

# New research reveals surprising insight into British drinking culture

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New research into the UK's alcohol consumption has revealed a surprising picture of Britain's drinking culture.

The study by the University of Sheffield's Alcohol Research Group, funded by Alcohol Research UK, shows that while heavy drinking is still commonplace, much consumption is moderate and sociable.

Between 2009 and 2011, almost half (46 per cent) of drinking occasions in the UK involved moderate, relaxed drinking in the home. However, nine per cent involved drinking heavily at home with a partner.

The study, published online by the scientific journal *Addiction*, also confirmed that 'pre-drinking' is a typical feature of nights out for both young adults and older drinkers - and often involves heavy consumption.

A total of 10 per cent of all drinking occasions involved groups of friends moving between home and pub drinking and consuming on average 14 units of [alcohol](#) - the equivalent of seven pints of beer or one and a half bottles of wine. However, for many, going out with friends often involved drinking only low levels of alcohol.

In comparison, almost half of get-togethers with friends or family which take place exclusively at home, such as dinner parties, house parties and watching sport, involved increased or higher risk drinking.

Dr John Holmes, a Senior Research Fellow in the University of

Sheffield's Alcohol Research Group, who led the study, said: "Far from the stereotypes of binge Britain or a nation of pub-drinkers, we find that British [drinking culture](#) mixes relaxed routine home drinking with elements of excess.

"Young people do binge drink on big nights out but we also see heavy drinking among middle-aged couples relaxing at home and among all ages at domestic get-togethers."

The findings come from detailed drinking diaries completed by a representative sample of 90,000 adults as part of Kantar Worldpanel's Alcovision study. In addition to recording how much they drank, participants detailed where and when they consumed alcohol, who was there and why they were drinking.

The researchers based at the University of Sheffield's School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR) used the diaries to identify eight main types of drinking occasion.

Most of these involved drinking in the home and included; drinking at home alone (14 per cent of occasions), light drinking at home with family (13 per cent), light drinking at home with a partner (20 per cent) and [heavy drinking](#) at home with a partner (nine per cent).

Consuming alcohol away from home was less common and included going out for a few drinks with friends (11 per cent of occasions) and going out for a meal as a couple or with family (nine per cent). The study found 10 per cent of occasions involved drinking heavily at both [home](#) and the pub - whether through pre- or post-drinking during a night out.

Dr James Nicholls, Director of Research and Policy Development at Alcohol Research UK, said "The idea that there is a single British drinking culture is wrong. Drinking behaviours have changed

enormously over time, and there are wide variations within society.

"Rather than assuming society is neatly divided between 'binge', 'heavy' or 'moderate' drinkers we should think about the occasions on which people drink more or less heavily - and the fact we may be moderate in some contexts, and less so in others. If we want to address problems associated with [drinking](#), we need to recognise the diversity of how we drink and understand the crucial role that cultures and contexts play in that."

**More information:** Ally AK, Lovatt M, Meier PS, Brennan A, and Holmes J. (2016) Developing a social practice-based typology of British drinking culture in 2009-2011: Implications for alcohol policy analysis. *Addiction* [DOI: 10.1111/add.13397](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.13397)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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