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HSC Public Health Agency
Project supported by the PHA


Understanding Alcohol



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Housekeeping

- Breaks
- Microphones
- Internet connections
- Confidentiality
- Questions/comments




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Course Objectives

By the end of today, you will be able to:

- Understand the prevalence of alcohol use in Northern Ireland
- Understand the legal framework for alcohol
- Understand alcohol units
- Identify levels of harm associated with alcohol misuse (for the user)





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Course Objectives

By the end of today, you will be able to:




- Understand evidence and guidance regarding alcohol use
- Understand methods used in assisting with alcohol-related behaviour change
- Identify relevant local services





1 Introduction


What is the prevalence of alcohol misuse in Northern Ireland, and how does it affect various groups?

Alcohol in Northern Ireland

<p>78% of adults (18+) in NI drink alcohol</p> <p>Adults with children were more likely to report alcohol use than adults without children</p>	<p>83% vs 76% Proportion of people in least deprived vs most deprived areas using alcohol</p> <p>1/5 of adults thought they should cut down on their drinking</p>	<p>29% of young people (11-16) in NI have drunk alcohol at least once</p> <p>£900 million Cost to Northern Ireland due to the effects of alcohol misuse</p>
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Sources: Health Survey Northern Ireland 2023/2024 (DOH, 2024); Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery: A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use (2021-2031); All Ireland Drug Prevalence Survey 2014/15



Four-fifths of males (80%) were drinkers, with 26% of males reporting that they drink above sensible weekly limits

- 7% of males reported that they thought they drink **quite a lot or heavily**
- Almost a fifth of male drinkers (19%) drank on **3 or more days** per week
- Of those males who drank in the last week, on the **day they drank the most, 37% had consumed up to five units** and 20% had consumed **over 14 units***

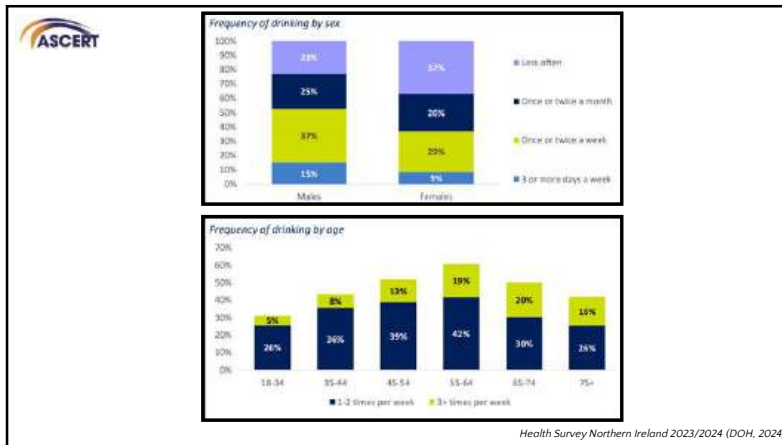
Three-quarters of females (73%) were drinkers, with 9% of females reporting that they drink above sensible weekly limits

- 3% of females reported that they thought they drink **quite a lot or heavily**
- A tenth of female drinkers (10%) drank on **3 or more days** per week
- Of those females who drank in the last week, on the **day they drank the most, 18% had consumed up to five units** and 4% had consumed **over 14 units***

Binge Drinking by Gender

* A total of 10% (12% of males) reported they had drunk more than usual in the last week - 18% of males & 27% of females

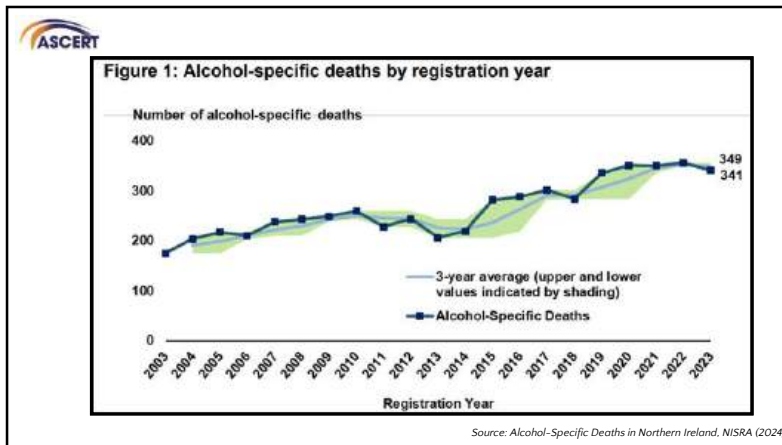
Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery: A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use (2021-2031)



Alcohol's Impact on Health in NI

- Approximately 9,840 hospital admissions** due to alcohol-related causes each year during 2020-2023
- Over 2,500 admissions at hospitals** with a diagnosis of alcoholic liver disease (2017/18)
- 5,615 deaths** caused specifically by alcohol in NI (2001 - 2022)
- 356 alcohol-specific deaths** in 2022
- 55-64 year olds** experienced the highest rate of alcohol-specific death
- 5x higher alcohol-specific mortality rate** in most deprived areas vs least deprived areas

Source: "Alcohol-Specific Deaths Northern Ireland" (NISRA 2024); "Alcohol-Specific Deaths in Northern Ireland: Socio-Demographic Analyses" (NISRA 2021)



Alcohol's Impact on Substance Misuse Services

- 66%** of clients on the Substance Misuse Database during 2023/2024 sought help for alcohol use (alone or with drugs)
- 37.1%** of clients seeking help for alcohol only were female; drugs only and drugs/alcohol skew more heavily male (70.5% and 78.5% respectively)
- 26-39 year olds** were the most common age group for drug and alcohol misuse clients
- 86% of males and 92% females seeking support for alcohol use** said that alcohol was their main problem substance
- 40+ year olds** were the most common age group for alcohol-only clients
- 47.7%** of clients indicated they drank daily

Source: Substance Misuse Database (2024)

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Alcohol and NI Youth

- 31%** have used alcohol – 11% of Year 8 and 64% of Year 12
- 13 years old** is the median age reported to having first tried an alcoholic drink
- 46%** of YP who had used alcohol had been drunk at least once
- 80%** of respondents said they lived in a household where at least one adult drank
- 25%** said they did something they regretted while drinking
- 9%** said that, as a result of drinking alcohol, they have ended up in a situation where they felt threatened or unsafe at least once

Source: Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2022

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Alcohol and the NI LGBT Community

- 91%** drink alcohol (general population = 77%)
- 93% of women vs 89% of men** drink (general population = 73% vs 80%)
- Twice as likely** to drink daily or most days compared to general population
- 14% of women and 12% of men** drink daily/most days (gen pop men 8%, women 5%)
- 57%** of LGBT people in England drink to a hazardous level (24% – gen pop)
- 30%** of LGBT people who contemplated suicide said substances contributed

Source: PHA's All Partied Out Report 2012

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2 Alcohol and the Law

What legislation surrounds alcohol use?

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Licensing: Types of Premises Selling Alcohol

- Pubs
- Off-licenses
- Hotels
- Guest houses
- Seamen's canteens
- Non-seagoing vessels
- Restaurants
- Conference centres
- Higher education institutions
- Indoor arenas
- Places of public entertainment (e.g. theatres, racetracks)
- Refreshment rooms in public transport premises (e.g. airports)



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Buying or Consuming Alcohol: Young People

- Licensing (NI) Order 1996, Registration of Clubs (NI) Order 1996, and Children and Young Persons Act (NI) 1968
- U14s can only consume alcohol in a private house and only for medical purposes
- Under 18s can't buy/consume alcohol in a place other than a private house
- It's an offence for someone to:
 - Buy alcohol for consumption by a U18
 - Send a U18 to buy alcohol from a licensed premises

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Buying or Consuming Alcohol: Young People

- It's an offence for a license holder to:
 - Sell alcohol to a U18 or someone else for consumption by a U18
 - Permit a U18 to go into a bar area or consume alcohol on premises
- U18s CAN
 - Be in a bar (not the bar area) until 9/9:30 pm* in places with a "children's certificate"; a sporting club until 10 pm, refreshment rooms, and off-licenses (if accompanied by an adult)



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The Law and Alcohol: Crime

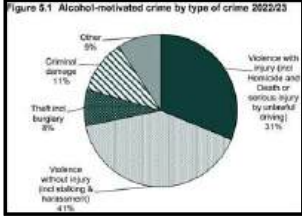


- Alcohol-defined offences
 - Public drunkenness
 - Drink driving
- Offences where alcohol use played a role (i.e. crimes committed while under the influence)
 - Domestic violence
 - Criminal damage

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1 in 5 crimes involve an "alcohol motivation"

23,917 Alcohol-motivated offenses in 2022/23



Source: PSNI Recorded Crime Statistics (2022/23)

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3 **Guidance Around Alcohol**

How should alcohol be used?





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Alcohol: **Guidance** for Adult Men and Women

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Alcohol units = Drink volume in mL x ABV

1000

 568 mL x 4.2% ABV = 2.4 units	 35 mL x 40% ABV = 1.4 units
 175 mL x 13.5% ABV = 2.4 units	 450 mL x 13.5% ABV = 6.1 units

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Binge drinking usually refers to drinking lots of alcohol in a short space of time or drinking to get drunk. In the UK, binge drinking is drinking more than **8** units in a single session for **men** or **6** units in a single session for **women**.

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Guidance: Adult Men and Women




- Why does alcohol affect women more than men?
 - Less dehydrogenase → higher BAC
 - Hormones
 - Women experience higher BACs (drinking their regular amount of alcohol) right before menstruation
 - Women tend to have a higher percentage of body fat/lower percentage of water

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Guidance: Pregnant Women

- Pregnant women shouldn't drink
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome is the most clinically recognisable Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder because it has the following abnormalities
 - CNS dysfunction
 - Facial dysmorphism
 - Pre- and post-natal growth deficiency



A child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (O'Rahilly 1996).

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Guidance: Pregnant Women

- Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND)
 - Intellectual disabilities, issues with behaviour, poor impulse control
- Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD)
 - Problems with heart, bones, and/or hearing
- Neurobehavioural Disorder Associated with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (ND-PAE)
 - Issues with thinking and memory, behaviour, and ADLs
 - Mother had to have drunk 13+ alcoholic drinks/month in pregnancy

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Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Guidance: U18s

- It's always better to abstain until 18
 - Under-15s should **not** drink
- Drinking can be hazardous to health at any age and it isn't the healthiest option for young people
- If U18s do drink, it should be
 - With the guidance of a parent/carer in a supervised environment*
 - Infrequent/no more than once a week
 - Under the recommended adult levels (14 units/week)

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4 Alcohol and the Brain

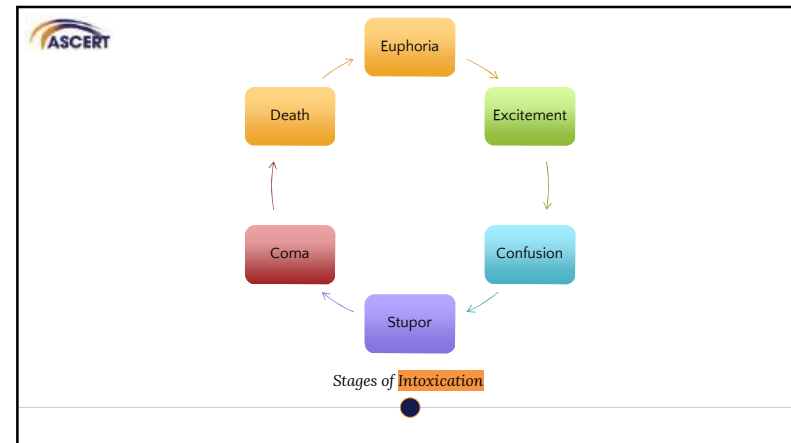
How does alcohol act on the brain?


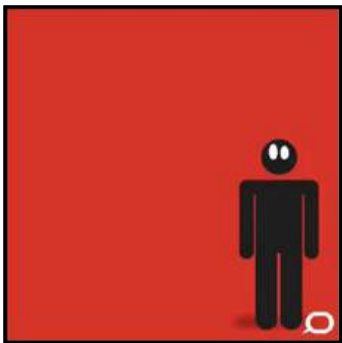
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Alcohol and the **Brain**


RMIT University Australia; https://youtube.com/Ah5_f2LLurE




Blood Alcohol **Concentration**

The Conversation; <https://youtu.be/zSKsSrXXj7E>




5 Alcohol-Related Risk

What are the risks associated with alcohol use?




Examples of Alcohol-Related Risks and Undesirable Effects

<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased risk of various cancers (e.g. liver, breast) Increased risk of liver cirrhosis Dehydration → skin appearance Difficulty sleeping 	<p>Mental/ Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased risk of suicide* Exacerbation of pre-existing mental health issues Mood swings 	<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fighting with others Anti-social/ criminal behaviour Job-related difficulties
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Mixing Alcohol With Other Drugs: **Depressants**

- Substances which make you feel relaxed but can slow down your heart rate and breathing, which can be fatal (e.g. benzodiazepines, co-codamol)
- Overdose is more likely since they have the same effects as alcohol



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Mixing Alcohol With Other Drugs: Stimulants


- Substances which make you feel more energetic
- Alcohol is a depressant that relaxes you (opposite effect) → may need to take more to feel an effect
- Stimulants and alcohol put strain on the heart → increased risk of heart failure



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Mixing Alcohol With Other Drugs: Cocaine

- Alcohol + cocaine = cocaethylene
 - Poisonous and can affect the heart; stays in your system longer than cocaine alone
- Alcohol can mask effects of cocaine → taking more to get the same high → increased risk of overdose



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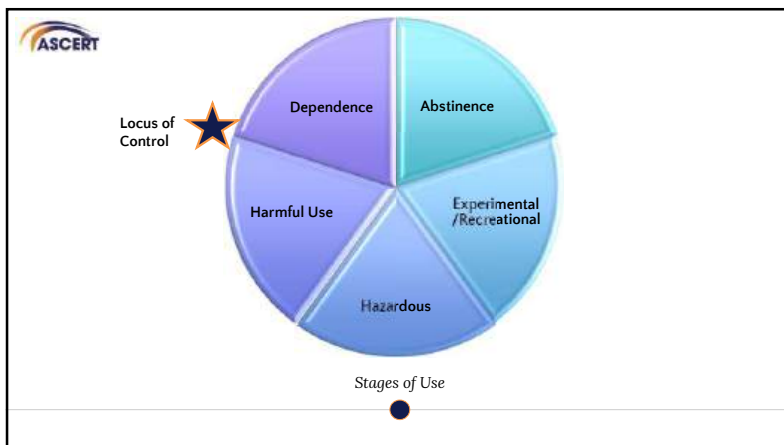


Young People and Risk-Taking Behaviour

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6 Assisting Alcohol-Related Behaviour Change

How can we help with behaviour change and what is the Stepped Care Model?



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Lightbulb icon

Safer Drinking

In groups, consider the case scenario assigned to you. What “safer drinking”/harm reduction advice would you give to this person?

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Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use: Staying Safe While Drinking

- Know your limit
- Stay with people you know/trust, especially in unfamiliar environments
- Avoid unnecessary risks (e.g. swimming, driving)
- Keep an eye on your drink
- Avoid mixing with energy drinks
- Be aware of the signs of alcohol poisoning
 - Passing out; nausea/vomiting; confusion; loss of bowel and bladder control; impaired breathing/swallowing

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Harm Reduction for Alcohol Use: Cutting Down

- Measure your pours
- Try to have at least 2-3 drink-free days
- Go for low- or no-alcohol alternatives (“mocktails”)
- Use smaller glasses
- Identify and act on drinking triggers
- Seek support if necessary


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Motivating Change



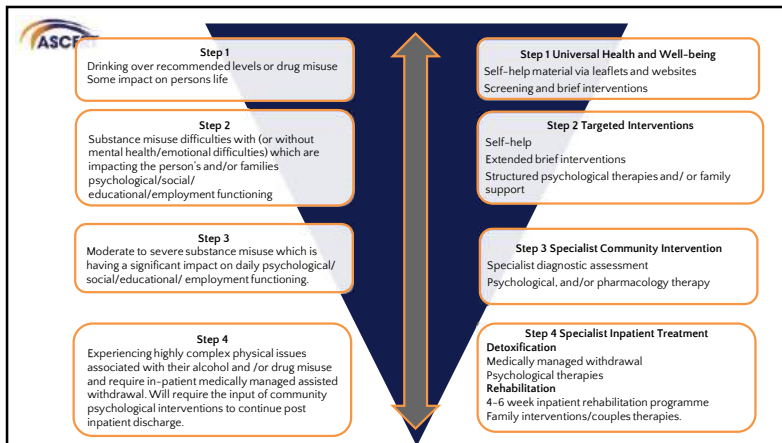
- For people who misuse alcohol, it's recommended that a motivational intervention is carried out as part of the initial assessment
 - Helping people recognise problems/potential problems related to their drinking
 - Helping to resolve ambivalence and encourage positive change and belief in the ability to change
 - Adopting a persuasive and supportive (rather than argumentative/confrontational) position

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Hi Jennifer.

Brief Advice - Alcohol



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7 Signposting

Who's available to help?



 **NIDACTS**

Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Coordination Teams

drugsandalcoholni.info







 **Family Support NI**

familysupportni.gov.uk

A directory of various support services (e.g. mental health, finances) and registered childcare services in NI





 **Thanks!**

Any questions?

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