

## Environment & society Forum

### Seminar - Drinking spaces and places: Examining who drinks alcohol, where and why?

The Royal Geographical society held an interesting seminar entitled 'Drinking spaces and places, who drinks where and why' in February with a variety of speakers from different disciplines looking at the motivations, locations and trends regarding drinking alcohol in Britain.

#### Trends in binge drinking in the UK

Dr Nicola Shelton, from the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London looked at trends in binge drinking in the UK. Based on statistics from the Health Survey for England 1991-2008 which is a Cross sectional nationally representative data of 10,000 adults aged 16 and over.

Shelton noted three data changes within the period studied, a move from weekly guidelines to daily maximum units (2-3 units of 8g for women and 3-4 units for men) in 1997/8, a change in the estimation in the number of units in a glass of wine in surveys from 2006/7. A glass of wine is now regarded as 2 units rather than 1 to account for larger glass sizes and strength of average wines. As a result, this can make it appear in recent statistics as though women's consumption is rising post 2006, but when the figures are adjusted to account for the change in method, it is clear that the downwards trend for both male and female binge drinking continues.

There are regional variances, with higher levels of binge drinking in the North West for example and binge drinking increasing in the South West among men up until 2003. All other regions show a decline in binge drinking, which has continued to the present day, with notable declines in the South East among men for example.

Among women, where figures are up to date (2008), again there has been a marked decline in binge drinking, even allowing for the new wine unit increase, with the exception of the South West and East of England.

The data also shows, interestingly, that among those who do binge drink, among 20-30% (depending on sex and region) would like to drink less and just

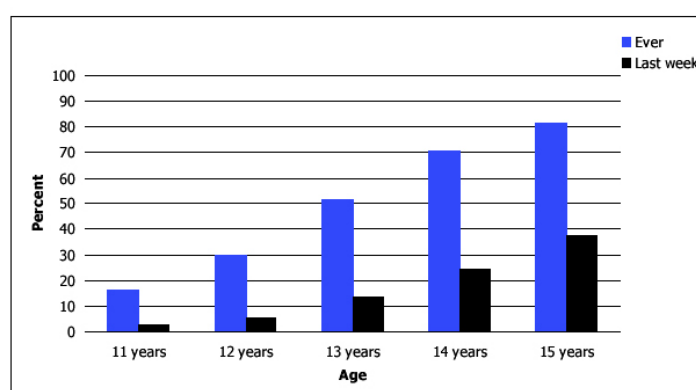
an average of 10% of those surveyed believed that getting drunk regularly was acceptable

#### Learning to drink: 11 to 15 year olds and alcohol

Elizabeth Fuller of the National Centre for Social Research presented data on the drinking behaviours of 11 to 15 year olds in Britain.

52% of 11 to 15 year olds have had at least one alcoholic drink, with a similar proportions of boys and girls. Unsurprisingly, the likelihood of drinking increase with age, from 16% of 11 year olds, 52% 13 year olds and 81% of 15 year olds having has a whole drink.

#### Experience of drinking alcohol by age



However, most have experienced their first drink in the family home under supervision. 18% drink alcohol in an average week (similar proportions of boys and girls), again hardly any 11 year olds drink weekly (3%), rising to 38% of 15 year olds. Less 11-15 year olds are drinking weekly, or have ever had an alcoholic drink than in 2001.

Those who do drink, do not do so every day, the median consumption is 8.5 units in a week

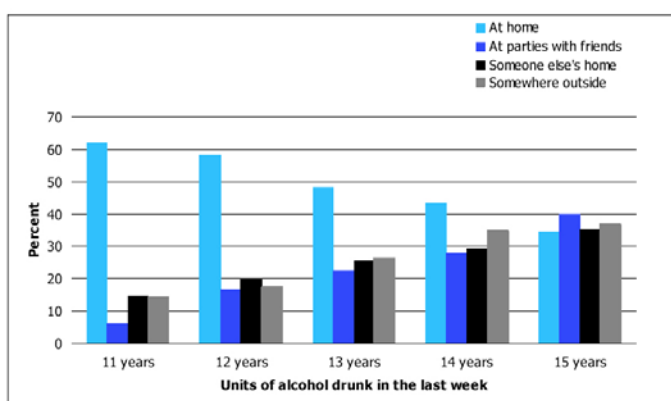
- Boys drink more than girls (9.8 units vs. 8.0 units)
- Again, consumption increases with age (11-13 year olds: 5.8 units; 15 year olds: 10.5 units)

**Drink preference**

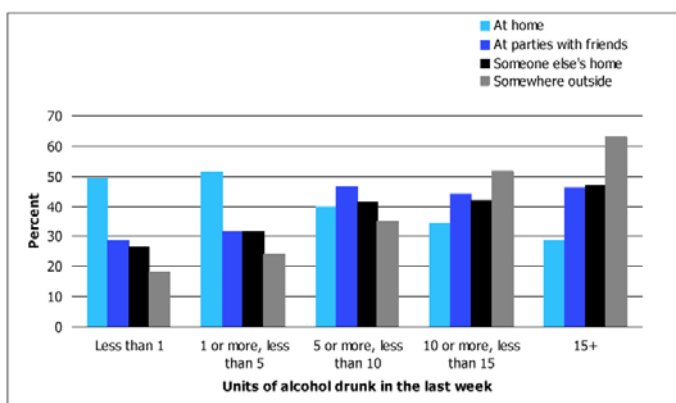
Amongst boys: 65% drank beer, lager or cider, 16% drank alco-pops and 11% spirits. Among girls, 35% drank beer or cider, 24% alco-pops, 20% wine and 19% spirits. Fewer teenagers drink weekly in London, due to a higher ethnic mix, this is termed ‘the London effect’ – with just 12% having drunk in last week. (average 18%).

Younger children are more likely to drink with parents (from 64% of 11 year old drinkers to 30% of 15 year old drinkers). Older children more likely to drink with friends (from 14% of 11 year olds to 69% of 15 year olds). 53% say families don’t mind as long as they don’t drink too much, attitudes change with age from 28% of 11 year olds parents allowing some drinking at home to 73% of 15 year olds Just 2% say families let them drink as much as they like.

**Where children usually drink, by age**



**Where children usually drink, by amount drunk in previous week**



**The protective effect of the family environment**

“Young people may suffer high levels of harm if they begin drinking in parks, streets or other unsupervised settings. In the home and other supervised settings, parents and carers can monitor the amounts of alcohol consumed.”

(Source: Donaldson L (2009) op cit, p.ix)

Amongst 11 –15 year olds who usually drink at home (and not out of doors)

- 36% said they had been drunk in the last four weeks
- 9% had vomited
- 3% had a fight
- 2% had trouble with the police
- <1% were taken to hospital

Among those who usually drink out of doors (and not at home)

- 82% said they had been drunk in the last four weeks
- 22% had vomited
- 9% had a fight
- 12% had trouble with the police
- 1% were taken to hospital

**Drinking out of doors**

So those who drank in unsupervised environments drank more, got drunk more often and engaged in other risk-taking behaviour and binge-style behaviour.

Hence the importance of family supervision, knowing where their children are and who they are with and providing a protective environment is of great importance to this age group in risk prevention regarding drinking.

**Regular drinking venues in the past 12 months, %**

	Total	Eden	Stoke
Home	72.9	72.5	73.3
Friends’/family’s houses	63.4	63.8	63
Pubs/bars	59.6	55.2	64.4
Restaurants	52.7	48.8	57.4
Hotels	28.2	26.2	30.4
Clubs	22.7	20.3	25.3

## Where people drink – from city centre to home

Professor Gill Valentine, from the School of Geography, at the University of Leeds presented findings commissioned by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation on how drinking location is moving from the on trade (restaurants, bars and clubs) to the home.

### The Urban environment

Professor Valentine asserts that patterns of drinking alcohol have been transformed over the last 30 years. Alongside, or in place of, traditional pubs and working men's clubs new corporate themed pubs, and hybrid café/bar/ club venues have emerged targeting a more diverse clientele including women, and students (Newburn and Shiner, 2001).

The report investigated the links between alcohol and where people drink it in two contrasting communities, one urban and one rural. The studies find that drinking cultures are not uniform across the country, but are embedded within wider historical, socio-economic and cultural contexts. The researchers identified clear differences in tolerance thresholds and expectations of appropriate behaviour between urban Stoke-on-Trent and rural Eden in Cumbria.

It also highlighted important differences in the ways that men and women drank also advise that alcohol strategies need to be nuanced to account for these gender differences.

These changes in the public consumption landscape have prompted concern about alcohol-fuelled disorder on the streets and led to conflict between night-life active groups and other residents as late-night venues have encroached upon traditional residential areas (Morgan, 1997; Jayne et al., 2006).

The involvement of police, health, education, and church bodies in addition to parties from the local drinks industry, local action groups and transport services aims to create a joined-up approach to crime and disorder reduction strategies. In this context, local authorities have sought to balance their entrepreneurial role with maintaining order by restricting the growth of drinking outlets, passing bye-laws to curb drinking on the streets and creating multi-agency teams to tackle disorder.

## Home consumption matters

The authors suggest that the health dangers of domestic drinking are being obscured by the public emphasis on the extremes of drunken behaviour on the streets rather than the normality of drinking at home.

Most respondents demonstrated a lack of awareness of the health risks of the high levels of alcohol which they consume at home. Home is also the space where young people increasingly learn to drink. Health promotion strategies must be specifically targeted for different social groups of drinkers, recommend the authors.

The authors conclude that different patterns of drinking, and attitudes to alcohol, are evident within different social groups (by age, gender and faith). Notably, young people ignore the potential health implications of their binge drinking because they justify it as a phase and so do not recognise the potential longer term risks of high levels of alcohol consumption.

Amongst older people there is a clear lack of awareness of alcohol content and the extent to which their domestic consumption might be defined as binge drinking. There are also important differences in the ways that men and women drink which indicate that alcohol strategies need to be nuanced to account for these gender differences.

The hidden levels of drinking found within Muslim communities suggest that there is a need for service providers to develop initiatives to reach problem-drinkers within communities where these issues are not publicly acknowledged.

### Urban regeneration for whom?

Finally the paper calls for strategies to revitalise the night-time economies of urban areas that are predicated on alcohol which therefore implicitly exclude faith communities, such as Muslims (who do not drink openly), and thus are potentially contributing to social segregation.

PDF copies of the presentations are available from <http://www.rgs.org/WhatsOn/ConferencesAndSeminars/Environment+And+Society+Forum.htm>