



Barometer 2021

Research Paper Series

A year on - Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol in the context of COVID-19.

Drinkaware, April 2022

DRINKAWARE

Acknowledgements

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As with all Drinkaware work, the collective efforts of the team in supportive research, ideation, editing and proofing is both critical and much appreciated.

The Barometer Research Paper Series is managed by Research & Impacts Manager, Dr Ann Stokes, and this paper was led by Dr Stokes with the assistance of Drinkaware CEO Sheena Horgan.

This is the second in the series of Drinkaware Barometer Research Papers. Our first paper in the series was published in June 2021 and documented key findings from our 2020 Barometer:

[Families, Alcohol and COVID-19: A detailed analysis of the drinking practices of adults in households with children during the ongoing pandemic](#)

We have published a number of research reports that are relevant to the topics discussed in this paper, all of which are free and can be accessed at drinkaware.ie/research.

- Understanding (Intentional/Unintentional) binge drinking at home
- Drinkaware Index analysing hazardous drinking in Ireland
- Drinkaware Barometer Report key findings 2017-2018

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Introductory note from B&A

We value our working relationship with the Drinkware team and the thought and consideration they place on the design of research studies.

It is to their credit that they were so decisive on the need to conduct research early in the pandemic in 2020.

Not only did that research highlight the burgeoning issues around drinking at home, it allowed the 2021 survey the huge benefit of comparing against the previous year's benchmark measures. It was from this vantage point we are able to confirm how well-established at home drinking patterns now are.

It is great to work with a team who are so passionate about their area of activity; and who are so considerate of what is involved in participating in research from the respondent side. It has been a pleasure to appreciate their sensitivity about both which types of questions are asked and the overall duration of the survey. That sensitivity and deliberation is also clearly evident in this report.

John O'Mahony, Director, B&A

CEO foreword

Zora Neale Hurston said “*research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and probing with a purpose*”.

The intrinsic value of good research

Research serves a very critical purpose at Drinkaware. It assures our work by informing, scoping and grounding it. The Drinkaware Barometers and research studies and papers have delivered insight and context that have significantly enriched the understanding around alcohol in Ireland, and through their related recommendations, furthered Drinkaware’s work and progress in the prevention and reduction of the misuse of alcohol, and tackling underage drinking.

Often the findings challenge the many assumptions and groupthink that so often prevails with regard to alcohol-related attitudes, behaviours and culture in Ireland. The value of the Drinkaware Barometer Series is its ability to articulate the evolving story of those attitudes, behaviours and culture. Utilising the ongoing national annual surveys, the Barometer Series offers comparisons and continuity in its questioning, but also deeper insights with the addition each year of important of-the-moment questions that reflect the current context. Both are analysed not just retrospectively against previous data sets, but also contextually against additional studies and research from national and international institutions. **The end result is a rich analysis of alcohol in Ireland that is a must read for anyone interested or engaged in the prevention or reduction of alcohol mis-use.**

Because Drinkaware takes this holistic approach we can highlight and anticipate emerging patterns and trends. Examples of such instances include: the identification of at-home drinking, pre-COVID-19, in the Index (2019); ‘household type’ was revealed as an emerging determinant of alcohol use in the Barometer (2020); and the findings in this paper, point to the pressing need to conduct further research and campaigns aimed at parents.

The importance of context

Drinkaware has a clear, defined public health purpose and the charity’s USP is undoubtedly that we view our work, including our research, through a public lens.

Alcohol consumption cannot be viewed or analysed in isolation, and it is the comprehensive approach we take that allows us to better define, encourage, support and enable positive behaviour change.

The most commonly asked question is “How much are we drinking?” But the critical question is “Why do we drink?” Without the answer to this question, preventions and interventions are working blind. The utilisation of the robust DMQ-R SF in the Barometer provides this important context and the cross referencing of the results across the years, provides the insight we need to truly appreciate the motivations and drivers of drinking in Ireland, and their direction of travel.

Quite rightly, the reporting on the Barometer findings in this regard, ‘red flag’ the high percentages of the adult drinking population that use alcohol ‘to cope’ (61%). But also, worth noting in the 2021 Barometer are the high numbers who drink for ‘enhancement’ purposes (66%). There is clear merit in exploring and understanding these data sets and the prevalence of this motivation amongst the groups in terms of frequency/volume/ ‘drinking more’ statements, all within the current context of a very changed and changing environment. From a behavioural change perspective, enhancement taps into the very human ‘loss aversion’ emotion and rationale. It is therefore important to understand this and consider how reward and restriction impact consumption and how the same solution is used to address two different problems, namely How can I cope? How can I have fun?

Context is, of course, key, and the exploration of the findings on consumption, location, age, household make-up, wellbeing, lifestyle etc., surface significant interconnections that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Furthermore, because the Barometer Series, scrutinises the Barometer data alongside other reports and studies, it adds new and pragmatic depth to the known determinants of consumption, whilst also revealing previously unidentified potential determinants of alcohol misuse (excessive, risky, hazardous, or potentially hazardous drinking) such as household make-up.

Alcohol data is complex

There is a danger in discussing alcohol in Ireland in simple and definitive terms, where the nuances of the data are likely lost and the complexity of Irish society's relationship with alcohol reduced to a polarised narrative of dependent stereotypes and 'the rest'.

Also the data can appear contradictory, accounted for by the prevalence of an array of biases in human behaviour. For example, young adults are the most health conscious and sober curious whilst also being the highest binge drinkers; the findings include people saying they're drinking less when they're still drinking excessively; those who are binge drinking say that they want to drink less; people agree the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines are reasonable yet don't know them.

The breadth of questioning in the Barometer is compelling because, when only viewed through a singular lens, data sets can be deceptive. But when behavioural data is juxtaposed with attitudinal and lifestyle data, a different, often more complex story regarding Irish society's relationship with alcohol unfolds.

There are critical gaps in the story of alcohol and Ireland that need to be closed. Gaps in knowledge and gaps in people's motivation versus their intention, or their intention versus their capacity to make healthier decisions. And the issue with 'gaps' is that in the absence of good information, assumptions and biases will prevail at best, or mis/disinformation will dominate at worst.

Complex issues require composite consideration. It is therefore for example, right and fitting that we highlight the key findings re 'drinking more', but it is also of value to interrogate and consider the insights re those drinking less, and what we can and/or need to learn from this cohort in order to support a change in behaviour in the other cohort that are 'drinking more'. For composite, also read collective because the merits of a collective and collegial approach are well documented and it is for this reason that Drinkaware's research is Open Access and that through our Research Briefings initiated in 2019, and our outreach and engagement, we encourage and embrace collaboration and co-operation with mission-aligned organisations.

The COVID-19 legacy

Alcohol is a very emotive subject in Ireland. Whatever your viewpoint, its presence is a part of our social fabric. It is therefore very relevant and indeed critical that the legacy of those first COVID-19 years, 2020 and 2021, is

considered with regard to alcohol. Admittedly this is still evolving, but what is clear is that as a society we are not the same as we were, and alcohol consumption, in terms of motivation, volume and frequency, is not the same as it was. Without due consideration of what has changed for the better, changed for the worse, and what the potential trajectories of drinking attitudes and behaviours are, opportunities may be missed, determinants overlooked, and attention misdirected.

As the changing behaviors of 2020 and 2021 take root, we need to look at how we overturn the problematic behaviours that are fast becoming established, and simultaneously how we sustain and expand the positive behaviours that have emerged. We need to define a new and better drinking culture, one that embeds broader knowledge, normalises positive motivation and enables and empowers healthier decisions. As indicated in the data and analysis in this paper, there are specific cohorts for whom targeted interventions are and/or will be needed. Young adults are a particular case in point. Parents are another, from the dual perspective of being vulnerable to problematic consumption, and also their potential as positive or negative role models and influences. This further highlights the need for more expansive parent-focused alcohol education, as well as in-school education to ensure the protection of the next generation of adults.

Being curious means being open to what the research tells us. Its interpretation in papers such as this one, is only a first step. Its discussion, and its follow-up actions, are the real turn key steps for those committed to progressing the prevention and reduction of alcohol misuse.

Background

The objective of this study was to understand the impact of the pandemic on Irish adults' drinking, one year on from the onset of COVID-19. We were specifically interested in understanding the who, what, where, when, how and why of drinking in Ireland one year into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

Significant shifts regarding alcohol consumption were identified:



55%

of adults reported drinking on a weekly basis in 2021 (52% in 2020)



49%

Indicated binge drinking in the past 30 days in 2021 (46% in 2020, 36% 2019)



61%

indicated drinking for coping reasons in 2021 (60% in 2020)



Low mental wellbeing peaked

Low mental wellbeing peaked among 25-34 year olds in 2021 (at 43%) as well as those that increased their consumption in the past twelve months.



Binge drinking increased

Binge drinking increased among younger adults in 2021: 31% of 18-24 year olds reported they typically 'binged' (6 standard drinks or more) when they drank in 2021 (16% in 2020)



Desire to drink less on the rise

Encouraging results included an increase in those reporting they would like to drink alcohol less often at 30% in 2021 (24% in 2020) and 37% in 2021 said they had already made small positive changes (31% in 2020)

Conclusion and recommendations

Findings from this study reveal which behaviours formed and/or changed in the initial lockdown, have transformed into established patterns of new rituals towards alcohol, a year on from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. More needs to be done to improve knowledge and motivation, and bridge intent and change such as the gap in binge drinking and the desire to drink less. A low-risk weekly guidelines campaign and public behaviour change drive would support adults to make positive changes to their alcohol consumption that can be sustained post COVID-19. Informed evidence such as this research and other data collections across behaviour science and public health fields, while also acknowledging the identified lived experiences of its target populations will be crucial to its success.

Changes in terms of adult drinker cohorts including 'high risk' groups and the determinants of consumption and their potential permeance and impact, as the pandemic's legacy, need careful consideration. To maximise the value of this important data requires further and ongoing analysis and discourse with multiple actors and agencies as co-operation and collaboration among all stakeholders is key.

This research also offers clear recommendations of areas that merit further examination through research including: young adults; the now established at home drinking; understanding those drinking less; and parents' attitudes, behaviour and role modelling.

Methods: A quota-controlled sampling procedure was utilised to deliver a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+. Online surveys were conducted April - May 2021. Questionnaire design incorporated internationally recognised question models including the AUDIT-C, Drinking Motive Questionnaire: Revised Short Form and Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.

Introduction

COVID-19 brought about a sudden and dramatic change to the daily routines of billions of people across the world. Since March 2020, we have experienced fundamental changes to our everyday lives. The ongoing pandemic, coupled with physical and social distancing measures as well as a series of lockdown phases, have led to a radical reorganisation of social, economic and cultural relations, leaving us to grapple with the terms of a 'new normal' in an anything but normal life experience.

Rapidly emerging research and evidence into the current impacts and longer-term consequences of the global pandemic continue to gather apace. During such periods of lockdown, in which health is even more important than usual, people may be trying to adopt healthier lifestyles and hence consumption of alcohol may have decreased (López-Bueno et al., 2020, Laguna et al., 2020, Rodrigues et al. 2022). International data shows that COVID-19 has had a mixed impact on alcohol consumption with a higher share of the population increasing their alcohol consumption and frequency of drinking during the initial lockdown. At the same time, however, a slightly higher share of the population reported a decrease in binge drinking. For instance, across 11 countries, 43% of people reported that they drank more frequently; 25% said less frequently and 32% reported no change in 2020 (OECD 2021). This is important as people changed the place of consumption with alcohol sales in on-license premises (bars, restaurants etc) plummeting, while off-premises sales and in particular online sales grew significantly during lockdown (OECD 2021). Upon examining changes in consumption and drinking occasion characteristics, reductions in on-trade consumption in Scotland and England during 2020 were mainly offset by an increase in off-trade and home drinking during COVID-19 lockdowns (Hardie et al. 2022).

Data from Public Health England (2021) across a number of surveys shows changes in patterns of drinking following COVID-19 restrictions in the UK, including more non-drinkers, less lighter drinkers and more heavier drinkers particularly among middle aged groups (35-64 years) (Anderson et al, 2022). A polarization in drinking has therefore been documented by this data, with some people drinking less than before the pandemic but heavier drinkers consuming more and evidence of increased alcohol-related harm (Hardie et al. 2022). Hence, those at higher risk of alcohol-related harm are over-represented in surveys and while overall levels of alcohol sales and

consumption recorded has not increased, the distribution within the population during COVID-19 restrictions has changed (Anderson et al. 2022). For instance, excess purchases of alcohol during 2020 increased substantially in the UK as the normal amount of alcohol purchased by a household increased with the heaviest buyers of alcohol increasing their purchases the most as well as to some extent among those in most deprived households (Anderson et al 2022). While alcohol consumption is reported to have decreased overall when compared with pre-pandemic levels across a growing number of international studies, certain sub-groups are reporting higher frequency of consumption thus highlighting the importance of segmentation in alcohol consumption analysis (Plata et al. 2022).

Overall per capita consumption is crucial to assess long-term trends and provide comparative levels of alcohol consumption in a country. In Ireland, alcohol consumption is calculated using the alcohol sales figures provided by the Revenue Commissioners and population figures provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The Revenue Commissioners provide alcohol sales figures for each beverage type and where excise duty has been paid. Population figures are based on census data that is collected every five years by the CSO and are then estimated for intervening years. However, to quote the HRB (2021) "surveys of alcohol consumption are also essential in order to estimate the level of harmful drinking patterns in a country, as well as demographic variations in consumption. This information is important in order to estimate the extent of alcohol-related harm in a country and identify groups of people who may be at higher risk of alcohol-related harm due to their patterns of consumption". The identification of sub-populations at risk from harmful drinking patterns, and an understanding of their behaviour, attitudes and motivations, are key to Drinkaware's mission to prevent and reduce the misuse of alcohol. The Barometer surveys the who, where, why and how drinking was taking place during COVID-19 and significantly both the unhealthy patterns of consumption (binge, hazardous drinking etc) as well as positives (drinking less, intent to drink less etc) are then broken down further by cohorts - gender/region/age/household type/working arrangement etc. Its inputs, objectives and what it seeks to understand and to analyse, is therefore very different from the purpose and data of the CSO/Revenue figures. Further information on alcohol consumption is available from the Drinkaware website: Alcohol Consumption in Ireland.

COVID-19 provides a unique context in which to examine Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol. A study of 21 European countries found that Ireland and the United Kingdom were the only two where alcohol

consumption had not declined during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kilian et al 2021). Despite restrictions, among drinkers who reported that their alcohol use had changed, more reported an increase in consumption than a decrease in Ireland (Reynolds et al 2021). However, we cannot examine alcohol in isolation as there is a multi-dimensional aspect to both society's/people's relationship with alcohol. There are multiple powerful social, economic and environmental determinants of alcohol usage/experience. According to Dahlgren & Whitehead (2007), the main determinants of health encompass individual lifestyle factors (age, sex and constitutional); social and community networks (living and working conditions) and general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions. In particular, social determinants in turn are attributable to differences in health-damaging behaviours and are factors that interact as the root of inequities in alcohol-related harm (WHO 2014).

Building on findings from the 2020 Barometer, the 2021 Barometer aimed to further understand the impact of the pandemic on Irish adults' drinking during April and May 2021 – one year on from the onset of initial restrictions imposed in March 2020 as a consequence of COVID-19 and the ongoing global pandemic.

The focus and purpose of this specific paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of 2021 Barometer findings while also referring to 2020 findings as relevant i.e. how Irish adults drinking/behaviours have changed one year on from COVID-19.

In April 2021, Drinkaware commissioned B&A to undertake its latest in the series of national surveys - Barometers - examining Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol. The objective of this specific study was to examine Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol in the unique context of COVID-19 during 2021. In line with the above, this study also sought to examine some of the key determinants of the public's attitudes and behaviours regarding alcohol, and the 'wider picture' in which adults experienced the ongoing pandemic in Ireland e.g., stress/ tension, mental health, economic impact, household dynamic as well as the behaviour of other adults.

The main objectives of the research were to understand the who, what, where, when, how and why of drinking in Ireland one year into the COVID-19 pandemic through:

1. Providing an overview of drinking behaviour of adults 18+ in Ireland, measuring frequency and quantity of drinking among adults
2. Further and deeper examination into how COVID-19 affected alcohol consumption following on from 2020
3. Investigate awareness of techniques for moderating drinking and positive steps taken to reduce consumption
4. Assess impact of pandemic on mental health and how it relates to alcohol consumption
5. Looking to life and drinking practices in COVID-19 and the future, including specific cohorts' experiences.

In addition to questions capturing drinking behaviour, the survey included questions on changes in the working situation of participants since the onset of COVID-19 as well as the impact of household stress/tension. Due to the large volume of data, we intend to publish future papers in 2022 on topics/issues not covered in the main 2021 report such as the specific experiences of young adults (See Recommendations section P.39). It is envisaged that the full data table and library of the COVID-19 Barometer data to date will be available to those wishing to view further details. We welcome secondary analysis of this data following permission and completion of a declaration. Please contact research@drinkaware.ie for more information.

The Barometers have been conducted by B&A on behalf of Drinkaware on five different occasions over the last four years, namely January 2017, June 2017, January 2018, April 2019 and April 2020. We also undertook a detailed analysis of hazardous drinking behaviour in 2018 as part of the Drinkware Index (2019). The objective of the specific study in 2020 was to examine Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol in the unique context of the initial lockdown of COVID-19, as the public were required to stay at home and be socially distant. Therefore, we now have important data gathered on the initial lockdown and now one year on. In this report, data will be drawn on as relevant from 2020, as well as pre-COVID in presenting key findings. Undertaking the Barometer at the initial lockdown phase in April 2020 and then a year on again in 2021 provides an opportunity to examine how COVID-19 has affected behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol in Ireland over the course of a year.

Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A) is Ireland's largest independent Market Research company.

Methodology

A Quantitative research design was employed. A quota-controlled sampling procedure was utilised to deliver a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+. The sample selected for the survey was extracted abiding by strict contact rules with individuals randomly selected within the survey target groupings. The quality controls applied included a series of integrity checks, including time for completion and screening data response patterns. Online surveys were conducted over a two-week period between April - May 2020. The survey included questions relating to patterns in alcohol consumption behaviour (changes in volume, frequency), motivations for drinking, occasions for consumption, household stress and working life since the onset of COVID-19 and personal wellbeing. Questionnaire design incorporated internationally recognised question models that we had used in the 2020 Barometer including:

- AUDIT-C (Babor et al 2001)
- Drinking Motive Questionnaire: Revised Short Form (DMQ-R SF) (Kuntsche & Kuntsche 2009)
- Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009)

As outlined above, 2021 was an opportunity to build on data gathered in 2020 as COVID-19 developed further. As we began to prepare for our 2021 survey, we envisaged that the data gathered would provide valuable insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of adults in Ireland and help establish whether initial drinking habits reported in 2020 have been normalised in 2021. Monitoring and understanding alcohol consumption patterns and trends are crucial in understanding the impact of this ongoing public health crisis, following the initial 'shock' associated with the first lockdown phase.

Drinkaware worked together with B&A and held a series of planning meetings during spring 2021 to carefully consider a variety of measures and questions that would provide an analysis of the key determinants of the public's behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol. We were also interested in the 'wider picture', which adults were experiencing in the ongoing pandemic, e.g., stress/ tension, mental health, economic impact, household dynamic, age, gender, region as well as the behaviour of other adults.

As part of the development process, careful consideration was taken to keep questions in line with 2020 due to the

importance of continuity in helping to identify potential patterns. At the same time, additional questions were added/revised to help examine COVID-19 - one year on in order to understand potential emerging trends and spotting issues of concern that may be developing. The ongoing pandemic has affected people's lives in a variety of ways, both at individual (fears – of the unknown, of illness, of death, isolation, physical and financial insecurity), household (individual plus tension/stress) and societal level (economic recession, educational and opportunities, limitations, job loss, rising inequities and stigma, infodemia, coronaphobia). Adults' behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol are intertwined with these dimensions and at the core of the Barometer. The use of three internationally recognised question models was an integral part of planning for the Barometer again in 2021 as detailed below.

Data on consumption collected 'in past 30 days' in line with 2020 is important in telling us if there had been changes from the initial lockdown phase in 2020. It provided us with information on sustained behaviours and standouts for certain cohorts and whether peaks/ standouts in certain cohorts have since taken place and/or intensified during 2021. However, we were very aware that 'normal' has taken on a new meaning in these difficult times so we also considered how we could ask participants to reflect on their drinking behavior since the onset of COVID-19, to what extent both the amount and frequency of alcohol consumed has changed both for them and for other members of their household. In examining those that reported drinking more or less, we were also interested in collecting data on adults' level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns through the AUDIT-C (WHO 2001) and to what extent the frequency of propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking consumption cohorts had changed since 2020.

The OECD (2021) acknowledges that *'During the COVID-19 pandemic, people have significantly changed drinking habits, shifting places of consumption from bars and restaurants to home'*. To reflect the unique context of the pandemic, we added additional questions to the 2021 Barometer to ascertain how new drinking occasions and spaces may have formed and developed. Such practices may now be sustained as a consequence of life in lockdown. We therefore asked participants about their experiences of having takeaway drinks, outdoor

drinking, online purchasing of alcohol and marking the end of the working day with a drink. Following Barometer 2020 and the identification of some worrying findings among parents (Drinkaware 2021), we were interested in learning more about potential changes to parents' alcohol consumption within household contexts one year on. So, we asked about specific drinking occasions for parents such as drinking when children are asleep/in bed as well as the acceptability of drinking when children are present.

Over one third of adults (36%) reported 'drinking alone' on a weekly+ basis in 2020 with peaks identified in certain cohorts (Drinkaware 2021). In planning for 2021, we were acutely aware that since COVID-19, 'drinking alone' had taken on a different meaning and may indeed be imposed rather than chosen for some due to restrictions. Some adults may also be drinking alone as a way of relieving loneliness and isolation. We wanted to understand more about solitary drinking occasions in the context of the ongoing pandemic and the reasons why certain adults are more likely to do so. We also acknowledge, that there are those that may report drinking alone but are not living alone. We included the Drinking Motivations Questionnaire: Revised Short Form (DMQ-R SF) (Kuntsche & Kuntsche 2009) in our survey to enable responses to be analysed according to the different motivations. To reflect the unique 'lockdown' circumstances, the presented motivations were updated for the purposes of this study in 2020 and again in 2021, to ascertain the key drivers and reasons for adults' drinking. This data would be specifically important in helping to further understand any pandemic-related changes in reasons for alcohol consumption. This would provide information on risk factors that may contribute to alcohol-related harm during the pandemic.

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009) was first used pre-COVID-19 in 2018 as part of the Drinkaware Index (Drinkaware 2019). It was decided to incorporate this question model into our 2020 Barometer in order to ascertain the impact of initial restrictions on adults' mental wellbeing. Asking participants to complete the SWEMWBS (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009) again in 2021 provided key data as to whether Irish adults' mental wellbeing worsened further from the spike in low mental wellbeing reported in 2020 (an almost pandemic in itself), or whether it since stabilised or improved for some and not others during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. What people were coping with back in April 2020 at the time of Barometer 2020 was an unprecedented crisis and set of stresses, worries and restrictions, albeit with an underlying assumption that this would pass. What we were asked to cope with one year on was anything but normal. And so too in 2021 we decided to add additional questions to

our Barometer on the availability of social networks, loss of routine as well as developing a new routine that would provide key information on some of the protective factors that may contribute to or inhibit such resilience despite prolonged and difficult life events.

As well as connecting the dots on alcohol consumption one year into the pandemic, as part of the Barometer in 2021, we were interested in looking towards the future and adults' behaviour post-COVID restrictions. We asked participants what they were most looking forward to in terms of leisure activities following easing restrictions that were due to commence in Ireland from May 2021 onwards, as well as whether they were likely to continue to drink at home.

The timing of the survey and data collection was crucial too, taking place in May 2021 and in line with easing of restrictions that was happening in Ireland at that time, emerging from a long, dark winter and sense of optimism and hope with the roll out of the vaccine programme. Understanding such behaviour changes during different phases of the pandemic is crucial to anticipating the sustainability of shifts.

Sample

All data collected was securely stored and analysed by B&A using quantitative software. Where B&A obtains personal identifiable data, it is stored in a safe and secure manner with limited access, in compliance with their ISO 27001 and all relevant Data Protection legislation¹. Key descriptive statistics on the full sample are presented in the table below. Information gathered was also broken

down further by life stage (single –45, single 45+, pre-family, family pre-school, family pre-teen, family teen, empty nester) allowing for further examination of the impacts for different household types in the unique context of COVID-19 and will be included as relevant in this paper.

Table 1: Full sample breakdown Barometer 2021

Base: All adults aged 18+ n=1000

		n	%
Gender	Male	484	49
	Female	516	51
Age	18-24	103	11
	25-34	177	17
	35-49	296	30
	50-64	268	23
	65+	156	19
Social class	ABC1F	514	50
	C2DE	486	51
Region	Dublin	256	29
	Rest of Leinster	269	27
	Munster	280	27
	Connaught/Ulster	195	18
Area	Urban	693	66
	Rural	307	34
Household type	Single -45	216	23
	Single 45+	147	15
	Pre-family	45	4
	Family pre-school	109	11
	Family pre-teen	156	14
	Family teen	97	9
	Empty nester	230	24

¹Any personal identifiable data linked to market research surveys is stored by B&A for no more than 12 months after which it is securely destroyed – unless explicit informed consent is given by individuals to store it for longer. B&A's Acumen online surveys are hosted by Microsoft Azure in Dublin. Security is integrated into every aspect of the Azure platform with multiples levels of encryption and back up. Vulnerability assessment tests are run on Acumen Online and B&A servers in Dublin on a quarterly basis. The results of the online surveys are downloaded to B&A's secure server for processing.

Findings by theme

The focus and purpose of this specific paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of 2021 Barometer findings while also referring to 2020 Barometer findings as relevant in helping to demonstrate how Irish adults are drinking and if/how their behaviours have changed one year on from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings will be presented in this paper across 9 key themes namely:

- I. Patterns of alcohol consumption
- II. Motivations for drinking alcohol
- III. Occasions for consumption
- IV. Prevalence of binge and hazardous drinking
- V. Household stress/ tension and economic impact/working arrangement
- VI. Mental wellbeing
- VII. Behavioural change challenges/positive steps
- VIII. Supports for moderating drinking
- IX. Life in lockdown and post-COVID-19

Theme 1: Patterns of alcohol consumption

- When asked about consuming alcohol in the past 30 days, over three quarters of Irish adults reported doing so (77%) in 2021. This represents a 5% increase on the figure reported during the initial lockdown phase in 2020 (72%).
- This is higher than the current drinker figure reported in the most recent Healthy Ireland Survey². Overall, 66% of people in Ireland aged 15 and older report consuming alcohol in the previous 6 months (Department of Health 2021)³.
- 55% of Irish adults reported drinking on a weekly+ basis (versus 52% in 2020).
- This finding is in line with that reported in the most recent Healthy Ireland Survey - over half (57%) of those reporting that they consumed alcohol in the last six months did so at least once a week, with 33% drinking on multiple days each week (Department of Health 2021).
- Frequency of drinking is still rising: during the initial lockdown in 2020 24% were drinking 2-3 times a week; 14% four or more times each week; and 52% drinking on an at least weekly basis. This has increased to 55% drinking at least weekly in 2021. Pre-COVID-19 in 2019, the same figure was 44% (Drinkaware Index, 2019)
- Higher rates of weekly+ drinking are reported among men (59%) vs women (50%) in 2021 plus there is a slight increase in figures from 2020 (57% men and 48% women).
- This corresponds with similar rates of weekly drinking among men (61%) and women (53%) identified in Healthy Ireland 2021. Significantly the 2021 Healthy Ireland data identifies an 8-point gender gap, with men consuming more alcohol than women, narrower than the 14-point gap measured in 2018, due to rates of weekly alcohol consumption rising faster among women (8-point increase since 2018) than men (2-point increase since 2018) (Department of Health 2021).
- Across age cohorts, the highest differences/increases in weekly+ consumption between 2020-2021 were amongst the younger 18–24-year-old age cohort at 51% (+13% v 2020) and the 65+ age cohort at 66% (+9% v 2020).

² Data collection for the Healthy Ireland study took place Oct 2020-March 2021 – representing a mid-way point between our 2020 and 2021 Barometer.

³ Note the age range for our Barometer survey was adults aged 18+ while the Healthy Ireland sample included people aged 15 and old. We also asked participants to recall consumption in past 30 days, while Health Ireland asked participants to recall consumption in previous 6 months. This may provide some explanation for the difference in consumption reported as well as the different time points in which data was gathered in each survey and the corresponding level of public health restrictions in place at the time.

- There was a significant peak among 65+ year olds, the age cohort reporting the highest weekly+ consumption with 66% doing so in 2021.
- Similarly, the recent Healthy Ireland Survey found that older drinkers continue to be those who drink most frequently. In line with Drinkaware research, 62% of drinkers aged 65 and older consumed alcohol at least once a week in the last 6 months (Healthy Ireland 2021).
- The under 24 age cohort had the lowest weekly consumption across all age cohorts. However, the 18–24-year-olds weekly consumption has seen the largest increase from 38% in 2020 to 51% in 2021.
- Healthy Ireland 2021 found weekly consumption of those under 25 at 34%. The specific timing of the Healthy Ireland 2021 survey may be important here.
- We also found that 9% of our total sample reported that they never drink alcohol, while 14% did not consume alcohol in the past 30 days in 2021.

Table 2: Alcohol consumption patterns – weekly+ 2021 and 2020

Pre-school	Total	Gender		Age				
		%	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64
Weekly+ 2021	55%	59%	50%	51%	49%	54%	52%	66%
Weekly+ 2020	52%	57%	48%	38%	51%	56%	51%	57%

Drinking more or less⁴:

- During the initial lockdown in 2020, 25% adults reported that they were drinking more i.e., increased their consumption of alcohol but 25% also reported drinking less i.e., decreased their consumption of alcohol in the past 30 days.
- In 2021- 19% claimed that they were drinking 'less' in the past 30 days, while 8% reported that they were drinking 'more' in the past 30 days and 11% indicated that someone in their household was drinking 'more'.
- Almost one quarter of families with pre-school children (24%) indicated either they or someone in their household was drinking 'more'. In 2020, one third of pre-school and pre-teen family households said they were drinking more in the past 30 days during the initial lockdown (highest reported across life stages and higher than national average of 25% in 2020).
- At the same time in 2020, a quarter of participants said that they were drinking less in the past 30 days and slightly lower figures were reported across the different households with children.
- Similar to the 2020 Barometer, the findings reported above are in line with, and expand on, other Irish COVID-19 research conducted by the CSO (2020a) that found households with children reported the highest proportion across all household composition in an increase in alcohol consumption at 27.3% during the initial lockdown phase.
- Nearly three quarters reported their consumption in the past 30 days as 'about the same' in 2021 (73%) while almost two thirds reported the consumption of others in the household as 'about the same' (64%). Such 'no change' figures are notable given that in 2020, 25% reported that they are drinking 'more' during the initial lockdown phase, while 29% indicated either they or someone in their household was drinking 'more'.
- While the overall pattern of changes in consumption over the past 30 days is stable, over 1 in 10 of the youngest age group (18-24 yrs) (12%) indicated both their own and their household drinking has increased in 2021 (vs 1% 65yrs+, 3% national).
- 2021 changes in self-reported consumption in past 30 days were lower but this is very deceptive - vital to remember increase in drinking reported in 2020: 2020 – 25% drinking more in past 30 days > 2021 – 8% drinking more (19% drinking less).

⁴ Participants were asked is the number of 'standard' drinks you have had in the past 30 days, more, less or about the same as before?

- Therefore 'about the same' is of crucial importance in 2021 with 73% reporting that they are doing so (i.e., increase sustained).

Table 3: *Drinking more, less, about same in past 30 days, 2021 (personal, other adults in household)*

Pre-school	National average
Any more personal	8%
Any more other	11%
Any less personal	19%
Any less other	25%
About the same personal	73%
About the same others	64%

- In 2021, we added a new question to the Barometer asking participants to self-review their personal drinking over the past 12 months. It was envisaged that this would provide important data on both changes in amount (size and number of drinks/volume) and frequency (number of days per week) of drinking alcohol since onset of COVID-19.
- Overall, 15% of adults reported that they had increased the amount and 14% had increased the frequency of alcohol consumed in the past 12 months.
- The most recent Healthy Ireland study found that just over two out of every five drinkers (42%) said they have been drinking less since the start of the Covid-19 restrictions. A similar proportion (44%) reported that their drinking has remained the same, while 13% reported drinking more (Government of Ireland 2021). These figures are broadly in line with the 'amount' figures in our personal drinking review of past 12 months as part of the 2021 Barometer – with 35% saying that they were drinking less, 50% reported that their drinking had remained the same, while 15% reported drinking more.
- Higher increases in either amount or frequency of alcohol consumption in the past 12 months were reported among weekly drinkers (26%) vs all drinkers in the past 30 days (21%).
- Across household type/lifestage, families with pre-school children were most likely to report increased alcohol consumption in either amount or frequency in the past 12 months, with 28% doing so.
- Similarly in Healthy Ireland 2021 findings - parents of children aged under 18 were found particularly likely to report an increase in their drinking (16% report an increase), with mothers (19%) more likely than fathers (13%) to report that they are now drinking more (Government of Ireland 2021)⁵.
- Percentages of those that reported their drinking had 'stayed the same' are important, providing indications of stability among half of adult drinkers since the onset of COVID-19. Therefore, spikes associated with the initial lockdown in 2020 as described above are important in this regard also. For instance, 50% of adults indicated that the amount of alcohol they have drunk in past 12 months has 'stayed the same', while 53% indicated that the frequency of drinking over the past 12 months had 'stayed the same'.
- 1 in 3 claimed that they will continue to decrease their consumption in 2021 as 35% indicated they have decreased the amount of drinks they have had and 33% have decreased the frequency of drinks since the COVID-19 pandemic began.
- In terms of pre-COVID-19 data, the Drinkaware Index (2019) also found that a consistent 1 in 4 Irish adults were drinking less when compared with their levels of drinking two years ago - 24% reported drinking less, 53% about the same and 6% more.

⁵ Our Barometer data is important as findings reported are broken further into three categories: 1. Pre-school (households with children aged 0-5 that have yet to start primary education) 2. Primary school (households with children generally aged 5-12 that are attending primary level education) 3. Teenagers (households with children generally aged between 13-18 and that are attending full-time secondary level education). Specific issues have been faced during the ongoing pandemic by households with children depending on age of child and 'households with children' cannot therefore be treated as a homogenous group (Drinkaware 2021).

- Across all age cohorts, 18–24-year-olds were most likely to report that they had decreased the amount of alcohol they drink since the start of COVID-19 at 41% (35% national).
- The Healthy Ireland 2021 report also found that younger adults were more likely to report decreasing their consumption since COVID-19 – For instance, the majority of drinkers aged under 35 reported a decrease in their alcohol consumption, with 57% of this group saying that the amount they drink is now lower (Government of Ireland 2021).
- However, we found that overall, 1 in 8 adults (12%) reported that they will continue to increase the amount or frequency in 2021, while 42% of 18–24-year-olds reported that they will continue to increase their consumption in the future, statistically significantly higher than all other age cohorts.

Table 4: Personal drinking review of past 12 months

Personal drinking	Total	18-24 yrs	Family pre-school	Weekly+
Amount				
Decreased	35%	41%	28%	25%
Stayed same	50%	41%	48%	52%
Increased	15%	18%	24%	22%
Frequency				
Decreased	33%	45%	30%	22%
Stayed same	53%	40%	46%	56%
Increased	14%	16%	24%	22%
Increased either	17%	21%	28%	26%

Theme 2: Motivations for drinking

The Drinking Motive Questionnaire: Revised Short Form (DMQ-R SF) consists of 12 motivations⁶ for drinking and a five-point response scale. The individual's responses used to determine the extent to which they drink for social reasons, enhancement reasons, conformity or coping reasons. This measure was included in the survey to enable responses to be analysed according to the different motivations. To reflect the unique 'Lockdown' circumstances, the presented motivations were updated for the purposes of this study in both 2020 and again in 2021 (with additional added) to ascertain the key drivers and reasons for adults' drinking in the context of COVID-19:

1. Social reasons: because it makes social gatherings more fun, to celebrate and because it improves social gatherings.
2. Enhancement reasons: because you like the feeling, to get a buzz, because it's fun and to get drunk.
3. Coping reasons: because it helps you when you feel depressed or anxious, to cheer up when you're in a bad mood, because you feel lonely, to help manage social distancing/isolation, to help with sleep, to help with boredom/isn't much to do and/or to help relax/unwind.
4. Conformity reasons: to fit in with a group you like, to be liked and/or so you won't feel left out.

⁶The DMQ-R DF (Kuntsche & Kuntsche 2009) encompasses the following motives:

1. Social - because it makes social gatherings more fun, because it improves parties and celebrations, because it helps you enjoy a party
2. Enhancement – because you like the feeling, because it's fun, to get high
3. Conformity – so you won't feel left out, to be liked, to fit in with a group you like
4. Coping - because it helps you when you feel depressed or nervous, to cheer up when you are in a bad mood, to forget about your problems.

Drinking for coping reasons:

- Coping is a key driver for increases in drinking during the COVID-19 pandemic in both 2020 and 2021 with nearly two third of current drinkers frequently drinking for coping reasons. During the initial lockdown phase, the main motivation for drinking in 2020 was coping (to help cheer up, to help sleep, when I'm feeling anxious or depressed) with 60% of adults doing so always/most/half of the time and increasing to 61% in 2021.
- Incidence of coping motivations is largely consistent with age and peaks among younger adult cohorts (72% of 18-24 yrs and 73% 25-34 yrs). Drinking to cope also peaks among those who have increased their consumption in the past year (82%) as well as among those that report binge drinking (70%).
- Drinking for coping reasons on a regular basis was also statistically significant among those who score 5+ on the AUDIT-C at 73%.
- When coping motivations are broken down further, drinking 'to help relax and unwind' remains the dominant motivation cited among Irish adults in 2021 with half of Irish adults (50%) doing so always/most/half of the time. Drinking 'to help relax and unwind' was also the top reason cited by 54% of Irish adults in 2020. In 2021, drinking 'to help relax and unwind' was significantly higher among 25-34-year-olds with 60% doing so as well as families with pre-teens/primary school children with 62% doing so. 7 out of 10 (70%) parents of younger children (pre-school) reported drinking 'to help relax and unwind' during the initial lockdown phase in 2020 (Drinkaware 2021).

Table 5: Coping motivations always/most/half of the time past 30 days, 2021

	Total	Gender		Age					Consumption		
	%	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Weekly+	Binge	Increased alcohol past 12 months
Coping	61%	66%	55%	72%	73%	67%	53%	44%	66%	70%	82%

- Over 1 in 10 referenced loneliness, isolation and feeling depressed/anxious as motivations, in line with findings during the initial lockdown in 2020. Significantly larger proportions of some cohorts such as young adults aged 18-24 years with 1 in 3 reported doing so in 2021 as documented in the table below.

Table 6: Drinking to cope with loneliness, isolation, feel depressed/anxious always/most/half of the time, past 30 days, 2021

Coping motivation	Total Current Drinkers %	Statistically Significant Peaks in 18-24 Year Olds
Because feel lonely	12%	28%
To help manage social distance / isolation	14%	29%
Because it helps when feel depressed / anxious	15%	31%

Drinking for Enhancement reasons:

- The second most common motivation reported was enhancement 57% in 2020 (because you like the feeling, to get a buzz, because it's fun and to get drunk). However, drinking for enhancement reasons had increased to 66% in 2021 and became the main motivation for drinking in 2021, with two thirds of Irish adults who are currently drinking doing so always/most/half of the time.

Table 7: Enhancement motivations always/most/half of the time past 30 days, 2021

	Total	Gender		Age					Consumption		
	%	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Weekly+	Binge	Increased alcohol past 12 months
Enhancement	66%	71%	61%	83%	78%	68%	55%	55%	70%	74%	74%

- Drinking for enhancement reasons on a regular basis was also statistically significant among those who score 5+ on the AUDIT-C⁷ at 73%.
- When Enhancement motivations are broken down further, 42% of current drinkers report drinking 'because you like the feeling' in 2021 (43% in 2020). Drinking because you like the feeling was significantly higher among male drinkers (49%) vs female drinkers (36%) as well as 18-24 year olds with 59% doing so always/most/half of the time in the past 30 days. There were also higher proportions of weekly+ binge drinkers (62%) and those that scored 5+ on the AUDIT-C (53%), highlighting the statistical significance of drinking because you like the feeling among those drinking at hazardous and potentially harmful levels in 2021.
- There was a small increase in some reasons reported in 2021 with 27% drinking to get a buzz (24% in 2020). Drinking to get a buzz was statistically significant among young adult cohorts with 57% of 18-24 year olds reporting that they do so always/most/half of the time in the past 30 days as well as 37% of current drinkers that report increased stress/tension in the household. There were also higher proportions of weekly+ binge drinkers (37%) and those that scored 5+ on the AUDIT-C (38%) reporting drinking to get a buzz, both of which are of statistical significance.
- 17% of current drinkers reported drinking to get drunk (15% in 2020). Drinking to get drunk was statistically significant among young adult cohorts with 42% of 18-24 year olds and 28% of 25-34 year olds reporting that they do so always/most/half of the time in the past 30 days. Across life stages/household types, nearly one third of families with pre-school children (30%) reported drinking to get drunk in 2021 (18% in 2020). There are also higher proportions of weekly+ binge drinkers (34%) and those that have increased stress/tension (30%) reporting drinking to get drunk, both of which are of statistical significance.
- Young adults were also most likely to state that they drink always/most/half of the time in the past 30 days 'because it's fun' with 67% of 18-24 year olds and 58% of 25-34 year olds doing so, compared with 40% total current drinkers and 28% 65+ year age group. Similarly, higher proportions of weekly+ binge drinkers (52%) and those that scored 5+ on AUDIT-C (54%) reported drinking because it's fun, both of which are of statistical significance.

Table 8: Drinking because you like the feeling, to get a buzz, because it's fun, to get drunk always/most/half of the time, 2021

Enhancement motivation	Total Current Drinkers %	Statistically Significant Peaks in 18-24 Year Olds
Because you like the feeling	42%	59%
To get a buzz	27%	57%
To get drunk	17%	42%
Because it's fun	40%	67%

⁷ Further details on specific findings relating to AUDIT-C scores are provided in a later section of the findings

Theme 3: Occasions for consumption

- In terms of occasions where alcohol was consumed in the past 30 days, findings demonstrate the imposed pattern of consumption within Irish households during the ongoing pandemic and periods of lockdown 2020-2021. An overall similar pattern was reported year on year:
- Drinkers were most likely to report drinking 'a small number of drinks at home with the family/housemates over mealtime/dinner' in past 30 days with 38% doing so at least once a week in 2021 (39% in 2020).
- Standout occasions - 37% of adults had drunk at home 'alone' at least once a week in the past 30 days (36% in 2020), this rose to 49% of drinkers who do so 'alone' on at a weekly+ basis and 48% among those who were binge drinking. Across lifestyle/ household types, single 45+ (53%) and families with pre-school children (51%) were statistically significantly more likely to report 'drinking at home alone' with over half of each cohort reporting doing so in 2021. Men were also more likely to report doing so on a weekly+ basis in 2021 (44% vs 30% women) indicating that they are (vs 30% women).
- The Barometer findings from both 2020 and 2021 showed an increase on total figure reported in pre-COVID with 15% of Irish adults reporting drinking at home alone at least once a week and 25% doing so weekly+ (Drinkaware 2019).
- Following on from the 2020 findings (Drinkaware 2021), we added an additional option of drinking alcohol 'when children in bed/house is quiet', overall, 11% of adults reported doing so in the past 30 days on a weekly basis. However, this rises to one in three among households with children, peaking at 40% for families with pre-school children and 33% of families with pre-teens/primary school children.
- Given the specific timing of the 2021 Barometer and the widespread media reporting of 'takeaway drinks' despite pubs and restaurants remaining closed, we also decided to add another option. Only 6% reported having 'takeaway drinks' on a weekly basis, while 17% reported doing so in the past 30 days. There was statistically significant peak among younger adult cohorts with over 4 in 10 (44%) 18-34 year olds reporting that they had 'takeaway drinks' in the past 30 days (27% 25-34 year olds). This contrasts with the 65+ year age group with only 5% reporting that they had 'takeaway drinks' in the past 30 days. In addition, a higher proportion of adults living in Dublin reported having has 'takeaway drinks' with 24% of current drinkers having done so in the past 30 days.

Table 9: Occasions where alcohol consumed in past 30 days, weekly + 2021 and 2020

Drinking occasion	% at least once a week	
	2021	2020
A small number of drinks at home with family/ housemates over meal times/ dinner	38%	39%
Drinking at home alone	37%	36%
A small number of drinks at home with partner/ housemates during day or evening (might be less than an hour)	35%	35%
Several drinks at home with partner/ housemates during evening (maybe 1 –3 hours)	23%	25%
When children are in bed/ house is quiet	11%	n/a
Drinking in family/friends' houses (inside or outside)	9%	n/a
Drinking together with family/friends online – via Facetime, Zoom etc	8%	16%
Drinking with others outdoors/ in gardens/ parks etc	7%	11%
Having 'takeaway drinks'	6%	n/a

Theme 4: Prevalence of binge and hazardous drinking

Binge Drinking - Heavy episodic drinking is defined as the proportion of adult drinkers (aged 15 and older) who have had at least 60 grams or more of pure alcohol on at least one occasion in the past 30 days. An intake of 60 grams of pure alcohol is approximately equal to 6 standard alcoholic drinks. Consuming six or more standard drinks of alcohol in one sitting is classified as binge drinking or excessive drinking.

- 49% of Irish adults reported that they had binge drank in the past 30 days (46% in 2020; 36% in 2018 *wording updated, comparison not direct)⁸. Any Binge drinking in the 'past 30 days' rose to nearly two thirds' (64%) of males (vs 34% females); and declined with age (60% in 18-24 yrs vs 33% in 65yrs+).
- On an average day of drinking in 2021, over 1 in 5 (22%) (20% 2020) of those who drink, reported drinking six or more standard drinks in that single setting i.e. binge drinking. This is an indication of a year-on-year increase in drinkers having typically 'binged' when they have drunk in the past 30 days (vs pre-COVID-19 19%).
- Across life stages/household type, families with pre-school children were most likely to report having typically 'binged' in 2021 with 28% doing so in the past 30 days (vs 21% doing so in 2020).
- Healthy Ireland 2021 found 15% of the population aged 15 and older are binge drinkers, which represents 22% of drinkers. Therefore, 22% of drinkers report binge drinking on a typical occasion according to Healthy Ireland 2021, the same as the 2021 Barometer figure⁹. This compares to 28% of the population aged 15+ (37% of drinkers) in the 2018 Healthy Ireland findings (Department of Health 2021).
- According to the Barometer data, males are more than twice as likely to engage in having typically 'binged' on alcohol when they have drunk in 2021 than females (31% vs 14%). This also represents an increase of 14.8% for men and 7.6% for women when compared with 2020 figures (27% vs 13%). Similarly Healthy Ireland 2021 found that men remain more likely than women to binge drink on a typical drinking occasion (35% and 10%, respectively) (Department of Health, 2021).
- Binge drinking amongst the 65+ year cohort was at 12% in 2021 (lowest across all age groups). This is in line with Healthy Ireland 2021 findings with 13% of those aged 65 and older reporting binge drinking on a typical occasion (Department of Health 2021).
- 14% of drinkers binge drink at least once a week in 2021 (vs Healthy Ireland 2021 20%) and 49% do so at least once a month (vs Healthy Ireland 37%). These are at similar levels to those measured in the Healthy Ireland 2018 survey. While Healthy Ireland statistics are encouraging in terms of an overall reduction in binge drinking vs pre-COVID-19, what we found in the Barometer series during the COVID-19 2020-2021 period was a small increase in those reporting binge drinking.
- At the same time, there was an increase in binge drinking among younger adults reported in 2021 - 18-24-year-olds more than other age cohorts - 31% of this age group reported they typically 'binged' on alcohol when they have drunk in 2021 compared to 16% at the time of the initial lockdown phase in 2020. Healthy Ireland 2021 also found 31% of those aged under 25 are binge drinking on a typical occasion (Department of Health 2021). Therefore, there appears to be a dramatic change in frequency of binge drinking among 18-34-year-olds when pre-COVID data is taken into consideration. For instance, the Drinkaware Index (2019) found that adults aged under 25 reported engaging in a substantial amount of binge drinking at 28 times in the past year, higher than any other age group and well above the national average of 16.

⁸ Change in wording: Pre-COVID, 19% Irish adults reported drinking more than 6 standard drinks in the past year on a weekly basis (incorporating 1% daily and 18% weekly) and 17% reported doing so monthly in past year (Drinkaware 2019). In 2020, 20% cited drinking 6 or more standard drinks in past 30 days.

⁹ Note different questioning - Healthy Ireland 2021 asked 'During the last 6 months, how often have you consumed the equivalent of 6 standard drinks in one drinking occasion?' while Barometer asked 'How often did you have 6 or more standard drinks on a single occasion in past 30 days?' Asking participants to recall over a shorter period may help account for differences. While both surveys included description plus examples of what a standard drink is, the 2021 Barometer included visual examples for participants.

Table 10: Levels of binge drinking in past 30 days, 2021 and 2020

	2021	2020
Any binge drinking in past 30 days	49%	46%
Binge at least once a week in past 30 days	14%	15%
Binge on typical day of drinking in past 30 days	22%	20%

Hazardous drinking may also occur where consumption exceeds the HSE recommended Low- Risk Weekly Guidelines (17 standard drinks for men and 11 standard drinks for women and at least 2 drink free days) but harm may not yet have been experience. In other words, drinking in a hazardous manner means that although they have not yet experienced harm, the person is likely to in the future. It is also possible to drink hazardously by binge drinking (six or more standard drinks in one sitting), even if the guidelines are adhered to.

The AUDIT tool, developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Babor et al 2001), is used to measure an individual's level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns¹. The AUDIT-C was completed in the Barometer 2021 based on consumption in the last 30 days. It is a modified, three question version of the AUDIT instrument used to provide a measure of consumption only. A score of less than 5 indicates lower risk drinking and scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking.

- Table 11 below outlines the AUDIT-C scores in our study based on those that consumed alcohol in 2021. 56% of Irish adults scored less than 5 on AUDIT-C (lower risk drinking). However, 44% had scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking. Men (58%), those resident in Dublin (52%) and parents of children under 18 years (52%) were more likely to score 5+ in 2021.
- In 2020, 58% of Irish adults scored less than 5 on AUDIT-C (lower risk drinking). However, similar to 2021, over four out of ten (42%) had scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking. Over half of families with pre-school children were more likely to score 5+ (56%) in 2020.

Table 11: AUDIT-C scores based those that consumed alcohol in last 30 days, 2021 and 2020

	2021	2020
5-	56%	58%
5+	44%	42%

Theme 5: Stress/tension and economic impact/working arrangement

- While a positive year on year dynamic is apparent in relation to household stress/tension, just over a quarter (27%) of adults continued to indicate a recent 'increase' in household stress/tension in 2021 (vs 47% increase in 2020).
- 2020 was representative of a shock figure in response to the dramatic change that occurred in March 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore the 2021 reporting of no change figure at over a half of adults (55%) is important as people may have got used to the stress/tension one year on.
- Standouts – Stress/tension increase was highest in the 18–24 year-old age cohort with just over one third of this group reporting so (37%) vs only 17% of 65+ year olds. Two thirds of young adults aged 18-24 years reported an increase in stress/tension (66%) during the initial lockdown phase in 2020. Notable that in 2021, 39% of 18-24 year olds reported no change to their levels of stress/tension.
- Across households with children, 32% of families reported an increase in stress/tension in 2021. The 'no change' figure is significant again here at 48% as in 2020 over a half of families with pre-school children (58%) reported an increase in stress/tension during the initial lockdown phase in 2020.

Table 12: Increase in household stress/tension by age cohort 2021

18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-49 yrs	50-64 yrs	65+ yrs	National avg
37%	24%	31%	27%	17%	27%

- Some worrying interconnections were found in 2021 with stress/tension peaks among the low mental wellbeing score group (48%) and those who reported an increase in consumption in the past year (39%). The behaviour of others in the household was important too with a 40% increase in stress/tension reported among those that stated either personal or others in household consumption of alcohol has increased in the past 30 days in 2021.

Table 13: Increase in household stress/tension interconnections 2021

Stress/tension	Total	Mental wellbeing scale			Alcohol consumption in last 12 months
		Low	Medium	High	
Increased	27%	48%	23%	9%	39%

- The negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy has been significant. While the seasonally adjusted standard measure of Monthly Unemployment was 5.3% in January 2022, the COVID-19 Adjusted Measure of Unemployment could indicate a rate of 7.8% if all claimants of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) were classified as unemployed. This alternative measure is up from a rate of 7.4% in December 2021 and down from 27.1% in January 2021 (CSO 2022). Indeed, since data for the 2021 Barometer was gathered, the economy is now fully reopened and sectors that were temporarily closed during both 2020 and 2021 due to public health restrictions have since re-opened. However, inflation is at a 20 year high with high levels of predictability regarding its future direction (SVP 2022). B&A (2022) recently found that despite most Covid restrictions coming to an end and a stable pandemic situation, consumer confidence is down significantly from January to February 2022, driven by concerns about Russia's invasion of Ukraine but also higher costs of living. Similarly, the ESRI found that worry about the economy increased in February 2022 (Lunn 2022).
- In 2020 and in response to the initial lockdown, we asked participants, which, if any, of the following has already occurred or do you foresee as likely in the near future for you or someone in your household? Over four out of ten Irish adults (43%) reported that during the initial lockdown phase, any negative economic impact (actual/likely) had occurred or foresee as likely to happen in the near future to themselves or someone in their household. This was higher among households with children with the highest negative economic impact reported among families with pre-teens and encompassed loss of job temporarily/permanently, salary reduction and/or working fewer hours with a lower salary. Nearly six out of ten families of primary school children (59%) reported any negative economic impact.
- The Eurofound study on living, working and COVID across Europe found that respondents in the 35-49 age category were more financially vulnerable than other age groups during the current pandemic. Female respondents,

more than male respondents, reported difficulties in combining work and private life and with the burden of care responsibilities increasing as well as women being impacted more in terms of a reduction in work hours and job losses versus that of men (Eurofound 2020). The CSO (2020b) found that households with children were most likely to be negatively financially affected by COVID-19, with 23.0% reporting major or moderate negative financial impact. International research found that COVID-19 has intensified pre-existing gender gaps with women being disproportionately affected by the negative health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic than men (Flor et al. 2022).

- Pre-COVID-19 data collected as part of the Irish Health Survey 2019 found an association between unemployment and poor mental health (CSO 2020c). UK research conducted during the initial lockdown phase in 2020 found that a deterioration in financial circumstances and physical health were associated with increased unit consumption for both men and women (Oldham et al 2021). Being furloughed was a consistent predictor of increases in binge drinking across men and women (Oldham et al 2021).
- We did not repeat the question on 'negative economic impact' in 2021 and instead asked participants about their current working arrangement. 30% of adults reported working from home in some professional form in 2021.
- While 15% of adults noted that they are now working from home full time due to COVID-19, this rose to just over 1 in 3 adults aged 25-34 years with 34% now doing so.

Table 14: Working arrangement, 2021

I have always worked from home	5%
I am now working from home full time due to Covid	15%
I am partially working from home due to Covid. However, there are still things I cannot quite do from home	10%
I am working but I cannot do my job from home	21%
I am no longer working due to Covid	2%
I am temporarily not working due to Covid restrictions	5%
I am a stay at home parent/retired/student etc	25%
Other specify	7%
None of these	8%

- We were also able to examine adults' working arrangement alongside a number of key variables such as mental wellbeing and changes in consumption since COVID-19:
- Those that stated that they were now working from home full time due to COVID-19 reported higher levels of low mental wellbeing (42%) (statistically significant) (see section below for further details on mental wellbeing).
- Those working from home full time due to COVID-19 also reported higher levels of an increase in their alcohol consumption over the past 12 months, with 23% reporting an increase in the amount or frequency of their drinking (statistically significant).
- However, 23% of those now working from home full time due to COVID19, reported that their consumption had decreased (statistically significant). 33% of those working from home report a decrease in the amount of alcohol, while 38% reported a decrease in frequency.

Theme 6: Mental wellbeing

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009) tool with 7 items was used to allow for analysis of any difference in response patterns according to mental wellbeing. Each of the 7 items carried a score between 1 and 7, giving individual participants an overall score between 7 and 35, with a lower score denoting a lower level of mental wellbeing. Mental wellbeing scores provide an extraordinary representative picture of broad culture and impact of COVID-19 2020-2021:

- Mental wellbeing plummeted when COVID-19 hit. In 2020, only 20% reported their mental wellbeing as high but for many it is still low, with a low rate of high mental wellbeing at 26% in 2021. This represents a dramatic pre-COVID-19 decrease from 63% of Irish adults reporting high mental wellbeing in 2019 (Drinkaware Index 2019)¹⁰.
- Overall, the mental wellbeing scale has stabilised since the dramatic shift that occurred at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, albeit at very poor levels' with over one third of Irish adults (35%) indicating low mental wellbeing in 2021. This is compared with 37% of Irish adults that reported low mental wellbeing in 2020 and only 11% pre-COVID-19 in 2018.
- High figures of low rates of mental health peaked among younger age groups with 40% of those under 50 years reporting low mental wellbeing and highest among 25-34 yr olds, with over 4 in 10 (43%) of this age cohort reporting low mental wellbeing. The senior cohort reported higher levels of mental well-being in 2021, with only 16% being classified as having low mental health at this time.
- The low mental wellbeing score group were significantly more likely to indicate household tension had increased in 2021 with 48% doing so.
- The link between mental wellbeing and excessive alcohol consumption is further evidenced in the 2021 findings where low mental wellbeing peaked for those who said their consumption increased in the past twelve months (43%).
- In terms of our pre-COVID-19 data, 9% of Irish adults in zone 1 (low risk), 11% zone 2 (hazardous/increasing risk) and 23% zone 3 and 4 (harmful/dependent) were found to have a low mental well-being score in the Index (Drinkaware, 2019).
- In the previous Barometer in 2020, we found that among Irish adults that reported any binge drinking in the past 30 days during the initial lockdown phase, 44% also reported low mental wellbeing (15% reported a high mental wellbeing alongside any binge drinking). In 2021, 37% of Irish adults that reported any binge drinking reported low mental wellbeing (23% reported a high mental wellbeing alongside any binge drinking).

Table 15: Mental Wellbeing Scale 2021

MWS	Total	Age					Binge Drinking		Increased Alcohol consumption past 12 months
		18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Never	Any	
Low	35%	40%	43%	40%	34%	16%	35%	37%	43%
Medium	39%	39%	38%	38%	40%	44%	37%	40%	38%
High	36%	21%	19%	22%	27%	40%	29%	23%	19%

¹⁰ In our pre-COVID-19 research, 63% of Irish adults reported high, 27% medium and 11% low mental health wellbeing (Drinkaware 2019).

- Healthy Ireland 2021 also found that more people reported that their mental health worsened during the pandemic than reported an improvement. 30% of respondents said their mental health worsened since the beginning of necessary public health restrictions in March 2020. 64% reported no change and 5% said that their mental health had improved. Females (34%), those aged 15 to 24 (45%), as well as those whose self-reported health is 'bad' (55%) were most likely to say their mental health had declined during the pandemic (Government of Ireland, 2021).
- In terms of emotional wellbeing, in line with our research findings the CSO found that in February 2021, more than four in ten (41.7%) respondents rated their overall life satisfaction as low. This is the highest rating for low overall life satisfaction captured in these COVID-19 series surveys to date (comparable rates in April and November 2020 were 29.6% and 35.6% respectively) (CSO, 2021). Similarly, the percentage of respondents that felt downhearted or depressed all or most of the time doubled between April and November 2020, from 5.5% to 11.5%. In addition, 27% respondents reported feeling lonely vs 17% in 2018 (CSO, 2020a). Global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25% during the first year of the pandemic according to the World Health Organization (2022).
- The new 'life in lockdown' questions for 2021 also provide an important additional insight into Irish adults' wellbeing¹¹:
- 46% reported a loss in daily routine since COVID-19, with a peak among 18-24 year olds (62%). Over half of those (56%) that reported a low mental wellbeing also cited a loss in daily routine since COVID-19.
- 1 in 3 adults (33%) reported that the COVID-19 crisis had placed a greater burden on them in terms of running the house. However, there were peaks in the 35–49 year-old cohort with over 4 in 10 (44%) reporting a greater burden, while 40% of recent binge drinkers also reported a greater burden. 47% of those with a low mental wellbeing reported a greater burden. Households with children also reported significantly higher levels of burden at 47% and peaking among over half (57%) of families with primary school children.

Table 16: Life in lockdown and adults' wellbeing, 2021

	Total	Low Mental Wellbeing	Age cohort peak	Binge drinking any	Families with children
Loss in daily routine since COVID-19	27%	56%	62% (18-24 yrs)	49%	46%
COVID-19 has placed a greater burden on running the house	33%	47%	44% (35-49 years)	40%	47% (57% families with primary school children)

Theme 7: Behavioural change challenges/Positive steps

- Only 2% of Irish adults correctly identified the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines for men and 4% for women. Correct awareness for the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines was 2% among men and 5% among women.
- This represents no improvement/change on previous years as well as pre-COVID-19. Consistently over the years, only 2-3% of adults know the correct HSE low-risk weekly guidelines.
- We therefore decided to add more questions on the HSE-Low-Risk Weekly Guidelines in The 2021 Barometer to help understand further given their central role in helping to tackle alcohol misuse:
- We asked participants do they think the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines are reasonable. While understanding is extremely low, 50% of adults believed they are 'reasonable' (49% guidelines for men, 51% guidelines for women). The percentage of those who responded 'don't know' is important too, with 1 in 4 adults doing so.

¹¹ Further details are available in section 10 of the findings below.

- Following on from 2020, we asked participants if they would follow the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines if they were aware of them. 42% of drinkers claimed they would follow guidelines if aware in 2021 (vs 40% in 2020).
- There was a clear interest and appetite towards healthier drinking behaviour in 2021 as 40% of those who have drunk in past 30 days and 28% of those who binge drank said they would follow the guidelines if they were aware of them. Yet only 46% of those who said they would like to drink less often said they would follow them.

Table 17: Would you follow the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines if aware, 2021

	Total	Frequency			Would like to drink less often	Increased Alcohol consumption past 12 months
		Drank past 30 days	Drank weekly+	Binge drink any		
Yes	42%	40%	36%	28%	46%	36%

- Consistently across the 2021 and previous Drinkaware Barometer surveys, people reported a desire to drink less and year on year rises are evident in those indicating intent in changing drinking behaviours. A positive re-thinking of drinking took place during the initial lockdown in 2020. COVID-19 undoubtedly prompted many to re-think of their alcohol consumption as nearly 24% of adults said they would like to drink less. In 2021, this increased to 30%. This desire to drink less was especially evident in the 2021 Barometer amongst those who were binge drinking (40%), or who had increased their consumption in the past twelve months (50%).
- With many acting on their good intentions, 31% of adults said they had already made positive changes to their drinking habits in 2020 and this increased to 37% in 2021.
- In the 2021 Barometer the additional question on self-review of consumption since COVID-19 provided important data as 50% of those who indicated their consumption has increased in past 12 months want to drink less.
- 19% of adults indicated they are drinking less in the past 30 days. In addition, 14% noted that they have not consumed alcohol in the past 30 days, while 9% reported that they never drink alcohol (vs 2020) 15% not in past 30 days and 13% never drink alcohol).
- The latest Healthy Ireland survey found that roughly 1 in 6 of those drinking less in their study report positive changes in their physical health, mental health, energy levels or quality of sleep (Government of Ireland 2021).
- At the same time, there is a similar important disconnect in the barometer as reported in 2020 with bingeing and wanting to change/drink less peaking among those who have binge drank and reporting 'I would like to drink alcohol less' (40%) and those who have increased consumption (50%).
- In addition, there was a contradiction in 46% of those who had increased drinking since COVID-19 believing that they 'have made small positive changes to my drinking habits (i.e., drink less) in past 30 days'. This points to a potential misunderstanding of how much they were actually consuming. In addition, 42% of those that reported any binge drinking in past 30 days also noted that they had drunk less in past 30 days (an increase on 2020 figure of 32%). This mirrors the underlying complacency/biases that we found in the previous research such as in the At-Home Study (Drinkaware 2020) and Index (Drinkaware 2019).

Table 18: Attitudes to current alcohol consumption 2021

	Total	Gender		Frequency			Increased Alcohol consumption past 12 months
	%	Male	Female	Drank past 30 days	Drank weekly+	Bing drinking any	
I would like to drink alcohol less often	30%	34%	25%	30%	33%	40%	50%
I have made small positive changes to my drinking	37%	37%	38%	36%	34%	42%	46%

Theme 8: Supports for moderating drinking

- Irish adults were asked to choose from a number of options which of the following would they find helpful in order to be more aware of the amount of alcohol they drink.
- The leading tool for moderating drinking cited was clear information on what is meant by standard drink and HSE low-risk weekly guidelines (31%) - Nearly 1 in 3 adults said that clear information would be helpful to be more aware of the amount they drink. This is consistent with the 2020 leading figure of 33%.
- The second leading preference was for a drinks calculator with just over 1 in 4 adults citing this (26%). Note this was a new option added for 2021 and so is not comparable to previous years.
- 1 in 4 adults also cited an app to monitor drinking (24%), a measuring cup (24%), and a device to monitor blood alcohol levels (23%)
- 1 in 5 adults noted a public health information campaign (22%), signage for HSE low-risk weekly guidelines at retail outlets at point of purchase (21%) (both increased from 2020 19% and 16% respectively).
- There was a significant gender difference in those reporting the measuring cup as helpful – with 18% of men vs 29% of women doing so.
- An app, public campaign and retail signage all over indexed among those who desire to drink less (30%, 29% and 28% respectively), while a device to monitor blood alcohol levels is significantly higher among those that had binge drank in past 30 days (31%).
- Younger adults were significantly more likely to cite an app to monitor drink compared with other age cohorts (38% of 18–24-year-olds, 35% 25–34-year-olds).
- 30% of adults said 'nothing, just their own efforts' (decrease on 2020 37%).

Table 19: Tools and techniques for moderating drinking, 2021

A device to monitor blood alcohol levels	23%
Clear information on what is meant by a standard drink and the maximum number an adult should drink in a week (low-risk weekly guidelines)	31%
An app to monitor drinking	24%
A measuring cup which indicates what is meant by a standard drink	24%
A pen/paper drink diary	5%
Information booklet containing advice tips on cutting down	12%
A public health information campaign	22%
Signage on HSE Low-risk guidelines at retail outlets at point of purchase	21%
A drinks calculator	26%
Digitally accessible/online resources and information	13%
Other (please specify)	2%
Nothing, just my own efforts	30%

Theme 9: Life in lockdown and post-COVID-19

- We added some additional questions to the 2021 Barometer in order to ascertain Irish adults' attitudes to 'life in lockdown':
- Over 4 in 10 adults (46%) were in agreement with the statement 'I have experienced a loss of daily routine since the COVID-19 crisis.'
- Older age groups were most likely to affirm their social networks with 72% of 65+ year olds in agreement with having a good social network/group of people that they can rely on.
- The most recent Healthy Ireland 2021 study found that a large majority of participants (81%) report feeling less socially connected due to the COVID-19 restrictions (Department of Health 2021).
- The youngest adult age group was most likely to have experienced a disrupted routine with a peak in nearly two thirds of 18-24 year olds reporting a loss in daily routine since COVID-19 (62%) (vs 42% of 65yrs+, national average 46%).
- Other research found that when the pandemic struck, almost half of those aged 22(46%) participating in the Growing up in Ireland study, who had been in employment, lost their job or were temporarily laid off because of the pandemic (Murray et al 2021).
- Irish research conducted by the TILDA study team found that while many people aged 60 and over have been impacted by restrictions, reporting heightened feelings of loneliness, isolation, a lost sense of dignity and challenges ensuing from the enforced restrictions in social contact, many also shared coping strategies, demonstrating remarkable resilience throughout; speaking of maintaining a positive outlook, optimism and a sense of gratitude while adapting to public health measures (Costello et al. 2021).

The new life in lockdown questions in the 2021 Barometer also allowed us to gain insight into new and emerging drinking practices and occasions as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions and life in lockdown during 2020 and 2021:

- Just over one third (34%) of drinkers indicated they are more likely to drink alcohol in at least one of the following ways since the onset of COVID-19 - during the daytime, during the week, during the weekend, to mark end of 'office'/workday with alcohol.
- There are important standouts among those drinking more and agreeing with any of the above regarding 'I am more likely to drink alcohol....' since COVID – 49% of those drinking weekly+, 53% of those that are binge drinking and 83% of those that report an increase in alcohol consumption in past 12 months.
- There are important standouts with the 18–24-year-old cohort too - 48% agree with any of above, representing the highest of all age cohorts:
- Just over 1/3 (34%) 18-24 year olds stated that they are 'more likely to drink alcohol during the week' since COVID (13% 65 yrs+, 21% national).
- A quarter (25%) of 18-24 year olds stated that they are "more likely to drink alcohol during the daytime" (5% 65 yrs+, 10% national).
- 41% of 18–24 year olds report being more likely to drink alcohol at weekend since COVID (20% 65+yrs, 27% national), and 29% "more likely to mark end of 'office'/workday with alcohol" (5% 65+yrs, 14% national).
- 21% of 18-24 year olds report they were more likely to bulk buy alcohol since the onset of COVID-19 (vs 12% national).
- A smaller number of adults also reported partaking in several other new 'drinking practices' since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with peaks among some cohorts:
- 6% of drinkers reported 'having a takeaway drink' in past 30 days. However, this rose to 30% among those who reported binge drinking.
- 12% adults reported they are more likely to bulk buy alcohol since the onset of COVID-19. This is significantly higher among weekly drinkers (17%), those that reported binge drinking (24%) and young adults aged 18-24 years (21%).

- 10% adults reported they were purchasing alcohol online (with home delivery) since the onset of COVID-19, with 22% of 18-24 year olds doing so.
- 13% of adults reported that they were more likely to buy expensive brands of alcohol since the onset of COVID-19, with 21% of binge drinkers more likely to do so.
- We also examined Irish adults' attitudes to drink driving with 87% in agreement with the statement 'Any amount of alcohol impairs your ability to drive', this figure is stronger than pre-COVID – 83% in 2019.
- Some notable differences were reported such as the gender divide – 80% men agree with the statement vs 93% women.
- Rural/urban divide too with 91% of those living in a rural area agreed with the statement vs 84% of those living in an urban area.
- Similarly, 50+ year old age cohorts were significantly more likely to agree with the statement compared with younger adult cohorts with 91% of 50-64 yr olds and 93% 65+ yr olds doing so (vs 82% of under 50 yr olds).

Table 20: Life in lockdown 2021

	Total	Age cohort peak	Drink alcohol weekly +	Binge drinking any
Any amount of alcohol impairs your ability to drive	87%	93% (65 yrs+)	85%	83%
I have a good social network/ group of people I can rely on	63%	72% (65 yrs+)	62%	58%
I will continue to drink at home post-COVID	55%	57% (35 yrs+)	68%	69%
I have experienced a loss of daily routine since the Covid crisis	46%	62% (18-24 yrs)	46%	49%
The Covid crisis has placed a greater burden on me in terms of the running of the home	33%	44% (35-39 yrs)	33%	40%
I am comfortable drinking at home with/when children are present	29%	35% (18-24 yrs)	34%	39%
I am more likely to drink alcohol during the weekend since Covid	27%	35% (18-24 yrs)	36%	39%
I am more likely to drink alcohol during the week since Covid	21%	35% (18-24 yrs)	28%	33%
I am more likely to mark the end of the 'office/ working' day with alcohol since Covid	14%	35% (18-24 yrs)	19%	24%
I am more likely to buy more expensive alcohol brands since Covid	14%	35% (18-24 yrs)	17%	21%
I am bulk buying alcohol since Covid	12%	35% (18-24 yrs)	17%	24%
I am buying alcohol online (with home delivery) since Covid	11%	35% (18-24 yrs)	12%	14%
I am more likely to drink alcohol during the daytime since Covid	10%	35% (18-24 yrs)	11%	16%

- Following on from the 2020 Barometer and findings specifically on drinking among households with children during the initial lockdown phase (See Families, alcohol and COVID-19 paper¹²), we were interested in finding out more. In the 2021 Barometer we therefore added a specific statement regarding drinking at home when children are present (see table 21 below):
- Significantly higher levels of families with primary school children (38%) and families with teens (45%) reported that they were comfortable drinking at home when children are present (vs national average 29%). It is important to note that a smaller proportion of families with pre-school children agreed with the statement (29%). Across all family households with children, 38% reported being comfortable. Higher levels of agreement were also found among adults that reported drinking weekly+ (34%) as well as those that binge drink (39%).
- In addition, there was a gender divide with 34% of men stating that they were comfortable drinking at home when children are present vs 24% of female respondents in agreement.

Table 21: 'I am comfortable drinking at home when children are present', 2021

Total	Male	Female	Families with pre-school children	Families with primary school children	Families with teens	All families	Drinking weekly+	Binge drinking
29%	34%	24%	29%	38%	45%	38%	34%	39%

Post-easing COVID-19 restrictions:

- Findings from the 2021 Barometer also provide some important indicators into potential changes and attitudes post easing of COVID-19 restrictions as was starting to take place in Ireland in May 2021 at the time of data collection and are outlined in Table 22 below:
- Over half of Irish adults (55%) stated that they will continue to drink at home post COVID-19. This is significantly higher among those that are weekly+ drinkers (68%) as well as those that report binge drinking (69%) (See Table 18).
- Eating out at restaurants was the top ranked leisure activity Irish adults indicated that they were most looking forward to doing following the lifting of restrictions at 69%.
- 34% of adults nominated going to pubs/bars/clubs in their top 3. However, this over indexed among young adults (40%) and those that reported drinking weekly+ (44%) and binge drinking (54%).
- Pre-COVID-19, 53% of adults reported that they visited pubs, bars or clubs on a monthly basis and 70% ate in restaurants (Barometer 2020). In addition, intensity of social activity pre-COVID-19 was highly related to age and much stronger among younger adults with 36% 18-24 year olds categorised as highly active (Barometer 2020).

Table 22: Life post-COVID-19, 2021

Most looking forward to, Any Top 3	Total	Gender		Peak age	Drink weekly+	Any binge drinking
		Male	Female			
Eat out at restaurants	69%	62%	76%	77% 65 yrs+	70%	68%
Go leisure shopping for clothes etc	43%	31%	55%	52% 18-24 yrs	36%	33%
Going on overseas holidays	40%	37%	43%	49% 25-34 yrs	40%	36%
Days out/visits to places of interest e.g. museums etc	38%	37%	38%	43% 50-64 yrs	32%	30%
Go to pubs/bars/clubs	34%	45%	24%	40% 18-24 yrs	44%	54%
Go to concerts, theatres etc	28%	28%	28%	39% 18-24 yrs	29%	28%
Go to the cinema	26%	27%	25%	36% 18-24 yrs	26%	24%
Go to watch sporting events	16%	24%	9%	19% 25-34, 50-64 yrs	17%	21%
Take part in any team or group sports	6%	11%	2%	12% 18-24 yrs	7%	7%

¹¹ <https://drinkaware.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Families-Alcohol-COVID-19.-Barometer-2020-Research-Paper-Series.pdf>

Discussion

This study measured the impact of the pandemic on Irish adults' drinking, one year on from the onset of restrictions imposed at the onset of COVID-19. The results as outlined in this paper indicate that when the data from 2021 is viewed alongside 2020 data, it reveals which behaviours formed in the initial lockdown have transformed into established patterns of new rituals towards alcohol among adults in Ireland.

Potentially harmful patterns of alcohol consumption:

Into the second year of the pandemic, the Barometer data shows that key measures of alcohol consumption have increased (and are sustained) from the already high levels of 12 months ago, including incidence of weekly drinkers and recent binge drinking. In demographic analysis, consumption patterns typically peak among pre-school families and often among the youngest adult age group.

While 2021 changes in levels of drinking reported are lower, this is very deceptive as it is vital to remember the increase in drinking first reported in 2020: 2020 – 25% drinking more in past 30 days > 2021 – 8% drinking more (19% drinking less). Therefore 'about the same' is of crucial importance in 2021. In addition, nearly three quarters report their consumption in the past 30 days as 'about the same' in 2021 (73%), while almost two thirds report the consumption of others in the household as 'about the same' (64%). Such 'no change' figures are notable given that in 2020 25% report that they are drinking 'more' during lockdown, while 29% indicated either they or someone in their household is drinking 'more'.

The personal drinking review since the start of COVID-19 provides vital data on both changes in amount (size and number of drinks/volume) and frequency (number of days per week) of drinking alcohol since onset of COVID-19¹³. Overall, 21% of drinkers and 26% of weekly drinkers indicated they have increased the amount or frequency of alcohol they consume since the start of COVID-19. 'Stayed the same' percentage is important providing indications of stability among half of adult drinkers since the onset of COVID-19. Therefore, the spikes associated with the initial lockdown in 2020 are crucial. Adults may say 'I'm sure my drinking will go back to normal post-COVID' but will it? Routines appear entrenched 12 plus

months into pandemic and it is important to examine 2021 re how our lives have changed but what lessons have we learnt?

Spending on alcoholic beverages (purchased for home consumption) during COVID-19 rose by €488m (up 22.0%) to reach €2.7bn up to the first half of 2021, compared with the period immediately before the pandemic (CSO 2021). However, data released by Revenue in March 2021 on alcohol excise receipts and volumes shows that recorded consumption in Ireland decreased 6.5% to 10.1 litres per capita in 2020 compared to 10.8 litres in 2019 in Ireland despite licenced premises being closed for much of 2020. Beer consumption decreased by 17% and cider by 12%, with the majority of beer and cider consumed in on-trade settings that remained closed/limited opening during this period. At the same time, wine consumption increased by 12% during the same period and spirits consumption reported a marginal increase of 0.7%. (Revenue, 2021). However, while overall alcohol sales and consumption has not increased, the distribution within the population during COVID-19 restrictions has changed (Anderson et al. 2022).

International research shows that COVID-19 has had a mixed impact on alcohol consumption (OECD 2021, Roberts et al. 2021). Research conducted in the UK during 2020 found that the initial lockdown was associated with increases in high-risk drinking but also attempts to reduce alcohol intake by high-risk drinkers (Jackson et al 2021, Public Health England 2021). Evidence gathered as part of a recent systematic review found there is wide variation across studies in the proportion of people consuming alcohol during the pandemic (Roberts et al. 2021). For most respondents in a Norwegian study, an average modest decline in consumption was found. However, the upper 5 to 10% of the drinkers increased their consumption and hence the prevalence of heavy drinkers increased, despite little or no change in total alcohol

¹³. Similar to our study, Healthy Ireland 2021 asked about change in consumption since COVID-19 i.e. would you say you have been drinking more, drinking less or has your drinking remained about the same? (DoH, 2021). However, it did not ask about specific changes in amount and frequency since COVID-19 as done in the 2021 Barometer. This is important as harmful consumption is not only about amount but also frequency. It is crucial because adults do not necessarily associate drinking at home with bingeing (Drinkaware 2020).

consumption (Rossow et al. 2021). This is a particularly important finding by Rossow and colleagues (2021) that may help explain differences in some Irish study findings focusing on changes in 'consumption'. In a study of 21 countries conducted between April and July 2021 alcohol use decreased on average across most countries except in Ireland and the UK, where alcohol consumption on average remained unchanged or increased, respectively. Average consumption remained unchanged in Ireland, while drinking frequencies and quantities consumed per occasion increased considerably in the UK, but not the frequency of HED events (Rehm et al. 2021). Other UK research conducted during the initial lockdown in 2020 found that one third of individuals reported drinking more frequently in lockdown, drinking more units per drinking occasion and more frequent heavy episodic drinking (HED). Men were more likely than women to drink both more and fewer units per drinking occasion. Deterioration in financial situation and physical health were associated with increased unit consumption and deterioration in psychological wellbeing as well as being furloughed consistently predicted increases in heavy episodic drinking (Oldham et al 2021).

Therefore, the 'established' pattern of those at higher risk of alcohol-related harm during COVID-19 in the 2021 Barometer, alongside international research cited in this paper, is concerning as well as complex. Increases in consumption among these heavy consumption groups represent a new 'paradox' (in data) and may help towards explaining increases in alcohol problems and alcohol-related death rates recently reported in the UK (e.g., Office for National Statistics for England and Wales) despite no increase in sales or customs/excise data on consumption reported (Anderson et al. 2022). Similarly, data from Scotland shows that while alcohol-related hospital stays decreased during the pandemic for some population groups, alcohol-specific deaths increased. This may help support evidence that drinking at hazardous and harmful levels may have increased for some groups, despite consumption reducing at the overall population level (Richardson et al. 2022).

While Healthy Ireland 2021 findings (Department of Health 2021) are encouraging in terms of an overall reduction in binge drinking vs pre-COVID data, note what we found in the Barometer series during COVID 2020-2021 period to date is a small increase in those reporting binge drinking. For instance, the 2021 Barometer identified binge drinking increases from the already high levels of 12 months ago and when we drink in 2021, 1 in 5 adults in Ireland binge typically. Males are also more than twice as likely to engage in binge drinking than females. These are particularly worrying findings with behavioural patterns on

bingeing in the home setting established now 12+ months in and the idea that these people will just change post-lockdown is questionable.

In addition, there is an increase in binge drinking reported among 18-24-year-olds more than other age cohorts - 31% of this age group reported binge drinking in 2021 compared to 16% at the time of the initial lockdown phase in 2020. Such rises coincide with other negative findings in this study i.e., low mental health of younger adults. US research conducted during 2020 found that COVID-19-related changes in drinking among college student drinkers were attributable to changes in context, particularly a shift away from heavy drinking with peers to lighter drinking with family as a consequence of public health restrictions (Jackson et al. 2021). There is also a dramatic change in frequency of binge drinking among 18-34-year-olds when pre-COVID data is taken into consideration. For instance, in the Drinkaware Index (2019) adults aged under 25 reported engaging in a substantial amount of binge drinking at 28 times in the past year, which was higher than any other age group and well above the national average of 16. Other Irish research serves to corroborate these trends. In one study of Trinity College Dublin health science students, 71% of respondents met the criteria for binge drinking (McAleer et al, 2021). The same trend was previously documented in the Irish Health Survey (2019) where the 15 – 24 age group reported the highest levels for drinking 6 or more units of alcohol in one sitting at least once a month, with 48% of this group reporting doing so (CSO, 2020b). Therefore, while the national average for levels of binge drinking as well as for young adults aged 18-24 years reported may be lower than pre-COVID, we know from other research that Irish adults do not associate binge drinking with at-home drinking even if they are unknowingly doing so while at home (Drinkaware 2020).

Therefore, with the closure of all licensed premises such as pubs, nightclubs and restaurants as a consequence of physical and social distancing measures Irish adults may believe that there are less opportunities for them to partake in binge drinking. Adults may unintentionally binge drink at home due to misunderstandings surrounding what a standard drink is (Drinkaware 2020).

Similar AUDIT C scores were reported in the 2021 and 2020 Barometers with over 4 out of 10 adults that have consumed alcohol scoring +5 on AUDIT-C. Previous analysis using data from Healthy Ireland Survey 2016, found that more than half (52.3%) of all drinkers in Ireland were classified as hazardous drinkers using the AUDIT-C (HRB 2021). Similarly, the HRB (2021) note that the National Alcohol and Drug Survey found that 54.3% of

drinkers scored 5 or more on the AUDIT-C. Hazardous drinking was more common among men (70%) than women (34%) and the Barometer also found higher rates among men as well as parents of children under 18. Overall, those in the 15–24-year-old age group (65%) were almost twice as likely to be classified as hazardous drinkers compared with those in the 65+ years age group (33%) (HRB 2021). Crucially while a high proportion of drinkers met AUDIT-C criteria for hazardous drinking and HED was common in this analysis, the researchers found that the majority considered themselves as being a light or moderate drinker (73.5%) (HRB 2021). This again points to a serious gap in knowledge and awareness over how much adults are actually consuming as identified in our Barometer series.

Low levels of mental wellbeing are sustained as well as negative drinking motivations and occasions for consumption established:

In comparison with 2020, the Mental Wellbeing Scale has stabilised, but at very poor levels and provides an extraordinary representative picture of broad culture and the impact of the ongoing pandemic on adults' wellbeing. The mental wellbeing scale is again strikingly negative with 35% of Irish adults indicating low mental wellbeing. 60% of current drinkers say they frequently drink for coping reasons while 49% of regular drinkers do so 'alone' on a weekly basis. When we also consider the pre-COVID-19 low mental health figure from 2018 – with just over 1 in 10 people (11%) reporting such - it shows how much adults' wellbeing has changed negatively during both 2020 and 2021.

The link between mental wellbeing and excessive alcohol consumption is further evidenced in the 2021 Barometer's findings where low mental wellbeing peaked for those for who say their consumption increased in the past twelve months (43%). Notably findings from a recent systematic review found that mental health difficulties were associated with higher alcohol usage overall during COVID-19 (Roberts et al. 2021). Other research has identified a corroboration between low mental wellbeing scores and an increase in alcohol consumption during the ongoing pandemic. For instance, the CSO (2020a) found that 29.5% of respondents that felt downhearted or depressed at least some of the time in the past four weeks (April 2020) reported an increase in alcohol consumption. US research found that while 29% of respondents increased alcohol use during March and April 2020, those with depressive symptoms had 64% greater odds of doing so (Capasso et al 2021)

Coping is a key driver in increases in drinking during COVID-19 reported in the Barometer 2020-2021. International research found that excessive alcohol use is a common response to coping with stress during the early phase of the pandemic in Australia (Neil et al. 2020). While increased alcohol use has previously been reported following traumatic events, COVID-19 is distinctive due to the extensive population exposure to ongoing trauma with a myriad of prolonged stresses and uncertainties (Sugarman & Greenfield 2021). UK research conducted during the initial lockdown found that those already drinking at hazardous levels were more likely to report increasing their consumption as well as those who were drinking to cope (Irizar et al. 2021).

The percentage of those drinking at home alone is worrying and demonstrates an established pattern among drinking occasions identified in 2020 and continuing in 2021. Globally, the focus of research during the initial lockdown phase explored possible increases in solitary home drinking (The Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology 2020). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis found that solitary drinking has a small positive association with alcohol problems, while it is significantly associated with negative affect, for adolescents and young adults (Skrzynski & Creswell 2020). Indeed, we must consider whether these are drinking 'alone' occasions as we know it from pre-COVID-19 as there has been a shift from in-person drinking gatherings to virtual drinking during the pandemic that may help fill a certain level of the social void experienced by many (Pakdaman & Clapp 2021). Further 'new' drinking practices identified in our research are discussed in the section below. As restrictions are eased, it is important to understand that we are no longer the same as we were prior to COVID-19 and the end of the pandemic requires adjustment that some may find difficult due to their experiences of the pandemic and the toll on our mental health (Taylor 2022). Indeed, recent Irish research conducted by the ESRI found that self-reported wellbeing declined following the removal of most COVID-19 restrictions in early 2022 (Lunn 2022).

Drinking for enhancement reasons (because you like the feeling, to get a buzz, because it's fun and to get drunk) are high in 2020 and become the main motivation in 2021 with two thirds of Irish adults who are currently drinking doing so always/most/half of the time. With 4 out of 10 adults highlighting that they are drinking 'because it's fun' we need to acknowledge that life has been 'boring' over the past two years with virtually all activities dramatically halted and multiple re-cancellations of social events planned due to public health restrictions in place. Not drinking may feel like opting out from having fun during this period and there are merits in considering what is it that these adults are looking for i.e. A bit of fun/

pleasure from consuming alcohol when so many other sources of fun have been taken away. However, there is a particular concern given the higher levels of drinking because it's fun among those at higher risk of alcohol-related harm in our study. Drinking because you like the feeling also peaks among those drinking at hazardous and potentially harmful levels in 2021. There is also small but worrying increases in some reasons reported in 2021 including drinking to get drunk and drinking to get a buzz being statistically significant among young adult cohorts. Getting drunk was viewed as pleasurable and valued among university students in UK research (Conroy et al. 2021). Given the findings it is crucial that we look at understanding the intentions and willingness surrounding such alcohol misuse and the decision-making process involved as documented in recent qualitative research among young adult high-intensity drinkers (Stevens et al. 2021). Another concern is that nearly three quarters (73%) of those that report regularly drinking for enhancement reasons in the 2021 study also score 5+ on the AUDIT-C denoting a propensity to increasing or hazardous drinking among this specific cohort.

New drinking practices in the home space as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions/life in lockdown:

At home drinking is now the norm and the 2021 Barometer identified a continuation for over half of adults planning to continue post-COVID alongside a number of new 'practices' when doing so. For instance, 1/3 of drinkers indicate that they are more likely to drink alcohol in at least one of the following ways since COVID-19 - during the daytime, during the week, during the weekend, to mark end of 'office'/workday with alcohol. International research conducted in Australia found that changes to individual work, study and social routines as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions on time, timing and context of drinking practices are shaping peoples' drinking practices (Caluzzi et al. 2021). While licensed premises shut, the 'home' has provided an increased opportunity for some adults to drink alcohol during periods of lockdown and may act as a trigger of increased drinking frequency and quantity. Insight into the impact of new working arrangements is also evident with 1/3 of adults in the 2021 Barometer report working from home. However, this figure is lower than that reported by the CSO identifying 65% currently working remotely in November 2021 (CSO 2022). The working from home dynamic is important as nearly a quarter reported an increase in consumption while another quarter reported a decrease. Opportunities for new drinking patterns may have emerged among an increasing remote workforce

(Caluzzi et al. 2021). At the same time, changes to drinking styles are also reported among those who have lost their job during the pandemic in international research (Caluzzi et al. 2021). However, research conducted in the UK found that lockdown restrictions were associated with later start times, thus going against concerns that home working and job retention schemes contribute towards an increase in day drinking (Hardie et al. 2022).

In examining drinking occasions, it is therefore essential that we examine the complexities of how people are drinking and not just how much (Caluzzi et al 2021). The conditions created by COVID-19 through lockdowns and social distancing has triggered a sudden expansion and further growth of e-commerce through online alcohol sales and delivery (Huckle et al. 2021, Plata et al. 2022). In some, mostly high-income, countries in North America and Europe, alcohol was classed as 'essential' in 2020, including allowing for online sales and delivery services, and as such likely led to increased consumption (Neufeld et al 2020). Indeed, research conducted in New Zealand found that online alcohol delivery was associated with heavier drinking during the first COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 (Huckle et al. 2021). Similarly, increased drinking frequency during COVID-19 restrictions in 2021 was found to be associated with alcohol delivery as well as purchasing in excess/stockpiling in a Canadian study of access to alcohol and purchasing behaviour (MacNabb et al. 2021). The same study also identified drinkers with a higher COVID-19 health risk were more likely to purchase alcohol online for delivery (MacNabb et al. 2021). Purchasing larger sizes of alcohol products and multi-pack sales of alcohol products reported during COVID-19 reflects not just the phenomena of stockpiling associated with the initial phases of the pandemic but also consumer convenience i.e., avoiding queues and keeping physical distance from others as well as people shopping less frequently due to restrictions on movements in place (Plata et al. 2022).

While later drinking start times were identified in the UK during lockdown restrictions in 2020, other significant changes in the characteristics of drinking occasions were identified in this study providing important data on the how people are drinking. For instance, drinking was associated with fewer drinking occasions in someone else's home and with friends/colleagues, more own-home drinking and in Scotland only more solitary drinking (Hardie et al 2022). Solitary drinking is a small but growing drinking occasion highlighted by adults in the 2020 and 2021 Barometers.

Collectively, evidence from the Barometers in both 2020 and 2021 provides important indications of ritualised

behaviour/shifts and particularly among certain cohorts – it has become part of their new routine, a stable pattern of behaviour. Changing drinking practices that have taken place as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions, have created new drinking patterns and styles that often did not fit within pre-existing notions of drinking or may have been previously overlooked in empirical research (Caluzzi et al 2021).

Parents drinking practices:

Recent international research shows that many parents with a permissive attitude to moderate alcohol intake, consume alcohol in front of their children while considering 'excessive' intake unacceptable (Bowden et al 2021). Indeed, across all family households with children in our 2021 study, over a third report being comfortable drinking when children are present, and significantly higher among primary school children and families with teens providing crucial data alongside that of from the initial lockdown experience for families of households with children (Drinkaware 2021). However, parental role modelling is important in the intergenerational transmission of alcohol habits and misuse (Sigman 2020). Children are more likely to see their parents drink simply because they are all at home during periods of COVID-19 lockdown (Sigman 2020). For some parents, alcohol has become a way to cope with increased stress at a unique time, where other alternative leisure options are not available (Cook et al 2021). We found that drinking 'to help relax and unwind' is significantly higher among families with pre-teens/primary school children with 62% doing so in 2021. Coping was the main type of motivation reported for drinking among households with children during the initial lockdown phase in 2020, peaking among households with pre-school children at 77% (Drinkaware 2021).

One of the recommendations from the independent evaluation of the Drinkaware Alcohol Education Programme conducted by Maynooth University was the need to promote and encourage greater engagement and support from parents in their children's alcohol education from an early age, and more consistent home-school messaging (McGilloway and Weafer, 2021). Existing empirical evidence shows that many parents want to be good role models (Litt et al. 2020; Myntinnen et al. 2020; Sawyer et al 2018). However, this may prove very difficult if parents are unaware or are disconnected with their own behaviour. For instance, in the Drinkaware 'Understanding (Intentional/Unintentional) Binge Drinking at Home' (2020) study we found that adults engaging in at home drinking, despite saying they were conscious of the

amount they were drinking, were not aware how much they were drinking in terms of standard drinks. COVID-19 thus provides a new layer to any examination of the role of parents and their drinking practices. For instance, in terms of families, we saw that during the initial lockdown phase in 2020, families with preschool and pre-teen children saw the highest increase in personal or household consumption at 39% and 34% respectively (vs 29% national average) (Drinkaware 2021).

Worrying interconnections with stress/tension levels reported:

Stress/tension increases represent a shock figure provided in 2020. Therefore 2021 reporting of 'no change' figure is crucial (55%) as people may have got used to the stress/tension experienced one year on. We also identified some worrying interconnections in our 2021 data. For instance, stress/tension peaks among the low mental wellbeing score group and those who report increases of consumption in past year. Australian research found that as a consequence of the pandemic, existing tensions have been aggravated and are both shaped and entangled with parents' alcohol consumption (Cook et al 2021).

Notably the young adult cohort is experiencing high levels of stress/tension as identified in the 2020 and 2021 Barometers. Many young adults have found themselves in a situation where they have moved back in with their parents/family members due to the impact of COVID-19 on school and university closures and/or job loss. Others that lived at home prior to COVID-19 now find themselves 'stuck at home' virtually 24/7. For instance, the majority of 22-year-olds (72%) lived with their parents at the time of The Growing up in Ireland COVID-19 Special Survey in December 2020, and over 20% had returned to the parental home during the pandemic (Murray et al 2021). The rise in household tension reported in the Barometers 2020-2021 is a trend that has also emerged in other studies (Eurofound, 2020; Orgiles et al, 2020). For instance, young respondents to the Eurofound (2020) survey experienced more tension than those aged fifty years and older, and a rise in household tension was also documented among Spanish and Italian households with young adults during lockdown measures (Orgiles et al, 2020).

Increase in those indicating intent to change drinking behaviours plus openness to supports for moderating drinking:

At the same time, we also identified a number of encouraging findings too with embedded changes both for the better in terms of drinking behaviours as well as for the worse among adults in Ireland. For some adults, lockdown may be seen as an opportunity to reassess their relationship with alcohol (Nicholls & Conroy 2021). While the physical presence of alcohol bottles may encourage consumption at home, the presence of empty bottles following consumption may also act as a time to reflect on drinking (Conroy & Nicholls 2021). There is year-on-year rises reported in the Barometer 2020-2021 in those indicating intent in changing drinking behaviours. Consistently across the 2021 and previous Drinkaware Barometer surveys, people reported a desire to drink less (circa 30%). This desire is especially evident in the 2021 Barometer amongst those who are binge drinking (40%), or who have increased their consumption in the past twelve months (50%). An additional and encouraging finding is that more than 1 in 3 (37%) have already made small positive changes to their drinking behaviour, which has increased from 31% in 2020. In addition, 50% of those who indicated their consumption has increased in the past 12 months want to drink less.

While understanding of the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines remains very low, circa 50% believe they are 'reasonable' and over 40% of drinkers claim they would follow them if they knew them. This is significant given recent research conducted in the UK that found that knowledge of guidelines for alcohol intake, physical activity, and fruit and vegetable intake alone may not lead to adherence and a focus on improving both perceptions of how useful and realistic they are may also be required (de Visser et al. 2021).

Hence while behavioural change challenges remain, this demonstrates a receptiveness among those that want/need guidelines. It calls into question, not their importance, but the guidelines' relevance with the consumer, as clearly, they don't resonate. The fact that the higher of the two levels (men's at 17 SDs) are more often cited shows perhaps a preference/optimism bias for a higher number. There appears to be a 'haze of meaning' with 21% of adults saying they 'don't know' what a standard drink is while 79% say that they do. Therefore, there is a value in the guidelines that is just not being converted. People don't dismiss them; they just don't know them.

In addition, we found that adults in 2021 are open to helpful supports for moderating drinking with over indexing among those who desire to drink less. Nearly 1 in 3 adults say that clear information would be helpful to be more aware of the amount they drink. This is consistent with the 2020 leading figure of 33%. It is also important as over 1/3 of adults in 2021 (36%) state that they are not willing to follow them if they were aware (vs 33% in 2020), hence the need is established but not used – the question therefore again is of how best to promote and engage the public on the low-risk guidelines). The app, public campaigns and retail signage are also moderation initiatives which over index among those who desire to drink less. Retail signage is notable given the introduction of specific measures under Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 that were implemented in 2021.

There are also some notes of caution in 2021 with evidence of interest/recognition of people's own consumption versus their intent in changing drinking behaviours being questionable. A similar important disconnect was reported in 2020 with bingeing and wanting to change/drink less peaking among those who have binge drank and reporting 'I would like to drink alcohol less', and those who have increased consumption. In addition, there is a contradiction in over 4 out of 10 of those who have increased drinking since COVID-19 believing that they 'have made small positive changes to my drinking habits (i.e., drink less) in past 30 days'. Similarly, over 4 out of 10 of those that reported any binge drinking in past 30 days also noted that they have drunk less in past 30 days (increase on 2020 figure 32%). Contradictory beliefs and values have previously been evident in accounts of drinking practices among university students with self-reported drinking contradicting participants' self-defined 'light drinker' status (Conroy et al. 2021).

Strengths of this study:

'The full impact of COVID-19 on alcohol use is not yet known' (Sugarman & Greenfield 2021) 'The impact of the pandemic on our society will be felt for years to come' (CSO 2022). In addition, the emotional legacy of the pandemic will become clearer in the months and years ahead (Taylor 2022).

Here in lies the strength of examining the Barometers with data from different time points during the ongoing pandemic. This means that the data presented in this paper is crucial in helping to understand the full impact of COVID-19 on adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol. Much of the existing published research has only included data from the early months of the pandemic and does not provide insight into changes in consumption

during both easing and re-introduction of restrictions (Hardie et al. 2022). Ireland has entered and exited several lockdown periods, therefore, the context in which drinking takes place is crucial. An additional strength of the study is that it builds on pre-COVID-19 data collection methods from both the Barometer series and Index (Drinkaware 2019). The study also examines patterns of consumption across a nationally representative sample with further segmentation by key groupings to comprehensively examine the who, what, where, when, how and why of drinking in Ireland one year into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Potential limitations:

With self-reporting we acknowledge that some participants may under-estimate how much they are drinking, in particular those that may be drinking to hazardous and/or harmful levels. We are also cognisant from previous qualitative research that adults may be unaware of how much actually drinking at home (Drinkaware 2020).

In asking adults to recall their drinking occasions on a weekly basis, people may be thinking an individual occasion and not over a week basis and this is important for consideration as part of 2022 Barometer planning. Heavy drinkers as well as alcohol purchases tend to be under-represented in household panel data (Anderson et al. 2022). Indeed, under-reporting may be most prevalent among households that are at most risk of purchasing the highest levels of alcohol (Anderson et al. 2022).

The ever-changing nature of the pandemic is challenging also with various changes in levels of restrictions in place from the time of project sign off to data collection, analysis and write up. As research studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to emerge it is important to highlight the diversity in methods used, local experiences and control measures in place as well as specific time periods of each study, all of which make interpretation of results difficult (Fitzgerald et al. 2021).

Conclusion

The data gathered in the Barometer 2021 study provides an in-depth and comprehensive insight into the lived experience of the ongoing pandemic for adults in Ireland. Examination of the data reveals entrenched behaviour a year on from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as potentially positive attitudes regarding alcohol consumption in Ireland. Some habits in home drinking picked up during 2020 appear to have become the 'new norm' associated with people's drinking and therefore warrant further monitoring over the coming months in order to help fully understand such behaviours (Hardie et al. 2022).

When the data from 2021 is viewed alongside the 2020 data, it reveals which behaviours formed in the initial lockdown, have transformed into established patterns of new rituals towards alcohol. Of most concern is the increase in binge drinking, particularly among males and young adults aged 18-24 years. Specific cohorts in the Irish adult population report higher patterns of alcohol consumption, namely households with younger children and men. Low mental wellbeing is a worrying issue identified for over half the young adult cohort and families with teenagers.

On a positive note, consistently across the 2021 and previous Drinkaware Barometer surveys, people report a desire to drink less (circa 30%) and this desire is especially evident in the 2021 Barometer amongst those who are binge drinking or who have increased their consumption in the past twelve months. An additional and encouraging finding is that more than 1 in 3 have already made small positive changes to their drinking behaviour, which has increased from 2020.

The Barometer data therefore identifies an emergence of a sub-set of domestic drinkers at risk of establishing potentially harmful patterns of alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it is encouraging that many adults report cutting down/back on their consumption at home. However, the crux is that both groups are not fully aware of how much they are drinking at home in the first place and may be inadvertently drinking more than they set out to do so during lockdown, with a lack of awareness of how hazardous and/or harmful their drinking is. Findings from 2021 also reveal which behaviours formed in the initial lockdown became established patterns of new rituals

towards alcohol a year on and are crucial to anticipating sustainability of shifts.

The disparity between the increase in binge drinking and desire to drink less, indicate a need for public education & engagement if positive changes to alcohol consumption are to be enabled and sustained post COVID-19. Here in lies the centrality of Drinkaware's work and specifically the recommendations for enhancing our work programme in 2022 as outlined above. According to Nicholls and Conroy (2021): 'Greater understanding of domestic drinking patterns during the pandemic – and the strategies used by those making changes to their consumption – may offer valuable, wider lessons around ways in which individuals and communities might be supported to change their relationships with alcohol in a post-COVID context'.

It is imperative that we continue to gather and analyse evidence-informed research on the COVID-19 lived experience and the wide-ranging and significant impact it has had (and is continuing to have) on many aspects of Irish adults' lives and livelihood and in turn behaviours including alcohol consumption. We plan on undertaking the Barometer again in April-May 2022 in conjunction with B&A, with questions to be reflective of the specific context and timing. This evidence also has important implications in terms of the potential impact of any likely/expected experiences of further lockdowns as well as post-COVID-19. As the trajectory of the pandemic continue to evolve and we live alongside COVID-19 and the threat of variants, certain groups/cohorts may need targeted/specific support and identifying these groups is an essential part in the development of future programmes/campaigns to help reduce alcohol harm.

Examining behaviour changes during both initial stages of the pandemic (2020) as well as the ongoing (2021) stages are crucial to understanding and anticipating likely sustainability of these shifts both during the ongoing pandemic and post-COVID-19. Collectively, the findings of both 2021 and 2020 Barometers also help inform the design of appropriate behaviour change interventions to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse and harm going forward. We look forward to sharing future publications from the Barometer 2021 as we as continue with our Barometer series.

As the national charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland, Drinkaware's work is grounded in research, evidence and rigorous evaluation.

The findings of this research signpost several recommendations that would make an important contribution to the prevention and reduction of alcohol misuse in Ireland and therefore Drinkaware's stated mission.

The following recommendations merit consideration with regard to Drinkaware's work programmes in 2022 and beyond, and indeed other related activities where the purpose is to address alcohol misuse and support public health:

1. A high profile, multi-media national campaign on the low-risk weekly guidelines

There is a clear and defined need to close the gap between information and intent, as evident in the data on increased binge drinking, and the data on increased desire to drink less. A widespread public information campaign is the required first step towards closing this gap. Critical to its efficacy is that the information is factual and user-friendly in terms of language and access. An example of this could be an expansion of the low-risk weekly guidelines social media campaign orchestrated by Drinkaware during the Christmas period in 2021, which delivered on its call-to-action i.e., to access the on-line calculator on drinkaware.ie.

2. A public behaviour change drive/programme

A coordinated campaign, that is informed by behaviour change best practice and the evidence in this and other data collections, will be crucial to convert alcohol-related health information into actionable knowledge that motivates and empowers people to make positive healthy choices with regards to alcohol. The drive can draw on the inventory of tools and supports that respondents in this study have said they would be open to using to moderate their drinking. Any programme based on behaviour change should harness the collective expertise in the behaviour science and public health fields and should also acknowledge the identified lived experiences of its target populations if it is to succeed.

3. Broad collation of red flags that indicate current and future risky drinking

The need to better understand the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 on the adult population's levels of risky drinking cannot be under-stated. Collating the 'red flag' findings identified in this paper and other studies, will result in more informed anticipation of legacy scenarios, and allow for more comprehensive mitigation preparedness. Drinkaware's data tracks both the pre-COVID-19 trends and the emerging trends that need to be monitored so that potentially critical unintended consequences can be captured and managed as part of a proactive rather than reactive approach. Such red flags are vital for preparation in advance of future pandemics as well as the uncertainties in economy and society that are currently happening with the strain associated with sharp rises in cost of living taking place in 2022.

4.

Broader consideration/re-configuration of 'high risk' groups/determinants of misuse

The public narrative and discussions on alcohol are too often polarised, taking a binary approach with regard to those who drink at high or low-risk. This and other Drinkaware reports (Drinkaware Index 2019) show the complexity of consumption data in the context of people's actual lived experiences and their evolving attitudes and situations. Tackling hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption requires more than a homogenous approach, especially with regard to the previously unidentified and emerging cohorts whose drinking is at potentially increasing and/or risky levels as revealed in our 2020 and 2021 Barometers. The use of international tools such as the AUDIT-C offers a crucial early warning system that signals characteristics among low-risk drinkers that may well lead to increasing risk. Furthermore, the addition of household/family make-up as a potential new determinant of consumption merits further exploration.

The complexity of the data presented in this report also shows how many of the determinants of alcohol are out of peoples' control, it is crucial that adults are empowered to help make personal changes to their lives and this is a key part of Drinkaware's work.

5.

Share, critique, document and disseminate data

Co-operation and collaboration among all stakeholders is well documented as being key to addressing alcohol misuse. The sharing of information and the additional importance of sharing lived experience learnings, is also a well-reported best practice. Drinkaware's data is open access and its depth and breadth mean it is well positioned to provide insight and context to the discussions and debate regarding prevention and reduction of alcohol harms. It is also in Drinkaware's view, beholden on us and others to work collectively and collaboratively as much as possible to deliver the most effective support. Alcohol data is complex and cannot be viewed in isolation but rather should be considered and critiqued through multiple lens, but in particular through the all-important public lens.

Additional areas of research

This paper offers clear recommendations of areas that merit further examination and future research, **some of which Drinkaware is already progressing**, as outlined below:

Young adults

Some worrying standouts among young adults were identified in both of the 2020 and 2021 Drinkaware Barometers. A research paper examining the specific experiences of young adults and impact of COVID-19 incorporating data from the forthcoming 2022 Barometer will be completed and published in late 2022.

The now established at home drinking trend

Over half of Irish adults' (55%) state that they will continue to drink at home post COVID-19, and the home must be viewed a specific 'drinking' space with a range of both challenges and opportunities to increase/decrease consumption plus associated harms. COVID-19 has changed the drinking at home experience, and it is not only about how much is consumed but why and how it is consumed. There are now a number of new emerging practices evident in the home, that are hidden and are potentially hazardous and we will consider these points carefully in preparing for the 2022 Barometer.

Understanding those drinking less

Another key part of the 2022 Barometer will involve examining the growing numbers of adults who are drinking less. This will in turn provide important information that may be helpful for cohorts that also identified in the Barometer Series that are drinking more and regarding how they may be encouraged and supported.

Parents – attitudes, behaviour and role modeling

In light of the indicative data in the Barometers regarding family households, a qualitative study in conjunction with B&A that is exploring parents' experiences will be complete later in 2022, the findings of which will provide deep rich data to build on those from the Barometer Series and also Maynooth University's Evaluation of the Alcohol Education Programme.

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