

9 December 2004

Coverage

Great Britain

Theme

Health and Care

Eight in 10 adults aware of alcohol units

Eighty three per cent of people in a survey of drinking behaviour and knowledge in 2004 said that they had heard of measuring alcohol consumption in units, according to a report* from the Office for National Statistics. This was similar to the 81 per cent who were aware of units in 2002, but higher than the 1998 figure of 75 per cent.

Fifty six per cent of those who had drunk beer in the last year knew that a unit of beer is half a pint but nearly one in five gave an amount that was wrong.

Knowledge of units among both men and women had increased between 1998 and 2004: for example, the proportion of men who knew that a unit of beer is half a pint increased from 49 per cent in 1997 to 59 per cent in 2004. Similarly, the proportion of women who drank wine who knew that a unit of wine is a glass increased from 51 per cent in 1998 to 66 per cent in 2004.

Drinkers who had heard of units were asked whether they kept a check on the number of units they drank: 13 per cent said that they had (similar to the 2002 figure of 11 per cent).

Nearly a third (31 per cent) of drinkers who had heard of units had seen unit labelling on alcohol, an increase from 23 per cent in 2000.

This report is the fifth presenting results from questions about drinking which were included on the ONS Omnibus survey at the request of the Department of Health. The questions were asked of 3,528 adults aged 16 and over in February and March 2004. This report looks at changes over the period 1997 to 2004.

****Drinking: Adults' Behaviour and Knowledge in 2004***
Series OS no.26. ISBN 1 85774 589 2.

Available free on the National Statistics website:
www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6990

Issued by
National Statistics
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone
Press Office 020 7533 5702
Email press.office@ons.gov.uk
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Statistician
Sandra Short 020 7533 5933
Email sandra.short@ons.gov.uk

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk

Other key findings from the survey include:

Knowledge of daily benchmarks

There has been an increase from 54 per cent in 1997 to 61 per cent in 2004 in the proportion of the sample who had heard of daily benchmarks (see background note 1). There was no difference between men and women.

Having heard of daily recommended levels did not necessarily mean that people knew what they were - 14 per cent thought that the recommended daily maximum for men was 5 units or more, and 10 per cent thought that for women, it was 4 units or more. There was no change in the knowledge of benchmark levels over the survey years.

About one male drinker in ten (11 per cent) had discussed drinking in the last year with their GP or someone else at the surgery, or a doctor or other medical person elsewhere. Women were less likely to have had discussions (only 8 per cent had done so). There was no change since 2000.

Awareness of unit labelling

The most frequently mentioned outlet where unit labelling had been seen was a supermarket or shop (71 per cent). Pubs were mentioned by a fifth, an increase since 2000 when 16 per cent said they had seen unit labelling in pubs. One in eight (12 per cent) mentioned off-licences, 6 per cent mentioned restaurants and 4 per cent nightclubs.

Places where people buy alcohol

The outlets where people were most likely to have bought alcohol in the last year were supermarkets (70 per cent), licensed bars (66 per cent) and restaurants (61 per cent).

The percentage of respondents who had bought alcohol from an off-licence or from a licensed bar in the past year fell between 1998 and 2004. Purchases from a restaurant increased from 57 per cent to 61 per cent over the same time period. The percentages for purchases from a branch of a supermarket or from other retail outlets were very similar to those found in previous survey years.

Men were nearly twice as likely as women to have bought alcohol from a bar in the past week either for themselves or others to drink (38 per cent compared with 22 per cent) and twice as likely to have bought alcohol from an off-licence (8 per cent compared with 4 per cent).

There was no difference overall in the proportions of men and women who had bought alcohol at a supermarket in the previous week: 26 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women had done so.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. Current government advice on drinking is that for men, consistently drinking 4 or more units a day is not recommended; for women, the equivalent amount is 3 units a day. These recommended maximum amounts are referred to in the report as daily benchmarks.
2. The Omnibus Survey is a multi-purpose survey carried out by the ONS most months on behalf of a range of government departments and other public and non-profit making bodies.
3. Differences cited in the text are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) unless otherwise stated.
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
5. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2004.