

Health and Community Care Research Programme Research Findings No.13

Attitudes Towards Alcohol Misuse: Views of the General Public

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Between February and June 2001 the Scottish Executive Health Department undertook a consultation exercise to inform the development of its Plan for Action on alcohol problems. As part of this exercise, various pieces of research were commissioned to explore issues around alcohol misuse in Scottish society. This paper summarises the results of a short survey which aimed to provide some baseline information about: the public's contact with alcohol-related services; attitudes towards alcohol in Scotland; and how the problem of alcohol misuse might be tackled. A representative sample of 1,061 Scottish adults was interviewed using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing.

Main findings

- One in ten respondents said they had ever had contact with services or organisations that provide help or advice about alcohol. There was little variation in levels of contact by age, socio-economic group or geographical area but the survey found some differences between men and women in the type of contact they had had.
- Men were more likely than women to report having contacted a service on their own behalf (3% and 1% respectively) and women were more likely than men to have contacted a service on behalf of someone else (11% and 7% respectively).
- Seven in ten respondents (71%) reported that they were either very confident or fairly confident that they would be able to find and contact services or organisations that provide help or advice about alcohol.
- The vast majority (92%) of respondents agreed that 'alcohol misuse is increasing among young people in Scotland'. Only 2% disagreed with this statement.
- Around a third (36%) agreed that 'men are much more likely than women to experience problems with alcohol' while almost half (45%) disagreed.
- Seven in ten respondents (70%) agreed that 'most violent crime is alcohol-related' although a fifth (20%) disagreed. Older people were more likely to agree with this statement than younger people.
- The most effective way of tackling alcohol misuse in Scotland was seen to be stricter enforcement of existing laws (84% of respondents supported this) followed by the improvement of services for people with alcohol problems (80%).
- Three-quarters (76%) of respondents thought that providing more information or education about the dangers of drinking and 60% that advertising campaigns on sensible drinking would be effective ways of tackling alcohol misuse in Scotland.

Introduction

A representative sample of 1,061 Scottish adults was asked four questions about:

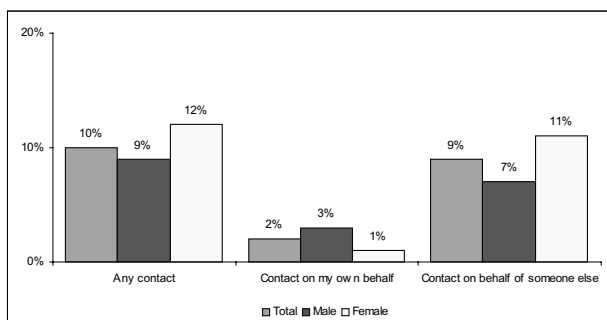
- confidence in knowing how to contact services and organisations providing help and/or advice relating to alcohol
- levels of contact with such services
- attitudes towards alcohol misuse
- perceived effectiveness of measures to tackle alcohol misuse in Scotland

The findings from this survey provided useful background and contextual information for the wider consultation exercise undertaken between February and June 2001 to inform the development of the Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse.

Alcohol-related services

One in ten respondents had ever been in contact with services or organisations that provide help or advice about alcohol. While similar proportions of men and women had had contact with any service (9% and 12% respectively), there was some difference in terms of the type of contact they had had. Men were more likely than women to report having contacted a service on their own behalf (3% and 1% respectively) and women more likely than men to report having contacted a service on behalf of someone else (11% and 7% respectively).¹

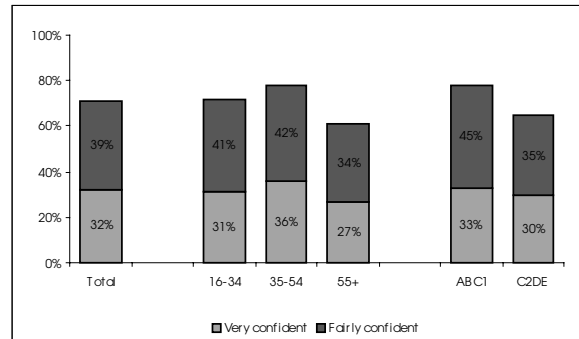
Fig. 1: Contact with alcohol-related services, by sex



Seven in ten respondents (71%) reported that they were either very confident or fairly confident that they would be able to find out about and contact

alcohol-related services. Older people and respondents in the lower socio-economic groups were less likely to feel confident about being able to find a contact.

Fig. 2: Confidence about contacting services, by age



Attitudes to alcohol misuse

There was no clear consensus on whether alcohol misuse was more of a problem for men or for women. Although a third (36%) agreed to some extent that men are much more likely than women to experience problems with alcohol, almost half (45%) disagreed. Men were more likely than women and younger people more likely than older people to agree with this statement.

The vast majority (92%) of respondents agreed that 'alcohol misuse is increasing among young people in Scotland.' Almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) strongly agreed with this statement, while a further 19% agreed slightly. Only 2% of all respondents disagreed that alcohol misuse is increasing among young people in Scotland. These findings were consistent across all sub-groups, including young people.

Seventy per cent of all respondents agreed with the statement, 'most violent crime is alcohol-related', although a further 20% disagreed. Levels of agreement increased with age – 86% of those aged 55 or over agreed that most violent crime was alcohol-related compared with 64% of those aged 16 to 34 years.

¹ All differences reported are statistically significant.

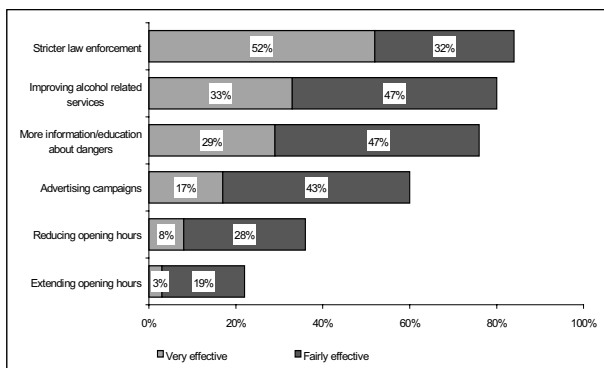
Tackling alcohol misuse in Scotland

Respondents were presented with a list of six possible ways of tackling alcohol misuse in Scotland:

- stricter enforcement of existing laws
- improving alcohol related Services
- more information/education about dangers
- advertising campaigns
- reducing opening hours
- extending opening hours

Stricter enforcement of existing laws – for example those relating to drink-driving, street disorder, licensed premises, under-age drinking – was seen to be the most effective way of tackling alcohol misuse in Scotland. Overall, eighty-four per cent of respondents thought this might be effective (see below).

Fig 3: Effectiveness of measures to tackle alcohol misuse



Improved services for people with alcohol problems was the measure perceived as the next most effective in tackling the problem of alcohol misuse in Scotland (80%), followed by providing more information or education about the dangers of drinking (76%) and advertising campaigns on sensible drinking (60%).

Opinions regarding altering the opening hours of licensed premises were mixed. Around a quarter of respondents thought *reducing* opening hours for licensed premises (28%) or *extending* opening hours for licensed premises (22%) would be effective in helping to tackle the problem of alcohol misuse in Scotland.

Conclusions

Although only a small proportion of respondents had had contact with alcohol-related services – either on their own behalf or for someone else – most were confident that they would be able to find and contact such services if they should ever need to.

It is clear from the findings that there is a strong perception that Scotland has a problem with alcohol misuse, both among men and women, and there is a concern that this may be increasing among young people today.

In terms of tackling this problem, the survey found strong support for tighter enforcement of existing laws and the improvement of services for people with alcohol problems. In addition, there were calls for increased provision of information and education about the dangers of drinking.

Methodological notes

A representative sample of 1,061 members of the Scottish adult population was interviewed using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Interviews were conducted in-home in, 41 sampling points across Scotland over the period 21-27 June 2001.

Quotas were set on the basis of age, sex and socio-economic group. To ensure that the sample was representative of the adult population, the data were weighted to match population estimates from the National Readership Survey of April 1998 – March 1999.

All differences reported between sub-groups (for example, between men and women) are statistically significant.

This Research Finding was developed for the Plan for Action on alcohol problems (published December 2001) and published alongside the following Research Findings in the CRU Health and Community Care series:

No 10: Towards a Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse: Responses to the Written Consultation, Reid Howie Associates, 2001

No 11: Towards a Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse: Summary of Evidence, Reid Howie Associates, 2001

No 12: Attitudes Towards Alcohol Misuse: Views of Problem Drinkers, Alcohol Service Users and Their Families and Friends, NFO System 3, 2001

No 14: Consultation with Children and Young People on the Scottish Executive's Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse, Save the Children, 2001

No 15: International Alcohol Policies: A Review of Selected Literature, Kate Sewel, 2001

Further research reports published in association with the Plan for Action may be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/health/alcoholproblems>

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