

One in five people in England harmed by others' drinking over past year

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One in five people in England have been harmed in some way by others' drinking over the past year, suggest the results of the largest survey of its kind in the UK, published in the online journal *BMJ Open*.

Nearly one in 20 of them experienced aggression—physically threatened

or hurt, or forced/pressurised into something sexual, the findings indicate.

In 2012, alcohol was responsible for around 6 per cent of all deaths and 5 per cent of all ill health around the globe.

The [survey](#) of 5000 adults across England looked at the extent, type, and frequency of the harms associated with other people's drinking, who is most likely to be affected, as well as who and what might be driving it.

The researchers drew on an extended Alcohol Toolkit Survey (ATS), carried out between November 2015 and January 2016. The ATS is a nationally representative household survey, which includes a new sample of adults every month.

The extended survey included 18 additional questions on a wide range of potential harms associated with other people's drinking.

These ranged from actual or threatened [physical violence](#), through emotional hurt or neglect or having to care for someone whose drinking had resulted in illness/disability, to being kept awake at night because of associated noise and disruption.

Those who said they had been in any of these situations in the past 12 months were asked to say who had been responsible, and how often it had happened.

They were also asked how much they drank themselves, using a validated measure (AUDIT) which identifies levels of hazardous/harmful drinking.

Data were available for 4874 respondents. These showed that one in five (just over 20%; 980) people said they had experienced at least one of the

18 harms as a result of someone else's drinking over the past year.

The most commonly reported harm was being kept awake at night (8%) or feeling anxious/uncomfortable at a social occasion (nearly 7%). But around one in 20 (4.6%; 225) said they had experienced violence/aggression—physically threatened or hurt, or forced/pressurised into sex.

Men (5.3%) were slightly more likely than women (4%) to experience violence/aggression while women were around twice as likely as men to say they had experienced emotional harm/neglect (just under 5% vs just over 2%).

Friends (590) and strangers (578) were the most commonly cited perpetrators, accounting for around half (46%) of the reported incidents.

One in five (19%) respondents who reported having been forced or pressurised into something sexual, said this was at the hands of a stranger, but the most commonly cited perpetrator was a co-habiting partner (23%, rising to almost 40% when including partners who lived elsewhere).

While most harms were experienced less than monthly (75%), around 5 per cent were experienced daily or near daily.

The factors associated with experiencing harm were younger age (16-24); white British ethnicity; having qualifications; living in private rented accommodation, rather than being a home-owner; having a disability; and being a hazardous drinker.

Hazardous drinkers were more than twice as likely to report harm as a result of someone else's drinking (nearly 38%) than those whose drinking was not at this level (just over 17%).

People with children in the household and those who were retired were less likely to experience harm.

This is an observational and exploratory study, and as such, can't establish cause. What's more, the responses relied on recall, and some groups, such as the homeless, and those in hospital, care, or in prisons, weren't included—factors which might have affected the results, caution the researchers.

But they point out: "This is the largest ever survey of [alcohol-related harms to others] conducted within the UK, and the first national study in England."

They add: "It is clear that [alcohol-related harm to others] is relatively prevalent and that some individuals experience harm frequently. The most prevalent harms could be considered insignificant, but even apparently minor harms such as sleep disruption can have an impact on health and quality of life, particularly if experienced persistently."

And they conclude: "Policies that focus on alcohol must take into consideration the impact of [drinking](#) on those other than the drinker."

More information: Alcohol-related harm to others in England: a cross-sectional analysis of national survey data, *BMJ Open* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-021046](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-021046)

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