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The growing trend of home-based drinking among adults in Ireland: evidence from the Barometer

Introduction

The Barometer has now been conducted by Ipsos B&A on behalf of Drinkaware on nine different occasions over the last eight years, namely January 2017, June 2017, January 2018, April 2019, April 2020, May 2021, June 2022, July 2023 and July 2024. We also conducted a Drinkaware Index in conjunction with Ipsos B&A in 2018 that comprehensively analysed hazardous drinking in Ireland, this was published in May 2019. Pre-COVID-19 data is important in highlighting factors that precede changes in drinking patterns. Collectively, extensive data gathered since the commencement of the Barometer series in 2017 allows for an annual examination of drinking practices over time and how they relate to other practices in daily life. However, we cannot examine alcohol in isolation as there is a multi-dimensional aspect to both society's and/or people's relationship with alcohol. There are multiple powerful social, economic, and environmental determinants of alcohol usage/experience. This study, therefore, also examines the 'wider picture' in which adults experience 2024, e.g., stress/tension, mental health, household dynamics, as well as the behaviour of other adults.

Following the planning phase and decisions regarding specific questioning, in June 2024, Drinkaware commissioned Ipsos B&A to undertake its latest in the series of national surveys - Barometers - examining Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol. The objective of this specific study was to examine Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol in the unique context of 2024. This study also sought to examine some of the key determinants of the public's attitudes and behaviours regarding alcohol, and the 'wider picture' of adults' experiences in Ireland in 2024 e.g., post COVID-19 pandemic, current cost of living crisis stress/tension, mental health, economic impact, household dynamics as well as the behaviour of other adults. Ultimately, the main objectives of the research were to understand the *who, what, where, when, how and why* of drinking among adults in Ireland in 2024.

A quantitative research design was employed. A quota-controlled sampling procedure was utilised to deliver a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+ (n = 1,045).

Online surveys were conducted between July and August 2024. Information gathered was broken down further by both age cohort (18-24 years, 25-34 years, 35-49 years, 50-64 years, 65+years) and life stage (single <45, single 45+, pre-family, family pre-school, family pre-teen, family teen, empty nester) allowing for further examination of the impacts for different age and household types in the unique context of post COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Questionnaire design incorporated internationally recognised question models including:

- AUDIT-C (Babor et al. 2001)

- Drinking Motive Questionnaire: Revised Short Form (DMQ-R SF) (Kuntsche & Kuntsche, 2009)
- Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009)

The focus of this paper is to provide an outline of the specific findings relating to the **focus on the Centrality of Home as a place for drinking alcohol identified in the Barometer series**. This paper will document who, how much and why adults drink alcohol at home but also some potentially worrying trends, with momentum building in recent years. We recently published a summary paper focused on the positive [patterns](#) identified in the Barometer series. Earlier this year we also published a [summary research paper](#) focused on public knowledge regarding the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines. Last year, we published a comprehensive paper that provided a detailed overview of the findings from the [2023 Barometer](#) as well as summary paper focusing specifically on [Wellbeing](#). We previously conducted a [qualitative piece of research focused on understanding home drinking](#) in 2019 and the findings of this study provided important evidence on the pre COVID-19 context.

Findings:

This paper will focus on the place/centrality of home drinking as identified in the Barometer. This encompasses where drinking alcohol takes place, by who, why, how much, as well as potentially worrying trends and moderation techniques used.

Where:

- Over half of adults that drink (57%) state that how/when/where they consume alcohol has changed in recent years and this peaks among those that report increased consumption in the past 12 months (69%).
- 45% of adult drinkers agree that they are more likely to drink at home in past 12 months (38% in 2023), this increases to 51% among weekly+ drinkers and 61% for those who reported increased alcohol consumption in the past 12 months.
- In addition, 45% of adults that drink in 2024 say that they spend more money on alcohol for consumption at home than on alcohol in pubs and restaurants (peaking among those aged 50-64 years and weekly+ drinkers, both at 53% respectively). This question was not asked in 2023, so there is no year-on-year comparison available.
- Participants were provided with a list of options in 2024 and asked how often they would purchase alcohol in each of the following locations. The responses given provide insight into the prominence of home drinking as outlined in Table 1 below. Supermarkets dominate as a location for purchasing alcohol, especially among weekly drinkers with 36% of this cohort doing so at least once a week. 24% of weekly drinkers report purchasing alcohol in pubs/restaurants at least once a week. When online orders and any home delivery are combined, 8% of weekly drinkers report purchasing by either/both these options once a week.

Table 1: Location of purchase of alcohol 2024 (Base all adults, n=1,045)

LOCATION	2024 AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK	2024 WEEKLY DRINKERS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK
SUPERMARKETS	24%	36%
PUBS/RESTAURANTS	14%	24%
CONVENIENCE STORE	8%	11%
OFF LICENSE	5%	7%
FUEL FORECOURTS	3%	4%
ONLINE (INCLUDING DELIVERY	3%	4%
ANY HOME DELIVERY (EXCLUDING ONLINE ORDERS)	3%	4%

How:

- In terms of occasions where alcohol is consumed, participants were provided with a number of options and asked how often, in the past 30 days, have they drank alcohol on occasions similar to those outlined in the list provided (see Table 2 below).
- The pattern of recent occasions is largely stable year on year, however, there has been a steady increase in drinking at home incidents.
- The top 3 occasions (at least once a week) reported in 2024 demonstrate the centrality of home as a place for consuming alcohol plus the normalising of drinking at home alone.
- In 2024, 'drinking at home alone' is the most common drinking occasion at 32%, followed by 'a small number of drinks at home with family/housemates over mealtimes' (30%) and 'a small number of drinks at home with partner/housemate not including mealtimes' (27%).
- In terms of 'drinking at home alone', there is a higher prevalence reported among adults living in urban areas (36%) compared with those living in rural areas (24%). There are also a number of statistically significant peaks. For instance, weekly+ drinkers are more likely to report drinking at home alone with 41% doing so. 38% of those who report any binge drinking also report drinking at home alone. There is also a peak among adults with an AUDIT-C¹ 5+ score (41%), those who have increased consumption in the past 12 months (54%), as well as adults who report a low mental wellbeing score (39%). Adults that drink at home alone at least once a week are also more likely to report that they would like to drink alcohol less often (44%).
- In contrast to higher levels of home drinking occasions reported, 18% of adults who drink report going out for drinks at least once a week in 2024 (such as meeting in a pub, restaurant, sports club, night club - any social event or after work) with no

¹ The AUDIT tool, developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Babor et al 2001), is used to measure an individual's level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns. The AUDIT-C was completed in the Barometer 2024 based on consumption in the last 30 days. It is a modified, three question version of the AUDIT instrument used to provide a measure of consumption only. A score of less than 5 indicates lower risk drinking and scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking.

drinking at home. Going out for drinks peaks among men (24%), as well as young adults (30% for both 18-24 and 25-34-year-olds). There are also statistically significant peaks among weekly drinkers (22%), any binge (25%), increased consumption (35%) and Audit-C 5+ scores (26%).

Table 2: Drinking Occasions past 30 days, at least once a week 2024 (n=864) and 2023 (n=838)

	2024	2023
Drinking at home alone	32%	32%
A small number of drinks at home with the family/ housemates over mealtimes/ dinner	30%	33%
A small number of drinks at home with a partner/ housemate during the day or evening (not including over mealtimes/ dinner	27%	29%
Several drinks at home with a partner/ housemate during the day or evening (maybe 1 to 3 hours)	20%	21%
Going out for drinks with friends, with no drinking at home (meeting people in pub, restaurant, sports club, night club - this can include after any social event or after work)	18%	18%
When children are in bed/ house is quiet*	16%	22%
Going out for a meal (including with a partner, family, or friends)	14%	14%
Mix of home drinking by yourself/ with others - and then night out with friends (a few different venues for a whole evening)	10%	11%
Drinking in family/ friends' houses (inside or outside)	9%	11%
Drinking with others outdoors/ in gardens/ parks/ festivals or concerts	7%	8%
Going out for a drink alone	6%	8%

**Only asked to parents (n=479 in 2024)*

Why:

The Drinking Motive Questionnaire: Revised Short Form (DMQ-R SF) (Kuntsche & Kuntsche, 2009) consists of 12 motivations for drinking and a five-point response scale. An individual's responses are used to determine the extent to which they drink for social reasons (e.g. to improve parties and celebrations), enhancement reasons (e.g. because they like the feeling), conformity (e.g. to be liked), or coping reasons (e.g. to improve a bad mood). This measure was included in the survey to enable responses to be analysed according to the different motivations.

While the findings from this questionnaire do not give home specific details, it does provide important data on the reasons why adults are drinking and in so doing indicators of potentially worrying drinking practices, if taking place at home (and drinking alone as above).

From 2020 to 2023 a slightly revised version of DMQ was used to reflect the unique 'lockdown' circumstances. In 2024, the original version was used making the results directly comparable to pre-COVID-19 but not to 2020-2023. Overall, the comparisons of motivations in 2024 versus 2018 (pre-COVID-19) show a similar basic ranking. However, the prevalence of multiple motivations has reduced across time - most particularly those related to 'fun',

‘parties’, ‘celebrations’ and ‘fitting in’. The strongest drinking motivations continue to relate to Social and Enhancement (53% and 62% respectively). In comparison to pre-COVID-19, Social and Conformity motivations are both down significantly (60% and 34% respectively in 2018) while Coping is up as outlined in Table 3 below. In comparison to pre-COVID-19, adults in Ireland are now more likely to drink for Coping reasons - this encompasses drinking because it helps you when you feel depressed or anxious, to cheer up when you are in a bad mood or stressed and/or to forget about your problem. Overall, coping listed as drinking motivation is up 5 points (29% in 2018, 34% in 2024).

Table 3: Drinking Motivations (DMQ) Past 30 Days (almost/most of the time/half of the time)

Motivation	2024 (n=838)	2018 (n=767)	Difference
Social	53%	60%	-7
Enhancement	62%	63%	-1
Coping	34%	29%	+5
Conformity	26%	34%	-8

What:

A new question was added in 2024 asking adults to state what type of alcohol they would normally drink on an occasion when typically drinking. Overall, the top three cited across all adults who drink alcohol were as follows: 53% beer, 49% wine, and 33% spirits. A full breakdown is provided in the table below including from adults who stated that they are more likely to drink at home in the past 12 months.

Table 4: Typical Drink (base ever drink alcohol n=940)

TYPICAL DRINK	EVER DRANK ALCOHOL (N=940)	MORE LIKELY TO DRINK AT HOME IN PAST 12 MTHS (N=413)
BEER	53%	53%
CIDER	21%	21%
WINE	49%	53%
PROSECCO/CHAMPAGNE	14%	14%
SPIRITS (WITH MIXER)	33%	35%
SPIRITS (AS A SHOT OR ON OWN)	12%	14%
PREMIXED SPIRITS DRINK	9%	8%
COCKTAILS	16%	13%
FORTIFIED WINE	3%	5%
OTHER ALCOHOLIC DRINK	2%	2%

Parents’ attitudes regarding drinking at home

- 47% of parents indicate they are comfortable with children present when drinking (41% in 2023)
- 29% of parents state that they are more comfortable with children seeing them drink at home than at social setting (27% in 2023)

Potentially worrying practices:

The 2024 Barometer also identifies some potentially worrying drinking practices specifically among adults who state that they are more likely to drink at home in the past 12 months. While 45% of adult drinkers overall state that they were doing so in 2024, there are also a number of statistically significant peaks among:

- Those that also agree that COVID-19 has impacted the amount/frequency of alcohol they drink (56%)
- Those who also say that they are buying more alcohol than they did a year ago (68%)
- Those who also agree that how/when/where they consume alcohol has changed in recent years (53%)
- Rising to 52% among those that would also like to drink alcohol less often.

In terms of spending more money on alcohol for consumption at home rather alcohol in pubs and restaurants, 45% of adult drinkers overall state that they were doing so in 2024. There are again several statistically significant peaks in terms of agreement:

- They are more likely to have increased consumption in the past 12 months (57%)
- They are more likely to have an AUDIT-C 5+ score (51%)

The Barometer also provides data on drinking and mental wellbeing as well as its impact on drinking practices:

- Mental wellbeing is measured in the Barometer series by using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009). 34% of adults report low mental wellbeing in 2024, this is steady and the same as what was reported in 2023 (30% in 2022). Overall, the structure of the mental wellbeing score continues to be vastly different to the benchmark level set pre-COVID-19 in 2018 (11%). Low mental wellbeing peaks among young adults in 2024 (49% under 24-year-olds, 45% 25-34-year-olds).
- Low mental wellbeing rises to 48% among adults who report increased alcohol consumption in the past 12 months.
- 1 in 4 (25%) Irish adults in 2024 indicate an increase in recent household stress/tension while 49% of those that report increased stress/tension also have low mental wellbeing; 46% of those that report increased stress/tension report increased consumption in past 12 months. 47% of adults reported increases in household stress/tension when asked in 2020 shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moderating behaviours and home drinking:

Participants were also asked for the first time in 2024 to what extent they had tried a range of things to moderate their drinking. Full details of the options as well as a breakdown of responses are provided in a recent [Summary Paper](#). One of the options provided was 'Avoid always having alcohol in the house.' One third of adults report that it was something that they did to moderate their drinking. However, 32% of adults said they could never see themselves doing this. While a further 25% agreed that they are not doing this but would be willing to do so.

47% of those who said they more likely to drink alcohol at home agree that they are also interested in monitoring and adapting their relationship with alcohol, this is a higher rate than adult drinkers overall (39%).

While 45% of adult drinkers agree that they are more likely to drink at home in the past 12 months, this rises to 52% among those that would also like to drink alcohol less often. 37% of adults who state that they are more likely to drink at home also report that they find themselves questioning when, how much and why they drink recently. 47% of those who state that they are more likely to drink at home also report that they are interested in monitoring and adapting their relationship with alcohol.

Interestingly, adults who report that they would like to drink alcohol less often are more likely to say that they have spent more money for alcohol for consumption at home than on alcohol in pubs and restaurants (52% vs 45% disagree).

Discussion:

The centrality of adults' consuming alcohol at home is key and the Barometer series has identified this as a rising trend in Ireland year on year. This paper provides further insight into where drinking alcohol takes place in the home in Ireland, by who, why, how much, as well as potentially worrying trends and moderation techniques used.

The Health Research Board highlights that there has been a move towards drinking at home rather than in licenced premises (HRB 2024). Qualitative research that we undertook pre-COVID-19 identified the prominence of home drinking among adults in Ireland (Drinkaware 2020). Home drinking has also been documented in the Healthy Ireland Series. As part of the 2022 Healthy Ireland Survey those who said they drank alcohol in the last 6 months were also asked where they drank the last time they consumed alcohol. The most frequently reported location for alcohol consumption the last time they drank was in their own home (44%), followed by drinking in a pub (30%); a restaurant, hotel, or café (13%); and drinking in someone else's home (10%) (DoH 2022).

In terms of who is drinking at home, younger adults aged 18 -34 are more likely to report going out for drinks with 30% doing so on a weekly basis in the latest Barometer. Findings from Healthy Ireland 2022 previously found that drinkers younger than 35 were more likely to drink in a pub (42%), and less likely to drink in their own home (26%). In addition, the majority (53%) of drinkers aged 35 or older reported that their most recent drinking occasion was in their own home, with little difference across age groups older than 35. Less than a quarter (23%) of drinkers aged 35 or older reported drinking in a pub (DoH 2022).

The top occasions for drinking alcohol (at least once a week) reported in the 2024 Barometer demonstrate the centrality of home as a place for consumption. It also showed a rise in normalising of drinking at home alone with almost 1 in 3 adults who drink now doing so at least once a week. Consuming alcohol alone is an under-researched area (Wilson et al 2025), and few studies have focused on drinking at home alone (Cook et al. 2023). Drinking alone has previously been identified as a potential risk factor for alcohol use disorder and is associated with heavy episodic drinking and alcohol-related problems (Wilson et al. 2025). Australian research found heavy drinkers were more likely to engage in solitary home drinking (Cook et al. 2023). A systematic review conducted by Skrzynski and Creswell (2021) found that adult solitary drinking was associated with greater alcohol consumption, more alcohol-related problems and negative reinforcement processes. Holmes and colleagues (2024) also warn about the unseen private intoxication not frequently associated with home drinking. As part of a latent class analysis of various types of drinking in the UK that took place during 2019, this study found that a large proportion of heavy drinking takes place in

occasion types such as *Quiet drink at home alone* and *Evening at home with partner*, which are commonly viewed as low-key or moderate (Holmes et al. 2024).

The reasons that adults provide in the Barometer as to why they drink are important in terms of helping to understand their motivations for drinking at home. We previously identified that home drinking was seen as convenient, comfortable and easy, as well as being affordable, accessible and acceptable and an alternative to going out. Qualitative research conducted in Australia found that drinking at home was associated with feelings of deceleration, calmness and relaxation (MacLean et al. 2024). Adults also expressed that drinking in public settings such as bars, pubs and restaurants was associated with greater self-monitoring and a sense of vigilance compared to when doing so at home (MacLean et al. 2024). While not home specific, adults in Ireland state that they are more likely to drink for coping reasons - this encompasses drinking because it helps you when you feel depressed or anxious, to cheer up when you are in a bad mood or stressed and/or to forget about your problem. This provides signals of potentially worrying drinking practices, if taking place at home (and drinking alone as above).

Higher levels of self-reported consumption of wine and spirits among those more likely to drink at home is identified in the Barometer. This is potentially concerning as we have also found very low levels of accurate knowledge of the HSE Low-risk weekly guidelines on an annual basis over the course of the Barometer series. We know from qualitative research conducted pre-COVID-19 that Irish adults do not associate binge drinking with at-home drinking even if they are unknowingly doing so while at home (Drinkaware 2020). We previously found that adults engaging in at home drinking; despite saying they were conscious of the amount they were drinking, were not aware how much they were drinking in terms of standard drinks. Adults may therefore unintentionally binge drink at home due to misunderstandings surrounding what a standard drink is and also a lack of measuring drinks when drinking at home (Drinkaware 2020).

The Barometer findings also provide further insight into parents' attitudes surrounding their drinking of alcohol at home, adding to what we already know. For instance, qualitative research conducted in 2022, which focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic found that while parents did not have an issue with children knowing or seeing them drink, they conveyed that some kinds of drinking were more acceptable than others. In so doing, the parents in this study created boundaries regarding a desirable and controlled narrative about their drinking e.g. only drinking at the weekend, as well as role modelling behaviours (Drinkaware 2022).

There is a clear link between mental wellbeing and household tension with statistically higher levels of low wellbeing among adults that report increased household stress/tension. Significantly higher levels of household stress and tension are also reported among adults that report consuming more in the past 12 months. In addition, higher levels of low mental wellbeing are also reported among those who reported increased consumption. Collectively this is concerning especially if such drinking is taking place behind closed doors, at home. Increased risky drinking has previously been associated with lower wellbeing (Creery & Davies 2024). Cross-sectional analysis of survey data in the UK found that coping motives mediated the association between wellbeing and AUDIT scores, and in so doing may interact to drive risky drinking among middle-aged adults, especially men (Creery & Davies 2024). Additional questions added to the Barometer in 2023 help in providing important indicators of adults' wellbeing and the interplay with alcohol. For instance, 21% of adults with low mental wellbeing stated that they were more likely to drink alcohol during the daytime in 2023 (vs 14% overall drinkers). In addition, 30% of adults with low mental wellbeing in 2023

stated they were more likely to drink alcohol during the week in the past 12 months (vs 23% overall drinkers) (Drinkaware 2024).

Conclusion:

The home is a unique and ubiquitous drinking environment that encompasses a range of challenges and opportunities to increase and decrease consumption plus associated potential harms. COVID-19 dramatically enforced the drinking at home experience and changed practices associated with it. Emerging routines of increased consumption in the home that developed during the pandemic may since have become normalised and hidden as well as being potentially hazardous to public health. To get a comprehensive picture of the situation, we need to look not only at whether adults are drinking at home but also how often, what the “at home” daily routines look like, how much is consumed at home, why, where it is purchased for at home consumption and how it is consumed.

While several concerning trends are identified post-pandemic, encouraging evidence is also emerging from the Barometer series in terms of moderating behaviours regarding drinking at home by adults in Ireland. For instance, it is encouraging that many adults report in 2024 cutting down/ back on their consumption at home. It is important that these trends are also encouraged and supported in order to build and sustain positive behaviour changes.

As the national independent charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland, Drinkaware's work is grounded in research, evidence and rigorous evaluation. Ultimately, continuing to understand who is drinking at home, how and why will provide crucial evidence to help inform and guide the design of campaigns and the specific messaging and content. This will help to contribute towards changing the behaviour and break harmful at home routines to prevent alcohol misuse and harm. Drinkaware aim to convey examples and encourage alternative ways to relax at home - Drinking at home is part of the crucial focus of Drinkaware's work programmes in 2025 and throughout its new strategic cycle 2025-2028.

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