

Statistical bulletin:

Adult drinking habits in Great Britain: 2014

Teetotalism, drinking in the week before interview, frequent drinking and units drunk, including changes in drinking patterns in recent years.



Contact:
Sarah Caul

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Table of contents

1. Main points
2. 2.5 million people drank more than 14 units of alcohol on their heaviest drinking day
3. Almost 1 in 5 higher earners drank alcohol on at least 5 days a week
4. Higher percentage of drinkers in Wales and Scotland drink over the recommended weekly amount in one day
5. Wine is the most popular choice of alcohol
6. Other characteristics of drinkers
7. Background information
8. Background notes

1. Main points

28.9 million people report that they had drunk alcohol in the week before interview.

2.5 million people drink more than 14 units of alcohol on their heaviest drinking day.

Almost 1 in 5 higher earners drink alcohol on at least 5 days a week.

Young people are less likely to have consumed alcohol in the last week than those who are older.

A higher percentage of drinkers in Wales and Scotland drink over the recommended weekly amount in one day.

Wine is the most popular choice of alcohol.

2. 2.5 million people drank more than 14 units of alcohol on their heaviest drinking day

In Great Britain in 2014, there were 28.9 million people who reported that they drank alcohol in the week before being interviewed for the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey. This equates to 58% of the population.

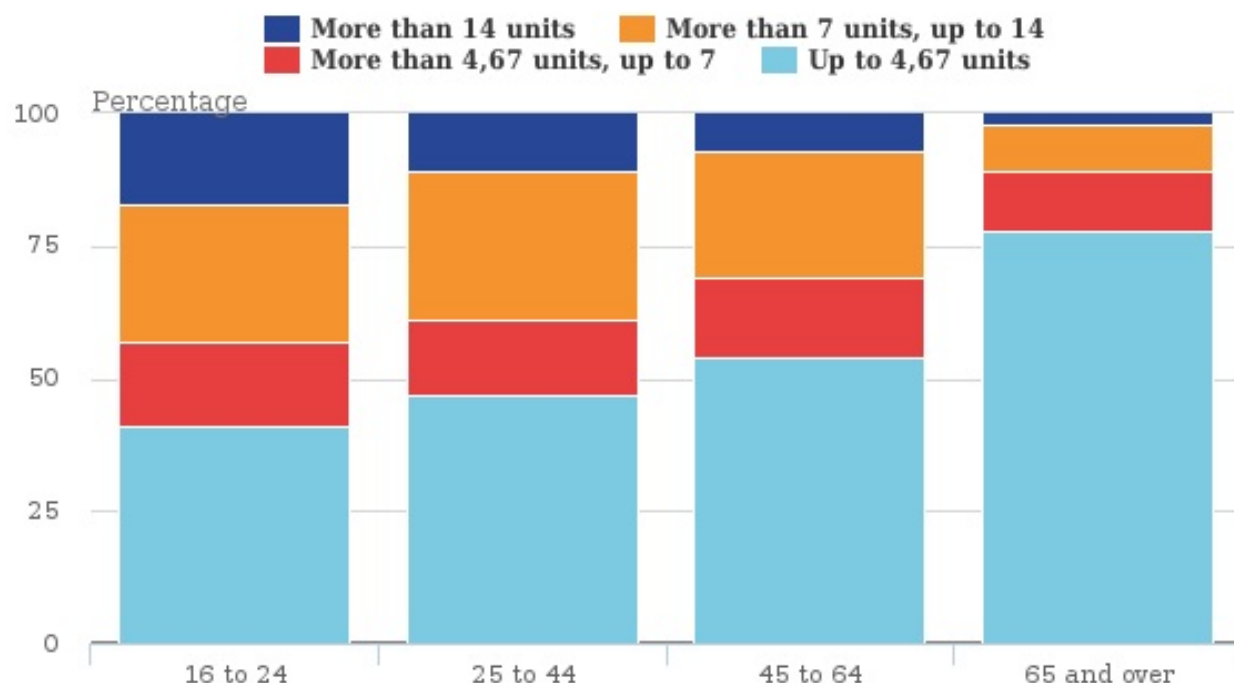
Focusing on those who drank alcohol, 12.9 million (45%) drank more than 4.67 units (around 2 pints of 4% beer or 2 medium (175 millilitre) glasses of 13% wine) on their heaviest drinking day. This is a third of the recommended weekly limit - the value you would drink if you drank 14 units spread evenly over 3 days. Of these, 2.5 million (9%) drank more units in one day than the weekly recommended amount of 14 units (6 pints of beer or 1.4 bottles of 13% wine).

Young people were less likely to have consumed alcohol; less than half (48%) of those aged 16 to 24 reported drinking alcohol in the previous week, compared with 66% of those aged 45 to 64.

While overall being less likely to drink alcohol, young drinkers were more likely than any other age group to consume more than the weekly recommended limit in one day. Among 16 to 24 year old drinkers, 17% consumed more than 14 units compared with 2% of those aged 65 and over.

Figure 1: Percentage who drank each unit group on heaviest drinking day by age group, 2014

Great Britain



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Office for National Statistics

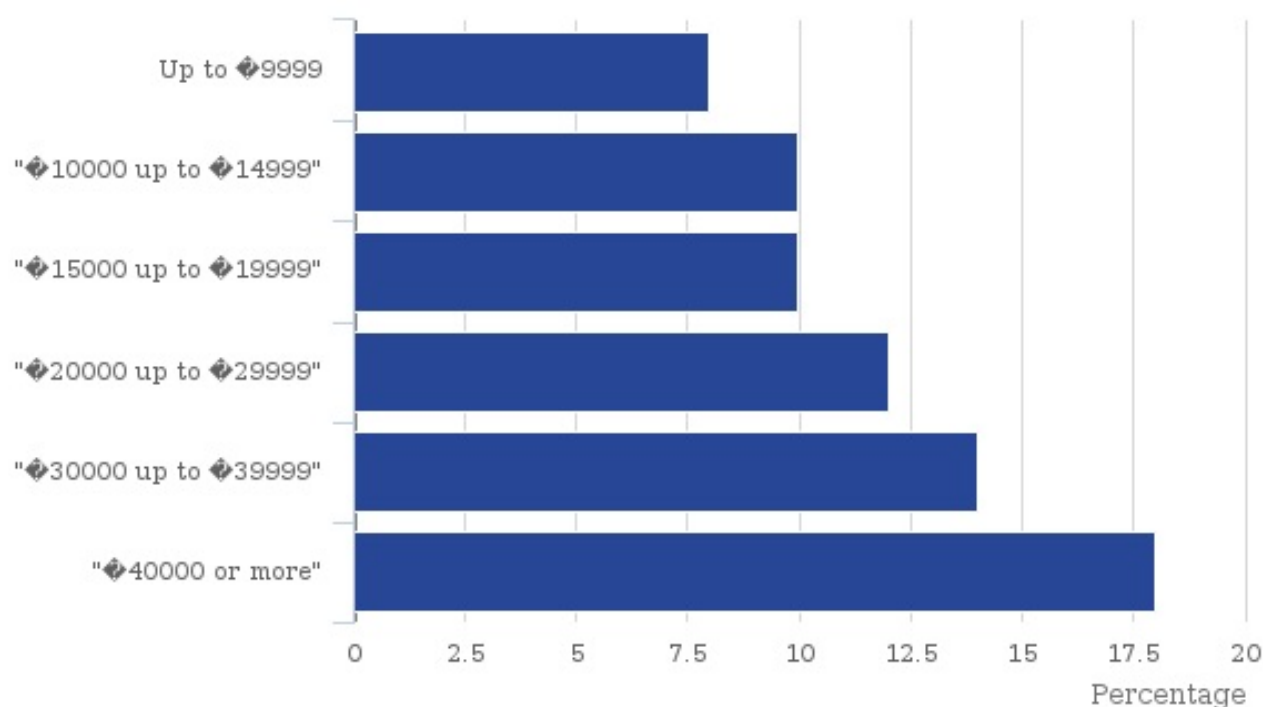
Men were more likely than women to drink alcohol, as well as consuming higher amounts. In the week previous to the survey, 64% of men had drunk alcohol, with over half (52%) drinking more than 4.67 units on their heaviest drinking day. In comparison, 53% of women had drunk alcohol in the previous week, with only 37% of those drinking more than 4.67 units on the heaviest day. Men were 3 times more likely to have drunk over 14 units on their heaviest drinking day, 12% of men compared with 4% of women.

3. Almost 1 in 5 higher earners drank alcohol on at least 5 days a week

Focusing on frequent drinkers, those who drink on at least 5 days of the week, individuals with an annual income of £40,000 and over were more than twice as likely (18%) to be frequent drinkers compared with those with an annual income less than £10,000 (8%).

Figure 2: Percentage of those who had drunk at least 5 days in the last week, by income, 2014

Great Britain



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Gross annual personal income includes all personal income before deductions for tax, National Insurance etc. It relates to income that is directly received (such as pay, benefits or interest from savings), and does not include income received through a third party (such as a spouse or partner).
2. The 'up to £9,999.99' group does not include those with no personal income.

Almost 4 out of every 5 people (78%) in the highest income band (income of £40,000 or more) said they had drunk alcohol in the last week and alcohol consumption generally falls as income falls. Almost 3 in 10 (29%) people in the lowest income band classed themselves as teetotal (that is, they do not drink alcohol at all), compared with less than 1 in 10 (9%) for the highest income band.

The difference in percentage of those who had drunk alcohol in the previous week could be due to the characteristics of those in each income group. For example, overall women were less likely to drink alcohol in the previous week than men, but they were also the majority (67%) of regular drinkers in the lowest income group. As the income bands rise, one sees the proportion of male drinkers rise and female drinkers fall. In the £40,000 and over income band, 77% of those who stated they had drunk alcohol in the last week were men.

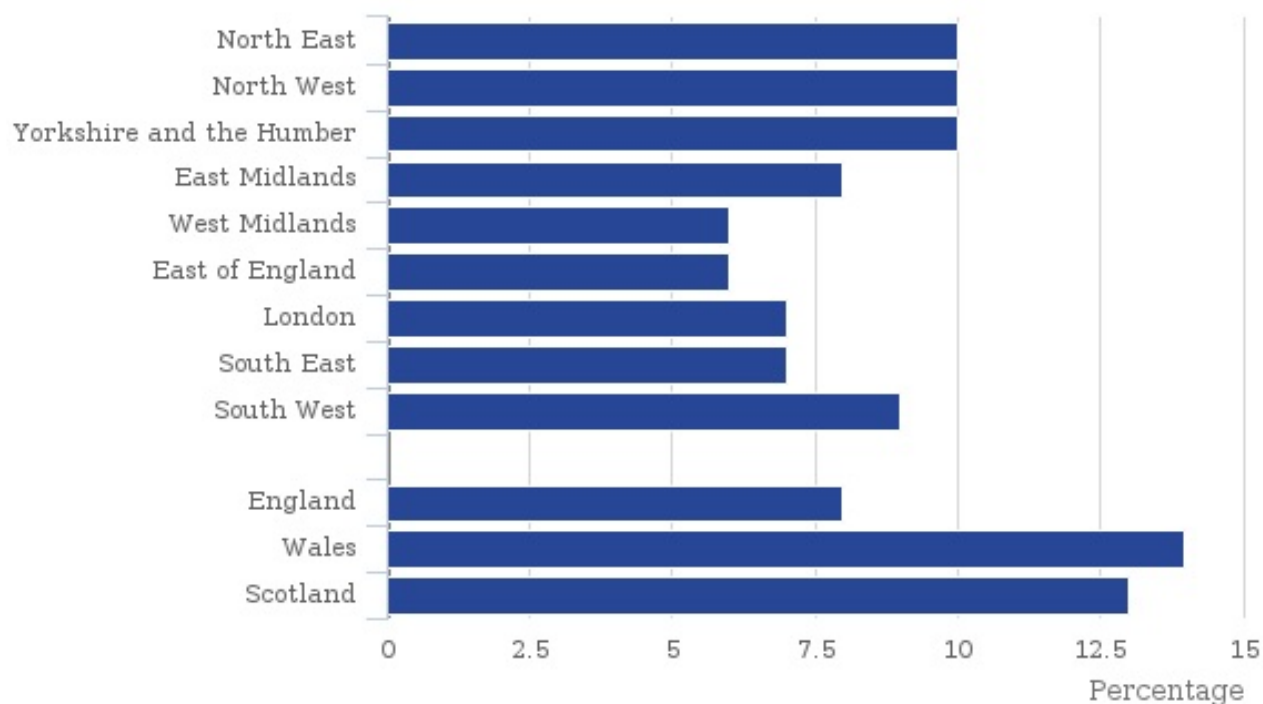
The age demographic of each income group may also partially explain the differences, as the higher income bands have a smaller amount of those aged 16 to 24, who are less likely to have drunk in the previous week. In each income group above £15,000, over 70% were aged between 25 and 64.

4. Higher percentage of drinkers in Wales and Scotland drink over the recommended weekly amount in one day

London had the lowest percentage of people who had drunk alcohol in the previous week (51%), followed by Wales (53%). The highest percentages were in the South East (62%) and the South West (62%). The percentage of people that had drunk their weekly limit in one day was highest for Wales (14%) and Scotland (13%). For each region in England, up to 1 in 10 people had drunk more than 14 units in one day.

Figure 3: Percentage of people stating they drank more than 14 units in one day, by region and country, 2014

Great Britain



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Office for National Statistics

Across the regions of England and countries of Great Britain, London is the only area where over a quarter of people described themselves as teetotal. The lowest percentage of teetotalers was in the South West, where only 17% of people stated that they did not drink at all.

Figure 4: Percentage of people stating they were teetotal by region and country, 2014

Great Britain



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Office for National Statistics

According to the 2011 Census, [London and West Midlands](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-ethnicity.html#tab-Ethnicity-across-the-English-regions-and-Wales) were the most ethnically diverse areas (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-ethnicity.html#tab-Ethnicity-across-the-English-regions-and-Wales>), and this could be a reason why these regions have the highest percentage of people stating they were teetotal. Those who classify themselves as White were more likely to report drinking in the previous week (61%) than other ethnic groups, while 7 in 10 people who stated they were Asian or Asian British were teetotal, compared with 16% of those who said they were White.

5. Wine is the most popular choice of alcohol

Just under half (47%) of people who had drunk alcohol in the week before interview chose to drink wine (including champagne) on their heaviest drinking day. This was followed by normal strength beer / stout / lager / cider (40%). The least popular drink was alcopops with less than 1%. Respondents of the survey were able to list more than one drink when asked what they chose to drink on their heaviest drinking day.

When analysing choice of alcohol by units consumed, the most popular choice of drink for those drinking up to 4.67 units was wine or champagne. The most popular drink for those who had drunk over 14 units on their heaviest drinking day was normal strength beer / stout / lager / cider.

6. Other characteristics of drinkers

The data that relates to the discussions in this bulletin can be found in the datasets. As well as the points discussed, there are also tables available on:

- Drinking frequency in the week before interview, by sex and age, Great Britain, 2005 to 2014
- Proportion of the population who drank the stated amounts of alcohol on their heaviest drinking day in the week before interview, by sex and age, Great Britain, 2005 to 2014
- Drinking habits and economic activity, Great Britain, 2014
- Drinking habits, by level of education, Great Britain, 2014
- Drinking habits by socio-economic classification, Great Britain, 2014
- Drinking habits by age and whether person lives alone, Great Britain, 2014
- Drinking habits, by sex and whether dependent children live in the household, Great Britain, 2014
- Drinking in pregnancy, Great Britain, 2014
- Drinking habits and cigarette smoking, Great Britain, 2014

7. Background information

On 8 January 2016, the government released new proposed [guidance on alcohol consumption \(https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/health-risks-from-alcohol-new-guidelines\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/health-risks-from-alcohol-new-guidelines). These guidelines recommend that adults do not regularly drink more than 14 units in a week, with these units being spread over at least 3 days. According to the [Drinkaware \(https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/what-is-alcohol/new-government-alcohol-unit-guidelines\)](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/what-is-alcohol/new-government-alcohol-unit-guidelines) website, 14 units of alcohol is the equivalent of 6 pints of 4% beer, 6 medium (175 millilitre) glasses of 13% wine or 14 standard measure (25 millilitre) glasses of a 40% spirit.

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey asks those who drank in the previous week how much they drank on their heaviest drinking day. For 2014, new tables were created in line with these guidelines. The unit breakdown has been broken down into the following categories:

Up to 4.67 units

This value is a third of the recommended weekly limit. This is the value you would drink if you drank 14 units spread evenly over three days.

More than 4.67 and up to 7 units

Evidence in the new guidelines suggests that the risk of accident or injury increases when drinking this amount of units over 3-6 hours.

More than 7 and up to 14 units

Up to the level that men and women are advised not to regularly drink in a week.

More than 14 units

The equivalent of drinking more than the low risk guidelines recommend for regular drinking in a week, in one day.

8. Background notes

1. The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

The data in this report were collected on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforhouseholdsandindividuals/householdandindividualsurveys/opinionsandlifestylesurveyopn>) - an omnibus survey run by the Office for National Statistics. The survey is run monthly and is open for both government and non-government organisations to run questions.

The OPN is currently the only randomised probability sample omnibus survey in Great Britain and provides a fast, reliable and flexible service to customers. More information on the survey and survey methodology can be found in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Information Guide (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/qmis/opinionsandlifestylesurveyqmi>).

2. How to commission a module on the survey

You can enquire about purchasing modules of questions by emailing the survey manager at opinions@ons.gsi.gov.uk.

3. Comparability

This report provides information on the alcohol consumption habits of adults in Great Britain, and follows on from the series of releases from the General Household Survey (GHS) and General Lifestyle Survey (GLF).

The OPN and GHS/GLF provide comparable results. However there are some differences in the design and content of the surveys. More information can be found in the 'Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Smoking Habits Amongst Adults, 2014 (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2014>)' publication.

In 2006, some changes were introduced to the methodology used to estimate alcohol consumption. The assumed number of units for "normal strength beer, stout, lager, or cider", "strong beer, stout, lager or cider" and "wine" categories changed. The 2005 estimates produced in this report have been recalculated and based on the same alcohol content assumptions as later estimates. The methodology for estimating wine consumption also changed in 2006. From 2006, respondents were asked about wine glass size, from a choice of small (125 millilitre), medium (175 millilitre) or large (250 millilitre). Previously it was assumed that 175 millilitre glasses had been used. The 2005 estimates do not, therefore, account for these potential differences in wine glass size.

4. Coherence

There are a number of other sources of alcohol consumption data. Some of these have been listed below, together with a brief explanation of their comparability with the OPN.

Health Survey for England (Health and Social Care Information Centre), Welsh Health Survey (Welsh government) and Scottish Health Survey (Scottish government)

There are some differences in the approach to data collection between these surveys. One difference is in the collection modes used to collect drinking data on these surveys.

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey collects data using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). This is the main method used on the Health Survey for England (HSE) and Scottish Health Survey (SHeS). However, on HSE and SHeS, paper booklets are used to collect alcohol consumption data for 16 and 17 year olds and in certain cases those aged 18 to 24 (18 to 19 for SHeS). The main collection mode for the Welsh Health Survey (WHS) is paper questionnaire.

Alcohol consumption data collected using CAPI tend to be lower than those using paper questionnaires. More information about these differences can be found in '[An Analysis of Mode Effects Using Data From the Health Survey for England 2006 and the Boost Survey for London](http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB05851/anal-mode-effe-data-heal-serv-eng-06-boos.pdf)' (<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB05851/anal-mode-effe-data-heal-serv-eng-06-boos.pdf>).

More information on each of these surveys, and the data collected, can be found on the [Health and Social Care Information Centre](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/external-links/other/adult-smoking-habits-in-great-britain/health-survey-for-england.html) (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/external-links/other/adult-smoking-habits-in-great-britain/health-survey-for-england.html>), [Welsh government](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/external-links/other/adult-smoking-habits-in-great-britain/welsh-health-survey.html) (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/external-links/other/adult-smoking-habits-in-great-britain/welsh-health-survey.html>) and [Scottish government](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/external-links/other/adult-smoking-habits-in-great-britain/scottish-health-survey.html) (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/external-links/other/adult-smoking-habits-in-great-britain/scottish-health-survey.html>) websites.

5. Reliability

It is likely that the estimates underestimate drinking levels to some extent. Social surveys consistently produce estimates of alcohol consumption that are lower than the levels indicated by alcohol sales data. This is likely to be because people either consciously or unconsciously underestimate their alcohol consumption.

6. Approach to statistical significance

Where estimates for different populations have been described as different throughout this commentary, they have been tested and found to be significantly different at 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).

95% confidence intervals for each table value have been supplied as a separate table. Where historical data have been provided, confidence intervals have been supplied for the last 2 years (2013 and 2014).

7. Assumed levels of alcohol in beverages

Table 1 shows the assumed number of units for each measure of each drink type collected on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

Table 1: Assumed alcohol content of drinks and measures collected on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Type of drink	Measure	Assumed units of alcohol
Normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider	Half-pint	1
Normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider	Pint	2
Normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider	Small can	1.5
Normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider	Large can	2
Normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider	Bottle	1.5
Normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider	Schooner	1.3 ¹
Strong beer, stout, lager or cider	Half-pint	2
Strong beer, stout, lager or cider	Pint	4
Strong beer, stout, lager or cider	Small can	2
Strong beer, stout, lager or cider	Large can	3
Strong beer, stout, lager or cider	Bottle	2
Strong beer, stout, lager or cider	Schooner	2.7 ²
Spirits or liqueurs	Standard 25ml measure	1
Sherry or martini	Glass	1
Wine (including champagne and babycham)	Small glass (125ml)	1.5

Wine (including champagne and babycham)	Medium glass (175ml)	2
Wine (including champagne and babycham)	Large glass (250ml)	3
Wine (including champagne and babycham)	Bottle	9
Wine (including champagne and babycham)	Unknown glass size	2
Alcopops	Small can	1.5
Alcopops	Standard bottle	1.5
Alcopops	Large bottle	3.5

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. A schooner is $\frac{2}{3}$ of a pint. When people said that they drank normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider in schooners, a value of $\frac{4}{3}$ (4 divided by 3) units was used for each schooner that was consumed.

2. A schooner is $\frac{2}{3}$ of a pint. When people said that they drank normal strength beer, stout, lager or cider in schooners, a value of $\frac{8}{3}$ (8 divided by 3) units was used for each schooner that was consumed

Contact details for this statistical bulletin

Sarah Caul

sarah.caul@ons.gov.uk

Telephone: +44 (0) 1633 456490

