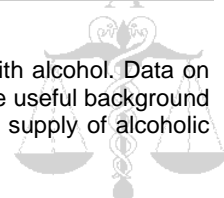


NHS Lifestyle statistics report.
Statistics on Alcohol: England, 2006.

Alcohol consumption can increase the risk of common health problems and causes some specific diseases. Recent case law suggests that lifestyle factors can be taken into account when considering compensation. If ever liability were to attach to the sale and supply of alcohol, the data provided in this report would help quantify the financial exposure. There remain many uncertainties about dose response relationships.

The report provides data on levels of consumption and health effects associated with alcohol. Data on consumption were taken from the General Household Survey 2004. The data provide useful background information in the unlikely event that one day, liability would attach to the sale and supply of alcoholic drinks. Alcoholic drinks clearly have the potential to cause serious ill health.



In England in 2004, 74% of men and 59% of women (aged 16 and over) reported drinking an alcoholic drink on at least one day during the week prior to interview. Men tended to drink on more days of the week than women; 24% of men had drunk on five or more days during the previous week, compared with 13% of women. Twice as many men than women reported drinking on every day in the previous week (15% compared with 8%).

In 2004, 39% of men reported drinking more than 4 units on at least one day in the week prior to interview. The proportion drinking above this level decreased with age, from 48% of men aged 16-24 to 19% of men aged 65 and over. 23% of men reported drinking more than 8 units on at least one day in the week prior to interview. The proportion ranged from 33% of men aged 16-24 to 6% of those aged 65 and over.

Twenty-two per cent of women had drunk more than 3 units of alcohol on at least one day in the week prior to interview. As with men, the prevalence of drinking above this level was strongly related to age; 39% of women aged 16-24 reported drinking more than 3 units on at least one day compared with 5% of those aged 65 and over. 9% reported drinking more than 6 units on at least one day during the previous week; 24% of those aged 16-24, but just 1% of those aged 65 and over.

The Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy identifies regular drinking, in men, of over 51 units a week and, in women, 36 units a week as chronic drinking.

In 2004/05 there were around 35,600 NHS hospital admissions in England with a primary diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol consumption and almost a total of 126,300 where this was either the primary or secondary diagnosis.

Acute intoxication accounted for over 20% of these admissions. In all, 50% of admissions were related to short term health problems. There were 423 cases of psychotic disorder and 12,992 cases of alcoholic liver disease. Dependence syndrome accounted for 10,000 admissions.

The Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England estimates that up to 22,000 premature deaths per year are associated in some way with alcohol misuse. [6000 of these were due to alcoholic liver disease, 500 due to mental disorders, 92 due to heart disease.]

Comment

The daily recommended maximum intakes are 3 or 4 units for men and 2 or 3 units for women. These values do not correspond to a safety threshold. The probability of harm to health due to exceeding these values is not reported. Drinking more than 8 units a day every day for an adult lifetime is likely to lead to ill health in men (6 units a day for women) but opinion varies significantly about the probabilities involved (1 unit = 8g alcohol).

If alcohol related health problems were the subject of liability-related compensation, alcoholic liver disease would be relatively straightforward to deal with, dependency syndrome would be very complex.

Alcohol is linked to causation/aggravation for a great many diseases but few of these are subject to liability compensation; they are, on the whole, public health problems. It is plausible that alcohol would play a role in vibration white finger for example. Recent case law suggests that lifestyle factors can be taken into account when considering compensation.