

DRINKING PATTERNS IN THE UK

Definitions

- The UK government advises that men should not regularly drink more than three to four units of alcohol per day and adult women should not regularly drink more than two to three units per day¹.

Data on binge and excessive drinking

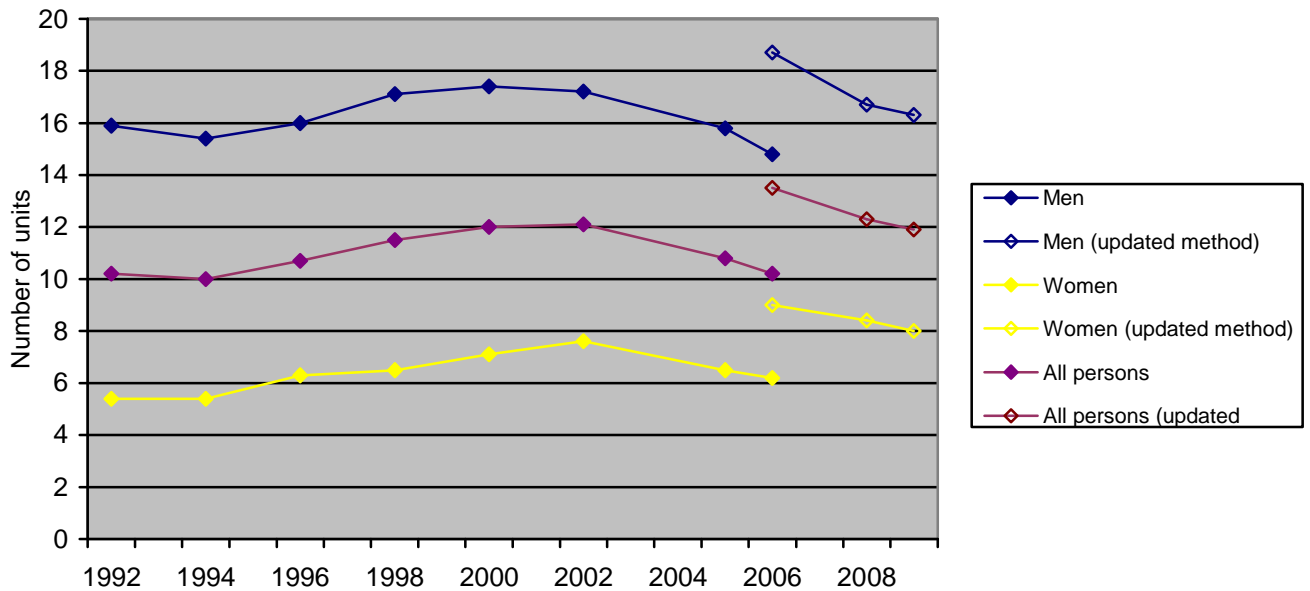
- The most reliable data on the extent of binge and excessive drinking in the UK is provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) through the General Lifestyle Survey (GLF).
- The GLS uses various measurements of alcohol consumption, including weekly consumption. It also measures the extent to which people drink more than twice the recommended daily maximum intake of alcohol.
- In 2006, in response to changes that had taken place over a number of years in the typical strength and size of serving of alcoholic drinks, the ONS updated its method of estimating alcohol consumption. The effect of this methodological change was to show an apparent sharp increase in drinking levels. For this reason, the ONS avoids direct comparisons between data obtained using the old method and data obtained using the new method.

Average weekly consumption

- The average level of weekly consumption in 2009 was 16.3 units for men and 8.0 units for women.
- The average number of units of alcohol consumed in a week rose steadily in the 1990s and achieved a peak of around 17 units for men and 7.5 units for women in the period 2000 to 2002. These levels fell to 14.8 units for men and 6.2 units for women in 2006. The revised methodology shows that the average number of units consumed is continuing to fall from 18.7 units for men and 9.0 for women in 2006 to 16.3 and 8.0 respectively in 2009.
- 68% of men and 54% of women say they have had a drink in the last seven days.

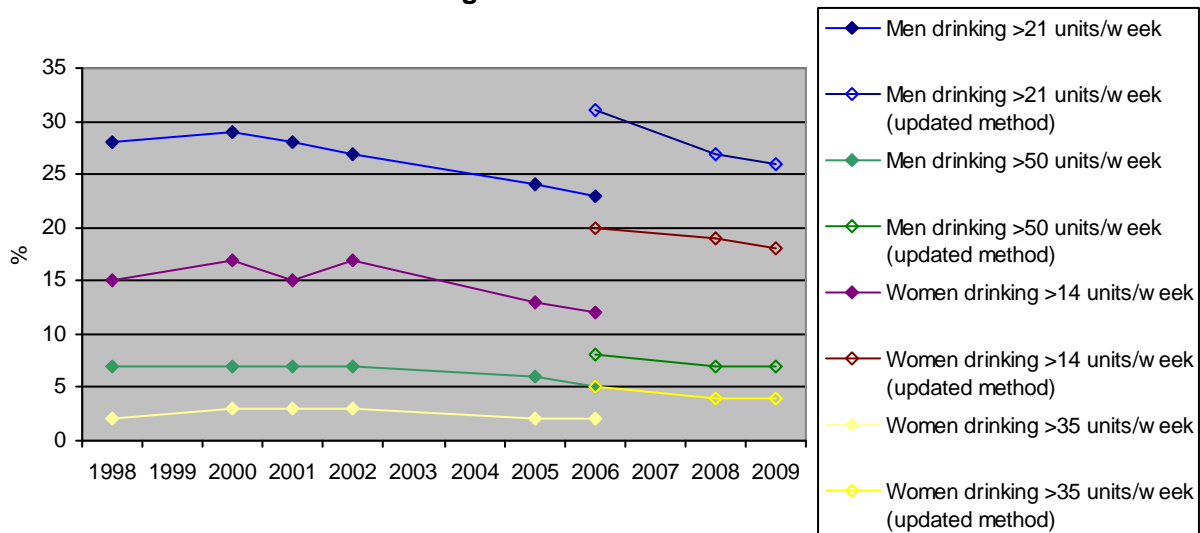
¹ For full information on responsible drinking, visit drinkware.co.uk

Fig 1 - Average weekly consumption, by sex: 1998 - 2009



Excessive weekly drinking

Fig 2 - Proportion of men exceeding 21/50 units/week and women exceeding 14/35 units/week - 1998-2009



- Some health professionals describe drinking levels of above 21 units a week by men and 14 units a week by women as “hazardous”; they further describe

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drinking levels of above 35 units a week by men and 21 units a week by women as “harmful”.

- Following an increase between 1998 and 2000, there has been a decline since 2002 in the proportion of both men drinking on average more than 21 units a week and women drinking more than 14 units.
- The proportion of men drinking more than 21 units a week on average fell from 29% in 2000 to 23% in 2006. This trend seems to be continuing under the revised methodology with a fall from 31% in 2006 to 26% in 2009.
- The proportion of women drinking more than 14 units a week fell from 17% in 2000 to 12% in 2006. Under the revised methodology there has been a fall from 20% in 2006 to 18% in 2009.
- Since 2000, there have also been falls in the proportion of men drinking more than 50 units a week and women drinking more than 35 units a week.
- The falls in the proportion of men and women drinking above these weekly thresholds have been most significant among the 16-24 age group.

Daily drinking

- The proportions of men drinking more than four units and women more than three units at least once in the previous seven days were fairly stable between 1998 and 2004 but then dropped between 2004 and 2006. This downward trend has continued under the revised methodology. The proportions drinking more than these amounts in 2009 are 37% of men and 29% of women.
- The proportion of men drinking more than twice the recommended daily maximum (i.e. more than eight units) on at least one day in the past week has followed a similar pattern (i.e. stable between 1998 and 2004 and in decline since then). It currently stands at 20%. There appears to be a similar downward trend in the proportion of women drinking heavily (more than six units) on at least one day in the past week. This fell from 10% in 2002 to 8% in 2006. Under the revised methodology it has fallen from 15% in 2006 to 13% in 2009,.