**Irish Alcohol Diaries 2013: New figures reveal 75% of alcohol is consumed as part of binge session**

New figures published today by the Health Research Board confirm that Irish drinking patterns are harmful and almost one in fourteen drinkers meet criteria for dependent drinking. The figures were captured as part of the first National Alcohol Diary Survey involving almost 6,000 people, aged 18-75 years, across Ireland during 2013.

According to Dr Graham Love, Chief Executive at the Health Research Board,

“*The amount we drink and the way we drink determine alcohol-related harm. We are still consuming alcohol far above the HSE recommended low-risk levels. But what this report really shines a light on is the pattern of harmful drinking which raises serious concerns for public health. Based on the figures in the report, more than 150,000 people are dependent drinkers, more than a 1.35 million are harmful drinkers and 30% of people interviewed say that they experienced some form of harm as a result of their own drinking.”*

*“The report also reveals we underestimate what we drink by about 60%. If this is the case, the situation is much worse than what has been presented in this report*.”

**Headline findings**

* 75% of all alcohol consumed was done so as part of a binge drinking session.
* One in five (21.1%) drinkers engaged in binge drinking at least once a week.
* Almost two thirds (64.3%) of 18-24 year-olds drinkers who participated in the survey consumed six or more standard drinks\* on a typical drinking session in the last year, for example three or more pints of beer, six or more pub measures of spirits or more than 600mls of wine (a regular bottle is 750mls).
* More than half (54%) of 18-75 year old drinkers were classified as harmful drinkers which equates to 1.35 million harmful drinkers in Ireland.
* One third (33%) of men and more than one fifth (23%) of women who consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey consumed more than the HSE low risk drinking guidelines of 16.8 standard drinks for men and 11.2 standard drinks for women.
* One in eight (13%) men and almost one in ten (9%) women drank their recommended weekly guidelines in one sitting in the week prior to the survey. Among 18-24 year-olds, 28% of men and 22% of women consume weekly guidelines in one sitting.
* When figures are applied to the population of drinkers: -
  + We spent more than €50.6 million was spent on alcohol in the week prior to the study;
  + 3,230 work-or-study years were lost through alcohol related illness in the year prior to the study.
* In the week prior to the survey 43% of standard drinks are consumed at home, 42% in a pub/nightclub and 10% in restaurant or hotel.
* 64% of men and 51% of women started drinking before the legal age of 18.
* Monthly binge drinking most common among 18-24 year old age group (at 60%).
* Harmful drinking is highest among 18-24 year old age group (at 75%).
* Dependent drinking is highest among 18-24 year old age group (at 15%).
* 21% of 18-75 year olds did not consume alcohol in previous 12 months.

*“This is the first time we have had such robust, detailed evidence on Irish people’s drinking habits. What is clear is we need to alter people’s perceptions of their drinking. The report shows people who defined themselves as ‘light or moderate drinkers’ actually drank six or more standard drinks in a typical drinking occasion, which is binge drinking,” says Dr Jean Long, Head of the Evidence Centre at the Health Research Board and co-author of the report. “Because it is considered normal behaviour to consume high quantities in a single session, people don’t realise they are drinking in a harmful way.”*

Dr Deirdre Mongan, research officer at the HRB and co-author of the report says,

*“It is hoped that the recent Public Health Alcohol Bill, which includes an extensive range of evidence-based measures to deal with alcohol use, will help reduce overall consumption to low risk levels and tackle the harmful drinking patterns we are seeing in this report.”*

A themed summary of the report is included below.

A copy of the report, *Alcohol Consumption in Ireland 2013: an analysis of a national alcohol diary survey,* is available on our website [www.hrb.ie/publications](http://www.hrb.ie/publications)

**ENDS**

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*Notes to editors*

*\* One standard drink equates to half a pint of beer, 100mls of wine or a pub measure of spirits.*

**Alcohol Consumption in Ireland 2013: Analysis of a national alcohol diary survey**

**Summary**

**Rationale and methods**

The main objective of the National Alcohol Diary Survey was to estimate personal consumption of, and expenditure on, alcohol among the general population aged 18–75 years living in private households in Ireland. The survey included a comprehensive series of questions on both the rates and patterns of alcohol consumption in Ireland and on alcohol related harm, and it involved interviewing 5,991 respondents in 3,897 households. The respondents were randomly selected using a two-stage probability sampling procedure. The survey was completed between July and October 2013, and achieved a household response rate of 67.2% and a within-household response rate of 77.1%. The survey population was weighted by age, gender and regional distribution, to ensure that the survey population mirrored the Central Statistics Office’s population estimates for 2013.

**General alcohol consumption patterns – key findings**

* The rate of abstinence, defined as consuming no alcohol in the previous 12 months, was 20.6% (95% confidence interval, CI, 19.2%–22.1%) among 18–75-year olds.
* Almost two-thirds (63.9%) of males and half (51.4%) of females started drinking alcohol before the age of 18 years.
* 77% (4,647) of respondents consumed alcohol in the 12 months prior to the survey and 69% (3,187) of drinkers consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey.
* Just over one-quarter (26.1%) of drinkers reported consuming one to two standard drinks per drinking occasion, which is less than the 30% of drinkers in the 2007 SLÁN survey. One to two standard drinks amounts to 10–20g of pure alcohol (and equates with one-half or one pint of beer, one to two pub measures of spirits, or 100 to 200ml of wine) and is within the HSE’s recommended low-risk daily alcohol consumption limits.
* Almost one-quarter (24.1%) of drinkers aged 18–24 years consumed alcohol at least twice weekly and 64.3% consumed six or more standard drinks (which equates with 60g of alcohol or more, for example, three or more pints of beer, six or more pub measures of spirits, or 600ml or more of wine) on a typical drinking occasion. This equates with the criteria for risky single-occasion drinking or binge drinking.
* The vast majority, two-in-three (66.8%) drinkers and four-in-five (80.3%) male drinkers, consumed six or more standard drinks on the occasion that they consumed the highest number of standard drinks in the last year.

**Alcohol consumption patterns in the week prior to the survey**

* 69% (n=3,187) of those who consumed alcohol in the last year drank in the week prior to this survey.
* One-third of male drinkers and over one-fifth (22.8%) of female drinkers, who consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey, drank more than the HSE’s recommended low-risk weekly drinking guidelines (i.e., more than 16.8 standard drinks per week for men and 11.2 standard drinks for women). This measure was highest in the 18–24 years age group, with 43.8% of young men and 39.0% of young women drinking more than the recommended weekly guidelines.
* One-in-eight (12.9%) men and one-in-ten (9.1%) women consumed more than the recommended weekly guidelines in a single day in the week prior to the survey. This measure was, once again, highest in the 18–24 years age group, with one-in-four (27.9%) young men and one-in-five (22.5%) young women drinking more than the recommended weekly guidelines in a single day.
* Beer was the most common type of alcohol consumed by men of all age groups (76.7%), wine was the most common type of alcohol consumed by women aged over 25 years (58.9%), and spirits were the most common type of alcohol consumed by young women aged 18–24 years (59.9%). Cider was consumed by more than one-in-five young adults (22.5%).
* The preferred drinking venues for people aged over 25 years in the week prior to the survey was at their own or someone else’s home (60–69%), while pubs, bars or nightclubs were the preferred venues for young people (72.3%).
* More people drank on the weekend days (Friday to Sunday) than on the weekdays (Monday to Thursday) and the same trend was observed for men and women and all age groups.
* The highest number of standard drinks were consumed at home (17,646, 42.7%), followed closely by the number of standard drinks consumed in a pub, nightclub or disco bar (17,251, 41.7%). A smaller number of standard drinks were consumed in a hotel or restaurant (4,313, 10.4%).
* Almost 6% of people drank alone during the week prior to the survey; 7% of men and 4.6% of women drank alone. The proportion who drank alone increased incrementally with age, with 1.8% of 18–24-year-olds drinking alone compared to 11.8% of 65–75-year-olds.

**Expenditure on alcohol in the week prior to the survey**

* In total, €96,267 was spent by survey respondents on alcohol in the week prior to the survey. The average price of a standard drink was €2.91. The survey respondents represent 0.19% of the adult population aged 18–75 years, and when this experience is applied to the adult population in Ireland, the spend was approximately €50,667,111 in a single week.
* One-in-eight (12.1%) people who consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey spent €60 or more on alcohol in that week.
* Just below 60% of expenditure was spent in on-trade facilities and 35% was spent in off-trade facilities.
* The average price of a standard drink is highest in hotels or restaurants (at €4.58) and lowest at home or in someone else’s home (at €2.76).

*These self-reported prices do not include alcohol consumed by others; rather they include alcohol purchased by the respondent, which may explain the high price of each standard drink consumed at home.*

**Harmful and dependent alcohol consumption in the year prior to the survey**

* Almost two-fifths (37.3%) of all respondents consumed six or more standard drinks on a single occasion one or more times a month in the last year; this practice is known as risky single-occasion drinking (RSOD) or binge drinking.
* One-in-five (21.1%) drinkers engaged in binge drinking at least once a week.
* Monthly binge drinking was most common among males aged 18–24 years (67.8%) and least common among women aged 65–75 years (5.2%).
* More than half (54.3%, 95% CI 52.5–56.1) of 18–75-year-old drinkers were classified as harmful drinkers using the World Health Organization’s AUDIT-C screening tool. When the proportion of survey respondents classified as harmful drinkers is applied to the population, it indicates that there were between 1.3 and 1.4 million harmful drinkers in Ireland in 2013.
* Among Irish drinkers aged 18–75 years, 6.9% (95% CI 6.0–7.9) scored positive for dependence using the DSM–IV criteria, which is a set of criteria for measuring dependence and is the gold standard for identifying dependence in a clinical setting. This indicates that there were somewhere between 149,300 and 203,897 dependent drinkers aged 18–75 years in Ireland in 2013.
* Dependence was most common in 18–24-year-olds (14.7%) and least common among 65–75-year-olds (2.2%)

**Harm to self and others in the year prior to the survey as a result of alcohol consumption**

* The overall prevalence of drinkers experiencing at least one of the eight harms as a result of their own alcohol use was 29.9%, with men 1.5 times more likely than women to report harms (men 35.7%, women 24.1%).
* The overall prevalence of experiencing at least one of the five harms as a result of someone else’s alcohol use was 17.1% (men 18% and women 15.6%).

**Effect of alcohol on work and study**

* The 3,276 respondents who work or are in education missed 1,083 days of work or study due to alcohol-related illness in the 12 months prior to the survey (which equates to 4.5 person work- or study-years). When the proportion of work- or study-days missed is applied to the total working and student population in Ireland, 736,486 work or study days or 3,230 work- or study-years were likely to have been lost in 2013.
* Of the 442 people who said they were unemployed at the time of the survey, six (1.4%) reported that they lost their job as a result of their alcohol consumption. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) reported that 391,507 people were on the Live Register at the end of November 2013, and when the experience among this representative sample is applied to the unemployed population, it is possible that 5,315 people on the Live Register in November 2013 lost their job due to alcohol use.

**Own perception of alcohol consumption pattern**

* The respondents were asked to classify their own drinking behaviour. A small proportion of respondents (2.1%) classified themselves as heavy drinkers who may or may not binge drink, while 39.6% classified themselves as moderate drinkers who may or may not binge drink, and 58.3% classified themselves as light drinkers who may or may not binge drink.
* When the self-perception assessment was cross-tabulated with the self-reported alcohol consumption on a typical drinking occasion, it was noted that one-in-five self-defined ‘light drinkers who do not binge drink’ and half of the self-defined ‘moderate drinkers who do not binge drink’ actually do so on a typical drinking occasion without realising it.

**Conclusion**

In the survey 75% of the alcohol consumed was done so as part of a binge drinking session. Given the proportions of drinkers whose reported consumption of alcohol meets the international criteria for harmful drinking (including binge drinking and the consumption of weekly limits on a single occasion) or dependent drinking, it may be concluded that we, in Ireland, consume alcohol in an unhealthy pattern. In addition, a considerable proportion of ‘self-defined light or moderate drinkers’ drink 60g or more of alcohol on a typical drinking occasion (equivalent to binge drinking) and do not realise that they consume alcohol in an unhealthy manner. The above findings lead to the conclusion that harmful drinking is the norm in Ireland, in particular for men and women under 35 years.

The reported amount of alcohol consumed by the survey population in the year prior to the survey, when multiplied to include the entire adult population, indicated that adults in Ireland consumed 4.2 litres of alcohol per person over 18 years. However, Revenue’s provisional figures for 2013 indicate that 10.6 litres of alcohol per capita were sold in Ireland, which implies that Irish people reported 39% of their alcohol consumption, which is a considerable underestimate of total consumption.