

## WOMEN'S DRINKING

The data presented here on women's drinking is based on the General Lifestyle Survey (GLS)<sup>1</sup>, formerly known as the General Household Survey (GHS), which has collected continuous data on adults' drinking from 1978.

Current Government guidelines advise that women should not regularly drink more than two to three units of alcohol per day<sup>2</sup>.

### Headline statistics 2009

- 54% of women drank in the week before survey. This compares with 55% in 2008.
- 29% of women drank more than 3 units and 13% of women drank more than 6 units on at least one day in the previous week. This compares with 32% and 14% respectively in 2008.
- Average consumption was 8.0 units in the previous week. This compares with 8.4 units in 2008.
- 6% of women drank every day and 10% drank on at least 5 days of the previous week.

### Trend data<sup>3</sup>

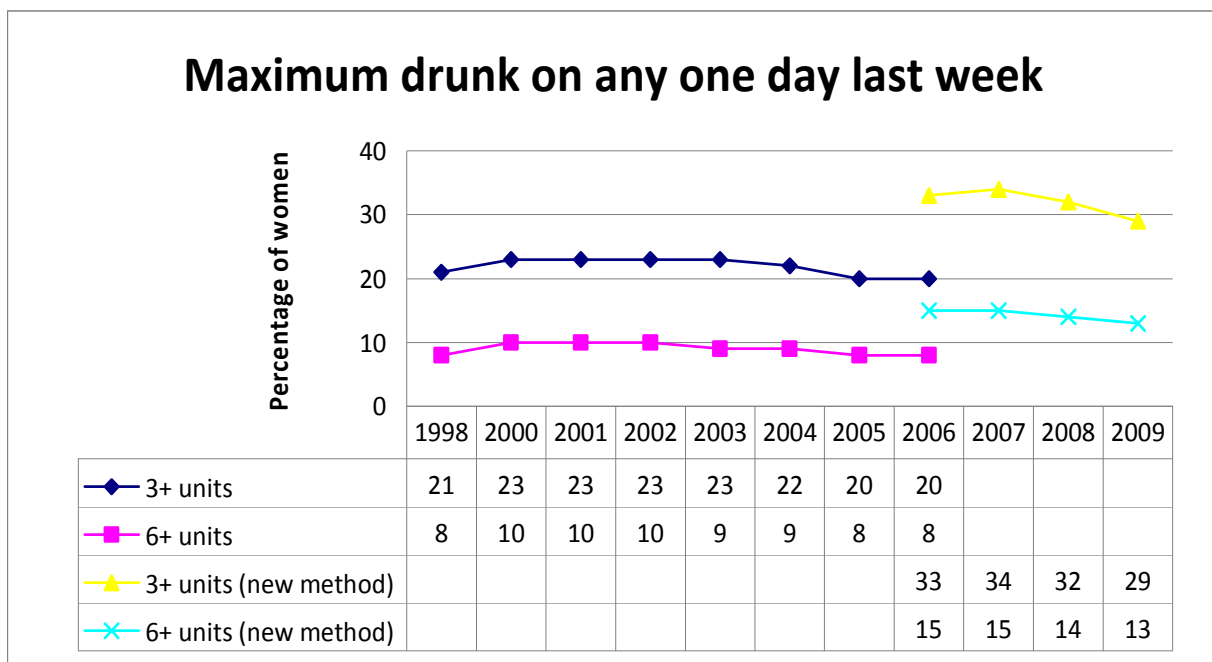
- The average number of units consumed in a week increased steadily over the 1990s reaching a peak of 7.6 units per week in 2002 before falling to 6.2 units per week in 2006. The revised methodology shows that average consumption per week is continuing to fall from 9.0 units in 2006 to 8.4 units in 2008 to 8.0 units in 2009.
- The proportion of women who drank in the week prior to survey has declined over time. Following a period of little change between 1998 and 2002, this figure fell from 60% in 2003 to 54% in 2009.
- The proportion of women who drank more than 3 units at least once in the previous week remained stable between 1998 and 2004 but has since slightly dropped. The revised methodology shows a continuing downward trend. The proportion of women drinking 3+ units was 32% in 2008 and 29% in 2009. [See graph below]
- The proportion of women exceeding 6 units at least once a week follows a similar pattern, remaining fairly stable between 1998 and 2004 then slightly declining. The figures fell from 10% in 2002 to 8% in 2006. Using the revised method of

<sup>1</sup> The latest published report in this series is "The General Lifestyle Survey 2009" published by the Office for National Statistics on 27 January 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For full responsible drinking guidelines see [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> In 2006, the ONS changed the way in which it estimated the number of units assumed to be in all drink categories with the biggest change affecting the 'wine' category. The results has been an apparent increase in drinking levels (especially relating to wine) which makes direct comparisons difficult between data collected before 2006 and data collected thereafter using the new method. Consideration of trends is complicated further by the introduction of weighting in 1998

converting volumes to units of alcohol the proportion of women drinking 6+ units was 14% in 2008 and 13% in 2009. [See graph below]



- There has been a marked fall in the proportion of young women (16-24) drinking more than 3 units on their heaviest drinking day; this figure fell from 42% in 2000 to 34% in 2006. The proportion of young women drinking 6+ units fell from 27% in 2000 to 20% in 2006. Using the revised methodology the proportion of young women drinking 3+ units fell from 39% in 2006 to 37% in 2009 and those drinking 6+ units fell from 25% to 24%, though these drops are not statistically significant.

### Characteristics of women drinkers

- Women in higher socio-economic groups drink more than women in lower economic groups (average weekly consumption in 2009 was 9.7 for women in managerial and professional groups compared with 6.6 units in routine/manual groups).
- Women drink more in Wales (8.6 units) than England (8.0 units per week) or Scotland (7.8 units). Within England, the heaviest drinkers are found in Yorkshire and Humber.
- Younger women are more likely to exceed 6 units at least once a week and heavy drinking decreases with increasing age; 24% of 16-24 year olds exceeded 6 units compared with 19% of 25-44 year olds, 11% of 45 – 64 year olds and only 2% of women aged 65 and over.
- The proportion of women drinking every day rises with increasing age; for example only 1% of 16-24 year olds drink every day compared with 10% of women aged 65 and over.