



HSE report reveals the untold story of the harms caused by *other people's* drinking in Ireland

[Click for full report](#)

The HSE today, Monday, 16th April, launched the first dedicated Irish survey on Alcohol's Harm to Others. "*The Untold Story: Harms Experienced in the Irish Population due to Others' Drinking*" quantifies some of alcohol's harm to others in modern Ireland. It makes very clear that preventing and reducing harm to others from drinkers is an urgent public health goal - equally as important as preventing and reducing harm to the drinker due to their own drinking.

Alcohol's harm from other people's drinking can affect a wide range of relationships in a person's life – family and friends, children, work colleagues and strangers. The purpose of this report is to explore how the drinking of others can negatively impact peoples' lives.

Key Findings from the report:

- **One in six carers** (16%) reported that children, for whom they had parental responsibility, experienced harm because of someone else's drinking.
- **One in every two people** (51%) reported experiencing harm due to strangers' drinking in the past 12 months.
- **Two in every five people** (44%) reported experiencing negative consequences due to the drinking of people they know.
- **Three in every five people** (61%) reported having a known heavy drinker in their life.
- **One in seven workers** (14%) reported work-related problems due to co-workers' drinking.
- **The total estimated cost** of AH20 as assessed in this survey was **€872.75 million**.
-

The costs estimated in this study are the tangible costs of harm to others. The survey results did not estimate the intangible cost (fear, pain, suffering, lost quality of life) of alcohol's harm to others, but these are clearly substantial.

Harms that are prominent throughout the report include: feeling unsafe, being harassed or insulted verbally, physical harassment, stress, having less money for household expenses, sleep disturbances, being a passenger with a drunk driver, ruined belongings and having to leave home due for safety.

Children are particularly vulnerable to harm from other people's drinking, be it within the family, among family members or in the wider community in which they live. Overall, **one in six carers** (16%) reported that children, for whom they had parental responsibility, experienced harm because of someone else's drinking.

Prof Robin Room, Professor of Alcohol Policy Research at University of Melbourne, noted the importance of this report to give a full picture of the harms associated with alcohol:

"For many years, the focus in discussing harms from drinking was on harms suffered by the drinker. Indeed, these harms are widespread and often severe. However, what has been missing from the picture is the burden that occasional or regular heavy drinking imposes directly on others at the interpersonal level. Others around the drinker, whatever their relationship with the drinker, are likely

to be affected, often adversely, by changes in thinking, demeanour and behaviour which result from drinking.”

One of the authors of the report, **Dr Ann Hope**, notes the significant evidence presented: *“Given that 3 in 5 people reported a known heavy drinker in their life, suggests the risk of harm from others’ drinking is widespread in Irish society, with some of it hidden. The fear to personal safety due to strangers’ drinking especially in public spaces can undermine a sense of community well-being and can be felt by both drinkers and non-drinker alike.”*

Another of the authors of the report, **Prof Joe Barry**, hopes the findings will inform national policy around alcohol in Ireland: *“This report provides solid evidence that harms to others from drinking are at least as widespread and of comparable magnitude to the harms to drinkers themselves.”*

The full report can be viewed at: <http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/helpful-resources/research-reports/the-untold-story-harms-experienced-in-the-irish-population-due-to-others-drinking.pdf>

ENDS

Editors notes:

Further information and support

Visit www.askaboutalcohol.ie or call the HSE Alcohol Helpline: 1800 459 459 Monday-Friday: 9.30am-5.30pm

Alcohol’s harm to others is

The harms done to by people’s drinking to others involve both socio-economic consequences and substantial health problems, such as alcohol-related injuries, mental health impacts and FASD... As stated in the WHO Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol (WHO, 2010a), “special attention needs to be given to reducing harm to people other than the drinker..

Global status report on alcohol and health – 2014 ed WHO <https://bit.ly/1eRz4el>

Alcohol consumption in Ireland in 2017: 11 litres per capita (15 +years) <https://bit.ly/2qruZZT>

What should per capita consumption be?

The Department of Health has recommended that men consume no more than 168 g of pure alcohol and that women consume no more than 112 g of pure alcohol per week. Per capita consumption is based on the entire population aged over 15 years. If every adult (15+ years) restricted his or her alcohol consumption to the recommended maximum low-risk limit on every week of the year, the actual per capita consumption would be 9.2 litres of pure alcohol per adult, or 16% less than was consumed in 2014. It may also be argued that this recommended limit should be even lower. If we take into account that 20.6% of the population do not drink alcohol at all, then the maximum low risk limit for the remaining population should be 7.4 litres.

Mongan D and Long J (2016) Overview of alcohol consumption, alcohol-related harm and alcohol policy in Ireland. HRB Overview Series 10. Dublin Health Research Board. <https://bit.ly/2GVHjfn>