

Drinking among British Women:

the impact on driving and walking

Conclusions and recommendations

There is a need for analysis and research to be disaggregated by sex or gender.

This research project has addressed an area of relatively sparse knowledge due to much existing research into drink driving being 'gender blind' especially in regard to that published by the public sector. The implication is that in future data and research should be routinely recorded and analysed by sex. Interestingly, useful drink driving data that does record sex is held by the private sector and there could be more liaison to use this for general research and analysis.

There is a lack of research and associated statistics on the risks of walking while intoxicated, and where these exist, the absence of a breakdown of findings by sex was noticeable.

The most up to date research we found in our 2012 literature review that included data on the sex of British pedestrian casualties and alcohol consumption was published in 1998. This equally applies to the impact of drugs on pedestrians. This situation needs redress.

There is a case for lowering the limit to reflect the effect of alcohol on women's bodies

The research also shows that there is a lack of clarity among women about the amount of alcohol that would put a female driver over the limit. Related to this finding is that the recommended maximum consumption limit for alcohol in the UK reflects average male metabolism and is thus likely to be too high for women's bodies.

Educational messages and advertising about alcohol intake and the dangers of drink driving should target various age groups among the female audience too.

The emphasis in advertising and education about alcoholic drink needs to redress the seeming male bias inherent in these messages and images to develop campaigns and projects specifically targeted towards women drivers. In particular there is a need to warn women who have consumed alcohol about the risks of responding to unexpected family or friends' demands for lifts.



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Research commissioned by



¹ This research is based on a literature review, face to face surveys with 430 women drivers and 45 male drivers, 20 in depth interviews with convicted women drivers and statistical analysis of c 151,452 motorists with a drink driving offence declared on the Direct Line Insurance comparison site. For the full literature review report see Beuret, K. (SRA) Corbett, C (Brunel University), Ward, H (UCL) "Drinking among British Women and its impact on their pedestrian and driving activities"



<http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Women-and-Drinking-2014.pdf>
For the full report of this research see <http://www.reesjeffreys.co.uk/wp-content/uploads> by the same authors

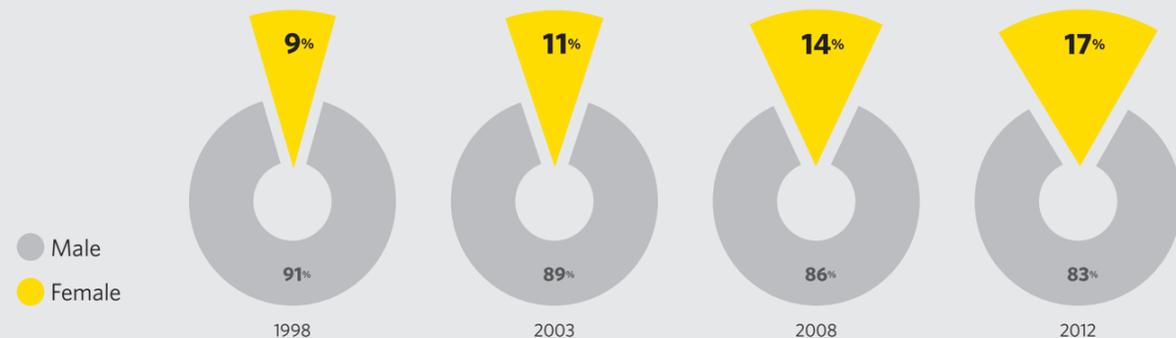
Is there a problem?

Although men's convictions for drink driving still comprise the majority, the increasing share of convictions for drink driving among women is concerning. For women convictions as a percentage of full licence holders has changed very little from 0.07 to 0.06% between 2003 to 2012 whilst for men it has halved (from 0.49 to 0.24%).

Furthermore this is not necessarily just a young driver's issue: a higher proportion of women than men over age 30 test positive for alcohol following a collision, taking miles driven into account.



Drink driving conviction figures



"I was surprised to realise that they'd been giving me large glasses of wine. I thought I'd be fine for driving after two."

What women thought they could drink and still drive legally

- 33% — a pint of 4.5% beer
- 17% — more than a standard 175cc glass of wine
- 13% — two or more bottles of alcopops

Yet all these are likely to be more than two units. One of the problems is that larger glasses of wine (up to 250cc) are often served by default and this is in the context of wine increasing in alcohol content as well as being seemingly the most popular alcoholic beverage for women.

The most usual place for women to drink is in the home either their own or someone else's. Government figures show that 63% of all alcohol is drunk in the home including 'preloading' i.e. drinking before going out to a bar. An ICM survey of 2,000 adults aged 30-45 found a third of men and nearly half of women who drank at home said they drank above the daily limit.

Drinking at home without standardised measures means it is harder to know how much has been drunk.

Key findings

The same amount of alcohol has a greater effect on a woman than a man

Women metabolise alcohol differently and reach a higher level of blood alcohol concentration than men when ingesting the same amount adjusted for body weight.

Women often don't know when they are over the limit for driving.

Knowledge about how much alcohol women can drink before driving and remain under the legal blood alcohol limit is poor overall, and in some cases potentially inaccurate. This uncertainty also contributed to the 17% who thought "they may have driven over the limit at least once or twice during the past year" which could therefore be either an over or more likely an under estimation of the true proportion.

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"It turned out that they'd been topping up my glass all night - so I lost count of what I'd drunk and thought I'd be OK to drive."

Reasons why women drink and drive

Although both men and women drink and drive in contravention to the law, the circumstances surrounding women's drink driving often concerns their gender roles as wives and mothers.

"I knew I shouldn't have gone but my daughter rang to say she was stuck in a dodgy part of town and couldn't get a taxi."

"We agreed that my husband would drive home but when it came to it he was well over the limit and so was I by then but not so much as him so we chanced it. Also he gets nasty when he's been drinking so I didn't want to make a scene."

"I started drinking to cope with the stress of coping with promotion and fitting it in with the family. The time I was arrested I'd been up late drinking the night before while I finished a report - I had no idea I was still over the limit the next morning."

There was also a perception held by some women among those who thought they had driven over the limit that they were less likely to get caught than men.

"I decided to drive carefully - they're mainly on the lookout for lads. Even if I was stopped I thought I'd flirt a bit and they'd let me off."

To some extent this was reinforced by a seeming emphasis on drink and also anti-drink advertising which predominantly features men and led to a view that women were relatively 'under the radar' in terms of being stopped and breathalysed.