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Coverage

United Kingdom

Theme

Health and Care

ONS updates alcohol survey methodology

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is to update the methods it uses to estimate alcohol consumption in drinking surveys, reflecting increases in the alcoholic strength of some drinks and the measures in which they are served.

The changes, which are set out in a report published by ONS today, relate mainly to wine consumption but also update estimates of the alcoholic strengths of beers, lagers and ciders.

Recent years have seen an increase in the availability of stronger wines, especially those from the New World, while wine glasses larger than the 'traditional' 125ml are increasingly popular in licensed premises.

Reflecting this, ONS surveys will in future include a question relating to wine glass size, while at the same time the presumed alcoholic content of an 'average' glass of wine will be increased. Improved estimates for beers, lagers and ciders will also be introduced.

While not reflecting a real change in individuals' drinking habits, the updates produce higher overall estimates of average weekly alcohol consumption. Applied to General Household Survey data for 2005, the updated methodology shows average weekly alcohol consumption as approximately one-third higher, up from 10.8 units to 14.3 units.

The first full results using the updated methodology will be available with the publication of the annual reports from the 2006 General Household Survey and the 2007 ONS Omnibus survey on 22 January 2008. The methodology will also be applied to the 2006 Health Survey for England report, published by the Information Centre for health and social care in late January 2008.

Issued by
National Statistics
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone
Press Office 020 7533 5706
Email press.office@ons.gsi.gov.uk
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Statistician
Eileen Goddard 01633 455 703

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The ONS report 'Estimating alcohol consumption from survey data: updated method of converting volumes to units' can be found at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=15067>
2. Development work on the report was carried out by ONS in consultation with the Department of Health and the Information Centre for health and social care.
3. The updated methodology will be applied to three surveys. The General Household Survey is a continuous multipurpose annual survey carried out by ONS that collects information on a range of topics from people living in private households in Great Britain. The ONS Omnibus Survey is a multipurpose survey developed by the ONS to be a fast, cost-effective and reliable way of obtaining information on a variety of topics too brief to warrant surveys of their own. A third survey, the Health Survey for England, is an annual survey designed to monitor the health of the population of England.
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the Press Office.
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