

DRINKAWARE

## UNDERSTANDING (INTENTIONAL/UNINTENTIONAL) BINGE DRINKING AT HOME

Qualitative research on the views and experiences of at-home drinking and (intentional/unintentional) binge drinking at home among Irish adults.

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# ABSTRACT

Alcohol consumption in the home setting pre-COVID-19 had become the new 'norm' with 62% of all drinking occasions taking place within the home in Ireland (Drinkaware Index, 2019). In addition, high levels of binge drinking or heavy episodic drinking were reported among Irish adults (WHO, 2018).

The aim of this research was to explore the views and experiences of at-home drinking and (intentional/unintentional) binge drinking at home among Irish adults. The specific objective was to further investigate the data from the Drinkaware Index (2019) by gathering insight into the experiences of at-home drinking to create a better understanding of its prevalence and drivers exploring the specific gaps in knowledge among Irish adults on binge drinking.

A Qualitative research design was employed. Following informed consent, six qualitative, semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted with a sample of Irish adults (n=39). Data was collected between October and November 2019. Thematic analysis was applied to examine the data in order to identify common themes and topics that were coming up repeatedly across the six focus groups and interpret key patterns of meaning.

Five core themes were identified across the six focus groups, namely 1. Attitudes to At-Home Drinking – seen as convenient, comfortable and easy, as well as being affordable, accessible and acceptable; an alternative to going out, 2. Motivations re Drinking At-Home – socially-driven and habit-forming; 3. Intention-knowledge Gap - people are conscious of their drinking, but lack of the correct or sufficient knowledge, along with self-serving biases, can make it difficult to deliver on good intentions; misconceptions of the difference between 'moderate' and 'binge' drinking 4. Moderation in Action - how intent translates (or not) into moderate consumption, the techniques used and how "moderate" is interpreted; and 5. Impacts – there can be both unintended and intentional consumption and consequences.

The findings provide an extensive suite of qualitative data on Irish adults' experiences of at-home drinking, and their intentions surrounding at home drinking. They provide vital learnings into the specific gaps in knowledge on binge drinking among a sample of Irish adults. The results of this study will be crucial to informing the development and delivery of national information campaigns on drinking in the home setting and the harms associated with binge drinking, and also the development and roll out of tools and collaterals to assist with reducing consumption in the home (i.e. provide adults with both knowledge and skills to change behaviour). The empirical evidence gathered will be crucial to understanding the mindset of Irish adults' at-home drinking prior to the current COVID-19 crisis as well as providing data on how it may be better managed post-crisis.

# ABOUT DRINKAWARE

Drinkaware is a national registered charity (20204601) established in 2016 with a vision of an Ireland where alcohol is not misused.

Drinkaware's mission is to prevent and reduce the misuse of alcohol, and to tackle underage drinking. Achieving this requires ambition, trust, independence, credibility and collaboration. As guided by our Strategic Plan 2019-2021, our mission is to identify the attitudinal and behavioural drivers of the misuse of alcohol, and use them, collaboratively, to support positive behavioural change.

Drinkaware has three core areas of activity: education, outreach and engagement, and research. Research plays a critical strategic role in Drinkaware and the charity is committed to ongoing investment in relevant research that informs our mission and activities, to ensure Drinkaware delivers evidence-informed programmes.

It is vital that our research is open, accessible and usable to all and in a format that is clear and easy to follow so it can have the greatest possible impact in enabling positive behaviour change.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, a special word of thanks also goes to the individuals that participated in the focus group discussions. This report carefully documents the collective story that was shared with us in the group discussions of a sample of Irish adults' experiences of at-home drinking and binge drinking.

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# BACKGROUND/RATIONALE

Drinkaware's in-depth research into the attitudinal and behavioural drivers of alcohol consumption (Drinkaware Index 2019) identified the emerging trend of at-home drinking whereby 62% of drinking occasions were taking place in the home setting. In line with the charity's mission and Strategic Plan 2019-2021, Drinkaware conducted this research to explore further the contextual aspects of this trend, and in particular its implications on binge drinking - a widely reported significant issue in many EU countries, and in particular in Ireland. In late 2019, Drinkaware began a programme of research to support how binge drinking might be addressed.

## COVID-19 Context

When conducting the research, we did not expect to be reporting on its findings at a time when the issue of 'at-home' drinking and human behaviour would be more prominent than ever due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the social and physical distancing measures put in place both by the Irish Government and across the globe. Ireland, and indeed the world, is dealing with unprecedented levels of change, and COVID-19 appears to be changing alcohol consumption habits with many people using alcohol as a relaxant and/or coping strategy during these uncertain times, in spite of the World Health Organisation (2020) stating that alcohol should not be used as a coping mechanism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers have noted that the way we drink and the harms we experience from alcohol consumption are set to change (Callinan & Livingston 2020). Furthermore, the potential social and health harms associated with home drinking may be intensified in the context of restrictions on movement outside the home (Reynolds & Wilkinson 2020).

Early indications of behaviour since the lockdown in March 2020 in Ireland are that spending on alcohol via retailers has risen, as more people drink at home at a time when licensed premises such as pubs, restaurants and clubs for closed as one of the measures introduced to tackle the COVID-19 crisis. For example, sales of alcohol in off-licences and supermarkets in Ireland jumped by 44% over

the Easter period according to data from Nielsen. In total sales of drink reached €49.3m in the week to the end of April 12 (Nielsen, 2020). Many aspects of life have so quickly and dramatically changed as a result of the virus and this has left many people feeling isolated, anxious and uncertain. Massive changes in routine and structure to each day have taken place with almost all 'normal' schedules gone. Here in lies a time that drinking and bad habits may manifest. For instance, existing research identified that during an infectious disease outbreak, healthcare workers found being quarantined to be associated with higher alcohol intake (Brooke et al. 2018). Other research has found that people drink more when they are exposed to negative news (de Hoog & Verboon, 2019). Pre-COVID 19 social drinking occasions have now been replaced by home online activities such as virtual pub quizzes, book clubs, wine tasting and cocktail making demonstrations. Drinking with friends and/or family online may be a way in which we can retain a level of social activity, even though we cannot be physically close (Davis & Morris 2020).

Early research results give an indication of drinking habits that may be starting to form as result of the pandemic, and changes to the way we drink are happening in the short term. Conducted in April 2020, the annual national survey, the Drinkaware Barometer, highlighted these changes, with 25% of Irish adults saying that they are drinking more since Covid-19. Frequency has also increased with 14% drinking four or more times each week in the past 30 days. The main reason for drinking reported was to relax and unwind – as tensions have increased in almost half (47%) of households. At the same time, 25% were reported to be drinking less and 31% have made positive changes to their drinking habits during lockdown (Drinkaware, 2020).

Further corroboration of behaviour change regarding alcohol consumption is evident in non-Irish research. For example, research in the UK shows that two distinct groups appear to have formed as reactions to the pandemic – those who are drinking more and those who are moderating/cutting down (Alcohol Change UK, 2020). Study findings found that 21% adults are drinking more

since the introduction of lockdown measures. This is in contrast to 47% of those who were already drinking the least and have cut down further or are abstaining. Other research in the UK has found similar results with 19% of adults reporting that they were drinking more alcohol than normal (YouGov, 2020). Research conducted in New Zealand found 19% adults reported drinking more than usual, with 34% reported drinking less than usual (Health Promotion Agency NZ, 2020). Similar results have also been found in Australia, with 20% of Australians purchasing more alcohol since lockdown, and of those households, 70% of them are drinking more alcohol than normal, with 33% reporting that they are now using alcohol daily (FARE, 2020). In the US, over one in three adults said that they are likely to drink more alcohol in isolation, with one fifth of study respondents stockpiling alcohol for self-isolation (Alcohol organisation USA, 2020).

Some other interesting patterns appear to be emerging also. For instance, young adults have been found to be most likely to be changing their alcohol intake since lockdown, with those age 18-24 the most likely to be both drinking more (25%) and drinking less (28%) when compared to other age groups (YouGov, 2020). Online purchasing of alcohol and delivery of alcohol to people's homes has previously been linked to a higher likelihood of risky drinking (Mojica-Perez et al. 2019). Set in the context of the current pandemic, research conducted by Nielsen found online annual purchasing had increased by 291% over the end of March 2019 (Forbes, 9th April 2020). How people are drinking is key too, with two thirds of respondents in research conducted in the UK admitting to having drunk alone during self-isolation (Vitl, 2020). In other research, only 32% of study participants said that they would feel comfortable going back to pubs and bars once lockdown is lifted (YouGov, 2020).

## Pre-COVID-19 Context

As this research was conducted pre-Covid-19, the status and prevalence of binge drinking provides context for the focus groups: According to the World Health Organisation Global Status Report 2018, pre-COVID-19 38% of all Irish people aged 15 and over had engaged in binge drinking, or heavy episodic drinking, in the 30 days prior to the research<sup>1</sup>. Before the current crisis, Irish people have also been found to be among the heaviest drinkers in the world, consuming an average of 13.2 litres of alcohol per year and placed fifth on a global league table of 189 nations (Manthey et al. 2019). Healthy Ireland 2018 data reveals a consistent trend for binge drinking among Irish adults aged 15 and over since the survey began in 2015, with 37% of drinkers binge drinking on a typical drinking occasion. In addition, 22% of drinkers were found to binge drink at least once a week, and 39% do so at least one a month (Healthy Ireland, 2018).

The Drinkaware Index (2019) uses internationally recognised tests for alcohol use disorders. In its ground-breaking risk-based configuration of the Irish population it reveals complacent and complicit over-consumption of alcohol among Irish adults that is very relevant to understanding the mindset of going into COVID-19:

- 74% of Irish adults believe drinking to excess is 'just a part of Irish culture.'
- 84% believe that they do not think they drink to excess.
- 44% reported drinking weekly
- Close to one in five (19%) Irish drinkers report consumption of seven or more standard drinks on a typical day of drinking, i.e. exceeding binge drinking levels.
- 21% would like to cut down on drinking, while 16% say that they are changing their drinking habits i.e. drinking less.
- 24% feel they may experience future health problems if they maintain current drinking levels

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<sup>1</sup> A standard drink is a measure of alcohol. In Ireland, one standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

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. This is the equivalent of six standard alcoholic drinks. Consuming six or more standard drinks of alcohol in one sitting is classified as binge drinking.

- 23% Irish adults were classified as at potential risk of becoming hazardous drinkers within what was previously considered a broadly low risk cohort<sup>2</sup>.

### Amongst the data there are two crucial contextual considerations regarding this issue:

1. Irish adults lack of understanding of what constitutes binge drinking is such that many may binge drink without realising it. The Drinkaware Index (2019) and Drinkaware Barometer (2019) show that just 1 in 10 Irish adults can correctly identify the three standard drink measure and only 2% can correctly cite the HSE Low Risk Weekly Guidelines<sup>3</sup>. Without knowledge of the national guidelines, individuals may be unintentionally drinking more alcohol than they had planned and ultimately, may be unaware of the impact on their health and wellness. Getting the facts about standard drinks and low risk drinking is crucial in order to understand drinking habits and change behaviour. The statistics above outline the scale of the binge-drinking problem in Ireland. Research also suggests that Irish adults see excessive drinking – and the related harms – as a phenomenon unconnected to their own lives (Drinkaware, 2019) and this acceptance and national complacency presents an additional challenge to be redressed, especially regarding the messaging around binge drinking and the public's receptiveness to it.

2. There is a clear identified increase in alcohol consumption in the home setting. The 2019 Drinkaware Index provides crucial data to support anecdotal claims about the new norm of home drinking in Ireland, with 62% of all drinking occasions taking place within the home. This suggests a cultural acceptance and social norming of alcohol consumption in a home setting, a departure from long-held assumptions of Ireland's social reliance and intrinsic association with licensed premises (Drinkaware, 2019).

This also presents a challenge regarding the 'control' of this drinking environment, and a recommendation from the Index was to ascertain more detail regarding the level and nature of incidences, and the attitudes towards, alcohol consumption in the home.

The HRB Overview Series 10 states that the off-licence sector accounted for 55-60% of the total volume of alcohol sold (Foley A., 2013) and the preferred location to drink for those over 25 years as being at their or someone else's home (2013 National Alcohol Diary Survey). The Drinkaware Index 2019 corroborates this and expands on the prevalence as well as preference of at-home drinking. In relation to drinking venues, the home provides a range of drinking occasion options that are taken up by significant percentages of drinkers on at least a weekly basis. Social drinking in one's own home or someone else's is a significant factor in the incidence of weekly drinking occasions. On a weekly basis:

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<sup>2</sup> Hazardous drinking is defined as when a person drinks over the recommended weekly low risk guidelines (17 standard drinks for men and 11 standard drinks for women). It is also possible to drink hazarously by binge drinking (six or more standard drinks in one sitting), even if the guidelines are adhered to. Health problems directly related to alcohol may not have been experienced yet, but there is an increasing risk of experiencing problems in the future.

Harmful drinking is defined as when a person drinks more than the low risk guidelines and has experienced health problems directly related to alcohol. Many of the health problems caused by harmful drinking do not cause any symptoms until they reach their most serious stages (e.g. liver cirrhosis, some cancers etc.).

Dependent means that a person feels that they are unable to function without alcohol and the consumption of alcohol becomes an important - or sometimes the most important - factor in their life. Depending on the level of dependence, a person can experience withdrawal symptoms if their supply of alcohol is suddenly stopped. Withdrawal symptoms can be both physical and psychological. Source: [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

<sup>3</sup> The HSE low-risk weekly guidelines are 11 standard drinks (110g pure alcohol) spread out over the week with at least two alcohol-free days for women, and 17 standard drinks (170g pure alcohol) for men.

- 21% of drinkers consume a small number of drinks at home with a partner as a couple, with a further 11% reporting they consume several drinks with a partner in their home;
- 18% have a small number of drinks in the home with the family; and,
- 7% combine home drinking and a night out with friends.

Other Irish research has found that drinking at home is commonplace with 63% of all alcohol consumption taking place in drinkers' own homes and only 12% consumed at pubs, bars and nightclubs (Callinan et al. 2016). In addition, hazardous alcohol consumption has been reported by 51% of the population (n=1075) across three sites in southern Ireland (Davoren et al. 2019). The Drinkaware Index (2019) identified hazardous/ increasing risk drinkers (21% of the drinking population), and a subset of drinkers within the low risk group who can be classified as at potential risk, and who constitute 23% of the drinking population<sup>4</sup>.

Before embarking on a specific national programme to address this issue, more insight is required to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of such a campaign, and to increase the likelihood of success. This project is therefore a valuable pre-cursor to a broader national programme. It delves deeper into the data from the Drinkaware Index (2019) regarding the incidences and attitudes around binge drinking and at home consumption.

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<sup>4</sup> The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test - (AUDIT) tool developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), is used to measure an individual's level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns. The test consists of ten questions, and the resulting analysis categorises respondents into four graduated categories of alcohol related risk and/or harm: Low risk; Hazardous/ increasing risk; Harmful/higher risk; Possible dependence (Babor, 2001). This question model was used in the Drinkaware Index (2018).



# AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH

The overall aim of this research was to explore the views and experiences of at-home drinking and (intentional/unintentional) binge drinking at home among Irish adults.

The specific objective of this research was to further investigate the data from the Drinkaware Index (2019) regarding incidences and attitudes around binge drinking and at-home consumption by:

- a. Gathering insight into the experiences of at-home drinking to create a better understanding of its prevalence and drivers
- b. Exploring the specific gaps in knowledge, intent and behaviour among Irish adults on binge drinking.

It was envisaged that the longer term objective of the programme will be to leverage the results and outputs from this project for a national campaign, and also to share the data and learning with a wider Irish and EU audience so that further insight, innovations and collaborations can be created.

## RESEARCH SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative research design was employed. The research study was carried out in collaboration with Amárach Research meaning that the project would benefit from Ireland's leading research & data analysis company's experience and also its reputation. It also adds an additional credibility to the project and its roll out. In addition, Amárach Research's expertise in behavioural change & engagement – as the founder of the Behavioural Economics Forum - further amplifies Drinkaware's knowledge in this area, and our capacity to scope and shape an effective national campaign to tackle binge drinking.

Six sites were selected for fieldwork (4=Dublin, 1=Cork, 1=Galway) and on behalf of Drinkaware, Amárach Research recruited and invited individuals to participate in a focus group discussions. Sampling was purposeful aiming to maximise variation in gender, age category and social class and in so doing to provide an adequate reflection of the demographic profile of Irish adults. Informed consent was sought prior to participation. All participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity and their ability to withdraw should they wish to do so.

In total, six qualitative, semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted with a sample of Irish

adults (n=39). Data was collected between October and November 2019. The focus group discussion guide was devised to provide a framework for the facilitator to explore, probe and ask questions on the following themes: experiences of at-home drinking, impact on health and wellness, knowledge of binge drinking as well as tools to assist Irish adults drinking alcohol at home i.e. knowledge on guidelines, measuring cup – what works, what doesn't.

The focus groups were conducted by two members of the Drinkaware team in a neutral venue i.e. meeting room of a hotel and at a time most convenient for all. At the end of each focus group discussion, participants received a €50 incentive as a token of appreciation for their involvement in the research project and to help cover any expenses associated with travel to/from the venue. Digital recordings of focus groups were made and following completion, each group was transcribed verbatim independently with all data anonymised. Both audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on password protected devices used only by Drinkaware staff. The data was then carefully analysed.

# FINDINGS

Thematic analysis was applied to examine the data in order to identify common themes and topics that were coming up repeatedly across the six focus groups, and to interpret key patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This involved the careful completion of a number of interlinked stages:

1. Familiarisation of the data - carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts
2. Initial coding - coding interesting features of the data by either writing notes on text or highlighting important patterns.
3. Generating themes – documenting themes in the data and identifying data relevant to each of them
4. Reviewing themes – ongoing analysis and generation of a thematic map of the analysis
5. Defining and naming the specific of each theme
6. Producing the final report – documenting the patterns of meaning and the story that the analysis tells.

## Key patterns of meaning across the themes

### 1. Attitudes to Drinking at Home

- Convenient, Comfortable and Easy
- Affordable and Accessible
- Acceptable
- Alternatives

### 2. Motivations re Drinking at Home

- Still socially-driven
- Habits & Associations - cues/triggers

### 3. Intention-Knowledge Gap

- Conscious but not necessarily knowledgeable
- Perceived relevance and self-serving biases
- What constitutes 'moderate' and 'binge drinking'

### 4. Moderation in Action

- Translating intent into moderate drinking
- Interpreting 'moderate drinking' and the techniques used

### 5. Impacts

- Unintended consumption
- Intentional consumption
- Consequences (sleep, emotion, children and households, harms and advertising)

**Five core themes and several sub-themes were identified as the key patterns of meaning to adults' at-home drinking experiences, and tell the story of the analysis process undertaken:**

## **1. Attitudes to Drinking at Home**

At home drinking was seen to be a convenient and comfortable, affordable and acceptable, as well as an attractive alternative to going out across the focus group discussions.

### **Convenient, Comfortable and Easy**

Participants spoke at length about both the ease and comfort associated with drinking at home: *'It's very little effort involved, you don't have to get dressed up... You don't have to get transport home, you know if you're going away, taxis and stuff like that'* (Focus group 2). They expressed how it was easier to have a drink at home: *'...I'm happy to stay at home, it's easier, more comfortable'* (Focus group 3). Having a drink at home was viewed as much more comfortable than going out after a long day: *'I'm working really long hours, wrecked tired like, the last thing I want to do is go out drinking until 10, 11 at night, whereas I can go home and be in my comfort zone'* (Focus group 4). Lack of comfort when out was also flagged: *'...that standing at the bar, you can't get a seat. I can't stand that'* (Focus group 6).

Too much planning and effort was seen to be involved with going out such as organising transport as well as babysitters cited by those that had children: *'I don't go out much, and it's a case of getting babysitters if we both go out, and if we both go out, we can't both drink. So, I tend to take it easy and stay at home, sociable drinks'* (Focus group 3). The additional expense associated with going out when having children in needing to factor in price of babysitting was raised: *'Never used to drink at home, but now I have kids, I can't afford to go out, taxis and babysitters, so I tend to just drink at home now'* (Focus group 4). The preference for staying at home was also cited as dependent on everyone's stage in life, with younger adults wanting to go out more to socialise: *'I think it also might depend on the stage of life you're in as well. Being young you actually want to go out and meet new people...'*

(Focus group 6). The weather was also expressed as a factor in deciding to drink at home rather than going out: *'I think because it's so cold in Ireland, you're just sometimes, oh, it's just so nice to sit in front of the fire.....It depends on the season as well, you drink less at home in the summer, because you're out and about'* (Focus group 4).

### **Affordable and Accessible**

The affordability and relatively cheap cost of drinking alcohol at home was discussed: *'...it's like so much cheaper. Like you go out and you can buy a bottle of gin for €30 and you're not going out with €50 and you buy two people a drink and you've nothing left. I just can't fathom it'* (Focus group 4). High cost was one of the main factors in participants' decision to drink at home. While enjoying going out, it was just too expensive and affordability was a big issue: *'I still love to go to the pub and have, but you just can't afford to drink in the pub'* (Focus group 1). While some participants would like to go out more, the high cost of drinks acted as a barrier: *'Of course I'd like to go out more... But it's just too expensive like, and even like for two drinks there the other night, It's say 15 quid, but that was only for two pints like, a craft cider and a craft beer...'* (Focus group 5).

Participants also noted that it was cheaper to bulk buy alcohol, and special offer incentives led to bulk buying and/or stocking up for specific occasions: *'price points in supermarkets and all that kind of thing, has, I wouldn't say encouraged, but somewhat, on there's a pack of ten, so it's somewhat easier'* (Focus group 5). *'People kind of know when the deals are on, stock up on them'* (Focus group 4).

It was also commented that there was always a special offer on that encouraged you to buy more than you intended to drink in the immediate future: *'Nowadays, you've got so many different offers,... you've always got an offer on the more popular brands that you're actually going to go for yourself and you'd probably grab a six pack or even 12 or 24, and it's not like it's going to go off any time soon, you know, you can store it, it's ok'* (Focus group 6).

Indeed the ease of bulk buying alcohol online for home delivery was also raised:

**'And if you go online and get it ordered, you get even more off... So like when that deal come on, I'm like, yes, straight in... That goes on our family WhatsApp'** (Focus group 4). The ease at which alcohol could be purchased through supermarkets was also highlighted: *'I think you start bringing alcohol into the supermarkets, I'm not saying I don't agree with it, it's encouraged a lot more people to drink more...It's more accessible as well'* (Focus group 2). However, some participants spoke about going to Northern Ireland to buy alcohol as it was deemed too expensive here.

Due to the relatively lower cost of drinking at home vs going out, the issue of quality was raised across the groups ie how at-home drinking makes more expensive brands more affordable: *'I think I would go for higher quality at home, because you can afford to do that, the premium. So we'll buy craft beers, or we'll buy premium gins, whiskeys'* (Focus group 1). *'So it will be a good bottle of red wine, you know you're not looking for the cheapest'* (Focus group 1). This was set in stark contrast to the cost of drinking out: *'I've got some bottles of gin in the cupboard and I enjoy a nice glass of gin, where if I was to go into a pub and pay for that, it would be nearly €10'* (Focus group 3).

Legislation and Minimum Unity Pricing (MUP) were seen as punitive for those 'in control' of their drinking. For instance, legislation surrounding opening hours for buying alcohol was criticised, with some participants believing that off-licences were closing too early. This was deemed to be unfair and created a fear of not having enough which actually can lead to people buying more: *'We're quite regimental in a way, like off licences closing at 10 like... Yeah it's mad...It absolutely makes no sense whatsoever, where if you curtail the amount of alcohol being consumed by one person, perhaps these places could stay open a bit later, so you're not buying that volume of lager or spirits... Panic buying.... You definitely buy way more.... They're trying to make it more expensive and cap the time to make people like buy less, but people are definitely just still going to keep buying it, no matter how expensive it is, so it's like they're just making money...'* (Focus group 5).

Minimum unit pricing (MUP) was also raised during the group discussions: *'That will affect the likes*

*of Aldi and Lidl because they sell ranges of cider at a euro a can'* (Focus group 4). With MUP, some participants questioned whether an increase in price would impact drinking at home: *'That could impact the home drinking thing quite significantly, I'd say, because just the perception, oh they're after putting it up'* (Focus group 4). However, it was also felt that legislation and high costs was **'...punishing the people that are in control of their drinking'** (Focus group 5). A price increase would not tackle cultural acceptance associated with alcohol in Ireland: *'they're not trying to change the culture in Ireland... you're stamping on it saying, it's bad for you. I know all the health risks, so we're just going to charge you a fortune for it'* (Focus group 5). It was highlighted that the root of the problem i.e. cultural acceptance was not being addressed: *'You know they're not going to the root of the problem'* (Focus group 5). It was also questioned as to whether MUP would lead to more people buying alcohol in Northern Ireland: *'So I refuse to buy spirits, just because of the price and now they're saying, they're bringing in minimum alcohol. Now I understand they have issues, and I support all that, but I really just think, pushing over the border like'* (Focus group 5). At the same time it was remarked that there was a strong association between tourism in Ireland and drinking alcohol: *'then on the other hand, (the government) are advertising, come to Ireland they're great craic and it's drink and ceol and all this craic'* (Focus group 5).

### Acceptable

Participants discussed drinking at home as an alternative to going out and referred to the cultural shift from pub to home. It was felt that the smoking ban led to less drinking in pubs: *'I'm not a smoker myself, but people enjoyed it more...and come now the winter and all, I'd be like, Mam will you come for a drink with Dad? Oh no, standing outside in the cold and having a smoke...'* (Focus group 5). Drinking at home also became more widespread during the recession when less people were going out: *'I think it's something that, when the recession happened a few years ago, it became more popular, and it became more of a habit for people'* (Focus group 5). Some participants felt that pubs were not as busy as they use to be and so in turn were not as much fun: *'It's not so much craic either out anymore. Like when you go out to watch a match,*

*there's not as many people around, so then it actually impacts your decision, if you go to a pub, Friday, Saturday, it's not as busy as it would have been, and then when you go out and it's not as busy, and then you say I'm not going to bother going the next time' (Focus group 4).*

For many, drinking at home was viewed as an alternative to going out and this included inviting people over: *'Yeah you get a group over and stay in the house, you don't have to go to the effort of dressing up, you're all in your pyjamas, dressing gowns, glasses of wine, so yeah, it would be an alternative in that case' (Focus group 6).* A preference to drink at home over going out/pub was spoken about: *'I prefer drinking at home...I couldn't care if I never went to the pub again' (Focus group 1).* However, the pub still had an important social aspect associated with it *'it's more you go up to meet the locals, have a chat and a drink' (Focus group 3).* The pub was also seen as associated with watching sporting events for some participants and they continued to do this, alongside drinking at home: *'I would just go down to the local, and if there was a match on, rugby or something like that' (Focus group 3).* In addition, going to the pub was associated with celebrating following a sporting event: *'If we win, you'd be inclined to go out and talk and celebrate and see' (Focus group 2).*

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that drinking at home was now the norm: ***'...as they say, staying in is the new going out' (Focus group 1).*** This was portrayed in stark contrast to participants' experiences of drinking at home when they were younger, which was seen as a luxury and limited to occasions such as Christmas: *'And no one ever came over for drink, unless it was Christmas....it was more of a luxury buy wasn't it. My parents never drank at home either, it was always like, the occasional bottle of wine, at occasions' (Focus group 5).* However, some participants noted that they liked the atmosphere of going to a pub at Christmas time: *'...if you go into a bar around Christmas, there's a great atmosphere and you love going out... Yeah it's brilliant' (Focus group 4).*

Recent changes to drink driving legislation also led to more people staying at home rather than go out: *'I think the whole no limit to the driving ban is a major factor to people staying at home drinking.*

*Because you could go for a pint after work and still get in the car legally and drive. Whereas now, there's no way... So that's a huge factor, it has to be, why people stay at home drinking' (Focus group 1).*

There also appeared to be cultural shift in the acceptability of drinking certain drinks at home which participants put down to marketing. Spirits like gin and whiskey some participants believed were marketed as fashionable: ***'...when you think about gin...I remember it as the weeper's drink, and it wasn't. It was an old fashioned. But it's been marketed so much, nothing has really changed with it, but you know and then new brands and fancy glasses and all, and now it's the in thing...and most of that is down to marketing... all these new ones. Whiskeys have even come back round again, haven't they...it's more of a fashion...'*** (Focus group 1).

### Alternatives

Participants spoke about their attitudes as well as experiences of no/low alcohol during the focus group discussions. It was noted as a growing market and positive experience: *'I'm 30, 31, like so, that age range, there seems to be no issues with having that no-alcoholic beer or non-alcoholic cider at an event like that' (Focus group 3).* It was associated as an alternative to drinking alcohol when out and not at home for some: *'I have never bought non-alcoholic for home, never' (Focus group 4).* A no-alcohol pub was noted 'Virgin Mary': *'There's that Virgin Mary on Capel Street... Oh that's all non-alcoholic...it's supposedly actually great.... Yeah the next time I go out, I might saunter down' (Focus group 4).* However, some participants spoke about starting to keep low strength beers in their fridge as an alternative to have at home: *'I find I seem to be buying more Heineken 0, people might be partaking then, you know, they mightn't be drinking alcohol, but's it's kind of a, I don't know if it's to be seen drinking the same as others' (Focus group 3).* Similarity in taste to alcoholic alternative was important: *'I actually find of all the non-alcoholics it probably tastes similar to the alcoholic stuff..... it can even taste nicer, it's refreshing' (Focus group 3).* However, criticisms were also raised relating to high cost: *'I think they're expensive too...you're paying the same' (Focus group 3); 'It's as expensive as beer...and it's not what it's supposed to be, so I*

feel it's kind of a cheat' (Focus group 1) *'...you sort of begrudge paying that'* (Focus group 4). Feeling 'cheated' by not drinking alcohol was raised: *'I didn't know quite how to define it, it's just, if you're drinking, you're drinking a beer, but there's no satisfaction in having a non-alcoholic beer I think'* (Focus group 1). Poor quality was another issue: *'I don't think they've got that 0% carry on right yet. It's only a matter of time, but right now it's nearly there'* (Focus group 6). Taste of non-alcohol wine taste was seen as poor: *'I've tried one of those low fat, or reduced alcohol wines. It's like drinking vinegar, it's disgusting'* (Focus group 2). *'But when you go that low, a lot of them are sweet, I can't stand sweet wine'* (Focus group 1). Nutritional value was also questioned: *'it's full of sugar and additives'* (Focus group 1).

## 2. Motivations re Drinking at Home

Motivations for drinking at-home, like most social occasions are socially-driven and are also habit-forming.

### Still socially-driven

Though solo conditionally acceptable, the preference among participants was to have drink at home with someone, chatting, relaxed, together as a couple. It was also associated with get-togethers.

In general, participants spoke of their preference to have a drink at home with someone (i.e. spouse, partner, family member, friend) rather than alone: *'It's like if you're having a drink, the drink is your company like, I would prefer to be having a conversation with somebody'* (Focus group 3). Drinking to relax together as a couple was commonly reported: *'I suppose for us it's that you have that bit of time together. Down time, it's just like turn on the television and have a glass of wine together, you know, and that would be really it, it's just to sit down and have a bit of a cheers, and chill out'* (Focus group 3).

There was a discomfort associated with drinking at home alone for some: *'I don't feel comfortable drinking on my own, I wouldn't really drink on my own'* (Focus group 1). Participants also recalled their experiences of drinking at home alone/ cautious of not drinking too much on own *'I have to be conscious of the amount I'm drinking, particular on my own'* (Focus group 1): *'I don't like getting*

*drunk on my own in the apartment, because it's a bit weird, it's a bit pointless, does that make sense'* (Focus group 5). Several participants noted that they did enjoy having a drink at home alone sometimes at the end of the day to relax (see below). For those that were living alone, they did not appear to have an issue with drinking at home on their own: *'I live on my own, and I'm quite happy to have a drink on my own'* (Focus group 1). Other participants while living with others, also enjoyed the opportunity to have a drink alone while relaxing: *'my husband is going out this Saturday night with friends, I'm not doing anything, so I'll have a few glasses of wine, watching whatever's on the telly'* (Focus group 2). At the same time, drinking excessively at home alone could go unnoticed to others: *'You're doing no harm on your own, you're falling into bed, nobody sees you. You know that way, you're doing no harm'* (Focus group 5).

Participants also spoke about drinking at home when friends or visitors are over, both as a way of hanging out and socialising: *'it's become more common to drink at home, but, I've seen that a lot of people are making it like big crowds of people coming and playing ping pong drinking games... It's kind of becoming like a bit of a social get together now'* (Focus group 5). It was much easier to have friends over than go out: *'I'm happy to stay at home, more comfortable. I get the girls over, or one friend maybe, especially at the weekend'* (Focus group 3). It was also seen as a way of getting together with wider family members: *'Like I'll have my parents and my aunts and my cousins in, every so often like, and then we'll play, like I have a record player and we'll have records and we'll play music and get a takeaway like'* (Focus group 5). It was also noted that it sometimes led to chatting about issues in more relaxed way when having drinks at home and opening up to a family member or friend: *'I just think, when you're drinking at home, if it was a case that it was problem, if you're at home drinking, it's less embarrassing, you can actually talk about these things...they might be open to sharing than they would be if they weren't drinking... you're drinking at home, you're in a familiar environment, you're in a safe space where you can talk about these things that you wouldn't have.....Like a mini shrink's office shall we say... Yeah and share the issues'* (Focus group 6).

## Habits and associations

Drinking at home was described by participants as a varied but habitual practice, typically as a reward or relief to help them relax, relieve stress, switch off at the end of the day or after a busy or stressful day, whilst watching TV, or on sporting occasions, whilst cooking, with food or visiting friends. Multiple associations or cue that promoted a drink were cited by participants:

Transitioning from day to evening, work to leisure, weekday to weekend were cited and often as something that they looked forward to: *'It's the weekend I won't go out, stay in, have a drink, cosy, you know'* (Focus group 5). Having a drink was seen as part of 'that Friday feeling' and taking the time to relax and switch off from the week: *'I think it's a relaxation thing isn't it. So you've had your glass of wine with Graham Norton or whoever on a Friday night. And it is, it's an end of the week kind of comedown. You've been so busy, it is, it's like a full stop at the end of the week'* (Focus group 1). There was a feeling of deserving it come the end of the week: *'...sometimes I think at the end of the week, you feel you nearly deserve your few glasses of wine. I know come Friday you'd be like, oh I just can't wait to have a glass of wine...I feel like I deserve it, especially if you've had a really tough week'* (Focus group 2). Only a few participants noted having a drink at home most days as a way of relaxing *'I would drink wine during the week like... for some reason a bottle of wine doesn't feel as bad'* (Focus group 5). It was associated with a time to relax and switch off after a busy day and watch TV, including sporting occasions: *'...your day would be so busy having kids at school, getting to work and cooking, and it's lovely to sit down and just chill out, have a glass of wine, whatever, beer and just watch telly'* (Focus group 3).

For some, drinking at home was viewed as stress-relief: *'It's to relieve stress for me, stress. I would be so stressed by the end of my day, the kids can drive you crazy, and it's the only way I can release it and I look forward to it. Saturday evening. And after the first glass of wine, it's gone, everything's gone, and I'm relaxed'* (Focus group 6). Some spoke about having a drink at home after a bad day *'Usually I'm good during the week, unless something happens.... you've had a bad day and you need a glass of wine'* (Focus group 5).

Others noted drinking at home for positive reason rather than because of something negative: *'...to try and use (alcohol) as a tool to add to a good night, or to add to a good occasion, rather than as a bad day, to add to a positive, rather than try and smooth over a negative, because then you're associating it with positive things, rather than a negative thing'* (Focus group 6).

The danger associated with drinking at home becoming a 'habit' was also raised as a consequence of a change in personal circumstances: *'I took a year off after I took the redundancy, so I just felt as if, ah sure, I might as well have a glass of wine. Do you know...It became a habit more than anything else....A complete habit, and I think when you're doing your shopping, sure you just throw a bottle of wine in your trolley.....I think it's a habit, I do think it's a habit drinking at home'* (Focus group 2).

Other associations included food and reading with many recalling that they associated drinking at home and cooking/food *'I might pour myself a glass of wine when I'm cooking'* (Focus group 1). *'I would definitely have a glass of wine with dinner if I'm at home, or a beer, depending on what I'm having'* (Focus group 1). Most disagreed with daytime drinking apart from when it was occasion: *'If there was a big occasion I could have, like I'd be sluggish though, I could have a glass of wine or something like that...But I would be very slow drinking during the day'* (Focus group 3). Drinking at home and retirement also raised specific issues such as the habit of drinking at home *'...now that I'm retired, I'm reading quite a lot, 2, 3 books a week and it's very nice to have a glass of wine with that, so that's where I'm at'* (Focus group 1).

The association of alcohol with being hospitable and entertaining and the need to have enough drink available when people are over was raised. At the same time, some participants highlighted the need to ensure that they had alcohol at home in case of an occasion or celebration. Certain drinks were only consumed at celebrations, for instance, spirits were cited as drinks for special occasions or kept for visitors. The need to have a range of drinks at home for potential visitors was also expressed, and always having a bottle in the house, just in case, was viewed as an Irish thing: *'...we'd always have a*

bottle of whiskey, prosecco, champagne, just in case of something, someone celebrating always.....it's like, I better have drink in, just in case someone calls or, we just fancy one. So it's always there' (Focus group 4).

Further notions regarding hospitality and gifting were described when participants recalled their experiences of drinking alcohol when visiting other people, as well as highlighting the importance of bringing alcohol when going to someone else's house: **'I can't turn up empty-handed.....I don't feel comfortable coming in empty-handed' (Focus group 2).** **'You'd bring your own drink and you'd bring more...you wouldn't feel right if you didn't...a present' (Focus group 1).** Participants discussed the expectation to bring a bottle when visiting others and that being courteous meant not wanting to arrive empty handed **'you don't want to be a burden then on drinking their drink.....the bottle of wine is the gift that you leave, and they might put it in the cupboard, and you might drink everything else, but not touch the wine, but it's a gift' (Focus group 3).**

In addition, participants recalled having drink at home after being out **'But you often find that some friends come back with you and have a few drinks afterwards. You're out there, sure you're only up there, sure come on in, we'll have one last one, before you're on your way, you know that sort of carry on' (Focus group 6).**

Drinking at home was more common at certain times of the year, for instance during the summer, while on holiday and at Christmas **'...you kind of stock up more on the drinks and stuff, so there is a difference at that time of year.....Christmas and holiday times are the times you go overboard really' (Focus group 3).**

### 3. Intention-Knowledge Gap

People are aware and conscious of their drinking but do not necessarily have full or correct information to deliver on good intentions.

### Conscious but not necessarily knowledgeable

Participants believed that they were more conscious of the amount they drink at home versus when out: **'I do think that you kind of, you always think the next morning, because, you know it's grand to be at home, sitting and supping away, but you know if you have to be doing something the next morning, you kind of feel you know will I be groggy getting up?' (Focus group 3).**

However, despite stating they were conscious of the amount, many participants did not know the actual amount they were drinking in terms of measures and standard drinks. Confirmation bias was evident in the attitude that there's **'no harm'** in few drinks at home and many said that they had **'only 1 or 2 drinks'**. For instance, a half bottle of wine was noted as marker of a **'few drinks'** for some. There was a mixed understanding of what a small number of drinks is / what a standard drink is / the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines (deemed not relevant 'to me') across the group discussions. For instance, one participant recalled sharing a bottle of wine with their partner and having two glasses each: **'It's not even the hangovers, the fact that you might even share a bottle of wine between myself and my wife, we'd have say two glasses each, but you feel it the next morning' (Focus group 1)**<sup>5</sup>. Participants discussed their own understanding of what a small number of drinks, and what a standard drink is: **'People say they only have one glass of wine or two glasses of wine and they have the bottle, as far as I know the bottle is 6 measures' (Focus group 3)**<sup>6</sup>. For instance, when asked for what their understanding of what a standard drink is, one participant noted: **'I have no idea, I haven't a clue' (Focus group 4).** They also provided information on their unknowing misunderstandings of such; **'I don't have to worry about it, because I'm going to have my large glass which only equates to 1, 2 or 3 drinks if you had to measure any one of my glasses' (Focus group 3).**

**'Only 1 or 2 drinks'** while having big glasses at home was misleading and led to several drinks in one, in

<sup>5</sup> 1 bottle = 7.5 Standard drinks

<sup>6</sup> Ibid



many cases without knowing: *'They're [big wine glasses] like fishbowls, they're great'* (Focus group 5). Many proudly spoke about having bigger glasses at home rather than those when out: *'My wine glass is bigger than the ones you get in pub.....that's one of those things now, you go to the pub and they look very scabby in comparison'* (Focus group 2). Indeed, some participants felt that having bigger glasses was a way in which they could 'slow' down on their drinking at home: *'I have a larger glass, but then I'd only have one, or maybe a second one, I wouldn't have any more than that. Like I'd fill up my large gin glass, it wouldn't be like the half you get in a bar, it would be fuller, but then I sit there sipping that one glass over a couple of hours'* (Focus group 3). Some participants noted that they did over pour in larger glasses and that they did not measure how much they were drinking: *'I definitely over pour, I don't measure at all'* (Focus group 2). However, it was acknowledged that bigger glasses meant that it was harder to measure how much you were drinking, particularly for wine and may lead to unintentionally drinking more: *'...there's no measure for a glass of wine as such...so it's really left to your own imagination as to how much a glass is and how big or small. I know the proper measure for wine is quite an old fashioned small glass, whereas our glasses nowadays... Goldfish bowls... Some people put that much in and other people put that much in, it's up to you, what considers what a glass is'* (Focus group 1).

The low-risk weekly guidelines and standard drink labelling on alcohol products were not something that participants used or followed: *'I've never even stopped to think, Jesus, what is the standard per week. Never even actually. I mean you see it all written, but you kind of just glaze over it, you know, you don't even, but it's just, it is awareness'* (Focus group 4). Many deemed that they were not relevant to them: *'I can't even think what it is, but it wouldn't bother me, because I'd be just doing it on a Saturday evening'* (Focus group 6). Many were not aware of what a standard drink is, or used

a measure at home. Indeed, when asked about what their understanding of what a standard drink is many participants gave incorrect answers as well as referring to 'units'<sup>7</sup>: *'A glass of wine is two units I think...A pint's a unit and a half isn't it. And obviously shots are going to be, it depends on the strength of your alcohol...I think one finger height of a spirit is a unit'* (Focus group 1). *'A beer I would say is a pint. That's a unit. That's one.'* (Focus group 2).

Yet, there was a danger in that the more relaxed a person is, the more they may drink, acknowledged by the different groups: *'I'm happy to go to the half bottle of wine, but sometimes I exceed that... I occasionally do that, it's too easy to be able to do, because at that stage you're nice and happy'* (Focus group 1). *'So it sort of starts you off, the more relaxed you get, the more you can drink'* (Focus group 2).

#### Perceived relevance / disassociation / self-serving bias

Perceptions of which information is relevant to them, along with people's biases, can mean they disassociate guidelines with their own behaviour. Participants spoke about their (mis)understanding and their (lack of) awareness of the HSE low risk weekly guidelines: *'You know the way, they say, recommend women have 12 units a week, or whatever it is'* (Focus group 1)<sup>8</sup>. Some had no awareness of the low risk weekly guidelines when drinking at home: *'I don't know...It's a couple of units, I, think you said, I'd randomly say it's 5 for a girl and 7 for a boy'* (Focus group 5), while others felt that the guidelines are not relevant as they believed that they were staying within limit: *'No it wouldn't bother me, it wouldn't come into the question, because I just don't drink enough for it to be a problem'* (Focus group 5). This was in contrast to when they were a younger adult: *'... now I've kind of gone to the stage where I'm not even drinking the amount of units that probably are*

<sup>7</sup> A unit of alcohol is not the same as a standard drink. This is the measure of alcohol used in the UK as opposed to standard drinks in Ireland. One UK unit contains 8 grams of pure alcohol, compared to 10 grams in one Irish standard drink. Alcohol guidelines are typically set by the Department of Health in each country and may differ.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

deemed acceptable or normal. So that's my take on it' (Focus group 3). Other participants felt that standard drink measurements were not relevant as they were not interested in knowing about them: 'I kind of feel I'm old enough not to care...if there was a campaign now going on to try and encourage me to drink less, I wouldn't even, it wouldn't even cross my radar at all' (Focus group 2).

However, the importance of knowing how much alcohol you were consuming and the potential negative impact on health by doing so excessively was recognised by some: '...we're all concerned about the units of alcohol we're consuming and how much we're supposed to consume and the detrimental effect on health if we're drinking more than our prescribed units every week, so knowing what you're drinking and how many units are within that' (Focus group 1).

Labelling on bottles of measures was expressed as a good idea but not something that was used or followed when at home: 'back to the measure, the units, that no one can understand, but if there was a way of measuring on bottles or on sizes or glasses... just make you I suppose more consciously aware of the exact measure that you are consuming at home, it might be an idea' (Focus group 5).

Criticisms were also raised with the guidelines seen as not clear or realistic - some participants used the term 'units' that they felt no one understood and were also not seen as realistic 'The units are absolutely ridiculous, what they say, so people are just like, it's like telling somebody that has never exercised, you've got to do a 10k and that's it. That's it or you die. It's just not going to work. I can't remember what they are off the top of my head, but I just know they're not realistic to what people are drinking. So, if you want to get people to be healthier and stuff like that, give them realistic goals. And I just found that every time you drink, like I'm binge drinking apparently' (Focus group 5).

It was highlighted that a marker of a standard drink measure on the side of a glass would be helpful to have at home, particularly with wine and different size/style of glasses: 'We know it's a pint for example because a pint is that particular size and you know we don't know what a standard glass of wine is going to look like, because, again it's fat, it's

big, it's skinny, but if there was a mark of 100ml on them at least you'd know you're drinking 10 glasses' (Focus group 5). However, keeping within standard drink measures was seen as not being realistic when having others over, and that they would feel negatively judged if they adhered to the measures: 'If you managed to pour 6 glasses out of a bottle, everybody would think it's a miserly quantity' (Focus group 1).

### Moderate and Binge Drinking

Participants' attitude and understanding/misunderstanding of what constitutes drinking too much, and in particular binge drinking versus moderate drinking, was in the main associated with younger adults' culture e.g. college students, sporting events, going out and getting drunk as opposed to at home drinking experiences: 'It all kind of comes back to the whole binge drinking culture we have...I'll put my hand up and say, you know as I was growing up, I used to binge drink...and I would go out every Saturday night, that's when I would have my number of units' (Focus group 5). 'I think it's just drinking to get drunk, you're drinking as fast as you can to get, that's the end, you're not enjoying what you're drinking' (Focus group 6). Many participants felt that they were not able to binge anymore as they got older: 'Yeah, you know you associate it with your younger years, you know what I mean. And you get to an age where it's not worth it' (Focus group 3). It was not something they did e.g. due to parental commitments: 'And as the kids came along ever sure that's when it started slowing down, I'm just not able' (Focus group 3).

Participants' comments regarding their drinking intentions, and their view of their own consumption in the home, were of moderate and not binge drinking. This was in spite of the fact that most of the participants were not aware of how much they were drinking: '...maybe having 6 or 7 drinks, which is classed as binge drinking, but I don't class it as binge drinking.....maybe I associate binge with the effects that you're gone out of control...where you're just gone off your head' (Focus group 2). A binge drinker was associated with a bad label, seen as alcohol dependent: 'it's in a sense saying you're alcohol dependent, which you're not, but I think it's an awful label' (Focus group 5).

There was general agreement among focus group participants that they viewed binge drinking as something associated with others and not themselves – except perhaps when they were young. Participants also spoke about a sense of regret over the potential dangers/risk that they had put themselves at by previously binge drinking: *'And that comes to mind, now when I think of the state I got in when I was younger, and thinking, how the hell did I get home every night, I just would put myself in that position now'* (Focus group 3).

Some felt that bingeing occasionally was not bad for you as part of a healthy lifestyle and used the example of having occasional fast food: *'if they made (binging) it a bit more, either like McDonalds is part of your healthy lifestyle, it's not going to kill you if you have one McDonalds a week or whatever, you have to be realistic with people'* (Focus group 5). Campaigns to curb binge drinking were seen as unrealistic by focusing on standard drink measures rather than helping people understanding the negative impact of excessive drinking: ***'Because you know, people do go too far, they should be starting there and making people understand that when they're drunk and they're losing, like even lose their 500euro iPhone or something on an ad. That would be like, people would be like, yeah that's actually a good point, but when the fun stops, stop. Something like that will speak to people about their real situation, rather than you are having 20 things of this, because it's just so, you know, figures in their head again'*** (Focus group 5).

#### 4. Moderation in Action

How intent translates (or not) into moderate consumption depends on how moderate drinking is interpreted.

##### The conundrum of moderating drinking at home

Many participants felt that they were more conscious of the amount of their drinking at home versus when out and believed that they drank less: *'I would probably drink less because I'd just be maybe watching a movie or something like that'* (Focus group 5). It was easier to stop yourself drinking at home than when out with a crowd drinking more: *'I find you'd be longer drinking at home than you would be like in the pub...you go through them*

*quicker if I was out, than if I was at home..... Someone's always going to the bar then, and when they go to the bar, you're kind of obliged to go, so the turnaround is quicker definitely I think'* (Focus group 3).

##### Moderation techniques

Participants referred to various moderation techniques that they used when drinking alcohol at home:

##### Setting limits

Setting limits e.g. Keeping 2/3 limit max at home versus going out (drinking more when out) was a technique used: *'...you keep it a bit more, you have two or three, that would be max like, where in the pub, if you're going out on the lash, you try and get whoever's coming, anyone to come along, you bring along to the pub like'* (Focus group 6). Setting a time limit as to for how long and how much is to be consumed when drinking at home, was another moderation technique used by some: *'For me if it was midweek, I wouldn't have more than two glasses'* (Focus group 2). The need to be disciplined when drinking at home was also raised: *'You have to control it too, because it can get out of hand. Like I would never go over my limit or anything at home. It can't possibly happen'* (Focus group 3). However, it was highlighted that this may prove more problematic for some people: *'It depends if you don't curtail it, if you don't curtail yourself, but there are some people that are going over the top altogether. Too much drinking at home.... It's their crutch and that in life'* (Focus group 6).

##### To measure or not

The groups' discussions on measuring drinks included free pouring, not measuring, not wanting to measure, having your own 'measure' of 'enough', and measuring being more generous. Some participants felt that everyone has their own 'measure' of enough, with people having their own limit rather than being told what is enough: ***'I think it's interesting that everyone has their own measure of when enough is enough and everyone has their own way of stopping when they need to stop'*** (Focus group 1). There was also a reluctance towards measuring drinks for others in the name of generosity: *'If I'm pouring someone else's drink,*

*I don't care, I just lash it in...my friend would be quick to comment if you weren't generous'* (Focus group 2). They noted about not wanting to be seen as mean for visitors: *'I suppose you give them a decent drink like, you wouldn't be mean with it like'* (Focus group 3). Indeed, many participants noted pouring more generous measures for themselves while drinking at home versus when out as well as a preference for double measures at home: *'Do I measure, oh I have my measure yeah. I think when I'm at home, I put the measure in and then I probably tip another little bit in, to be honest with you. As my sister says, home measures'* (Focus group 1). Letting people pour their own drinks and measures was also used: *'you want to be seen as generous, and it's nice to pour a decent amount, or get them to help themselves, that's an easy way'* (Focus group 1). Some participants did not want to measure *'ignorance is bliss'* or cared: *'I think I'm more aware of the measures at the start but then, as I drink more, I don't really care about them'* (Focus group 5) while others referred to measuring by taste: *'I'll test it, no, a little bit more tonic, that's good'* (Focus group 4). Free pouring was commonly cited among the different groups: *'No [to measuring] it's a free pour all the way..... sometimes ignorance is bliss'* (Focus group 4). Topping up was another technique used: *'I usually try to top it up a bit, and that's saving on going back to the fridge'* (Focus group 3). While another participant noted that the only measure they used was when there was no alcohol left: ***'Apart from the fact that everything's gone, that would be the only measure we have, it's like, we've ran out, that would be the extent of the measure'*** (Focus group 6).

### Slower and controlled drinking

Participants noted taking their time and not rushing their drink while at home. Sipping drinks at home was seen to take longer than when out and also with more control: *'You'd kind of sip and you'd be watching television and settling in, the glass goes down you know if you're out, the glass is always in your hand, you know'* (Focus group 3). However, it was also noted that it was easier to drink more of certain alcoholic drinks such as wine compared with beer: *'I think with the beer as well, with the fizz, you're kind of sipping over with it. With the wine you can kind of just gulp it a bit quicker if that*

*makes sense'* (Focus group 5).

Some participants felt that they drank quicker/more when out. For instance, being in a round when out led to drinking more than intended rather than being able to keep own pace at home: *'...you're basically drinking at your own pace, whereas, if you're out in a pub, you're going to be in round, you're going to feel more pressure to drink more. Where if you're at home, it's just you with the bottle and you deciding how much you drink'* (Focus group 6).

### Calorie counting

Calories and alcohol were highlighted by some as an issue that was important to them alongside awareness of alcohol content e.g. watch out for gaining weight from drinking: ***'I've Slimming World in the morning... I'd gotten overweight, it's now I'm conscious. I was always conscious of the empty calories in alcohol....I have set myself a target...it's the amount of calories, so at this stage I'm definitely down to the half bottle of wine between a Friday and Saturday night and I'd be conscious of the alcohol content as well'*** (Focus group 1).

### Water

Drinking water was seen as an important moderation technique while at home: *'I would always put a couple of jugs or bottles of water on the table and usually it would be sort of every second drink would be water or wine or whatever they're taking'* (Focus group 1). Diluting or weakening of alcohol was also noted: *'I add more 7Up to it, make it a little weaker'* (Focus group 1).

### Glass size

Not having a *'full glass'* was important and glass size was seen as important to moderating but also unintentionally encouraging drinking more, particularly when bigger glasses were used: *'But a glass does make a big difference at home, I think because you do, because if you have nice gin glass or wine or wine glass, even a beer glass.....And there's only a half a glass left, you'd better open another (bottle)'* (Focus group 4). However, some participants enjoyed the freedom of having a 'big' glass when drinking at home: *'I love more wine, I sit down and turn on the TV and I'll have another big glass and I love it'* (Focus group 6).

## Leftovers

For some, their preferred moderation measurement technique was whatever was left in the bottle: *'I think the measure is the bottle. Oh look, it's gone down to there, that's the measure, especially for wine. Is there anything left in the bottle? The measure is the bottle'* (Focus group 4). Using half a bottle of wine as a marker was another technique noted: *'I just look at how much is left of the wine, when I'm half way down yeah' '...bottles are different shapes, so you might have a little poser, puzzle, where the halfway mark on this bottle.... if I stop at a half a bottle, and that's just our little bit of discipline...I don't quantify it religiously or anything like that, but I try to ensure that there's enough left for the next day'* (Focus group 1). Indeed, some participants noted that they stopped drinking wine as it was too easy to drink a full bottle. Buying mini wine bottles was provided as an example to moderating such behaviour: *'I'll buy you know the little mini bottles of red wine, or a little bottle of prosecco, so I can just say, I'll just have the one'* (Focus group 5). It was also referred to a moderation technique used by some when the only person drinking wine at home: *'I would have like the small bottles of wine actually. I think they're handy, let's say if it's myself and my boyfriend, he mightn't drink wine, I wouldn't have bottle, just have a glass, I'd just have one of those little bottles'* (Focus group 2)<sup>9</sup>.

## Not buying it

Not stocking up or having drink in the house unless drinking, was another technique used: *'I've stopped buying alcohol and having it in the house during the week...And I just don't have it there'* (Focus group 5).

## Conscious of drink driving (plus 'morning after')

Participants spoke about having alternatives to alcohol when having guests in their home, and about their awareness of drink driving/never offering people driving a drink when at home. In addition, *'the morning after'* and drink driving when at home drinking was something that they were conscious of leading to some setting limits: *'I think*

*it's the best, especially if you're at home, you can say, I have to drive tomorrow morning, yeah, I'll leave it at that'* (Focus group 4).

## How drinking is viewed by others

How the stigma associated with drinking at home and being seen as an alcoholic has changed, was raised: *'There's no stigma about it now. Do you remember when home drinking used to be... Alcoholic?...Yeah basically...Drinking at home, now it's the norm...Totally normal'* (Focus group 4). Participants commented on how alcohol dependency issues could remain hidden at home and this was dangerous: *'It's less visible though, if people have a drinking problem, that if they're drinking at home all the time, than people going out for a drink. At least you'll see them outside if they're over drinking, but if they're in their home...It can be cloaked yeah'* (Focus group 6).

## 5. Impacts

### Unintended consumption

Some participants noted that as they were getting older, they were not able to drink as much: *'I think as you get older, I can't, I did it a couple of weeks ago, my old work group called in, we were meant to go for food, we didn't go for food, we just had copious amounts of alcohol and I had to go to work the next day and .. like I literally can't, I can't operate. I did call in sick, and I'm never drinking during the week again... Yeah, like years ago, I was able to do it, but no, I'm too old'* (Focus group 5). However, participants also noted that they no longer wanted to drink excessively and wanted to make the most of their weekends: *'I realised last year, that Sunday morning can be better than Saturday night, if you don't drink too much on a Saturday and you can have the morning'* (Focus group 1).

The social aspect of at home drink meant that it was also easy to drink more at home than intended especially when other people were around: *'I'm saying I'd have three...but then my sister could come over and the others could come over and the craic is good and it's this, and you could have*

<sup>9</sup> The mini bottles hold 2 standard drinks but the participant is referring to it as '1 glass'

*five before, you know what I mean...because you're pouring so many glasses of wine, It's on the next day when you go, oh my god, how many bottles are here that you realise that you drank more than you thought you did'* (Focus group 1).

### Intentional consumption

Pre-drinking was spoken about in association with youth-related binge drinking: *'They call it prinks... they drank twice as much at home...because if they had to drink that when they went out, they wouldn't drink half as much. If they had to buy it'* (Focus group 6). Pre-drinking was seen as common practice among younger adults: *'...my daughter's 22 and if they're going out, our house seems to be pre-drink central, so you see them coming in and they've their bottles of whatever, and sure they're all locked before they leave the house...'* (Focus group 2). It also led to not spending as much when going out afterwards: *'pre-drinks it's cheaper a lot of time than starting at 8 o'clock in the pub to whatever time you come home, or leaving at 11 o'clock hammered and then you're not spending as much out like'* (Focus group 6).

### Alcohol & sleep

There were mixed views on drinking at home and its impact on sleep with some feeling that it helped: *'If I had a glass of wine, it puts me to sleep'* (Focus group 3) *'There's no harm in a few drinks'...it will help you to sleep as well'* (Focus group 6). Others noted a negative impact on sleep if having more than 2/3 max drinks at home *'...if you have more than 2 or 3 max, it affects my sleep...I find that too, too many and you wake up early, yeah'* (Focus group 1). It was also noted that alcohol could sometimes keep people awake: *'Sometimes alcohol can keep you awake, it all depends on the mood....It all depends on the time of day, the company you have and the mood you're in'* (Focus group 2).

### Alcohol & emotions

The association between drink and opening up emotions was highlighted: *'Drink is a big magnifier of your emotions'* (Focus group 1). Some participants highlighted how excessive drinking could have a negative impact on mood: *'I've learned I suppose, if I've had too much, I'd be as cranky as hell the next day, just don't talk to someone'* (Focus group 3).

### Harms and advertising

Some participants felt that the negative impact of alcohol was not strong enough in adverts: *'Alcohol with cancers and heart problems and all, it doesn't hit you the same way an ad for a cigarette would'* (Focus group 1).

### Impact on children and households

Attitudes surrounding drinking alcohol at home and children (both when young children are present as well as teenage drinking) were discussed. Participants with young children were more inclined to drink at home than go out, with the cost of going out such as 'babysitter' making it more convenient to drink at home: *'If I stay in, I don't have to get a babysitter, and I can have whatever drink I want'* (Focus group 3). Some spoke about the habit of having a drink at home when the baby is asleep, or as a way of having time to oneself and/or to relax as a couple as they were no longer going out as much: *'it's just to let the hair down and have our own bit of time'* (Focus group 3). Other participants noted drinking at the weekend when their children are gone to bed: *'We'd have a few there on the weekend when the kids have gone to bed, that's it, when there's nothing else...we'd have two or three drinks and that's it'* (Focus group 3). Not drinking around or in front of children was highlighted: *'I wouldn't drink around him (son). When I get a little escape away from him, I would'* (Focus group 1). Indeed, some participants did not like their children to see them drinking: *'I couldn't enjoy a drink with the children. They actually, they've never really seen me drink to be honest. Not that I wouldn't let them categorically, but I don't like to let them see me drinking. I don't like drink on the table when they come down in the morning or anything'* (Focus group 3). Others also spoke about their experiences of having a hangover when on their own with children as well as not consuming alcohol due to parental commitments.

Participants also spoke about the importance of parents and role modelling behaviour towards children: ***'It's not what you tell them, it's what they see'*** (Focus group 3). This was particularly important for teenagers: *'You give your good example, like my kids are teenagers, but I actually wouldn't like to sit down at night and have a drink with them, or they would, it's just a separate*

*thing'* (Focus group 3). Participants recalled their experiences of their own parents drinking when younger: *'...my parents would always have opened a bottle of wine with Sunday dinner or with a meal.....drinking at home was something that way always done because they didn't go out to do it'* (Focus group 1). Attitudes to teenage drinking were also raised. Experience of other countries such as France noted where there was cultural acceptance of young people drinking vs Ireland's experience: *'..when you go to France and you see the kids all around their family, kids do start off drinking early, but they learn to drink say, by 16, 17 in moderation with a glass of wine with some food, so you know, that culture in France and stuff, is deemed probably acceptable. And it's probably, it kind of teaches kids that way of lifestyle as well, you know'* (Focus group 3). Drug taking among young people seen as a growing and widespread issue due to its low cost relative to drinking alcohol *'people are taking drugs, because it's actually cheaper than drinking'* (Focus group 5).

# DISCUSSION AND RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

**The study findings reported here provide vital qualitative data and insight into Irish adults' at-home drinking across several themes: attitudes; motivations; intentions (versus knowledge); experiences; and finally the impact of at home drinking.**

## Attitudes

Participants spoke at length about their attitudes to at home consumption of alcohol – at home drinking was expressed as convenient, comfortable and easy. The collective and contextual ease with which it can happen makes it so prevalent and the pricing and marketing issues that were mentioned were clear facilitators. This sometimes led to situations of 'bulk buying' whereby special offer incentives were encouraging such behaviour.

However, alcohol misuse/dependency issues may go 'hidden' behind closed doors. Indeed those drinking to harmful and hazardous levels in their homes can go unnoticed (Jayne et al. 2016). Among the predictors for hazardous drinking at home found in other research were greater frequency of consuming alcohol at home and drinking alcohol at home because it is cheaper than drinking out (Foster & Canfield 2017).

At home drinking was taking place at a time when people were leading busy stressful lives and were both financially and quality conscious – hence they were accessing good brands/quality for less than you pay in pubs/restaurants. At the same time, the pub still had an important social aspect associated with it particularly for sporting events. Pubs can provide people with important opportunities to both establish and maintain friendships and social connections (Thurnell-Read, 2019). They have previously been found to be specifically important spaces for community-dwelling older adults can maintain social support (Buz, Sanchez et al. 2014).

Recent changes to drink driving legislation also appeared to aid the new acceptance of drinking at home as the norm. Changes to customer behaviour

such as fewer people drinking after work have recently been identified among licensed premises following the introduction of a lower drink-drive limit (Sumpter et al. 2020).

While recognising the role of regulation such as MUP, it was expressed that it did not address the root of the problem by tackling the cultural acceptance of alcohol in Ireland. Such legislative measures were criticised as being punitive for those in control of their drinking.

Focus group discussions also provided an important insight into Irish adults' attitudes and experiences of no-low alcohol. While a growing market was acknowledged, it was mainly associated as an alternative to drinking alcohol when out. Criticisms included the high cost and poor quality for some. Previous research has found among adults that constantly use strategies to moderate their drinking there was a strong predictor of low-risk drinking (Mugavin et al 2018). However, the authors also found that never using a strategy was more positively associated with low risk drinking that using it rarely (Mugavin et al 2018).

There is something prophetic in the comment "staying in is the new going out" and clearly at-home drinking is an established, acceptable and attractive new norm.

## Motivations

In terms of motivations for drinking at home, it was discussed as a social habit and a preference to have a drink with someone either living with such as a spouse, partner or as an opportunity to socialise by either having friends/family over or going to their house. The 'habits' associated with home drinking with wine was previously found to be used as a source of cultural capital among middle-class occupational groups (Brierley-Jones et al 2014). Having a drink at home to relax was highlighted as well as providing a reward/treat by giving a sense of relief and an opportunity to switch off at the end of a busy day. This could occur either alone or with



somebody else. Such drinking habits and behaviour at home was specifically associated with cues such as time transitions to day to night, weekday to weekend etc.

Drinking at home was also seen as more prominent at certain times of the year such as Christmas or Summer. UK research found that socialising events that take place with friends and/or family at home – such as dinner parties, house parties and watching sport involve increased or 'higher risk drinking (Ally et al, 2016). The authors point out that understanding moderation in certain contexts and less so in others warrants further investigation (Ally et al. 2016). Drinking alone, while less commonplace than social drinking at home, has been found to be associated with an increased likelihood of drinking for negative reinforcement (such as to relieve stress or as a coping mechanism) (Corbin et al 2020).

There were positive associations with regard to drinking at home, aligned with cues such as the end of the day, end of work and 'me-time' and viewing the drink as a 'reward'. That said using drink to cope or relieve stress is well documented (Kuntsche et al. 2006; Drinkaware 2019) and was evident in some of the group discussions in this current study.

The discussions also highlighted the association of alcohol and hospitality and sociability as previously highlighted in the Drinkaware Index (2019).

## Intention-Knowledge Gap

Overall, participants appeared to be conscious and aware of their drinking at home. However, the personal inclination to either interpret or ignore guidelines and measures meant that they were not informed and there was an intention-knowledge gap. 'Small and 'A few' are conveniently open to mis-interpretation and adults are unable to deliver on their intentions of only having '1 or 2 drinks' when at home. For instance, mixed understandings of what constituted a small number of drinks, a standard drink, cross over with the use of term unit, non-compliance with the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines were all common place. Previous research has found that we can be inclined to pour larger portions of alcohol when at home compared with the pre-determined measures that are provided in pubs and restaurants (Livingston & Callinan 2015).

Along with all of this, are our innate biases - our optimism bias, confidence bias are amplified by what's known as the empathy gap i.e. when we're enjoying something now, we find it hard to imagine the harm that may come later, or it could be said that we choose to ignore it. We frame what we tell ourselves to fit our choices. Behavioural change data (Corr & Plagnol, 2018) contends that time plays its part in the choices people make with the preference being for a minimal time lag. What this means is people can grasp the value of the 'here and now' or the imminent, whereas the longer-term benefits are typically harder to perceive and consequently, less tangible or 'real' and less attractive. This is why, as a health determinant, the context and the environment of the drinking occasion is important. What will the message look like, will it be seen and where (e.g. at the point of alcohol purchase or the point of consumption, in a home setting or on-trade outlet, etc.) are crucial considerations. These positions are borne out in research (Roderique-Davies et al. 2018) that investigated the impact of health messages on alcohol products. Its authors surmised that: "Despite the majority of participants being in favour of health messages on bottles and cans, they don't actually attend to them in any great detail".

What's apparent is that the spectrum of at-risk drinking (WHO, 2001) – from low risk to harmful, hazardous and dependent – does not register with participants in our study. This is also evident in other research where there is a stark lack of awareness of the national low risk guidelines as well as standard drinks (De Visser & Birch, 2019; Hobin et al. 2018; Kalinowski & Humphreys 2016; Rosenberg et al. 2018; Wettlaufer, 2018). Binge drinking was viewed by participants in our study as something that was not relevant and associated with younger adults going out and getting drunk as opposed to drinking at home. In a study in the Netherlands, alcohol consumption at home was found to be under-estimated because of inaccurate information and awareness on standard drink sizes (de Beukelaar et al. 2019). A particular barrier to knowledge around binge drinking is relevance, and by disassociating the relevance - and associating it with extreme excessive drinking, young people/culture and alcohol dependency – we absolve our need to take heed. There is also an argument that media reporting, in the main, has a tendency

to be black and white on the subject of alcohol consumption. Binge drinking amongst young people for example, is well covered in the media, and endorses the popular view that binge drinking is something young people do, when in fact its prevalence crosses most demographics (though it the U25s are higher than older age groups) (Drinkaware Index 2019). This media narrative also supports people's optimism bias, that misuse and dependency is something that happens to others and not themselves. Younger age groups do have a different approach to risk than older cohorts. Of note in the Drinkaware Index 2019 is the high number of under 25s who do not recognise future alcohol related risks. At 27%, this is the highest percentage of all age groups. This awareness presents a contradiction when viewed against the problematic drinking patterns reported by under-25s and suggests that their health concerns are also accompanied by a distinct lack of urgency.

Whether it is conscious or unconscious, the misconception of what is moderate drinking accommodates a certain justification or rationalisation of drinking behaviours. A consequence of this is that it normalises this behaviour, regardless of whether it contravenes the guidelines or definitions of what at risk drinking is. There is a view that the measure of binge drinking, at 6+ drinks, is too strict, which would support any reticence to recognise this behaviour in oneself. Given that the pathway to positive behaviour change with regard to drinking involves awareness, understanding and motivation at the outset, then careful consideration of this needs to be given if the challenge to educate and embed the knowledge and acceptance of what is risky consumption or alcohol misuse is to be addressed.

The majority of the participants were aware of their alcohol consumption, no doubt driven in part by the growing trend in health and wellness. But the Intention-Knowledge Gap means that without the correct information i.e. what is a Standard Drink, what are the Low Risk Guidelines, what is Binge Drinking, they cannot convert their mindful preference into actual behaviour. This lack of knowledge allows people's natural biases to dominate their attitude to alcohol and in particular at-risk and binge drinking. The social aspect of drinking, was highlighted in this research and this is

in line with previous studies (.g. Foster & Ferguson 2012; Holloway et al. 2008). This 'positive' on which people are averse to losing out and the social norms and broad societal expectations regarding hospitality as described by participants in our study - to 'bring a bottle' when visiting someone's home, to pour 'generous' measures - further this.

## Experiences

Techniques used to moderate alcohol consumption were outlined as many participants noted that they felt that they were more disciplined when at home. However, such intentions were unable to translate into practice when they did not know how much they were actually drinking. Techniques used included keeping a 2/3 maximum limit and drinking slower at home vs when out i.e. 'sipping'. However, many did not measure in the first instance and did not want to do so either with 'free pouring', measuring by taste, using half bottle as a marker or by what is left all commonly cited.

Small wine bottles were noted and, in this regard, recent research found that consuming wine at home from smaller bottles may reduce both the amount consumed and rate of consumption (Codling et al. 2020; Mantzari et al. 2020). Additional intake of wine may become more effortful due to smaller bottle size (Hollands et al. 2015). However, people are known to underestimate their alcohol consumption (Department of Health and Social Care, UK, 2013). Glass size was seen as both crucial in moderating the amount drunk (especially for calories) but bigger glasses (e.g. for wine and gin) were very welcomed and they again unintentionally encouraged some to drink more at home. There was a certain level of freedom expressed about glass size, pointing to a certain autonomy associated with it, in line with other research (Foster & Ferguson 2012). Wine glass sizes have dramatically increased in size across the past three decades (Zupan et al. 2017).

Not having drink in the house unless having a drink was cited, while the importance of ensuring alcohol was at home in case of an occasion or having visitors was also noted, thus highlighting the contradiction among participants. Drink driving and the 'morning after' was something that participants were conscious of and this led them to set limits when drinking at home. However, there is a real

danger associated with not knowing what/how much you are consuming i.e. standard drink and driving. Calorie content was another technique used by some participants when drinking at home. The 2019 Drinkaware Barometer found that 61% of Irish adults would like to see more on calorie and sugar content of alcoholic drinks.

## Impacts

The impacts of at home drinking led to both unintended and intentional consumption and consequences.

The concept of having only one or two drinks was misleading when having a big glass at home. Recent research has found that larger glasses increase wine consumption in restaurants (Plling et al. 2020). There was a danger associated with drinking more when relaxed and the social aspect of drinking at home also led to unintentionally drinking more. In contrast, combining drinking at home with going out (pre-drinking) led to binge drinking, which was viewed as intentional, harmful and something that only younger adults did. Pre-drinking has been found to increase the risk of alcohol-related harm (Miller et al. 2016). Recent research by the Health Research Board in Ireland found that the majority of alcohol consumption and related harms in the Irish population are accounted for by low- and moderate-risk drinkers (i.e. drinkers who were not dependent on alcohol), and specifically by those who engage in heavy episodic drinking. Together, monthly and occasional HED drinkers accounted for 62% of all drinkers, consumed 70% of alcohol and accounted for 59% of alcohol-related harms (O'Dwyer et al. 2019).

While acknowledging the importance of the negative impact on health of drinking excessively, this was not seen as relevant to participants in our study as they believed that they were not drinking excessively. Rather than expressing concerns about long-term health implications, immediate impacts were discussed in the main such as sleep impact (Foster & Heyman 2013). This was associated with having more than a small number of drinks when at home. Health has previously not been identified as a significant consideration when constructing alcohol consumption among mid-aged non-problematised drinkers (Muhlack et al 2016).

Finally, focus group discussions gave an insight into the impact of drinking at home and attitudes surrounding drinking at home and children. Those with young children spoke of their preference to drink at home vs going out due to their parental commitments. Parents also spoke about the importance of parents' role modelling behaviour towards children, which was seen as particularly important for teenagers. Parental role modelling of alcohol use is important in influencing alcohol consumption in adolescence and in later life (Bowden et al. 2019).

# CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The domestic realm of drinking at home has often been ignored (Jayne et al. 2016). This study provides an extensive suite of qualitative data gathered on how Irish adults experience at-home drinking and their intentions of doing so. The study findings reported here provide vital learnings into the specific gaps in knowledge on binge drinking among a sample of Irish adults. The majority of participants do not set out to drink excessively while at home, the 'good' intention is there but they are unable to follow through. Unknowingly, many are consuming more than intended when drinking at home due to their misunderstandings. Thus, this highlights key areas to be addressed in order to increase awareness of unintentional binge drinking. Drinking spaces were previously treated as passive backdrops in the alcohol studies literature (Jayne, Valentine & Holloway 2008a, 2008b). However, drinking spaces are active agents with the capacity to shape alcohol consumption, practices and experiences (Wilkinson, 2016). The drinking space of 'at-home' appears to do just that, within the 'comfort of the couch' lies potential dangers. Motivations for drinking associated with relaxation and socialising were common among our participants and here in lies the problem with unintentionally drinking more and unable to follow through with moderation. All the while, adults are not knowing as to what hazardous drinking is and it is not seen as relevant to them and their situation. Ultimately, the findings reiterate those of the Drinkaware Index (2019) with Irish adults seeing excessive drinking and their related harms as a phenomenon unconnected to their own lives.

By carefully listening to the experiences of a sample of people in a non-prescribed manner through a series of semi-structured focus group discussions, the qualitative approach taken provides the best approach to enhance our understanding of the unresearched topic that is at-home drinking experiences. Understanding the drivers of the growing trend for at-home drinking is crucial in order to allow and support key stakeholders respond to societal changes (Foster & Ferguson 2012). The results of this study will inform the development, implementation and roll out of a focused information campaign on drinking in the home setting, the harms associated with binge

drinking, and also the development, implementation and roll out of tools and collaterals to assist with reducing consumption in the home (i.e. provide adults with both knowledge and skills to change behaviour). The data creates a set of learning and recommendations regarding a broader intervention programme to address the issue of binge drinking in the home setting. The output from this project is aligned with Drinkaware's commitment as a national charity working to prevent and reduce the misuse of alcohol, to evidence-led education and measured, effective communications programmes. It will both qualify and inform a broader national out-reach to be implemented in 2020/2021 and thereby ensure its delivery and its efficacy.

This qualitative study gives a comprehensive overview of Irish adults' at home drinking experiences prior to COVID-19. It's relevance is amplified within the context of this current pandemic, because it acts as a 'precursor' to the expectation that this trend has increased: The indication of this and other data (Index 2019) is that the attitude, motives and reasons that adults drink, are changing, and that new drinking habits are clearly being formed. Documenting these emerging and growing behaviour and attitudinal shifts contributes to the important insight and data bank regarding alcohol consumption in Ireland. This allows for a deeper understanding of the context, that can in turn be applied to create better interventions and preventions regarding alcohol misuse.

By conducting this qualitative research pre-Covid 19, this emerging trend has been registered and recorded. It provides a valuable qualitative baseline context against which current Covid 19 Drinking at Home data can be viewed. Since March 2020 alcohol consumption in Ireland has only be possible in the home setting, as all pubs and restaurants are closed. How this has changed people's behaviour and attitude to drinking at home, and whether this shift will continue or retreat as 2020 progresses, are key questions for those involved in the prevention and reduction of alcohol misuse. Understanding these shifts and their rationale will be critical to addressing future consumption challenges in this regard.

Supplementary cross-analysis briefing papers will be published by Drinkaware as new data becomes available. As with all Drinkaware research, this report and data is accessible to all interested parties and the charity welcomes co-operative and collaborative opportunities with other mission-aligned organisations.

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