest household income group drink beer/lager/cider/stout compared to 66% in the highest household income group. Drinking wine is more popular in the higher household income groups ($p<0.001$) where half of men drink wine compared to less than one in ten (8%) in the lowest household income group.

Education

As with socioeconomic group and income variables, level of education has strong significance in relation to wine drinking ($p<0.001$). More of those at the highest level of education (37%) drink wine compared to those with no qualifications (14%).

Other personal characteristics

Catholic male drinkers are more likely to choose beer/lager/cider/stout ($p<0.01$), while Protestant men are more likely to drink wine than Catholic men ($p<0.05$). Marital status has no significant impact on choice of drink.

Women

Table 31 in Appendix 2 details women's choice of drink by personal characteristics.

Age

It was not possible to calculate statistical variation with age for drinking beer/lager/cider/stout, but it would seem that fewer women in the youngest (37%) and oldest groups (38%) drink wine compared to those aged 30-44 and 45-59 years (57% and 53% respectively). This finding is statistically significant ($p<0.01$). Spirits are clearly preferred by older women; 60% of the oldest group drink spirits compared to 35% of the youngest group ($p<0.01$). For alcopops and coolers, there is a statistically significant difference between the age groups. These types of drink are mainly chosen by 18-29 year old women; 20% of them drink alcopops/coolers compared to just 3% of the other groups.

Socioeconomic group and income

The impact of socioeconomic group is again only significant for beer/lager/cider/stout and wine. As with men, significantly more women in the manual group ($p<0.05$) prefer beer/lager/cider/stout (29% compared with 18% in the non-manual group). For wine, the situation is reversed, with more non-manual women drinking wine (61% compared with 36% of women in the manual group), and the significance is higher ($p<0.001$). The pattern is similar for household income, but income also has a significant effect on spirit drinking, which increases among the lower household income groups ($p<0.05$).

Education

Women with the highest level of education drink more wine than other groups, and spirit drinking is more common among those with no qualifications ($p<0.01$).

Other personal characteristics

Marital status has an impact only on wine drinking ($p < 0.001$): a greater proportion of married/cohabiting women drink wine (58%) compared to single or separated/divorced women (36-37%). There is no variation in the type of drink chosen by women from different community backgrounds.

Does our choice of drink vary by day of the week?

The proportion of drinkers choosing each drink on each day of the week is detailed in Tables 32 and 34 Appendix 2. When drinks are ranked in order of popularity for each day of the week (Table 33), we can see that for men there is little variation in choice of drink over the course of the week, with beer/lager/cider/stout as the most popular drink, followed by spirits, then wine, except for Sunday when wine becomes more popular than spirits. The pattern for women (wine first, then spirits, then beer/lager/cider/stout) shows no variation in rank order over the week (Table 35); however, Table 34 in Appendix 2 shows that the proportion of women drinking beer/lager/cider/stout increases on a Friday and Saturday.

Varied drinking choice

Socioeconomic circumstances (particularly household income) play a significant role ($p < 0.05$) in the number of types of drink chosen, more so for women than men. Around two thirds of men will drink only one type of drink throughout the whole week, no matter what the day, time, location or company. Table 36 shows that men in the professional/intermediate group are slightly more likely to drink more than one type of drink, as are men on a higher household income ($p < 0.05$). Whether or not a man will drink more than one type of drink in a week is not dependent on any other personal characteristics.

For women, socioeconomic group, household income and education status are all significant ($p < 0.05$). Women in the professional/intermediate group and those with qualifications are more likely to drink more than one type of drink in a week. Women in the lowest household income group and those with no qualifications are more likely to have just one type of drink.

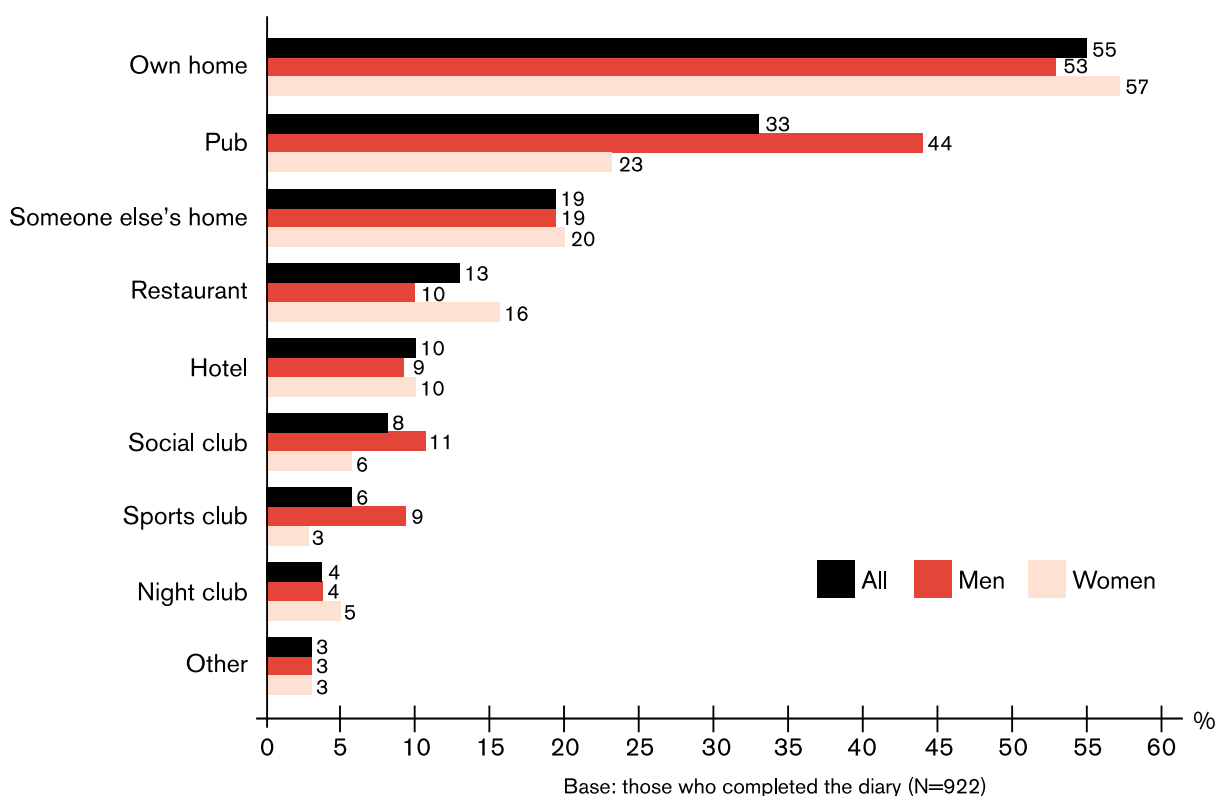
Where do we drink?

The main setting for drinking is in our own home (55%), followed by the pub (33%), and then someone else's home (19%). It is important to note the prevalence of drinking at home or in someone else's home.

Underreporting is expected in all alcohol studies but it may be higher than usual for Northern Ireland studies because so many people drink at home.¹ For those who drink spirits at home, accuracy of measurement is particularly poor, and wine drinkers may judge the amount of wine drunk by the bottle rather than the glass. So for home drinkers, we would expect a poor estimate of how much they drink and underreporting of units consumed.

The drinking setting is similar for men and women (see Figure 8). At home, in the pub, and in someone else's home are ranked first, second and third respectively for both men and women; however, after that the choice of setting differs: for men the fourth setting is a social club, while for women it is a restaurant.

Figure 8: Setting where drinking alcohol most frequently took place analysed by sex



Drinking location is analysed separately for men and women in relation to other personal characteristics (Tables 37 and 38, Appendix 2).

Men

Age

The pub is the preferred place to drink for the youngest men. Going to the pub shows a statistical variation between different age groups: 65% of the youngest age group go to a pub compared to 28% of the oldest age group ($p < 0.001$). Only men in the youngest age group go to a nightclub. Drinking in their own home is more common for those aged 30 or over ($p < 0.01$), whereas drinking in someone else's home is more popular for those aged 18-29.

Socioeconomic group and income

Drinking in their own home is the most popular setting for men in the non-manual socioeconomic group. The pub and their own home are both equally popular for manual groups. Going to the pub shows statistical variation between non-manual and manual men ($p < 0.01$). More men in the non-manual group go to a restaurant or hotel ($p < 0.05$), whereas more men in the manual group go to a social club ($p < 0.001$). Men on higher household incomes go to the pub least often ($p < 0.05$), whereas men on the lowest household income are least likely to drink in hotels or restaurants ($p < 0.05$). Those in the lowest household income group are most likely to go to a social club. Drinking in their own home is least popular with those on the lowest household income ($p < 0.001$). Socioeconomic status or household income has no impact on whether or not men drink in nightclubs.

Other personal characteristics

The only setting where marital status has a significant effect is the pub ($p < 0.001$), with married/cohabiting couples being least likely to go to the pub. More Catholics than Protestants drink in pubs ($p < 0.001$), while more Protestants drink in a sports club ($p < 0.001$).

Women

Age

Women of all ages are most likely to drink in their own home. For the youngest women, drinking in the pub is the next most popular option. There is significant variation between the age groups regarding going to pubs ($p < 0.05$), with 34% of the youngest age group going to a pub compared to 11% of the oldest age group. As with men, going to nightclubs is dominated by the 18-29 year olds, although there is also a small proportion of women aged 30-59 who go to nightclubs. There is no statistical variation for other settings between age groups.

Socioeconomic group and income

As with men, women in the higher household income groups ($p < 0.05$) or in the non-manual group ($p < 0.01$) are more likely to drink in a hotel or restaurant. Women in the manual group are also more likely to go to a social club to drink than those in the non-manual group ($p < 0.05$).

Other personal characteristics

Married/cohabiting women, like their male counterparts, are most likely to drink in their own homes. Catholic women are more likely to go to a pub ($p < 0.01$) than Protestant women, while Protestant women are more likely to drink in a restaurant or hotel ($p < 0.05$).

Does setting vary by day of the week?

Where people choose to drink may vary over the course of the week. Tables 39 and 40 in Appendix 2 present the proportion of men and women drinking in each setting by day of the week. Tables 2 and 3 below show the three most common locations for drinking (in order of popularity) for each day of the week.

Both men and women are most likely to be drinking in their own homes on any day of the week. The second most popular place for men on any day of the week is the pub. While drinking at home is always ranked first, the proportion of people drinking at home goes down at the weekend, when the proportion drinking in a pub and someone else's home starts to increase (see Tables 39 and 40 in Appendix 2 for percentages).

Table 2: Where drinking takes place throughout the week (men)

Rank	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	own home	own home	own home	own home	own home	own home	own home
2	pub	pub	pub	pub	pub	pub	pub
3	social club	social club/ someone else's home	restaurant	social club	social club	someone else's home	someone else's home

Table 3: Where drinking takes place throughout the week (women)

Rank	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	own home	own home	own home	own home	own home	own home	own home
2	pub	restaurant	restaurant	pub	pub	pub	someone else's home
3	someone else's home	someone else's home	pub/someone else's home	restaurant	someone else's home	someone else's home	restaurant

Women's second choice varies over the course of the week, but the pub becomes a definite second choice from Thursday to Saturday.

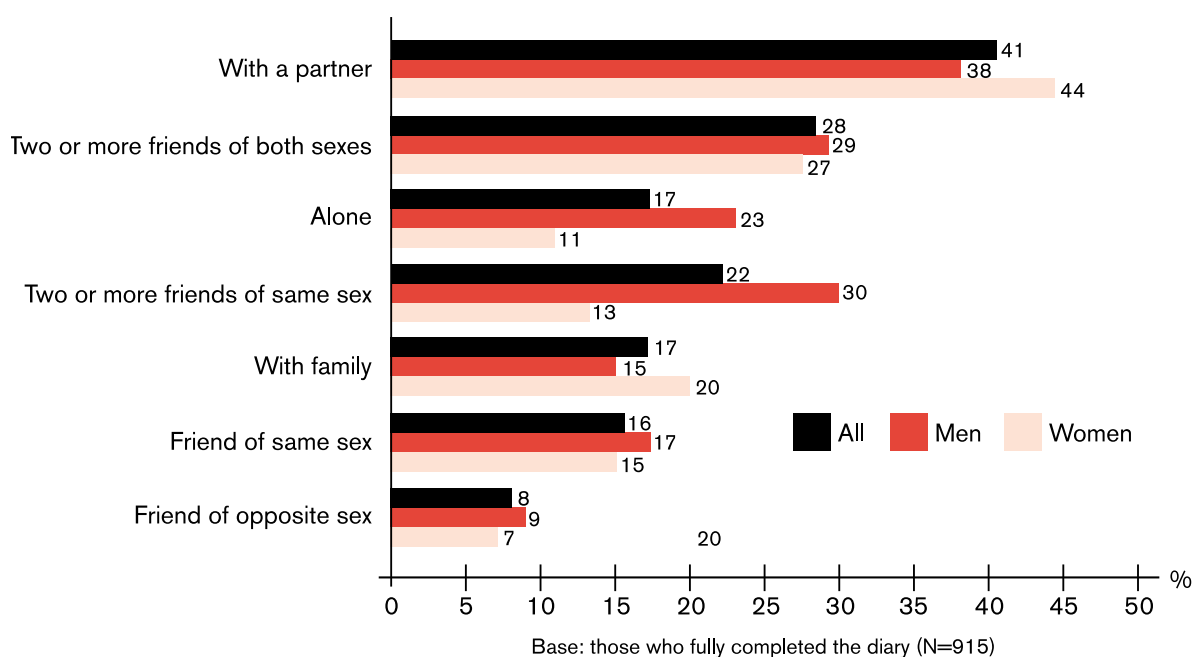
A social club is the third choice for men during weekdays (although the proportion of men drinking in a social club is much lower than the proportion drinking at home or in the pub); however, someone else's home becomes a definite third choice on a Saturday (11%) and Sunday (14%). For women, someone else's home is the third choice for five out of seven days of the week.

It is important to note the prevalence of drinking in one's own or someone else's home, especially on a weekend, when this may be in addition to drinking elsewhere, such as in a pub or social club.

Who do we drink with?

Figure 9 demonstrates that both men and women are most likely to drink with their partner (41%). The pattern of who we choose to drink with varies between the sexes: in second place for men is the all-male group (two or more friends of the same sex), whereas in second place for women is the mixed sex group. Tables 42 and 43 in Appendix 2 detail drinking company for men and women by personal circumstances.

Figure 9: Drinking company by sex



Men

Age

Younger men are more likely to drink with two or more friends of the same sex or in mixed sex groups ($p < 0.001$). Older men are most likely to drink alone ($p < 0.001$), while those aged 30-59 are more likely to drink with their partner.

Socioeconomic group, income and education

Men in the non-manual group and those on higher household incomes ($p < 0.001$) are significantly more likely to drink with their partner. Those in the non-manual group are also more likely to drink in mixed sex groups ($p < 0.05$), whereas men in the manual group are more likely to drink with other male friends ($p < 0.05$). Those who have achieved a higher level of education are more likely to drink in a mixed sex group ($p < 0.001$).

Marital status

Separated/divorced people are more likely to drink alone. Widowed men are more likely than the rest to drink with a male friend ($p < 0.001$) and single men are more likely to drink in groups ($p < 0.05$), including mixed sex groups.

Religion

Although the most common choice is to drink with a partner, Catholic men appear to be significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to drink with a single male friend and Protestant men more likely to drink with a group of male friends.

Women

Age

Women in the youngest age group are more likely to drink with one friend of the same sex ($p < 0.01$) or one friend of the opposite sex ($p < 0.001$) than other age groups. Women between the ages of 30-59 are more likely to drink with their partner than the youngest or oldest women ($p < 0.001$). Unlike older men, older women do not show a significant tendency to drink alone.

Socioeconomic group and income

Socioeconomic group appears to have little impact on whom women drink with, except that those in the non-manual group are more likely to drink with a partner, and those in the manual group are more likely to drink with one friend of the same sex.

More women from the lowest household income groups drink alone ($p < 0.05$). Those from higher household income groups were more likely to drink with a partner ($p < 0.001$) and with family ($p < 0.05$). Women in the lower household income groups are also more likely to drink with one friend of same sex ($p < 0.01$).

Other personal characteristics

Marital status has little impact on women's drinking company, except that widowed women appear more likely to drink alone or with one friend of the same sex. There is no significant variation in drinking company between Catholic and Protestant women.

Does who we drink with vary by day of the week?

On weekdays men are more likely to drink with their partners or by themselves, with the all male group in third place. By the weekend, while partner is still the most common choice, the group becomes more important, with an all male group in second place on a Friday and the mixed sex group taking second place on a Saturday. On Sundays, drinking with partners or with the family is most common.

Table 4: Variation in drinking company during the week (men)

Rank	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	Partner	By myself	Partner	Partner	Partner	Partner	Partner
2	By myself	Partner	By myself	By myself	All male group	Mixed sex group	Family
3	All male group	All male group	All male group	All male group	By myself	All male group	All male group

The pattern for women is similar except that drinking in single sex groups is not as common for women as it is for men. Drinking with a partner or alone are the most common situations on weekdays, but as the weekend approaches, the order changes so that although drinking with a partner is still most popular, mixed sex groups become the second choice. As with men, on a Sunday the order changes again to drinking with their partner and their family.

Table 5: Variation in drinking company during the week (women)

Rank	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	Partner	Partner	Partner	Partner	Partner	Partner	Partner
2	By myself	By myself	By myself	Mixed sex group	Mixed sex group	Mixed sex group	Family
3	Mixed sex group	Mixed sex group	Family	My myself/ family	Family	Family	Mixed sex group

How much do we drink?

Those who drank in the week prior to the survey were taken through a seven day recall diary. The diary asked about each instance of drinking over five periods of time in each day for the seven days prior to interview. Nine hundred and fifteen people completed the drinking diary in full, 75% of those who said they drank. As mentioned earlier, underreporting is expected in all alcohol studies. For this study we are more interested in the pattern, such as when and where limits are exceeded, rather than the exact amounts consumed.

Daily drinking limits

Current sensible drinking guidelines advise that men should not drink more than four units in any one day and that drinking four units or more a day, every day increases the risk of harm.¹ The same advice applies to women at a level of three units per day.

The adverse health effects of heavy consumption are widely acknowledged.¹¹ The link between heavy sustained drinking and physical and psychosocial morbidity includes liver disease, stroke, certain cancers, hypertension and depression.

Table 6 below highlights the number of days that those who completed the diary reached or exceeded the recommended daily limit.

Table 6: Number of days per week men and women reached or exceeded the recommended daily limit

Number of days	Males \geq 4 units per day %	Females \geq 3 units per day %
None	22	20
One	31	44
Two	23	22
Three	11	7
Four	5	4
Five	3	1
Six	2	1
Seven	3	1
Base: those who fully completed the diary	N = 448	N = 467

Twenty two percent of men and 20% of women who completed the diary did not exceed their daily limit at all. Fifty four percent of men and 66% of women exceeded their daily limit on just two days. Earlier analysis suggests that these days are more likely to be a Friday and Saturday, and analysis of incidence of exceeding the daily limit per day will reveal if this is the case. A further 24% of men and 14% of women exceeded their daily limit on three days or more.

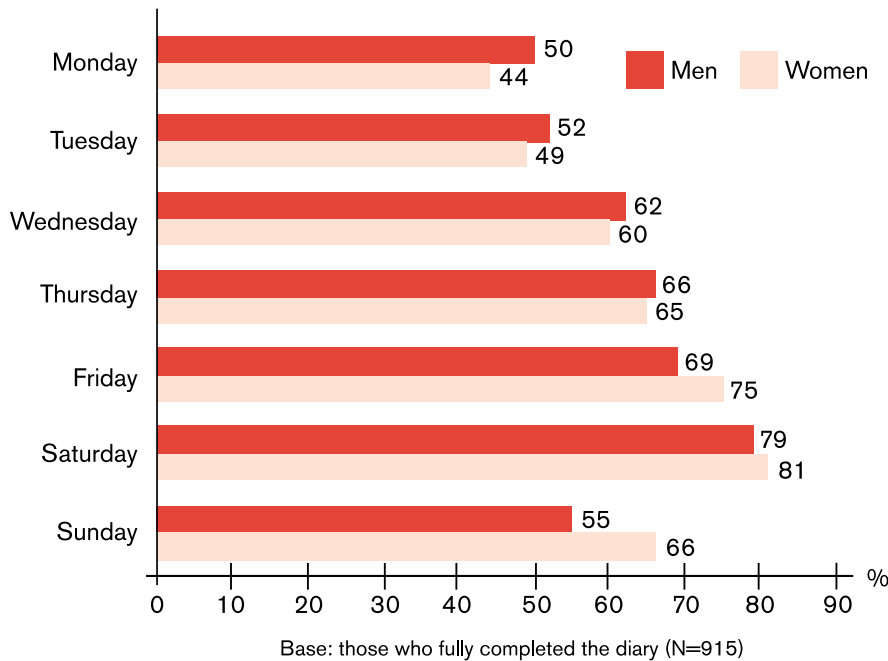
Does exceeding daily limit have a pattern?

Figure 10 below clearly shows that the proportion of those who drink and who exceed their daily limit increases through the week reaching a peak on a Saturday. On Saturdays over three quarters of males who drank (79%) exceeded their daily limit compared to 50% of those who drank on a Monday. The pattern is

identical for women: on Saturdays eight out of ten (81%) women who drink exceeded their daily limit compared to 44% of those who drank on a Monday.

So far we have established that the number of drinking occasions is relatively low and, while the proportion of those regularly exceeding the daily limit is low, it appears that not only are more people drinking at the weekends but more are drinking to excess at weekends. Analysis of weekly consumption will confirm if there is a high consumption over a small number of weekend occasions indicating that most Northern Ireland drinkers are drinking on only one or two days per week but that these are heavy drinking occasions or 'binge' occasions.

Figure 10: Percentage of men and women exceeding recommended daily limits per day



Weekly drinking limits

When the new daily drinking guidelines were introduced in 1995, a common misinterpretation was that the maximum recommended level of four units a day for men and three units a day for women could be multiplied by seven to give weekly totals of 28 and 21 units respectively. However, this is not the case. The figures of four units for men and three units for women represent the maximum amount it is considered safe to drink in a single day, but drinking this amount every day is not recommended - the pre-1995 weekly guidelines for sensible drinking (a weekly limit of 21 units for men and 14 units for women) remain relevant. Analysis of drinking levels over the week is therefore still useful.

Risk drinkers

Table 7 below shows that 37% of male drinkers who completed the seven day diary exceeded 21 units in a week. One in five women (20%) who completed the diary exceeded 14 units in a week.

Table 7: Units of alcohol consumed in the week prior to the study

Units of alcohol	Men (%)	Women (%)
1 - 7	23	46
7 - 14	24	34
Risk drinking for women (14 - 21)	16	12
Risk drinking for men (21 - 28)	37	8
Base: those who fully completed the diary	N=448	N=467

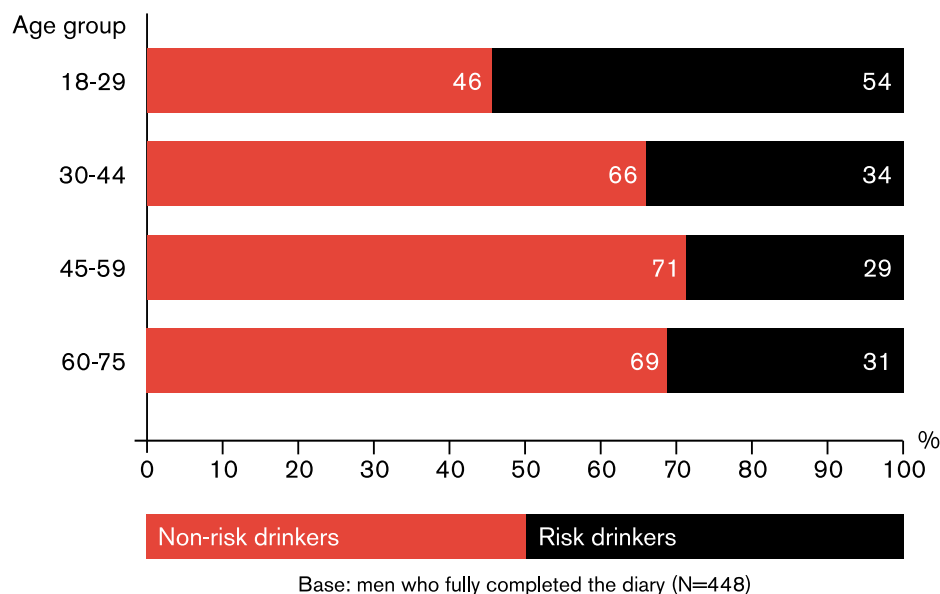
Men

Men's weekly consumption was analysed by personal characteristics and is presented in Table 50, Appendix 2, for those drinking up to 21 units per week, referred to as non-risk drinkers, and those exceeding 21 units, referred to as risk drinkers.

Age

There is a statistical variation ($p < 0.01$) between men of different age groups for exceeding 21 units. Those in the youngest age group (18-29 year olds) are more likely to be risk drinkers than those in the older age groups. Figure 10 shows that 54% of 18-29 year old male drinkers exceeded 21 units compared to 31% of those aged 60 to 75.

Figure 11: Percentage of men exceeding weekly limit by age group

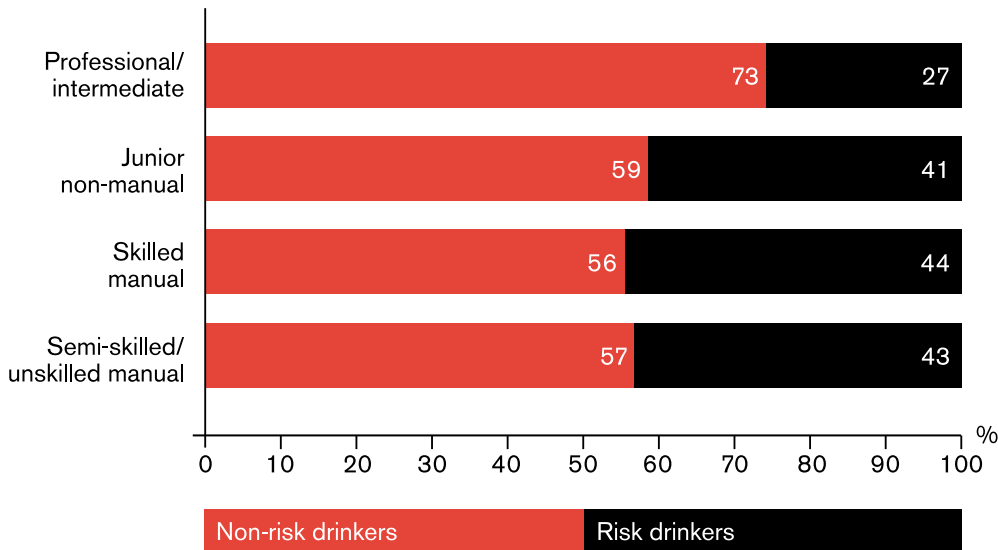


This indicates a much more serious problem for men in the 18-29 age group, as earlier analyses revealed that men in this age group drink on fewer days of the week and therefore are probably drinking heavily on one or two occasions at the weekend. Older men are not only drinking fewer units overall but they are also spreading them over more drinking occasions, suggesting that the youngest age group comprises regular binge drinkers.

Socioeconomic group

Analysis by socioeconomic group also showed a statistically significant variation ($p < 0.01$) in drinking levels for men. Those in the professional/intermediate group, although more likely to be drinkers and to drink more often, were least likely to be risk drinkers (ie to exceed the weekly limit). Figure 12 demonstrates this.

Figure 12: Percentage of men exceeding weekly limit by socioeconomic group



Base: men who fully completed the diary (N=448)

Marital status

Table 46 shows that half of single men and almost half of widowed men (47%) were risk drinkers, compared to around one in three married or cohabiting men (32%) or men who were separated or divorced (34%).

Other background variables

Table 46 shows that the number of units men drink in a week has no statistically significant variation between groups with different household incomes, level of education or community background.

Women

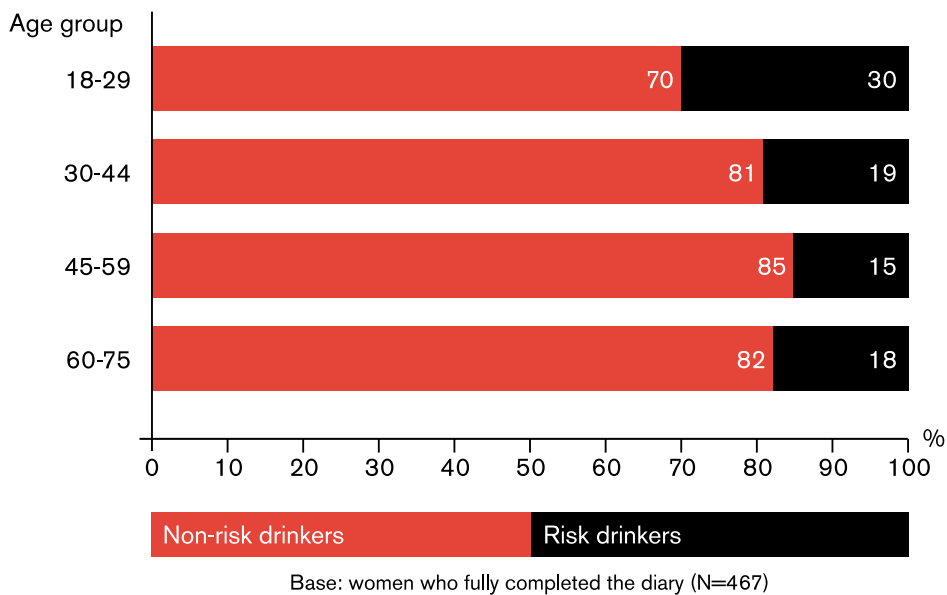
Current sensible drinking guidelines advise that women should not drink more than three units in any one day and drinking three units or more a day, every day, increases the risk of harm. However, as explained earlier for men, the advice of three units per day maximum should not be multiplied by seven days to get a weekly total of 21 units - the pre-1995 sensible drinking guideline of a weekly limit of 14 units for women still applies.

Women's weekly consumption was analysed by personal characteristics and is presented in Table 47, Appendix 2, for those drinking up to 14 units per week, referred to as non-risk drinkers and those exceeding 14 units, referred to as risk drinkers.

Age

As with men, there is a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) in weekly consumption between women of different age groups. Those in the youngest age group (18-29 year olds) are more likely to be risk drinkers (ie to exceed the weekly limit) than the older groups. Figure 13 shows that 30% of those in the 18-29 age group could be classified as risk drinkers compared to 15% of those aged 45-59.

Figure 13: Percentage of women exceeding weekly limit by age group



Socioeconomic group, income and education

Analysis by socioeconomic, household income and education variables shows no statistically significant variation for women.

Other background variables

Although statistical analysis was not possible, it appears that single women are more likely to be risk drinkers than those in any other marital status group, with 34% of single women compared to 17% of married/cohabiting women exceeding their weekly limit. There is no difference between the proportions of Catholic and Protestant women who exceed the weekly limits.

Patterns of drinking

Analysis so far of when and how much people drink is building up a pattern that shows only a few drinking occasions in the week. Very small proportions exceed their daily limit regularly, yet there is a considerable proportion that can be classified as risk drinkers. This would suggest a pattern in Northern Ireland of drinkers drinking heavily on only one or a few occasions per week. This pattern of few but heavy drinking occasions is sometimes referred to as 'binge' drinking.

Binge drinking

Research has found that the number of heavy drinking occasions is a stronger predictor of drinking problems than level of consumption.³

There is no widely accepted definition of a 'binge'. The general public may still interpret the term 'binge' to mean prolonged bouts of continuous drinking, which can last for weeks.^{12,13} In some epidemiological studies, a binge has been defined as the consumption of five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more for women. In UK literature a binge session is defined as the consumption of at least ten units of alcohol for men and seven units for women, ie roughly half the recommended weekly limit, in a single drinking session.¹⁴

Using both these guidelines, we attempted to identify binge drinking episodes for each individual who completed the diary. Of those drinkers who drank in the week prior to the survey (N=915), nearly half (48%) of the men who completed the diary and over a third (35%) of the women had engaged in at least one binge drinking session.

Who is binge drinking?

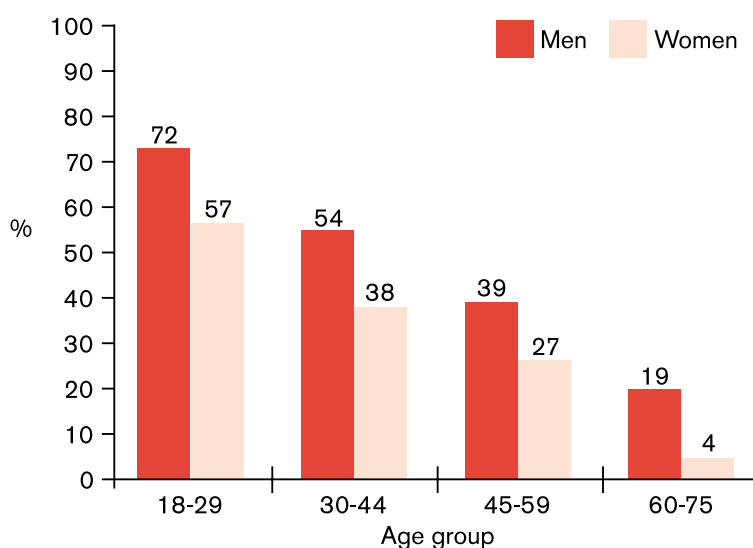
Men

Men who exceeded ten units (eg five pints of beer/lager/cider/stout) in any one session were classified as 'binge' drinkers. The proportion of non-binge and binge drinkers was analysed by personal characteristics and presented in Table 48, Appendix 2. Almost half (48%) of the men who completed the diary had participated in at least one binge session in the week the diary referred to.

Age

Analysis by age group shows that binge drinking is most common in younger men and the incidence drops sharply as they get older. This variation is strongly significant ($p < 0.001$). More than seven out of ten (72%) 18-29 year old men who completed the diary had engaged in at least one binge session. This compares to 19% of men in the 60-75 age group. Figure 14 clearly demonstrates this pattern.

Figure 14: Proportion of binge drinkers in each age group by sex

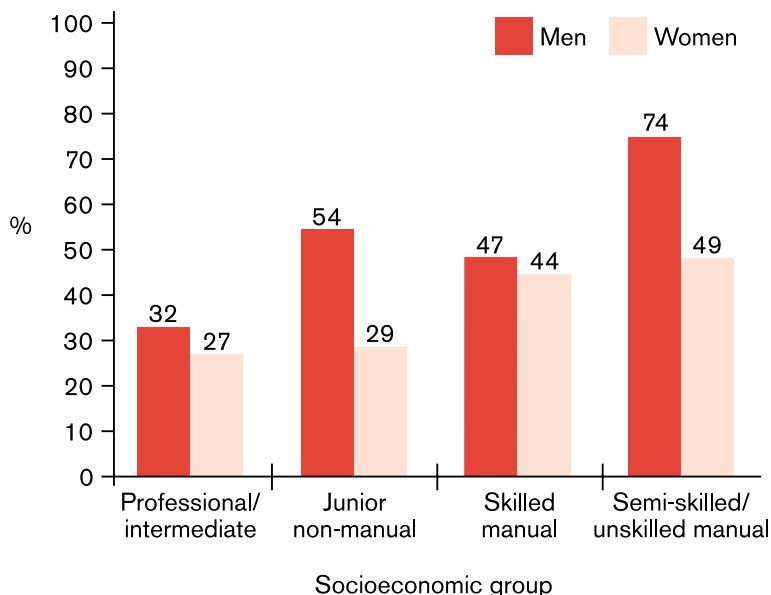


Base: those who fully completed the diary (N=915)

Socioeconomic group

There is significant variation in the incidence of binge drinking between men in different socioeconomic groups ($p < 0.001$). Figure 15 shows that men in the professional/intermediate group, while more likely to drink overall, are least likely to engage in binge drinking, at just under a third (32%). Binge drinking is most common among those in the semi-skilled/unskilled manual groups, where almost three quarters (74%) of men had experienced a binge event during the week covered by the diary.

Figure 15: Proportion of binge drinkers in each socioeconomic group by sex



Base: those who fully completed the diary (N=915)

Marital status

Marital status has a highly significant impact on the likelihood of binge drinking ($p < 0.001$). Single men were more likely than others to experience a binge drinking event. Over two thirds of them (68%) had experienced a binge event compared to 42% of married/cohabiting men.

Other personal characteristics

There is no statistical variation in the occurrence of binge drinking between men of different household incomes, education status or religion (community background).

Women

Women who exceeded seven units in any one session (eg three small pub bottles of wine or four bottles of Bacardi Breezer) were classified as having engaged in a binge drinking session. The proportions of non-binge drinkers and binge drinkers were analysed by personal characteristics and presented in Table 48 in Appendix 2. More than a third (35%) of women who completed the diary had engaged in at least one binge session in the week their diary referred to.

Age

Although it was not possible to calculate statistical significance for women by age group, the pattern for women appears similar to that seen for men, with younger women much more likely to binge than older ones (see Figure 14 opposite). More than half (57%) of 18-29 year old women who had completed the diary had engaged in at least one binge session, compared to only 4% of the 60-75 year old age group.

Socioeconomic group

Levels of binge drinking vary significantly between women in different socioeconomic groups ($p < 0.001$). The pattern is similar to that seen in men (see Figure 15 above). Those in the professional/intermediate group, while more likely to drink, are least likely to binge (27%). Incidence of binge drinking is highest among those in the semi-skilled/unskilled manual group, where almost half (49%) of women had engaged in a binge drinking session during the week of the diary.

Income

The diary data show that, unlike men, household income has a significant effect on women's likelihood to binge ($p < 0.001$). Those in the lowest household income group, while least likely to drink overall, are most likely to binge. Forty six percent of women in this group had engaged in a binge drinking session, compared to 21% of those in the highest household income group.

Figure 16: Proportion of binge drinkers in each income group by sex



Base: those who fully completed the diary (N=915)

Marital status

Although it was not possible to calculate statistical significance, it seems that single women (58%) and those who are separated/divorced (59%) are more likely to binge than married/cohabiting women (26%).

Other personal characteristics

Analysis of women's binge drinking in relation to level of education or religion showed no statistically significant variation.

Frequency of bingeing over the week

A small proportion of the diary sample binged on several occasions in the week covered by the diary. Less than 1% of drinkers binged on all seven days. Of those men who completed the diary, almost half (48%) engaged in at least one binge event. More than four out of ten of those who binged engaged in more than one binge (42% or 21% of those who completed the diary). Of those women who completed the diary, over a third (35%) engaged in at least one binge drinking episode. Of those women who binged, 18% (or 6% of all female drinkers who completed the diary) engaged in more than one binge during the week.

Table 8: Number of times per week that men and women exceed binge limits

Number of days exceeded the limit	% men drinking 10 ≥ units per day	% women drinking 7 ≥ units per day
One	28	27
Two	14	7
Three	3	<1
Four	2	<1
Five	<1	0
Six	<1	0
Seven	<1	<1
Base: those who fully completed the diary	N=448	N=467

This information was analysed by personal characteristics and revealed no significant variations in the frequency of bingeing between different groups of men for any variable. See Table 49, Appendix 2. The same analysis for women revealed a significant association between frequency of bingeing and age ($p < 0.001$), marital status ($p < 0.001$), socioeconomic group ($p < 0.01$) and household income ($p < 0.001$). For details see Table 50, Appendix 2.

The youngest women (aged 18-29) are more likely to binge more often. Fifteen percent of this age group who completed the diary binged at least twice in the week compared to 8% of 30-44 year olds; none of the 60-75 year old women binged more than once. Women in the lowest household income group were more likely to binge and to binge more frequently than those from households with a higher household income (14% of the lowest household income group binged more than once compared to 5% of those in the highest household income group).

When is binge drinking most likely to occur?

For those who completed the diary, Figure 17 displays the percentage that drank and the percentage that experienced a binge session for each day of the week. On Monday, 24% of males who completed the diary had a drink, and 3% engaged in a binge event (ie in excess of 10 units). This represents 12% of those who had a drink on that particular day. On Saturday, 76% of those who completed the diary had a drink and 37% (almost half of those who had a drink) engaged in a binge drinking session. The pattern is similar for women.

Figure 17 clearly demonstrates a similar pattern to that of drinking occurrence (see Figure 4 on page 19), ie a low incidence midweek with a steep rise on Friday and a peak on Saturday. The day when drinking occurrence is highest is also the day when most alcohol is consumed, ie Saturday, and the day on which binge drinking is most likely to occur.

Figure 17: Incidence of binge drinking per day - men

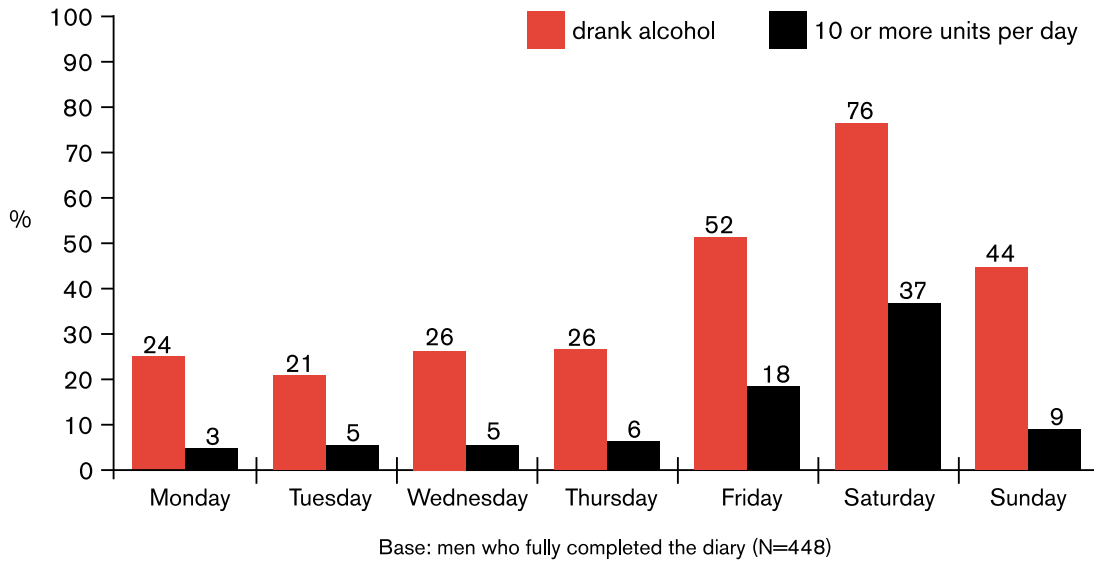
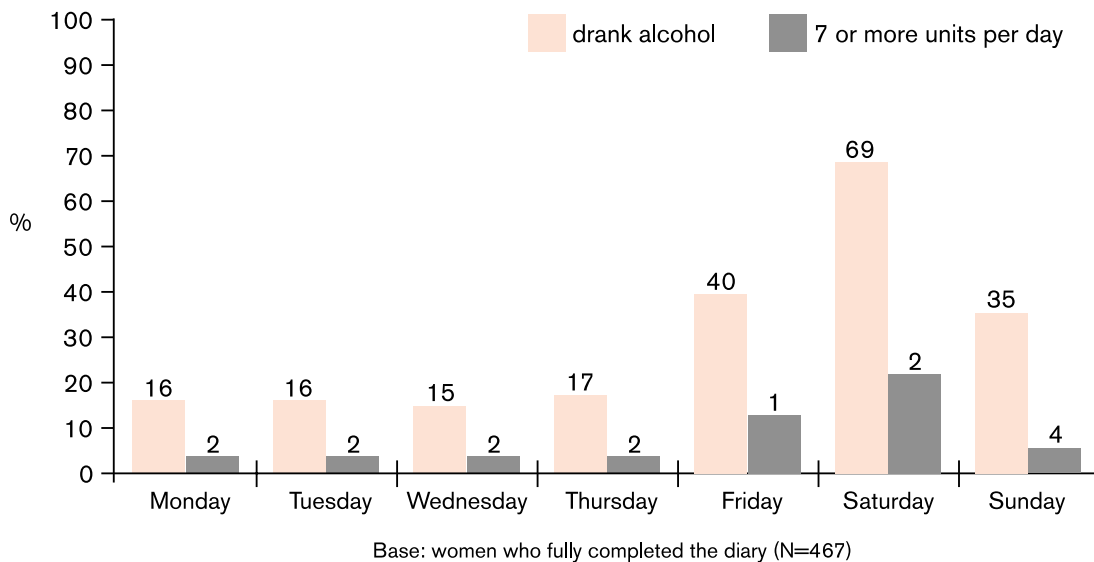


Figure 18: Incidence of binge drinking per day - women



In which setting is binge drinking most likely to occur?

Analysis of binge drinkers versus non-binge drinkers and setting (Table 9) revealed that binge drinking was more likely to take place in a pub. This relationship was highly significant ($p < 0.001$) for both men and women.

The other location that had a significant impact on binge drinking is the social club. This was more highly significant for men than women ($p < 0.01$ for males and $p < 0.05$ for females). The other significant setting - although again more highly significant for men ($p < 0.01$) than for women ($p < 0.05$) - is own home. Those who drink in their own home are less likely to binge drink. However, this finding needs to be treated with caution bearing in mind the lack of accuracy in estimating the amount drunk at home.

Table 9: Binge drinking by setting

Location	Men			Women		
	Non binge (%)	Binge (%)	Sig (p)	Non binge (%)	Binge (%)	Sig (p)
Pub	27	63	***	16	36	***
Hotel/restaurant	21	14	NS	27	20	NS
Sports club	8	10	NS	3	2	‡
Social club	7	16	**	4	9	*
Night club	1	8	‡	1	12	‡
Own home	59	47	**	61	51	*
Other's home	17	21	NS	19	21	NS
Base (N)	231	217		302	165	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Is binge drinking related to our drinking company?

Drinking company appears to have a significant impact on binge drinking. Those who drink with their partner are less likely to be binge drinkers. This is more significant for women (p<0.001) than men (p<0.01). Women who drink with one friend (male or female) are more likely to binge (p<0.001). This pattern is similar for men but the association is stronger when men drink with a friend of the same sex (p<0.01) than of the opposite sex (p<0.05). Group drinking has a significant impact on bingeing no matter whether it is a same sex or mixed sex group. This association is stronger for men (p<0.001) than women (p<0.05).

Table 10: Binge by drinking company

Drinking company	Men			Women		
	Non binge (%)	Binge (%)	Sig (p)	Non binge (%)	Binge (%)	Sig (p)
Alone	23	23	NS	12	10	NS
With partner	45	30	**	50	32	***
With a friend (same sex)	12	24	**	10	24	***
With a friend (opposite sex)	6	12	*	3	15	***
With two or more friends (same sex)	20	41	***	11	18	*
With two or more friends (both sexes)	21	37	***	24	33	*
With family	15	15	NS	21	18	NS
Base (N)	231	217		302	165	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant.

Do binge drinkers drink certain types of drink?

Analysis of binge drinking by type of drink shows that more binge drinkers, both male and female, drink beer/lager/cider/stout ($p < 0.001$). Wine drinkers are less likely to binge ($p < 0.001$). For women, spirits contribute to the female binge ($p < 0.01$), as do alcopops and coolers ($p < 0.05$), mostly drunk by young women.

Table 11: Binge drinking by the drink of choice

	Men			Women		
	Non binge (%)	Binge (%)	Sig. (p)	Non binge (%)	Binge (%)	Sig. (p)
Beer	63	90	***	14	38	***
Strong beer	2	6	‡	1	4	‡
Wine	35	19	**	60	33	***
Sherry	1	1	‡	6	2	‡
Spirits	24	29	NS	37	52	**
Alcopops/Coolers	1	1	‡	4	9	*
Base (N)	231	217		302	165	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ and *** $p < 0.001$). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Comparing binge drinkers with weekly consumption

As expected, the proportion of those who binge and the frequency of bingeing increases with increasing consumption. However, over a quarter (27%) of men and a quarter of women (25%) who drank within the sensible drinking limits engaged in a binge drinking session.

Table 12: Male binge drinking by type of drinker

	No binge %	1 binge %	2 binges %	3 binges %
Sensible (≤ 21)	73	27	<1	0
Risk ($> 21-50$)	18	37	41	5
Heavy (50+)	3	6	24	67
All	52	28	14	6

Base: all men who fully completed the diary (N=448)

Table 13: Female binge drinking by type of drinker

	No binge %	1 binge %	2 binges %
Sensible (≤ 14)	75	25	0
Risk (15+)	23	34	43
All	65	27	9

Base: all women who fully completed the diary (N=467)

CAGE - screening for problems

The CAGE questions are four clinical interview questions that have been used internationally as an assessment instrument for identifying problems with alcohol.¹⁰ The questions focus on Cutting down, Annoyance by criticism, Guilty feeling, and an Eye opener (drinking first thing in the morning), making the acronym CAGE. It is accepted that a positive answer to two or more CAGE questions would indicate a problem with alcohol.

Table 14 below presents the proportion who answered positively to each CAGE question. Significantly more men than women responded positively to the questions on cutting down and annoyed by criticism.

Table 14: Percentage of those who completed the diary who answered positively to each CAGE question

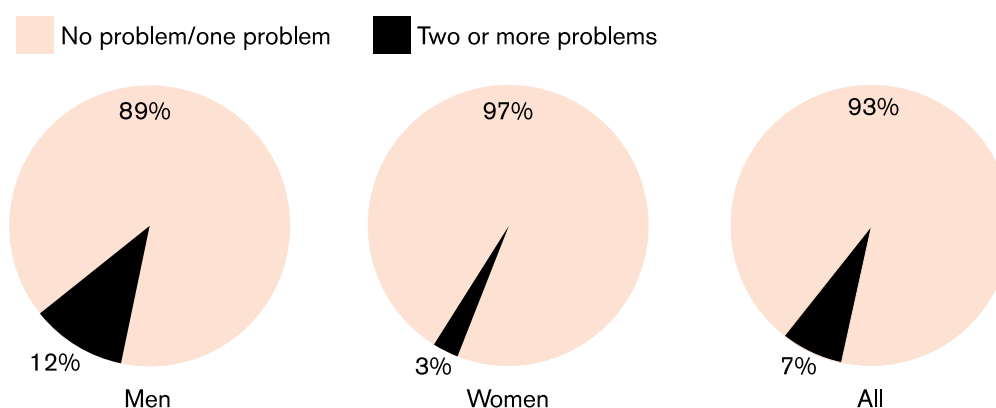
	Overall (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
I have felt that I ought to <u>C</u> ut down on my drinking ***	14	19	10
People have <u>A</u> nnoyed me by criticising my drinking***	10	14	6
I have felt ashamed or <u>G</u> uilty about my drinking *	5	7	3
I have had a drink first thing in the morning to steady my nerves or get rid of a hangover (<u>E</u> ye opener)	4	8	1 (N=3)
Base (N)	921	452	469

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05 and ***p<0.001)

CAGE positive drinkers

Seven percent of people who drank in the week prior to their interview responded positively to at least two CAGE questions, indicating a possible alcohol problem. Significantly (p<0.001) more men (12%), than women (3%) could be assessed as having an alcohol related problem. Tables 51 and 52 in Appendix 2 present analysis by personal characteristics of those who could be assessed as CAGE positive and non CAGE positive.

Figure 19: Proportion of respondents who answered positively to CAGE questions



Base: those who completed the diary (N=922)

Men

There was no significant variation between age groups with regard to being positive for CAGE. However, analysis by socioeconomic group shows statistically significant variation (p<0.01) between groups. Those in the professional/intermediate socioeconomic group have the lowest level of CAGE positive: 1 in 20 (5%) were

CAGE positive compared to almost one in five (19%) of those in the semi-skilled/unskilled group. It was not possible to calculate statistics by household income but it seems that a higher proportion of those in the lowest household income were CAGE positive, 17% of them, compared to 11% of those in the highest household income group.

It was not possible to calculate statistics for marital status because of low numbers in that category, but it appears that a higher proportion of separated or divorced men were CAGE positive (19%) than those in any other marital status group (eg 12% of singles, 11% married/cohabiting).

There is no statistically significant variation between different education groups or religious background.

Women

Due to the small numbers involved it is not possible to calculate statistical significance for women.

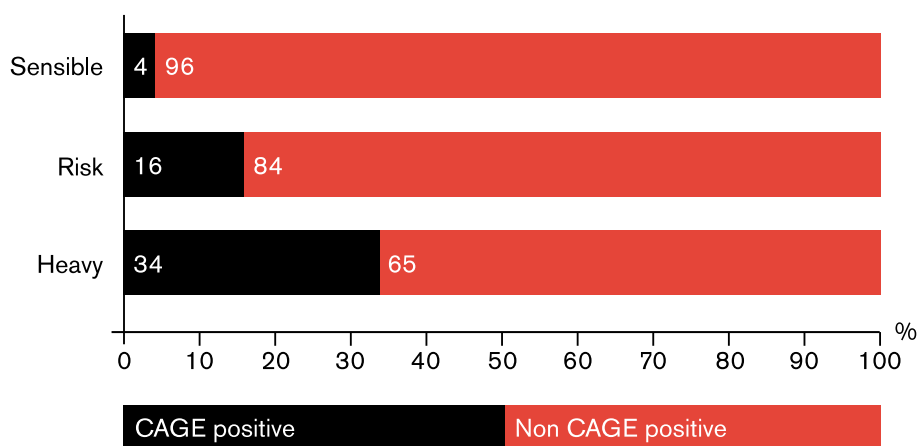
Analysing CAGE by drinker types

CAGE analysis was cross analysed with weekly drinking levels (sensible, risk and heavy), and binge analysis for men only (women were omitted from this analysis because the numbers were too small).

CAGE by weekly consumption

As expected there is a statistically significant difference between drinking levels and those screening as CAGE positive ($p < 0.001$). A higher proportion of those men who drank heavily (50 units plus per week) screened positive for CAGE.

Figure 20: CAGE by type of drinker - men



Base: those who completed the diary (N=922)

Cross analysing CAGE with number of binges

Of those men who were CAGE positive one in five (21%) were not classified as binge drinkers. More than half (52%) of those people who screened as CAGE positive had experienced more than one binge in the week ($p < 0.001$).

Table 15: CAGE by binge - men

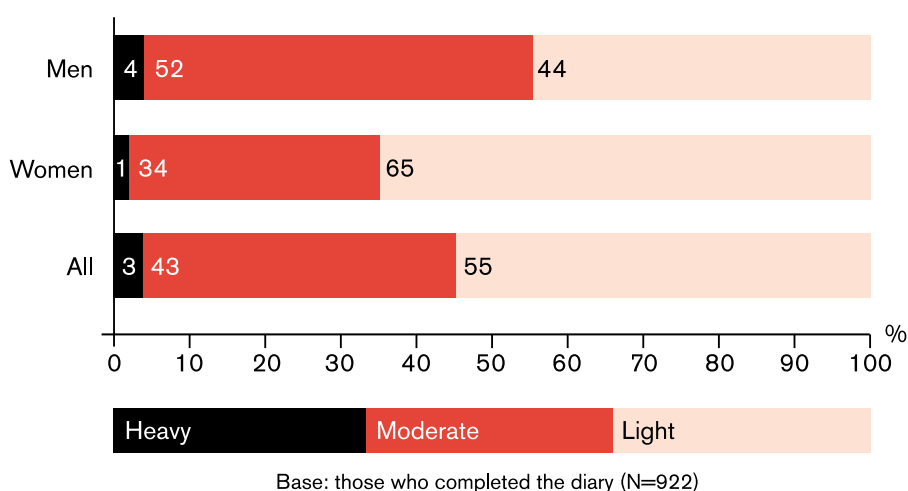
	No binge %	1 binge %	2 binges %	3 binges %
CAGE positive	21	27	31	21
Non CAGE positive	55	28	12	51

Self-perception versus reality

All those who completed the diary were asked to describe themselves as either a heavy, moderate or light drinker.

Figure 21 shows that 4% of men and 1% of women described themselves as heavy drinkers. The majority of men described themselves as moderate drinkers (52%), the majority of women described themselves as light drinkers (65%).

Figure 21: Self-perception of drinking habits by sex



Tables 16 and 17 compare respondents' own perceptions of their drinking habits with their actual weekly drinking level, whether or not they binge drink and their CAGE analysis.

For men, 2% of those who described themselves as light drinkers actually drank more than 50 units during the week in which they completed the diary, and would therefore be classified as heavy drinkers. A further 9% drank in excess of the pre-1995 weekly drinking guidelines (21 units per week for men) and their consumption levels would classify them as 'risk' drinkers. So just over 11% of those who described themselves as light drinkers were actually risk or heavy drinkers according to their weekly consumption levels.

A substantial proportion of those who described themselves as light drinkers (23%) were classified as having engaged in binge drinking and 3% of them screened positive for alcohol problems (CAGE).

According to weekly consumption levels, 46% of those that described themselves as moderate were actually risk drinkers (21 or more units a week), and a further 8% were heavy drinkers (50 or more units a week). So over half (54%) of those who described themselves as moderate drinkers drank more than the weekly sensible drinking guidelines.

Two thirds of them had engaged in a binge drinking session and a relatively high proportion (14%) screened positive for alcohol problems.

Table 16: Self-perception compared with weekly level, binge and CAGE for men

In previous week ...		Self-perception			Sig (p)
		Heavy (%)	Moderate (%)	Light (%)	
Weekly consumption level					
50+ units	Heavy drinker	58	8	2 (N=4)	
21+ units	Risk drinker	32	46	9	
≤ 21 units	Sensible drinker	11 (N=2)	47	89	‡
Binge drinking					
One or more binge sessions		95	66	23	
Drank but did not binge		5 (N=1)	34	77	‡
Problem drinking					
CAGE +		74	14	3	
Non CAGE+		26	86	98	***
		19	235	198	

Base: all men who completed the diary (N=452)

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (***p<0.001). ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

More women accurately described their levels when compared with their consumption over the week. Ninety two percent of those who described themselves as light drinkers could be classified as a sensible drinker according to the pre-1995 weekly guidelines (14 units per week for women). Although 24% of them had engaged in a binge drinking session none of those women who described themselves as light drinkers screened positive for alcohol problems (CAGE).

Four in ten (41%) of those women who described themselves as moderate drinkers drank above the pre-1995 weekly sensible drinking limit and would be described as risk drinkers. Fifty four percent of them also engaged in at least one binge session, and a substantial proportion (7%) of them screened positive for problems (CAGE).

Table 17: Self-perception compared with weekly level, binge and CAGE for women

In previous week ...		Self-perception			Sig (p)
		Heavy (%)	Moderate (%)	Light (%)	
Weekly consumption level					
14+ units	Risk drinker	100	41	8	
≤ 14 units	Sensible drinker	0	59	92	‡
Binge drinking					
One or more binge sessions		100	54	24	
Drank but did not binge		0	44	76	‡
Problem drinking					
CAGE +		67 (N=4)	7		
Non CAGE+		33 (N=2)	93	100	‡
		6	157	306	

Base: all women who completed the diary (N=469)

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Discussion

There are a number of broad conclusions arising from this study that have specific implications for those who are working to tackle alcohol misuse. Consequently, consideration of these conclusions and implications brings into focus other, wider issues.

The survey data reported in this study highlight significant features in relation to drinking patterns in Northern Ireland. These can be summarised as follows:

- The pattern of drinking matches well the concept of sessional or binge drinking.
- This pattern of drinking is consistent across all the variables relating to gender, age and socioeconomic background, but is clearly more marked among men in the lower socioeconomic groups.
- A significant proportion of men and women are drinking above the pre-1995 recommended weekly lower risk levels.
- A significant proportion of men and women are drinking in excess of the current daily guidelines for alcohol consumption.
- A significant proportion of men displays current drinking behaviour that could be described as risky.

Implications

Individual health

There are specific risks associated with particular patterns of drinking: Heavy regular drinking increases the risk of a wide range of illnesses and conditions such as cirrhosis of the liver and a number of cancers, while sessional or binge drinking is associated with an increased risk of strokes and heart problems. It is clear from this report that both types of drinking are prevalent in Northern Ireland, and the cost to the health service has been estimated elsewhere.¹⁵

Societal health

Similarly, it has been noted elsewhere that certain patterns of drinking are associated with specific costs to society.¹⁶ Of note are those costs usually attributed to binge drinking, including opportunistic crime, vandalism, drunken behaviour, fights and assaults. These costs add to the burden of policing and health and insurance claims. There is also a cost to the economy in terms of absenteeism from work, which can as easily be the result of too much alcohol the night before as of long-term heavy drinking.

Policy development

There is currently a debate on whether alcohol policies and subsequent initiatives should aim to control the level of aggregate alcohol consumption, ie reduce the amount of alcohol everyone drinks, or to target 'harmful' or risky patterns of drinking, eg binge drinking. This debate is typically portrayed as being between the 'total consumption' model (or 'population approach') and the 'harm reduction' or 'risk reduction' model. Proponents of the total consumption model argue that much of the variation in alcohol-related harm is strongly linked with fluctuations in per capita alcohol consumption.¹⁶ The harm reduction model says that the link between consumption level and harm rates is misunderstood because the patterns of drinking are neglected in the analysis: not all drinking is harmful, but some patterns are more harmful than others.¹⁷ These differences in policy are translated into differences in approaches.

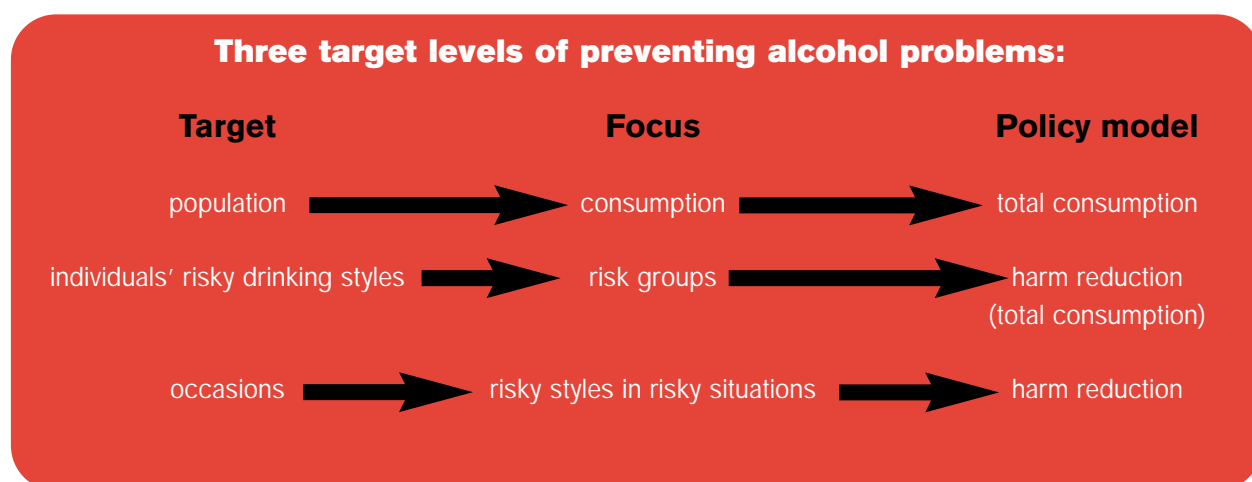
Public health approaches

The population model would generally support approaches that aim to address the whole drinking population - including restricting supply of and access to alcohol as well as whole and selected population public information campaigns. Measures would include the use of fiscal policies, restrictions on the issuing of licences, reductions in opening hours, raising the age limit, together with public information campaigns aimed at reducing the overall demand for alcohol.

The harm or risk reduction model typically involves targeting specific patterns of drinking that are deemed harmful, with a special emphasis on addressing the consequences of consumption rather than just the actual consumption. Such measures include addressing issues such as 'happy hours'; encouraging server training; targeting public information campaigns, eg to young adult males; and making the drinking environment 'safer', eg use of shatter-proof glasses.

It has been argued that the differences between these two basic approaches can also be described as differences in emphasis on measures at the population level, the individual level, and the level of occasions and contexts. The total consumption approach is more concerned with population measures, whereas the harm reduction model often operates with measures targeted at individuals or occasions.⁴

These differences in approach can be summarised in the following scheme:



Issues

In terms of policy development and public health approaches, there are a couple of issues that still need to be addressed or at least be considered:

Do patterns of drinking reflect a drinking culture or are they a result of a drinking culture?

It could be argued that more work needs to be carried out to look even more closely at exactly what makes up the Northern Ireland drinking culture. This report highlights certain drinking behaviours and identifies certain patterns of drinking, but it does not attempt to define or describe Northern Ireland's drinking culture, as that would involve a more detailed ethnographic study.

How can patterns of drinking be changed?

The discussion regarding different policies and different approaches raises the question of how in fact one can change drinking patterns. Others have looked at this issue and have pointed out that changes can take place in the short and long term in response to changes in legislation (eg opening hours), in leisure habits (eg number of clubs), in the economy (eg disposable income) and in society in general (eg greater urbanisation). Some of these more long-term changes are beyond the reach of 'alcohol policies' alone, while others, such as price rises and restrictions on opening hours, could well impact on drinking patterns in the short term.

This discussion in turn leads to the issue discussed earlier of whether the aim of policies should be to change 'harmful' drinking patterns or simply make them less harmful.

Recommendations

The pattern of drinking in Northern Ireland described as drinking to excess or binge drinking needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The data presented in this report inform a number of recommendations:

- Develop approaches to both address the nature of the drinking itself and reduce the harmful consequences of the drinking. Such measures could include stricter enforcement of existing legislation pertaining to licensing laws; development of 'safer drinking' initiatives, such as server training; restrictions on initiatives that encourage excessive drinking, such as discount sales and 'happy hours'; and targeted public information campaigns.
- Learn from those initiatives in other parts of the world where a similar pattern has been observed and measures have been adopted to address it, eg Australia, Canada.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the Northern Ireland 'drinking culture' through the use of ethnographic surveys. Some qualitative research into the drinking behaviours and attitudes of young adult drinkers has been carried out recently, but such work should be extended and carried out in more depth.¹²
- An Alcohol Strategy and various Action Plans were designed to address the issue of alcohol misuse in Northern Ireland. It is important that those responsible for developing policies and commissioning and implementing initiatives in this area are well informed of the current debate between the population model and the harm reduction approach.
- The appropriateness or otherwise of community approaches to addressing alcohol misuse needs to be explored in greater detail. Examples of good practice should be examined to identify their key features and whether such approaches or examples could be used elsewhere.

References

1. Bennett et al. Alcohol and Alcoholism. Sensible Drinking: The report of an inter-departmental working group. London: Department of Health, 1995.
2. Rehm et al. On the emerging paradigm of drinking patterns and their social and health consequences. *Addiction* 2000; 91: 1615-36.
3. Single E and Leino V. The levels, patterns and consequences of drinking. In: Grant M and Litvak J (Eds). *Drinking Patterns and their consequences*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1998.
4. Simpura J. Drinking Patterns and alcohol policy. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 1999; 16: 35-45.
5. Blaney R and MacKenzie G. A Northern Ireland Community Health Study. Belfast: Department of Community Medicine, Queen's University of Belfast, 1978.
6. Harbinson JJM and Haire T. *Drinking Practices in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Policy Planning and Research Unit. Department of Finance and Personnel, 1982.
7. Sweeny K, Gillan J and Orr J. *Drinking Habits in Northern Ireland, 1987-1989*. Policy Planning and Research Unit Occasional Paper 22. Belfast: Department of Health and Social Services, 1990.
8. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. *Continuous Household Survey 1988, 1998/1999 and 1999/2000*.
9. MacAuley D, McCrum EE, Stott G, Evans AE, Sweeney K, Trinick T, Boreham CAG. *The Northern Ireland Health and Activity Survey*. Belfast: HMSO, 1994.
10. Ewing JA. Detecting alcoholism: the CAGE questionnaire. *JAMA* 1984; 252: 1905-1907.
11. Faculty of Public Health Medicine. *Alcohol and the public health*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.
12. Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland. *Attitudes and behaviour of young adult drinkers in Northern Ireland: a qualitative study*. Belfast: HPANI (unpublished).
13. Moore L, Smith C and Catford J. Binge drinking: prevalence, patterns and policy. *Health education research theory and practice* 1994; 9 (4): 497-505.
14. Weschsler H and Austin S B. Binge drinking: the five/four measure. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. Jan 1998; 59 (1): 122-124.
15. Department of Health and Social Services. *Reducing alcohol related harm in Northern Ireland. A report to DHSS by the project team*. Belfast: Department of Health and Social Services, 1999.
16. Edwards G et al. *Alcohol Policy and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
17. Roche AM and Evans KR. The Implications of Drinking Patterns for Primary Prevention, Education and Screening. In: Grant M and Litvak J (Eds). *Drinking Patterns and their consequences*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1998.

Appendix 1: Response rate and profile of respondents

This section profiles the respondents who participated in the survey. All adult (18-75 years) members of the selected households were asked to respond. This section provides details on the response rate and profiles individual respondents. Key characteristics of the sample are compared to that of the Northern Ireland population based on the survey data and estimates published in the Northern Ireland Annual Abstract of Statistics 17, 1999, NISRA and the Continuous Household Survey 1988 and 1998/1999, NISRA.

Response rate

The sample used for the survey was based on households, and an overall response rate of 70% was achieved. One in five households (20%) refused to take part in the study and one in ten (10%) had no one at home when an interviewer called.

Table 18: Response rate (households) to the survey

	Total sample of households (N)	
Issued addresses	2,050	
Non eligible	281	
Eligible addresses	1,769	

	Eligible sample of households achieved (N)	Eligible sample achieved (%)
Issued addresses	1,769	100
Households interviewed*	1,243	70
Refusals	356	20
No contact	170	10

*Note: Interviews achieved includes partial and proxy interviews.

Respondents

Information was gathered from all adults aged between 18-75 years living within the selected household. Responses were achieved from 1,752 individual adults and their demographic and socioeconomic circumstances are shown in Table 19 below.

Table 19: Demographic and socioeconomic profile of the respondents to the survey

	Base (N)	All (%)
Sex		
Male	733	42
Female	1,019	58
Age group		
18-29	328	19
30-44	576	33
45-59	463	26
60-75	385	22
Marital status		
Single	345	20
Married/cohabiting	1,142	65
Separated/Divorced	147	8
Widowed	118	7
Socioeconomic group		
Professional/intermediate	490	28
Junior non-manual	358	20
Skilled manual	272	16
Semi-skilled/unskilled	478	27
Economically inactive	154	9
Household income		
£25,000 or over	445	25
£15-24,999	358	20
£10-14,999	283	16
under £10,000	514	19
Missing	152	9
Education status		
A Level/higher education	524	30
O Level/commercial	503	29
No qualifications	725	41
Religious group		
Catholic	673	38
Protestant	944	54
Missing	135	8
Overall	1,752	

Data validation

To determine if the survey sample was representative of the general population, the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for the households and respondents were compared with available figures for Northern Ireland taken from the Annual Abstract of Statistics.

The dynamics of the sample in terms of age, sex, and socioeconomic grouping of respondents were also compared to figures for the Northern Ireland population. From this the sample was shown to have a lower proportion of 18-29 year olds (19% compared to 26%) than would be expected in the Northern Ireland population.

The socioeconomic grouping of respondents was similar to those for the Northern Ireland population with one exception: there was an under representation of men in the skilled manual grouping (30% compared to 37%).

Differences in the age ranges of the samples for the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) and the alcohol survey could also account for differences in social class grouping. The CHS figures included all adults aged 16+, whereas this survey sample excludes those aged 16 to 17. The validation checks showed that the achieved sample for the survey was broadly representative of the Northern Ireland population.

Table 20: The age and sex profile of respondents in the sample compared with the Northern Ireland population estimates (1998)

	Alcohol survey sample			Northern Ireland 1998 estimates		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Age group (years)						
18-29	20	18	19	27	25	26
30-44	30	35	33	32	32	32
45-59	27	26	26	24	24	24
60-75	23	21	22	17	19	18
Base (N)	733	1,019	1,752	558,684	576,283	1,134,967

Source: Table 1.1 page 3, Northern Ireland Annual Abstract of Statistics Number 17, 1999.

Socioeconomic grouping

Individuals who had never worked and those who did not provide sufficient information to determine their socioeconomic group were not assigned a socioeconomic group. They are included in Tables 19 and 21 under the heading economically inactive. The distribution obtained from this survey is compared with the information supplied by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) from the 1998/1999 Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey. The CHS data relate to all those aged 16+, while the age range of the alcohol survey was 18-75 years.

Table 21: The socioeconomic grouping of respondents to the alcohol survey compared to the CHS

	Alcohol Survey Sample 1999			Northern Ireland 1998 estimates		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Socioeconomic grouping based on occupation						
Professional (non-manual)	7	2	4	5	2	3
Employer manager (non-manual)	14	8	10	15	7	11
Intermediate (non-manual)	12	16	14	8	14	11
Junior non-manual	11	27	21	9	27	19
Skilled manual	30	5	16	37	6	20
Semi-skilled manual	15	25	21	15	26	21
Unskilled manual	5	8	6	4	7	6
Economically inactive	7	10	8	7	11	9
Base (N)	729	1,016	1,745	2,720	3,063	5,783

Comparing the alcohol survey with the Continuous Household Survey

The sample was profiled in terms of drinker types and the results compared to CHS data. The results presented in Table 22 are based on the total number of respondents (N=1,752) to the study.

Table 22: Comparison of drinker types

	1988 CHS (%)	1998/99 CHS (%)	Alcohol survey (1999)
Males			
Non-drinker	24	22	25
Below sensible levels (<21 units/week)	62	56	52
More than sensible but less than dangerous	12	18	18
Dangerous levels (50+ units/week)	3	4	5
Base (N)	2,491	1,840	733
Females			
Non-drinker	38	31	33
Below sensible levels (<21 units/week)	58	59	58
More than sensible but less than dangerous	4	8	8
Dangerous levels (35+ units/week)	0	1	1
Base (N)	3,113	2,579	1,019

Source: Continuous Household Survey 1988 and 1998/1999, NISRA.

Appendix 2: Presentation of results

The results presented in Tables 23 and 24 are based on the total number of respondents (N=1,752) to the study. Under socioeconomic group, household income and religious group, 'economically inactive' and 'missing' are excluded from analysis.

Table 23: Drinking status of the respondents to the alcohol survey by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Ever drank alcohol (%)	Never drank alcohol (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Sex				**
Male	75	25	733	
Female	67	33	1,019	
Age group				***
18-29	79	21	328	
30-44	81	19	576	
45-59	69	31	463	
60-75	49	51	385	
Marital status				***
Single	71	29	345	
Married/cohabiting	71	29	1,142	
Separated/divorced	78	22	147	
Widowed	51	49	118	
Socioeconomic group				**
Professional/intermediate	77	23	490	
Junior non-manual	73	27	358	
Skilled manual	68	32	272	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	69	31	478	
Household income				***
£25,000 or over	79	21	445	
£15-24,999	76	24	358	
£10-14,999	71	29	283	
Under £10,000	61	39	514	
Education status				***
A Level/higher education	82	18	524	
O Level/commercial	76	25	503	
No qualifications	58	42	725	
Religious group				***
Catholic	76	24	673	
Protestant	67	33	944	
Overall	70	30	1,752	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (**p<0.01 and ***p<0.001)

Table 24: Demographic and socioeconomic circumstances of the drinking respondents to the survey by sex

	Males who ever drank alcohol (%)	Base (N)	Females who ever drank alcohol (%)	Base (N)
Age group	***		***	
18-29	81	144	78	184
30-44	88	223	77	353
45-59	70	199	67	264
60-75	56	167	43	218
Marital status	*		***	
Single	71	172	71	173
Married/cohabiting	77	481	67	661
Separated/divorced	80	46	76	101
Widowed	56	34	49	84
Socioeconomic group	NS		***	
Professional/intermediate	78	236	76	254
Junior non-manual	83	80	71	278
Skilled manual	72	221	51	51
Semi-skilled/unskilled	75	143	66	335
Household income	**		***	
£25,000 or over	81	207	78	238
£15-24,999	80	153	74	205
£10-14,999	76	112	67	171
Under £10,000	66	190	58	324
Education status	***		***	
A Level/higher education	85	257	80	267
O Level/commercial	79	203	73	300
No qualifications	62	273	56	452
Religious group	**		**	
Catholic	80	270	73	403
Protestant	71	401	64	543
Overall	75	733	67	1,019

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant.

Analyses relating to those who reported ever drinking alcohol

The following tables relate only to those respondents who reported that they ever drank alcohol (ie 70% of the total sample, N=1,233).

Table 25: Respondents' estimate of how often they usually drank alcohol by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Almost daily (%)	At least 1 day per week (%)	Less than weekly (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Sex					
Male	15	62	23	547	***
Female	7	51	43	686	
Age group					
18-29	5	60	35	260	***
30-44	7	63	30	468	
45-59	16	52	32	318	
60-75	17	37	46	187	
Marital status					
Single	7	63	30	245	**
Married/cohabiting	11	55	35	814	
Separated/divorced	11	61	29	114	
Widowed	15	33	52	60	
Socioeconomic group					
Professional/intermediate	13	54	34	378	*
Junior non-manual	8	61	31	262	
Skilled manual	11	61	28	184	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	9	52	39	328	
Household income					
£25,000 or over	14	54	32	352	*
£15-24,999	10	63	27	273	
£10-14,999	7	55	39	200	
Under £10,000	11	48	41	312	
Education status					
A Level/higher education	11	60	29	432	**
O Level/commercial	8	60	32	380	
No qualifications	11	48	41	421	
Religious group					
Catholic	9	61	31	13	**
Protestant	11	51	39	18	
Overall	10	56	34	1,233	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001)

The overall base is those who drink (ie 1,233), of which 547 are male drinkers.

Table 26: Male respondents' estimate of how often they usually drank alcohol by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Almost daily (%)	At least 1 day per week (%)	Less than weekly (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group					***
18-29	6	72	22	116	
30-44	8	70	22	197	
45-59	25	54	21	140	
60-75	23	45	32	94	
Marital status					NS
Single	11	66	23	122	
Married/cohabiting	14	61	25	369	
Separated/divorced	22	65	14	37	
Widowed	37	58	5 (N=1)	19	
Socioeconomic group					NS
Professional/intermediate	17	57	27	185	
Junior non-manual	15	64	21	66	
Skilled manual	13	62	25	158	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	16	65	19	107	
Household income					NS
£25,000 or over	19	57	24	167	
£15-24,999	12	68	20	122	
£10-14,999	11	61	28	85	
Under £10,000	18	57	26	125	
Education status					NS
A Level/higher education	12	66	22	218	
O Level/commercial	14	63	24	160	
No qualifications	18	57	24	169	
Religious group					NS
Catholic	12	68	21	216	
Protestant	15	57	28	285	
Overall	15	62	23	547	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (**p<0.001). NS = not significant.

The overall base is those who drink (ie 1,233), of which 686 are female drinkers.

Table 27: Female respondents' estimate of how often they usually drank alcohol by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Almost daily (%)	At least 1 day per week (%)	Less than weekly (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group					***
18-29	4	51	45	144	
30-44	6	58	37	271	
45-59	8	50	42	178	
60-75	11	30	59	93	
Marital status					NS
Single	3 (N=4)	59	37	123	
Married/cohabiting	8	49	43	445	
Separated/divorced	5 (N=4)	58	36	77	
Widowed	5 (N=2)	22	73	41	
Socioeconomic group					NS
Professional/intermediate	9	51	40	193	
Junior non-manual	6	60	34	196	
Skilled manual	(N=0)	58	42	26	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	5	46	49	221	
Household income					*
£25,000 or over	9	51	40	185	
£15-24,999	7	60	33	151	
£10-14,999	4	50	46	115	
Under £10,000	6	43	51	187	
Education status					***
A Level/higher education	10	53	36	214	
O Level/commercial	5	58	38	220	
No qualifications	6	42	52	252	
Religious group					*
Catholic	6	56	38	295	
Protestant	7	46	47	346	
Overall	7	51	43	686	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant.

The overall base is those who drink (ie 1,233), of which 547 are male drinkers.

Table 28: Male daily drinking patterns by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Monday (%)	Tuesday (%)	Wednesday (%)	Thursday (%)	Friday (%)	Saturday (%)	Sunday (%)	Base (N)
Age group								
18-29	14	13	20	19	42	66	24	116
30-44	15	11	17	14	41	63	36	197
45-59	26	23	26	26	45	61	42	140
60-75	28	26	27	34	40	59	42	94
Sig (p)	**	**	NS	***	NS	NS	*	
Marital status								
Single	16	15	19	20	45	62	27	122
Married/cohabiting	20	17	21	21	41	61	37	369
Separated/divorced	22	16	32	19	46	68	43	37
Widowed	32	26	26	37	47	84	53	19
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Socioeconomic group								
Professional/intermediate	21	20	23	23	47	55	43	185
Junior non-manual	15	14	20	18	38	65	32	66
Skilled manual	19	16	22	21	40	68	34	158
Semi-skilled/unskilled	21	18	20	19	43	67	34	107
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Household income								
£25,000 or over	21	20	24	22	47	65	57	167
£15-24,999	16	19	21	21	47	62	62	122
£10-14,999	17	12	21	19	33	61	74	85
Under £10,000	23	18	22	24	42	62	65	125
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Education status								
A Level/higher education	18	17	23	21	44	62	40	218
O Level/commercial	19	15	21	21	42	66	38	160
No qualifications	23	18	21	23	40	61	29	169
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Religious group								
Catholic	16	15	21	19	37	62	38	216
Protestant	22	18	21	23	46	62	33	285
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Overall (%)	20	17	22	21	42	63	36	
Base (N)								547

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant.

The overall base is those who drink (ie 1,233), of which 686 are female drinkers.

Table 29: Female daily drinking patterns by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Monday (%)	Tuesday (%)	Wednesday (%)	Thursday (%)	Friday (%)	Saturday (%)	Sunday (%)	Base (N)
Age group								
18-29	8	6	10	10	27	44	13	144
30-44	11	11	8	10	28	54	25	271
45-59	12	11	14	11	29	49	30	178
60-75	15	16	13	18	19	30	24	93
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	**	**	
Marital status								
Single	11	11	11	16	29	50	13	123
Married/cohabiting	12	11	11	11	28	48	28	445
Separated/divorced	9	13	7	8	27	53	20	77
Widowed	10	7	10	15	12	22	12	41
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	**	**	
Socioeconomic group								
Professional/intermediate	13	13	13	15	27	50	34	193
Junior non-manual	12	12	10	12	31	53	27	196
Skilled manual	12 (N=3)	8 (N=2)	4 (N=1)	0	42	31	23	26
Semi-skilled/unskilled	8	8	9	10	24	45	15	221
Sig (p)	‡	‡	‡	‡	NS	NS	***	
Household income								
£25,000 or over	13	16	14	13	34	51	33	185
£15-24,999	16	11	9	11	31	52	31	151
£10-14,999	6	8	10	10	26	46	15	115
Under £10,000	10	9	9	11	19	41	16	187
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	**	NS	***	
Education status								
A Level/higher education	11	15	15	16	31	55	32	214
O Level/commercial	16	11	8	11	26	52	26	220
No qualifications	8	7	8	9	24	38	15	252
Sig (p)	*	*	*	*	NS	***	***	
Religious group								
Catholic	10	9	10	11	25	51	24	295
Protestant	12	11	11	12	27	45	23	346
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Overall (%)	11	11	11	12	27	48	24	
Base (N)	686							

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

The following tables relate only to those respondents who drank in the week prior to the survey and completed either all sections of the seven day recall diary (N=915) or most sections of the diary (N=922).

Table 30: Drink of choice for males by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Beer (%)	Strong beer (%)	Wine (%)	Sherry (%)	Spirits (%)	Alcopop/Coolers (%)	Base (N)
Age group							
18-29	93	2	13	0	22	2	98
30-44	83	5	28	1	19	1	167
45-59	66	4	39	3	31	1	116
60-75	56	3	27	0	41	0	71
Sig (p)	***	‡	**	‡	**	‡	
Marital status							
Single	93	5	9	1	73	2	99
Married/cohabiting	71	4	35	1	76	1	304
Separated/divorced	72	0	25	3	66	0	32
Widowed	82	6	6	0	65	0	17
Sig (p)	‡	‡	‡	‡	NS	‡	
Socioeconomic group							
Non-manual	68	2	45	2	25	1	211
Manual	83	6	13	0	28	1	212
Sig (p)	**	‡	***	‡	NS	‡	
Household income							
£25,000 or over	66	4	50	2	25	0	142
£15-24,999	81	4	30	2	24	2	105
£10-14,999	76	3	15	0	24	5	62
Under £10,000	83	4	8	0	32	0	103
Sig (p)	*	‡	***	‡	NS	‡	
Education status							
A Level/higher education	76	3	37	1	23	1	186
O Level/commercial	84	2	26	2	24	1	134
No qualifications	70	6	14	1	33	1	132
Sig (p)	*	‡	***	‡	NS	‡	
Religious group							
Catholic	84	2	21	1	25	2	182
Protestant	72	6	31	1	27	<1	228
Sig (p)	**	‡	*	‡	NS	‡	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 31: Drink of choice for females by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Beer (%)	Strong beer (%)	Wine (%)	Sherry (%)	Spirits (%)	Alcopop/ Coolers (%)	Base (N)
Age group							
18-29	35	3	37	1	35	20	92
30-44	27	2	57	3	37	3	208
45-59	15	1	53	6	49	3	125
60-75	4	0	38	13	60	0	45
Sig (p)	‡	‡	**	‡	**	‡	
Marital status							
Single	34	2	37	2	40	20	85
Married/cohabiting	20	1	58	4	39	3	310
Separated/divorced	27	3	36	5	53	3	59
Widowed	6	0	31	13	63	0	16
Sig (p)	‡	‡	***	‡	NS	‡	
Socioeconomic group							
Non-manual	18	1	61	6	38	5	284
Manual	29	3	36	2	47	6	160
Sig (p)	*	‡	***	‡	NS	NS	
Household income							
£25,000 or over	15	1	70	5	33	5	141
£15-24,999	21	4	65	5	40	5	112
£10-14,999	33	1	34	5	44	8	77
Under £10,000	30	1	24	4	53	8	107
Sig (p)	**	‡	***	‡	*	NS	
Education status							
A Level/higher education	19	1	66	5	34	8	166
O Level/commercial	25	4	54	4	39	5	159
No qualifications	26	1	28	3	55	4	145
Sig (p)	NS	‡	***	‡	**	NS	
Religious group							
Catholic	27	3	47	1	42	6	216
Protestant	21	1	51	7	42	5	224
Sig (p)	NS	‡	NS	‡	NS	NS	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 32: The drink of choice for male respondents during the week

	Mon (%)	Tues (%)	Wed (%)	Thurs (%)	Fri (%)	Sat (%)	Sun (%)
Shandy	3	2	1	3	2	1	0
Beer/lager/cider/stout	60	54	59	59	67	72	56
Strong beer	4	4	3	5	4	3	4
Low alcohol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wine	18	23	23	21	16	17	36
Sherry	1	2	0	0	1	0	0
Spirits	24	25	24	22	24	23	18
Alcopops	0	0	0	0	<1	<1	<1
Coolers	0	0	0	1	0	<1	<1
Other	1	1	1	2	<1	1	2
Base (N)	108	92	118	117	231	342	197

Table 33: Drink ranking through the week – top three for males

RANK	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	beer	beer	beer	beer	beer	beer	beer
2	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits	wine
3	wine	wine	wine	wine	wine	wine	spirits

Table 34: The drink of choice for female respondents during the week

	Mon (%)	Tues (%)	Wed (%)	Thurs (%)	Fri (%)	Sat (%)	Sun (%)
Shandy	1	1	1	2	<1	2	2
Beer/lager/cider/stout	16	15	15	11	19	21	9
Strong beer	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
Low alcohol	0	0	0	0	0	<1	0
Wine	53	53	49	44	39	41	66
Sherry	9	7	10	5	4	2	4
Spirits	28	27	28	39	36	38	27
Alcopops	1	0	1	0	2	2	0
Coolers	3	3	0	8	6	2	0
Other	0	1	0	0	0	<1	<1
Base (N)	76	73	72	79	185	326	162

Table 35: Drink ranking through the week – top three for females

RANK	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	wine	wine	wine	wine	wine	wine	wine
2	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits	spirits
3	beer	beer	beer	beer	beer	beer	beer

Table 36: The number of different drinks respondents consumed in the week

	Males				Females			
	1 type of drink (%)	2-4 types of drink (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)	1 type of drink (%)	2-4 types of drink (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group	NS				NS			
18-29	69	31	98		74	26	92	
30-44	69	31	167		74	26	208	
45-59	60	40	116		76	24	125	
60-75	70	30	71		80	20	45	
Marital status	NS				‡			
Single	69	31	99		71	29	85	
Married/cohabiting	66	34	304		75	25	310	
Separated/divorced	66	34	32		76	24	59	
Widowed	71	29	17		88	12	16	
Socioeconomic group	NS				*			
Professional/intermediate	58	42	156		67	33	138	
Junior non-manual	66	34	55		77	23	146	
Skilled manual	70	30	121		72	28	18	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	74	26	91		82	18	142	
Household income	*				*			
£25,000 or over	59	41	142		74	26	141	
£15-24,999	65	35	105		66	34	112	
£10-14,999	76	24	62		73	27	77	
Under £10,000	73	27	103		83	17	107	
Education status	NS				*			
A Level/higher education	64	36	186		71	29	166	
O Level/commercial	65	35	134		71	29	159	
No qualifications	74	26	132		83	17	145	
Religious group	NS				NS			
Catholic	71	29	182		76	24	216	
Protestant	64	36	228		75	25	224	
Overall (%)	67	33	452		75	25	470	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 37: Most frequent setting for male drinking by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Pub (%)	Restaurant/hotel (%)	Sports club (%)	Social club (%)	Night club (%)	Own home (%)	Someone else's home (%)	Base (N)
Age group								
18-29	65	10	10	6	18	38	27	98
30-44	44	22	7	13	0	56	19	167
45-59	35	22	10	11	0	61	12	116
60-75	28	11	10	13	0	55	18	71
Sig (p)	***	*	NS	NS	‡	**	NS	
Marital status								
Single	72	9	10	9	18	29	29	99
Married/cohabiting	33	21	10	10	0	63	16	304
Separated/divorced	50	16	0	19	0	50	19	32
Widowed	65	0	0	24	0	24	18	17
Sig (p)	***	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	
Socioeconomic group								
Non-manual	36	22	12	4	4	60	22	211
Manual	49	13	7	19	2	49	16	212
Sig (p)	**	*	NS	***	NS	*	NS	
Household income								
£25,000 or over	36	23	10	5	3	68	18	142
£15-24,999	40	25	13	11	3	56	24	105
£10-14,999	57	11	7	11	2	48	10	62
Under £10,000	49	11	2	17	7	39	19	103
Sig (p)	*	*	‡	*	‡	***	NS	
Education status								
A Level/higher education	43	17	11	8	5	58	25	186
O Level/commercial	49	24	10	14	6	50	14	134
No qualifications	39	11	5	12	0	50	14	132
Sig (p)	NS	*	NS	NS	‡	NS	*	
Religious group								
Catholic	57	14	4	10	5	47	18	182
Protestant	34	19	14	13	3	56	19	228
Sig (p)	***	NS	***	NS	NS	NS	NS	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 38: Most frequent setting for female drinking by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Pub (%)	Restaurant/hotel (%)	Sports club (%)	Social club (%)	Night club (%)	Own home (%)	Someone else's home (%)	Base (N)
Age group								
18-29	34	17	1	3	15	40	21	92
30-44	22	25	1	6	3	61	22	208
45-59	22	30	4	5	2	62	13	125
60-75	11	22	7	13	0	62	24	45
Sig (p)	*	NS	‡	‡	‡	**	NS	
Marital status								
Single	35	25	0	8	18	34	20	85
Married/cohabiting	20	25	3	4	<1	66	19	310
Separated/divorced	25	24	3	9	10	46	22	59
Widowed	13	19	13	13	0	56	13	16
Sig (p)	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	***	‡	
Socioeconomic group								
Non-manual	23	30	2	4	4	59	23	284
Manual	24	18	3	9	5	56	15	160
Sig (p)	NS	**	NS	*	NS	NS	*	
Household income								
£25,000 or over	18	33	2	3	2	61	21	141
£15-24,999	29	27	2	3	2	65	21	112
£10-14,999	26	22	4	7	10	51	18	77
Under £10,000	23	16	4	11	7	54	16	107
Sig (p)	NS	*	NS	‡	‡	NS	NS	
Education status								
A Level/higher education	22	33	2	1	7	58	26	166
O Level/commercial	20	26	2	8	5	57	22	159
No qualifications	29	13	3	9	2	57	10	145
Sig (p)	NS	***	‡	‡	‡	NS	**	
Religious group								
Catholic	29	20	1	5	6	53	16	216
Protestant	17	29	4	8	4	60	22	224
Sig (p)	**	*	‡	NS	NS	NS	NS	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 39: Where male respondents reported drinking throughout the week

	Mon (%)	Tues (%)	Wed (%)	Thurs (%)	Fri (%)	Sat (%)	Sun (%)
Pub	25	18	25	23	30	34	17
Hotel (for a drink)	2	0	1	2	1	1	2
Hotel (other reason)	4	4	3	1	3	2	5
Restaurant	5	3	6	4	5	5	7
Sports club	2	2	5	6	3	6	4
Social club	7	5	4	9	8	7	6
Night club	0	0	1	1	3	3	1
Own home	52	60	54	54	48	41	51
Someone else's home	6	5	5	4	6	11	14
Outdoors	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other	1	1	1	1	<1	1	2
Base (N)	108	92	118	117	231	342	197

Table 40: Where female respondents reported drinking throughout the week

	Mon (%)	Tues (%)	Wed (%)	Thurs (%)	Fri (%)	Sat (%)	Sun (%)
Pub	12	5	8	20	14	17	9
Hotel (for a drink)	8	3	3	1	3	3	1
Hotel (other reason)	1	1	0	5	3	5	2
Restaurant	4	14	13	13	7	9	10
Sports club	0	3	0	3	2	1	2
Social club	0	4	3	5	3	5	2
Night club	1	1	0	0	3	6	1
Own home	68	63	67	51	55	46	61
Someone else's home	9	7	8	5	13	13	15
Outdoors	0	0	0	0	<1	0	1
Other	4	1	0	1	1	1	0
Base (N)	76	73	72	79	185	326	162

Table 41: Drinking company by sex

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Overall (%)
Drank alone	23	11	17
With partner	38	44	41
Friend of same sex	17	15	16
Friend of opposite sex	9	7	8
Two or more friends of same sex	30	13	22
Two or more friends of both sexes	29	27	28
With family	15	20	17
Base (N)	452	470	922

Table 42: Drinking partners for males by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Drank alone (%)	With partner (%)	Friend of same sex (%)	Friend of opposite sex (%)	Two or more friends of same sex (%)	Two or more friends of both sexes (%)	With family (%)	Base (N)
Age group								
18-29	12	19	21	20	43	45	7	98
30-44	21	43	19	8	28	28	17	167
45-59	24	53	11	6	26	23	19	116
60-75	41	27	18	0	25	18	13	71
Sig (p)	***	***	NS	‡	*	***	NS	
Marital status								
Single	22	3	27	27	41	46	11	99
Married/cohabiting	20	55	12	2	26	24	17	304
Separated/divorced	44	3	19	13	38	31	6	32
Widowed	35	0	53	12	35	18	12	17
Sig (p)	*	‡	***	‡	*	‡	‡	
Socioeconomic group								
Non-manual	22	46	14	9	25	32	18	211
Manual	26	35	19	8	34	24	12	212
Sig (p)	NS	*	NS	NS	*	*	NS	
Household income								
£25,000 or over	22	50	16	9	23	37	17	142
£15-24,999	20	42	14	9	37	27	18	105
£10-14,999	21	36	13	13	40	26	8	62
Under £10,000	31	23	25	8	25	20	13	103
Sig (p)	NS	***	NS	NS	*	*	NS	
Education status								
A Level/higher education	21	38	20	10	34	40	14	186
O Level/commercial	21	40	16	11	28	27	17	134
No qualifications	28	35	16	5	27	15	14	132
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	***	NS	
Religious group								
Catholic	23	35	22	9	25	28	13	182
Protestant	23	39	14	7	34	31	17	228
Sig (p)	NS	NS	*	NS	*	NS	NS	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 43: Drinking partners for females by respondents' demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Drank alone (%)	With partner (%)	Friend of same sex (%)	Friend of opposite sex (%)	Two or more friends of same sex (%)	Two or more friends of both sexes (%)	With family (%)	Base (N)
Age group								
18-29	4	25	24	17	17	32	16	92
30-44	9	50	15	7	11	27	22	208
45-59	17	51	7	4	12	26	19	125
60-75	22	38	16	0	18	18	20	45
Sig (p)	‡	***	**	***	NS	NS	NS	
Marital status								
Single	9	5	25	28	27	32	17	85
Married/cohabiting	9	65	9	1	8	25	22	310
Separated/divorced	17	5	25	10	20	32	19	59
Widowed	38	0	44	6	13	19	6	16
Sig (p)	**	‡	***	‡	‡	‡	‡	NS
Socioeconomic group								
Non-manual	11	48	12	9	12	29	23	284
Manual	13	36	19	6	14	24	18	160
Sig (p)	NS	*	*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Household income								
£25,000 or over	9	57	8	5	14	26	22	141
£15-24,999	5	53	13	5	7	31	28	112
£10-14,999	16	33	18	12	20	27	10	77
Under £10,000	17	27	24	10	17	24	17	107
Sig (p)	*	***	**	NS	NS	NS	*	
Education status								
A Level/higher education	8	45	13	10	11	34	26	166
O Level/commercial	13	40	17	7	18	28	20	159
No qualifications	12	47	15	5	11	18	14	145
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	**	*	
Religious group								
Catholic	10	43	13	8	14	31	19	216
Protestant	12	46	17	7	13	24	21	224
Sig (p)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 44: Who male respondents reported drinking with during the week

Drank with . . .	Mon (%)	Tues (%)	Wed (%)	Thurs (%)	Fri (%)	Sat (%)	Sun (%)
Myself	25	32	25	22	17	15	15
Partner	28	25	26	27	30	29	32
Friend (same sex)	17	9	14	10	7	11	7
Friend (opposite sex)	2	4	3	2	5	6	5
Two or more friends (same sex)	20	15	18	19	22	18	16
Two or more friends (both sexes)	6	10	11	12	15	23	13
Family	6	5	6	9	7	7	20
Base (N)	108	92	118	117	231	342	197

Table 45: Who female respondents reported drinking with during the week

Drank with . . .	Mon (%)	Tues (%)	Wed (%)	Thurs (%)	Fri (%)	Sat (%)	Sun (%)
Myself	22	18	15	14	8	7	10
Partner	39	34	38	34	39	40	40
Friend (same sex)	9	12	7	10	11	8	4
Friend (opposite sex)	8	1	8	5	5	6	4
Two or more friends (same sex)	7	10	10	9	8	10	4
Two or more friends (both sexes)	12	16	11	16	19	21	11
Family	8	12	13	14	12	11	29
Base (N)	76	73	72	79	185	326	162

Table 46: Units of alcohol consumed per week for males by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Non risk drinkers 1 to 21 units per week (%)	Risk drinkers More than 21 units per week (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group				**
18-29	46	54	95	
30-44	66	34	167	
45-59	71	29	116	
60-75	69	31	70	
Marital status				*
Single	51	50	99	
Married/cohabiting	68	32	300	
Separated/divorced	66	34	32	
Widowed	53	47	17	
Socioeconomic group				*
Professional/intermediate	73	27	154	
Junior non-manual	59	41	54	
Skilled manual	56	44	121	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	57	43	90	
Household income				NS
£25,000 or over	65	35	140	
£15-24,999	61	39	103	
£10-14,999	61	39	62	
Under £10,000	61	39	103	
Education status				NS
A Level/higher education	64	36	185	
O Level/commercial	56	44	132	
No qualifications	70	31	131	
Religious group				NS
Catholic	68	32	182	
Protestant	61	39	224	
Overall	63	37	448	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (*p<0.05 and **p<0.01). NS = not significant.

Table 47: Units of alcohol consumed per week for females by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Non risk drinkers 1 to 14 units per week (%)	Risk drinkers More than 14 units per week (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group				NS
18-29	70	30	91	
30-44	81	19	207	
45-59	85	15	124	
60-75	82	18	45	
Marital status				‡
Single	66	34	85	
Married/cohabiting	83	17	307	
Separated/divorced	81	19	59	
Widowed	94	6 (N=1)	16	
Socioeconomic group				NS
Professional/intermediate	82	18	138	
Junior non-manual	81	19	145	
Skilled manual	72	28	18	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	79	21	140	
Household income				NS
£25,000 or over	83	17	140	
£15-24,999	76	24	111	
£10-14,999	83	17	77	
Under £10,000	77	23	107	
Education status				NS
A Level/higher education	80	20	164	
O Level/commercial	79	21	159	
No qualifications	81	19	144	
Religious group				NS
Catholic	80	20	213	
Protestant	80	20	224	
Overall	80	20	467	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square. NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 48: Those with one or more binge sessions per week by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Males		Females	
	Drank but not binged (%)	1 or more binge sessions (%)	Drank but not binged (%)	1 or more binge sessions (%)
Age group	***		‡	
18-29	28	72	43	57
30-44	46	54	62	38
45-59	61	39	73	27
60-75	81	19	96	4 (N=2)
Marital status	***		‡	
Single	32	68	42	58
Married/cohabiting	58	42	74	26
Separated/divorced	47	53	41	59
Widowed	53	47	94	1 (N=1)
Socioeconomic group	***		***	
Professional/intermediate	68	32	73	27
Junior non-manual	46	54	71	29
Skilled manual	53	47	56	44
Semi-skilled/unskilled	26	74	51	49
Household income	NS		***	
£25,000 or over	59	41	79	21
£15-24,999	45	55	64	36
£10-14,999	45	55	56	44
Under £10,000	57	43	54	46
Education status	NS		NS	
A Level/higher education	50	50	68	32
O Level/commercial	47	53	64	36
No qualifications	58	42	62	38
Religious group	NS		NS	
Catholic	48	52	62	38
Protestant	52	48	67	33
Overall	52	48	65	35

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (**p<0.001). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 49: Frequency of male binge sessions during the week by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Drank but not binged (%)	1 binge session (%)	2 binge sessions (%)	3+ binge sessions (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group						***
18-29	28	37	24	11	95	
30-44	46	32	17	5	167	
45-59	61	25	8	6	116	
60-75	81	10	4	4	70	
Marital status						***
Single	32	32	26	9	99	
Married/cohabiting	58	27	10	4	300	
Separated/divorced	47	25	13	16	32	
Widowed	53 (N=9)	24 (N=4)	12 (N=2)	12 (N=2)	17	
Socioeconomic group						***
Professional/intermediate	68	21	7	5	154	
Junior non-manual	46	30	19	6	54	
Skilled manual	53	26	17	4	121	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	26	43	17	14	90	
Household income						NS
£25,000 or over	59	24	11	6	140	
£15-24,999	45	31	18	7	103	
£10-14,999	45	34	15	7	62	
Under £10,000	57	19	16	8	103	
Education status						NS
A Level/higher education	50	28	13	7	185	
O Level/commercial	47	26	22	5	132	
No qualifications	58	28	8	7	131	
Religious group						NS
Catholic	48	34	13	6	182	
Protestant	52	25	15	7	224	
Overall	52	29	14	6	448	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (**p<0.001). NS = not significant.

Table 50: Frequency of female binge sessions during the week by demographic and socioeconomic circumstances

	Drank but not binged (%)	1 binge session (%)	2 binge sessions (%)	Base (N)	Sig (p)
Age group					NS
18-29	43	42	15	91	
30-44	62	30	8	207	
45-59	73	19	7	124	
60-75	96	4	0	45	
Marital status					NS
Single	42	42	15	85	
Married/cohabiting	74	20	6	307	
Separated/divorced	41	46	14	59	
Widowed	N=15	N=1	0	16	
Socioeconomic group					***
Professional/intermediate	73	23	4	138	
Junior non-manual	71	21	8	145	
Skilled manual	56 (N=10)	28 (N=5)	17 (N=3)	18	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	51	36	13	140	
Household income					***
£25,000 or over	79	16	5	140	
£15-24,999	64	28	8	111	
£10-14,999	56	35	9	77	
Under £10,000	54	32	14	107	
Education status					NS
A Level/higher education	68	24	8	164	
O Level/commercial	64	28	8	159	
No qualifications	62	29	10	144	
Religious group					NS
Catholic	62	28	9	213	
Protestant	67	25	8	224	
Overall	65	27	9	467	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (***) $p < 0.001$. NS = not significant.

Table 51: Profile of males indicating alcohol problems according to CAGE

	CAGE positive		Non CAGE positive		Base (N)	Sig (p)
	2-4 problems (%)	1 problem (%)	No problems (%)			
Age group						NS
18-29	12	24	64	98		
30-44	14	17	70	167		
45-59	10	18	72	116		
60-75	7	11	82	71		
Marital status						‡
Single	12	24	64	99		
Married/cohabiting	11	15	75	304		
Separated/divorced	19	25	56	32		
Widowed	12 (N=2)	18 (N=3)	71	17		
Socioeconomic group						**
Professional/intermediate	5	14	81	156		
Junior non-manual	20	22	58	55		
Skilled manual	12	19	69	121		
Semi-skilled/unskilled	19	20	62	91		
Household income						‡
£25,000 or over	11	16	73	142		
£15-24,999	13	27	60	105		
£10-14,999	7	8	86	62		
Under £10,000	17	18	65	103		
Education status						NS
A Level/higher education	11	20	69	186		
O Level/commercial	14	19	66	134		
No qualifications	10	12	78	132		
Religious group						NS
Catholic	12	16	73	182		
Protestant	11	20	70	228		
Overall (%)	12	18	71	452		

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square (**p<0.01). NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.

Table 52: Profile of females indicating alcohol problems according to CAGE

	CAGE positive		Non CAGE positive		Base (N)	Sig (p)
	2 or more problems (%)	1 problem (%)	No problems (%)			
Age group						‡
18-29	3	12	85		92	
30-44	4	13	83		208	
45-59	2	10	87		125	
60-75	0	13	87		45	
Marital status						‡
Single	5	12	84		85	
Married/cohabiting	3	12	85		310	
Separated/divorced	2	10	88		59	
Widowed	0	13 (N=2)	88		16	
Socioeconomic group						‡
Professional/intermediate	3	10	87		138	
Junior non-manual	3	19	78		146	
Skilled manual	0	11 (N=2)	89		18	
Semi-skilled/unskilled	3	7	90		142	
Household income						‡
£25,000 or over	2	10	88		141	
£15-24,999	4	19	78		112	
£10-14,999	3	10	87		77	
Under £10,000	5	10	85		107	
Education status						NS
A Level/higher education	3	15	83		166	
O Level/commercial	3	13	84		159	
No qualifications	4	8	88		145	
Religious group						NS
Catholic	3	12	85		216	
Protestant	2	12	86		224	
Overall (%)	3	12	85		470	

Note: Statistical test used was chi-square. NS = not significant. ‡ = cell numbers were too low for statistical tests to be carried out.



Health
Promotion
Agency

The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland
18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.
Tel: 028 9031 1611 (Voice/Minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.
www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

