# Drinking Patterns among the British: Implications for Alcohol Policy Support

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## Abstract

This study was conducted using a sample of 350 British respondents on alcohol consumption habits among respondents in London.

**Objective:** The main objective identified in the study is to explore British people's drinking patterns and to present specific implications for alcohol policy support.

**Methods:** The methodology used in the study was quantitative research, as the researcher administered questionnaires to participants via email. The questionnaires consisted of adequately constructed questions aimed at exploring drinking patterns among participants.

**Results:** The data retrieved from participants were analysed using SPSS software. Results represent statistically significant relationships were found among the set of variables identified in the methodology section of the study. The variables that represented the most relevant findings included frequency of drinking alcohol at home and consumption of alcohol in the workplace. In addition, the variable of religion demonstrated statistically significant results considering that a significant portion of the sample is constituted of Muslims (40%). Such an aspect has had a profound impact on research findings because of specific limitations on alcohol consumptions as imposed by the respective religion.

**Conclusion:** One of the main conclusions demonstrated in the study is that British consumers of alcoholic beverages generally tend to have a high drinking rate. The high rate of British alcohol consumers has implications for alcohol policy support.

**Keywords:** Alcohol; Policy support; Internet; Drinking pattern

## Introduction

The consumption of alcohol severely impacts the health of individuals, being related to both extensive health complications and social problems alike. In the context of the UK, alcohol consumption was measured as 10.4 litres, including beer, wine and spirits, per person per year in the period from 2008 to 2010, and is progressively increasing [1]. This represents a serious concern for the increasing number of British who consume alcohol on a regular basis [2]. Studies intended to measure the impact of public opinion on alcohol policies were conducted in various countries [3]. As a result, substantial evidence indicates the close interaction between public opinion and the adoption of alcohol policy [4]. The exploration of alcohol consumption patterns has significant implications to direct future policy goals. Different factors are usually explored in the literature, such as race and ethnicity, status and role, and age [3].

As stated by Meier [5], the balance between adult consumers of alcohol versus those who never consume alcohol has been relatively stable for the past few years. It was found that drinking in women under the age of 25 significantly declined in the last few decades. In addition, Meier mentioned about shifting drinking preferences in the UK. Traditionally the UK has been seen as a beer drinking country but preferences of UK consumers have gradually changed to favour wine. Yet the overall aspect of drinking seems problematic, implying the importance of considering specific regulations and policies that would help the UK set a balanced strategy to decrease the population's drinking rates. Obtaining a relevant understanding of those aspects can help in the establishment of suitable long-term objectives in terms of encouraging the population to decrease their drinking patterns over time. In the present study, the focus is on exploring drinking patterns among the British and the need for alcohol policy support.

## Methodology

### Research design

The research methodology used in the current study is quantitative because it allows the generation of substantial data, which are unbiased and subjective to make generalisations of the aspects of drinking patterns among the wider population [3]. This type of research design allows for the systematic exploration of data as well as emerging relationships. It is descriptive by nature considering the element of descriptive statistics used in the analysis section of the study [6]. The selected research design establishes relationships among specified dependent and independent variables.

### Sampling

The sample consisted of 350 British individuals, as they are from different age groups. The gender factor was not an applicable measure for the context of this study. In terms of the sampling method used in the present study, random sampling was considered suitable [7]. The sample of 350 British respondents was selected from a large set from the British population living in London, UK. Each person was selected randomly to participate in the study, implying that all individuals had an equal chance of participating which is the basis of the random sampling technique.

In terms of ethical considerations, it is important to note that the researcher initially obtained ethical approval from participants by providing them with an informed consent form. The ethical approval was obtained from the organisation of the researcher. This form contained a detailed description of the nature and objectives of the study. The response rate of the participants was relatively high, as of 400 administered questionnaires 350 were returned completed. The questionnaires were sent to participants via email.

## Variables

One of the demographic variables used in the study is that of age, as it represents significant implications for alcohol policy support [8]. Other essential variables included in the research refer to drinking patterns for the last six months, frequency of consuming alcohol at home and outside, tendency to drink alcohol in the workplace, type of alcohol consumed at home for the last six months, time during the day of purchasing alcohol when outside, and purchasing alcohol over the internet [7]. Variables such as gender, race/ethnics and religion were included in the data analysis process.

## Methods of data analysis

These variables were tested done using SPSS software, which can provide sufficient details regarding the drinking patterns of the British. The data collection method used in the study is a questionnaire, as respondents were presented with 40 questions to answer [3]. As part of the methods of data analysis used in this study, the strategy of frequency distribution has been considered. In order to demonstrate statistically significant relationships among the specified variables, the researcher used a method of data analysis identified as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA); this is a relevant technique to analyse the impact of drinking patterns among the sample population in the present research [9].

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis in this study is as follows: the frequency of consuming alcohol, either at home or outside, determines the drinking patterns of British consumers.

## Results

Three hundred and fifty participants returned the completed questionnaires, of which 200 were male and 150 female. Yet it has been found that the majority of people who consume alcohol are male (70%), as these findings confirm evidence found in the literature [5]. It should be indicated that there is a tendency for females at the age group of 28-38 to present an increase in their alcohol drinking patterns. Participants from four age groups were identified, as the majority of respondents (n=130) came from the 21-28 age group. The least number of participants (n=8) were identified from the 28-38 age group. Representatives of the 38-50 and 50-65+ age groups also were considerably high, n=107 and n=105, respectively (Table 1).

As indicated from the Table above, the standard deviation values

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | 21-28 | 130 | 37.0 | 37.1 | 37.1 |
| | 28-38 | 8 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 39.4 |
| | 38-50 | 107 | 30.5 | 30.6 | 70.0 |
| | 50-65+ | 105 | 29.9 | 30.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 350 | 99.7 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | .3 | | |
| Total | | 351 | 100.0 | | |

**Table 1:** Age of Participants.

| Data | Total | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Daily | 50 | 14.2 |
| 5 to 6 times a week | 40 | 11.4 |
| twice a week | 35 | 10.24 |
| once a week | 40 | 11.4 |
| Monthly | 25 | 7.14 |
| bi-monthly | 20 | 5.71 |
| 2-3 months | 20 | 5.71 |
| Never | 120 | 34.2 |
| Total | 350 | 100 |

**Table 2:** Frequency of Drinking Alcohol at Home.

for the different variables are relatively small, indicating that the data obtained from respondents are clustered rather closely to the mean. Drinking patterns of British respondents in the last six months showed that 59.7% openly admitted to having regularly consumed alcohol for the identified period (n=209). The remaining 40.3% (n=141) of the sample presented a negative answer regarding the possibility to consume alcohol.

A significant variable that was measured in this study was the frequency of drinking alcohol at home [10]. Surprisingly, the results showed that 45.7% of British respondents never consumed alcohol at home [11]. Yet this did not exclude the possibility of these people to consume alcohol elsewhere, such as in restaurants, bars, night clubs, or while on holiday (Table 2).

In addition to that, there were statistically significant results regarding the daily frequency of 14.2% of the individuals who reported to consume alcohol at their home. The individuals consuming alcohol 5 to 6 times a week were reported to be 11.4%, while the percentage of those drinking once a week and twice a week was almost identical, 11.4% and 10.24%, respectively. Yet it is interesting to note that drinking patterns of individuals consuming alcohol monthly, bi-monthly and 2-3 months were significantly lower compared to the previously discussed frequencies, represented at the values of 7.14%, 5.71% and 5.71, respectively. The high percentage of people who claimed that they never drink alcohol at home (34.2%) can be explained with the validity of religion considering that a substantial part of the sample were Muslims.

The one-sample test showed that in relation to measuring the frequency of the British to drinking outside, statistically significant results have emerged, considering that the mean difference was 4.29. Another statistically significant trend that was reported was that 49.1% of the respondents stated that they never consumed alcohol outside [12]. These statistical dimensions were adequately confirmed by the values of the confidence interval of the difference [13] (Tables 3 and 4).

The variable of drinking alcoholic beverages in the workplace was measured as well. The mean difference was 1.81, indicating general low consumption of alcohol in the workplace, however, there were participants who indicated a positive answer to the question of consuming alcohol in the workplaces, which raises a significant concern about the alcoholic dependence of these individuals who seemingly cannot give up their habit even in the workplace.

Regarding the type of alcohol consumed by participants at home for the last six months, it was observed that 51.7% of participants tended to consume spirits, followed by beer (32.5%), wine (11.0%), and mixed cocktail beverages (4.8%). Alcoholic beverages were classified to determine British alcohol consumers' dependence or preference of certain kinds of alcohol [3].

The specific time during the day when British people considered

|  | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age of Participants | 350 | 2.5343 | 1.26342 | .06753 |
| Drinking in the Last Six Months | 350 | 1.4029 | .49117 | .02625 |
| Frequency of Drinking Alcohol at Home | 350 | 4.0743 | 1.96099 | .10482 |
| Frequency of Drinking Alcohol Outside | 350 | 4.2914 | 1.81389 | .09696 |
| Drinking Alcohol in the Workplace | 350 | 1.8143 | .38943 | .02082 |
| Type of Alcohol Consumed at Home for the Last 6 Months | 209 | 1.8804 | .78449 | .05426 |
| Time during the Day of Purchasing Alcohol when Outside | 209 | 3.5837 | 1.22236 | .08455 |
| Purchasing Alcohol over the Internet | 209 | 1.6029 | .49048 | .03393 |

**Table 3:** One-Sample Statistics.

|  | Test Value = 0 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|  |  |  |  |  | Lower | Upper |
| Age of Participants | 37.527 | 349 | .000 | 2.53429 | 2.4015 | 2.6671 |
| Drinking in the Last Six Months | 53.433 | 349 | .000 | 1.40286 | 1.3512 | 1.4545 |
| Frequency of Drinking Alcohol at Home | 38.870 | 349 | .000 | 4.07429 | 3.8681 | 4.2804 |
| Frequency of Drinking Alcohol Outside | 44.261 | 349 | .000 | 4.29143 | 4.1007 | 4.4821 |
| Drinking Alcohol in the Workplace | 87.158 | 349 | .000 | 1.81429 | 1.7733 | 1.8552 |
| Type of Alcohol Consumed at Home for the Last 6 Months | 34.652 | 208 | .000 | 1.88038 | 1.7734 | 1.9874 |
| Time during the Day of Purchasing Alcohol when Outside | 42.385 | 208 | .000 | 3.58373 | 3.4170 | 3.7504 |
| Purchasing Alcohol over the Internet | 47.245 | 208 | .000 | 1.60287 | 1.5360 | 1.6698 |

**Table 4:** One-Sample Test.

|  |  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frequency of Drinking Alcohol at Home | Between Groups | 189.258 | 3 | 63.086 | 18.934 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 1152.811 | 346 | 3.332 |  |  |
|  | Total | 1342.069 | 349 |  |  |  |
| Drinking in the Last Six Months | Between Groups | 18.841 | 3 | 6.280 | 33.248 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 65.357 | 346 | .189 |  |  |
|  | Total | 84.197 | 349 |  |  |  |
| Frequency of Drinking Alcohol Outside | Between Groups | 150.676 | 3 | 50.225 | 17.420 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 997.598 | 346 | 2.883 |  |  |
|  | Total | 1148.274 | 349 |  |  |  |
| Type of Alcohol Consumed at Home for the Last 6 Months | Between Groups | .133 | 3 | .044 | .071 | .975 |
|  | Within Groups | 127.877 | 205 | .624 |  |  |
|  | Total | 128.010 | 208 |  |  |  |
| Drinking Alcohol in the Workplace | Between Groups | 2.467 | 3 | .822 | 5.638 | .001 |
|  | Within Groups | 50.462 | 346 | .146 |  |  |
|  | Total | 52.929 | 349 |  |  |  |
| Time during the Day of Purchasing Alcohol when Outside | Between Groups | 7.100 | 3 | 2.367 | 1.598 | .191 |
|  | Within Groups | 303.685 | 205 | 1.481 |  |  |
|  | Total | 310.785 | 208 |  |  |  |
| Purchasing Alcohol over the Internet | Between Groups | 1.291 | 3 | .430 | 1.810 | .147 |
|  | Within Groups | 48.747 | 205 | .238 |  |  |
|  | Total | 50.038 | 208 |  |  |  |

**Table 5:** ANOVA.

purchasing alcoholic beverages outside was also measured; the greatest numbers of alcohol consumers were evening and late-night consumers, 27.3% and 29.7%, respectively. Another statistically significant trend that emerged in contrast was that 19.6% of participants indicated a preference for purchasing alcoholic beverages during midday [12]. There were no statistically significant results in relation to the preference of British consumers to purchase alcohol during the early morning. Such results were derived from conducting ANOVA testing that pointed out such statistically significant relationships among variables (Table 5).

The last measure that was included in the study referred to British people's tendency to purchase alcoholic beverages over the Internet, even though the majority of participants (60.3%) did not, the remaining 39.7%, had purchased alcoholic beverages over the Internet with statistically significant results.

## Discussion

The fact that most British consumers of alcohol in this study belong to the 21-28 age group indicates significant problems in terms of drinking patterns among this young population [14]. This aspect demonstrates a relevant concern in terms of public health and social

impact of drinking, as these issues should be addressed in an appropriate alcohol support policy [13]. However, it has been observed that older individuals also tend to consume alcohol regularly, which represents another significant concern about the elderly individuals' health.

The findings on the frequency of consuming alcoholic beverages both at home and outside demonstrate specific concerns related to the regulation of alcohol in the country [14]. It can be suggested that a substantial number of British consumers of alcohol have unrestricted access to purchasing alcohol, including the option of buying alcohol over the Internet [15].

The drinking patterns of British consumers of alcohol vary, but one can conclude that the UK represents one of the countries which can be identified as a drinking nation [16]. It can be concluded that the consumption of alcoholic beverages is positively correlated with the overall negative effects of alcohol. In this relation, it is important to enforce relevant policies on alcohol in order to decrease the general population's tendency to consume various alcoholic beverages. The inadequate control of alcohol consumption may create substantial social and public health problems; as such challenges should be tackled with the adoption of well-researched and reasonable policies [12].

It can be suggested that taxes on alcohol should be increased, which may demonstrate a relevant policy measure to decrease the consumption of alcohol in the country [16]. The present alcohol tax system is perceived as inefficient to a certain extent considering the high number of individuals who tend to consume alcohol either at their home or outside. Yet it can be stated that a particular number of British do not consider the option of consuming alcohol, which may be the result of relevant alcohol policies that were implemented in the country [3].

It is important to discuss certain implications regarding the level of support of British people for alcohol policies to be adopted in the country. Such a level of support is generally found dependent on demographic variables and the drinking patterns of the respective population [17]. The frequency of consuming alcoholic beverages, either at home or outside, predicts the major drinking patterns of British consumers. In this way, the findings confirmed the research hypothesis stated earlier; however, British policymakers should consider the importance of factors such as alcohol availability and pricing when drafting specific policies on controlling the consumption of alcohol in the country. The opposition to similar controlling measures may also create certain challenges that need to be considered in the broad context [12]. The necessity to implement a comprehensive reform on controlling alcohol availability and consumption represents an essential priority of the UK government. It can be indicated that the majority of participants may be more inclined to support more targeted measures to indicate their support for alcohol policy.

Moreover, the variable of religion was included in the data analysis process. It was indicated that a substantial number of participants were practicing Muslims (40%), and they shared that they never consumed alcohol. This can be explained with the specificity of their religious faith that prohibits them from consuming alcohol since it is considered one of the greatest sins in Islam. It also can be concluded that some part of the sample abstained from the practice of consuming alcohol because of ethical and moral reasons.

## Limitations

The major limitation presented in this study is the lack of information on contextual factors, which prevented the researcher from interpreting the research findings more thoroughly [6]. Moreover,

the research methods used in the present research are quite inflexible because they cannot be modified after the study had started. Another limitation of this study was the reduction of data to numbers, which may result in the loss of essential information. In terms of impact, there is a limitation regarding the determination of statistical significance (Maxim, 1999). This may further result in the generation of erroneous research findings. Another limitation in the study was the lack of information on the precise amount of alcohol consumed on a given drinking occasion. Gender differences in drinking patterns were not discussed as well.

## Conclusion

The present study focused on measuring drinking patterns among representatives of the British population. Quantitative research methodology was implemented in the research in order to obtain, as objectively as possible results from participants [3]. The sample consisted of 350 British respondents who completed questionnaires representing a series of questions related to drinking patterns, frequency of consuming alcohol either at their home or outside, and the practical implications of alcohol policy support [12]. It has been concluded that British people are high consumers of alcohol, and such an alarming trend indicates the importance of adopting a strict alcohol policy that may better regulate, as well as decrease, the consumption of alcohol in the country.

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