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UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

# LICIT AND ILLICIT DRUG USE IN AMSTERDAM II

*Report of a household survey in 1994 on the prevalence of drug use among the population of 12 years and over*

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# 5

## Alcohol

### 5.1 Introduction

Drinking alcohol is legal and widely accepted in society. Its use is more widespread than the use of any other drug. However, the use of alcohol can have very different forms. It can be a pleasant diversion after a long day at work, a life-threatening compulsory habit, and everything in between. In this chapter, we will focus on the question of who drinks how much. This approach is somewhat different from that of the other chapters, where the quantity of consumption is not subjected to analysis. In this chapter, both the frequency and volume of consumption are studied.

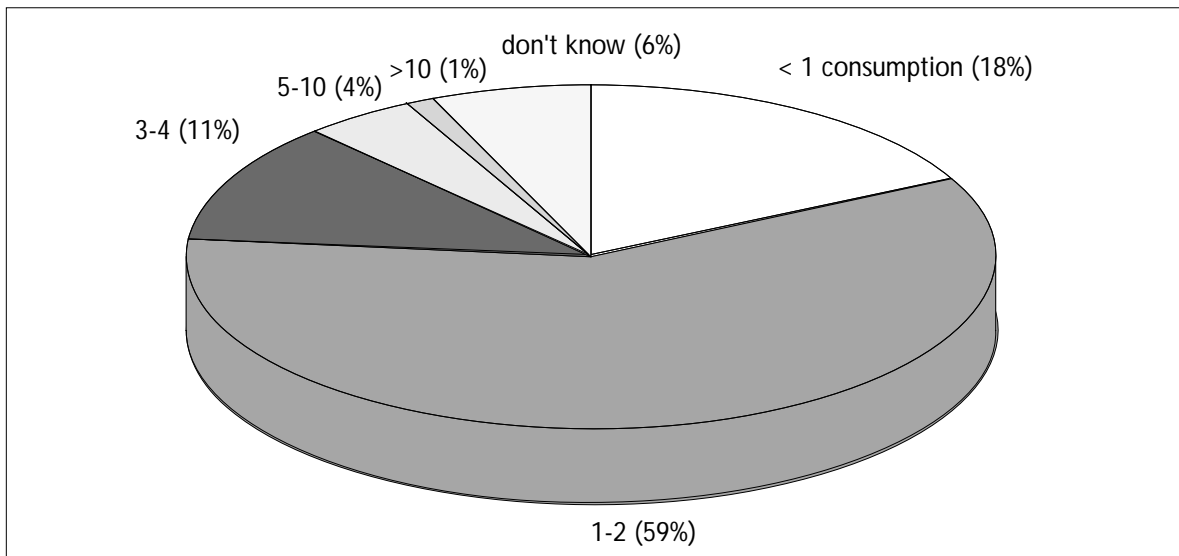
### 5.2 Prevalence

Very few people have never taken an alcoholic beverage. Lifetime prevalence of alcohol is 86 percent. Recent use too, is higher than any other drug (last year prevalence is 77% and last month prevalence 69%). In other words: many people drink, and a large majority of our respondents did so in the month prior to the interview. This continuation rate, or the proportion of all drinkers that continued drinking into the month preceding the interview is 80 percent: higher than for any other drug.

In Chapter 2, we saw that the frequency of drinking alcohol varies. Of all people that did drink in the month prior to the interview (69 percent of the population), most had a low to moderate frequency of consumption (36 percent 1-4 days; 19 percent 5-8 days and 12 percent on 9-14 days). The remainder drank more often (11 percent on 15-20 days and 20 percent more than that). Thus, use of alcohol was more or less equally divided among low (1-4 days), moderate (8-14 days) and high frequency (more than 14 days). The question that naturally follows is: how much do these people drink? Average daily consumption is expressed in Figure 5.1.

The majority drank little to moderately: 77 percent consumed less than 3 glasses daily. Remarkably, a relatively large group of 6 percent proved unable to answer the question of how much they drink. The remaining group (16%) had a relatively high consumption of 3 or more glasses a day.

Figure 5.1 Average daily consumption of alcoholic beverages (N=3,351)

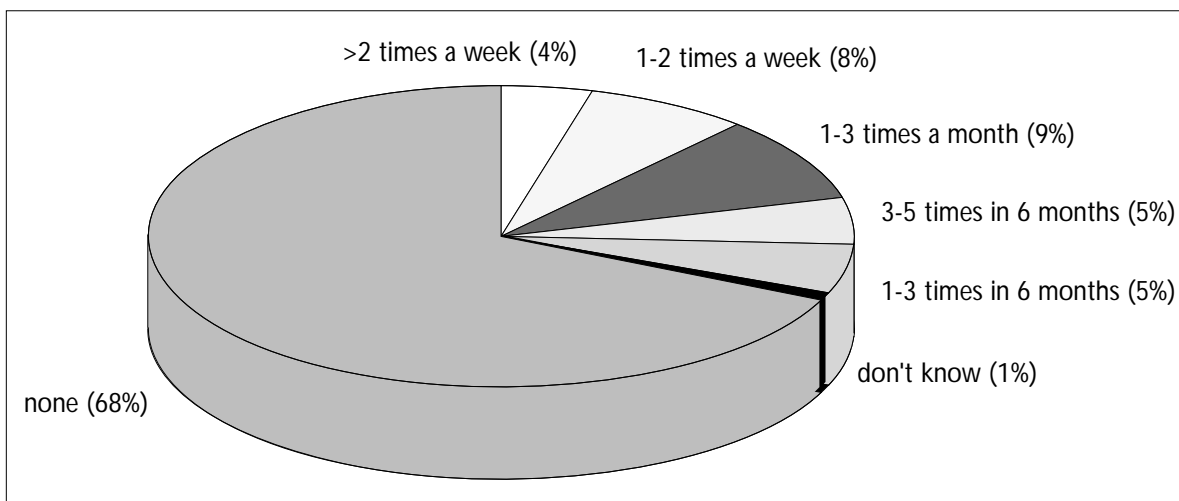


Two additional questions were designed to find out to what extent people drink substantial quantities of alcohol (defined as more than six glasses) on a single occasion and how many of these occasions took place in the six months preceding the interview. Figure 5.2 shows the results for both questions.

Of all those who drank alcohol, less than half (42%) met the criteria of having had 'a substantial quantity' in the preceding six months. The right side of the figure shows the number of occasions when more than 6 glasses were consumed. This is 1-3 times a month for the largest group (29%), but there is substantial variation.

Data on consumption of alcohol in the country as a whole are collected by the Central Bureau of Statistics. Overall differences with the present survey are not

Figure 5.2 Number of occasions in the six months preceding the interview when more than 6 glasses of alcohol were consumed



noteworthy. Nationally, 20.4 percent of the population abstained from drinking; in Amsterdam the figure was 21.2 percent. In both cases, 46 percent never drank more than 6 glasses on a single occasion.

Differences in abstinence between the sexes however, are more interesting. In Amsterdam, 25 percent of all women and 17 percent of all men were abstinent. For the country as a whole, the percentages are 28 and 12 percent respectively. Generally speaking, therefore, in Amsterdam, fewer men and more women drink alcoholic beverages.

### 5.3 Social-demographic aspects of alcohol use

We can conclude from the previous section that drinking is very much integrated into society. If we look at drinking behaviour in relation to age, we find that only the very young show lower prevalence figures. The average age of initial alcohol consumption is approximately 18 years.

Young people also stood out in another interesting respect: women had significantly higher figures for last year and last month prevalence than men (Table 5.1). Surprisingly, the same was true for lifetime prevalence in the age group of 50-59 years (see also Figure 5.3).

The number of days on which alcohol was consumed was lower for younger people (Fig. 5.4). Starting at the age of thirty, regular drinking (on more than 15 days a month) increased. Possibly, younger people only drink when they go out, while others also drink on other occasions.

Figure 5.3 Lifetime prevalence of alcohol use by age group and gender

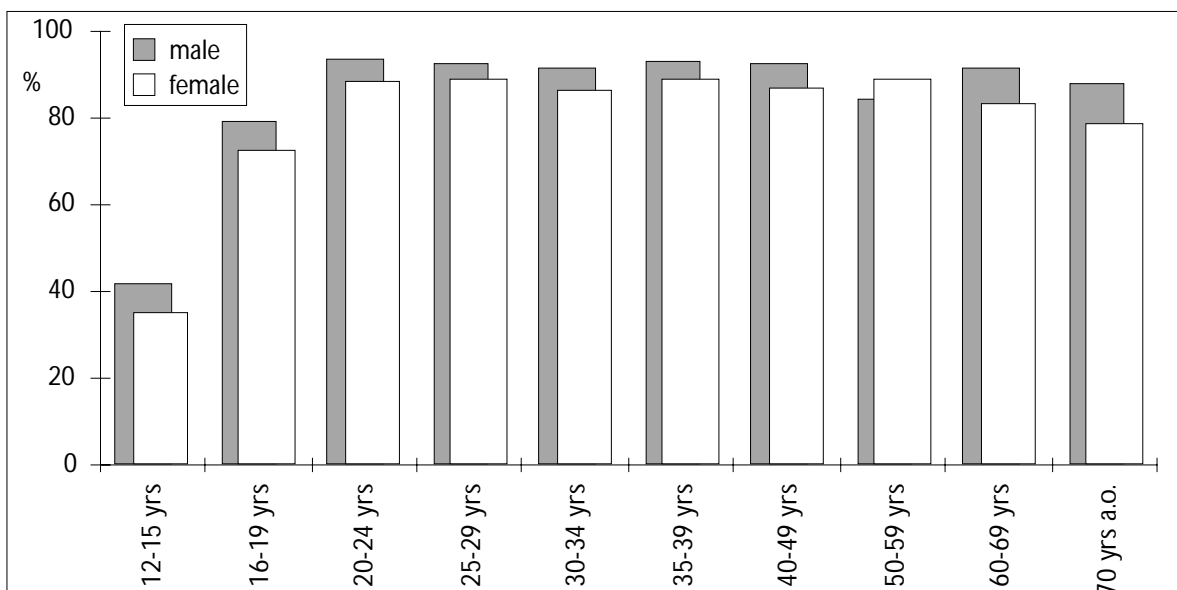
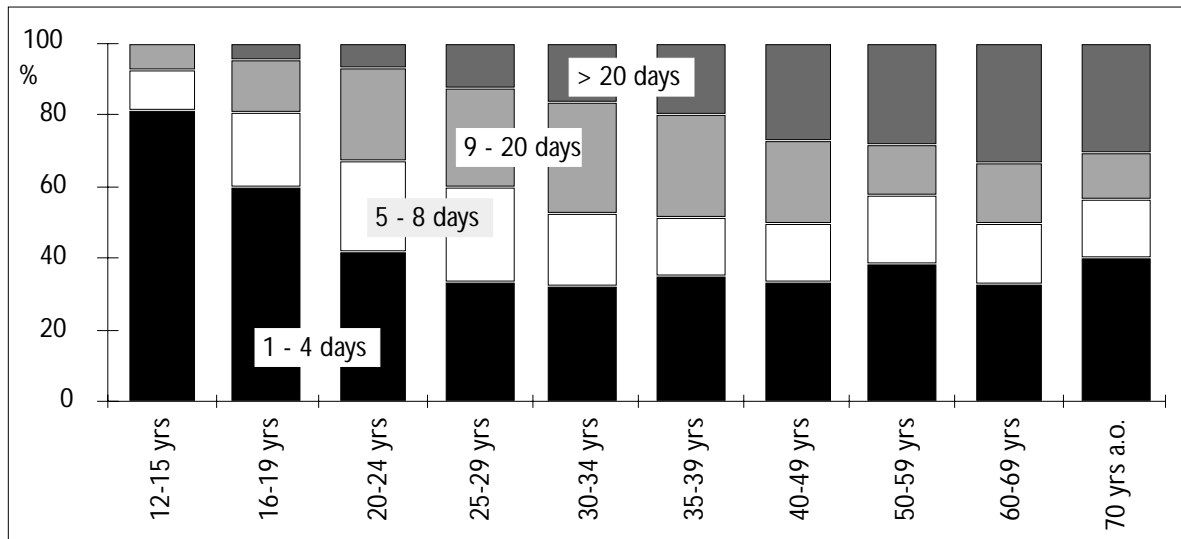


Figure 5.4 Frequency of last month alcohol consumption, by age group



In addition, very young people as well as the elderly did not drink substantial amounts of alcohol on any single occasion (Fig. 5.5)<sup>1</sup>. In the youngest age group, 87 percent never had more than 6 glasses of alcohol on any single occasion in the preceding 6 months. The corresponding figure was 42 percent for the age group 20-24. Occasional substantial drinking occurred mainly in the age groups between 20 and 40 years. After that, the figure of the category 'never' rose rapidly to a percentage of 92. The number of occasions on which much alcohol is consumed showed a complementary pattern. Young people still stood out as a group with low scores. Less than 10 percent of the population under the age of 20 consumed substantial amounts. The age group 20-24 had the highest proportion of 'heavy' drinkers: 23 percent. The other two age groups with a relatively high number of 'heavy' drinkers were 35-39 and 40-49.

Figure 5.5 Number of occasions when more than 6 glasses of alcohol were consumed in the preceding six months, by age group

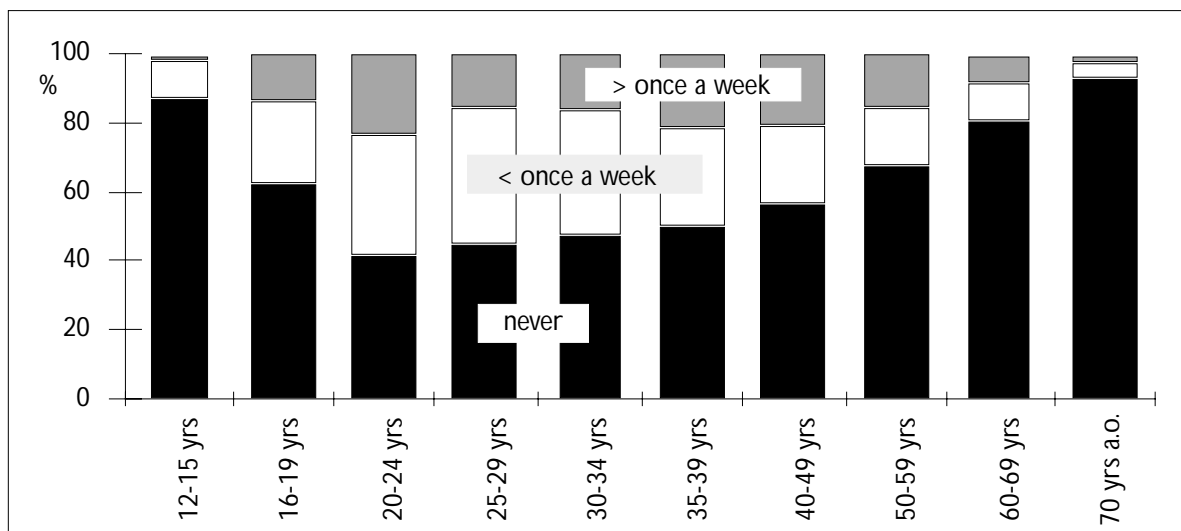
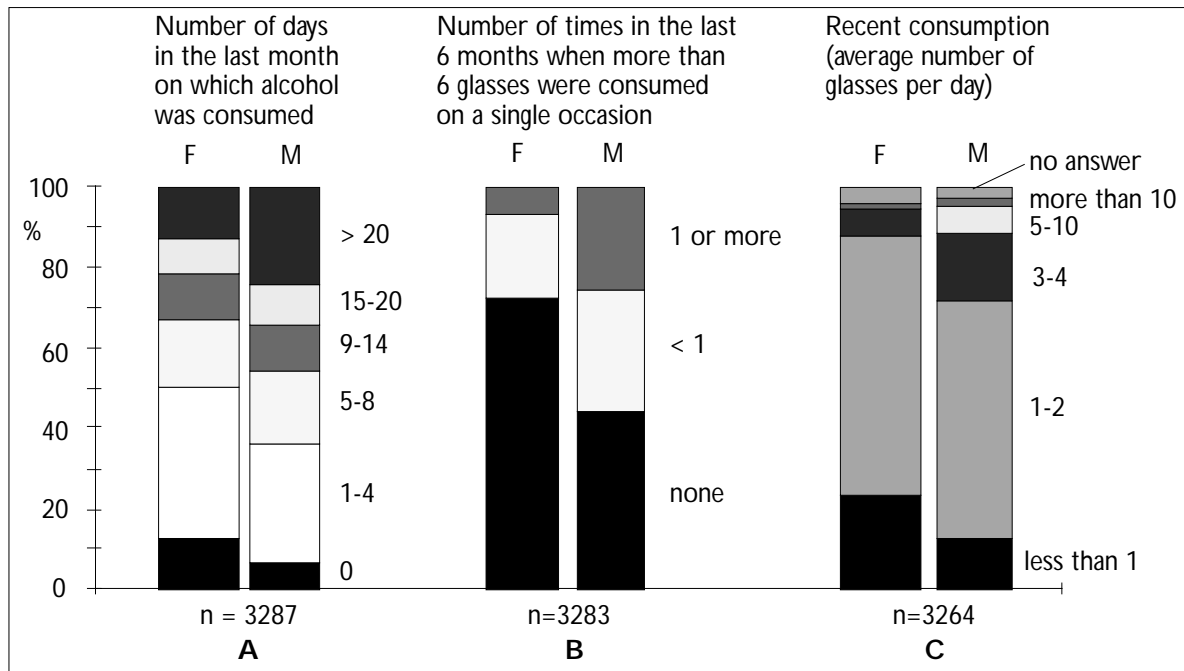


Figure 5.6 Some characteristics of drinking behaviour by gender



As was mentioned earlier, alcohol consumption is related to gender. Lifetime, last year and last month prevalence was higher for men. Figure 5.6 summarizes some characteristics of alcohol consumption in relation to gender.

Part A clearly shows that men drank on a greater number of days. The differences lie mainly in the lowest categories (0-4 days), where women are strongly represented, and in the highest categories (more than 20 days), which is a male domain. The classes that represent a more or less moderate frequency of consumption (5-20 days) show surprising little difference.

Part B gives the number of times per week that six or more glasses were consumed. It shows that 'substantial drinking' is, above all, a male characteristic: 25 percent drank more than six glasses at least once a week; for women this was seven percent.

The average number of glasses per day is expressed in Part C. On average, the majority of both men and women drank fewer than two glasses of alcohol a day. Higher consumption was rare, especially among women. The highest category, more than ten glasses a day, contains only five women and is, therefore, not visible on the graph. The number of men who drank more than two glasses a day is higher, but here too, the peak category was small. Of course, there are also differences within the two groups. We saw before that older women drank less than young women. Other variables, such as ethnicity and education are very important when it concerns drinking behaviour, especially among women. Apparently, the more emancipated women had drinking patterns more like that of men, while other women drank significantly fewer alcoholic beverages.

Ethnicity is a very important variable in analysing drinking (Table 5.2). People of non-Dutch origin, especially Moroccans, have very low prevalence figures. The explanation for this must be sought in the Muslim religion, which prohibits drinking alcohol. Lifetime prevalence for Moroccans is 19.7 percent. It must be stressed that drinking among Moroccan women is extremely rare: we found only two Moroccan women that admitted drinking alcohol at some point. Furthermore, almost 40 percent of the Moroccans that had ever drunk alcohol, had never had more than 25 drinks (in a lifetime), and could not, therefore, be considered experienced in this respect. Fairly low prevalence figures were also found among people of Turkish origin. Here, 42 percent had tried alcohol at some time. As with Moroccans, most abstinent Turkish people are women. Turkish men have a lifetime prevalence of 61 percent. Figures for people from other European countries and North America are comparable to those of Dutch origin.

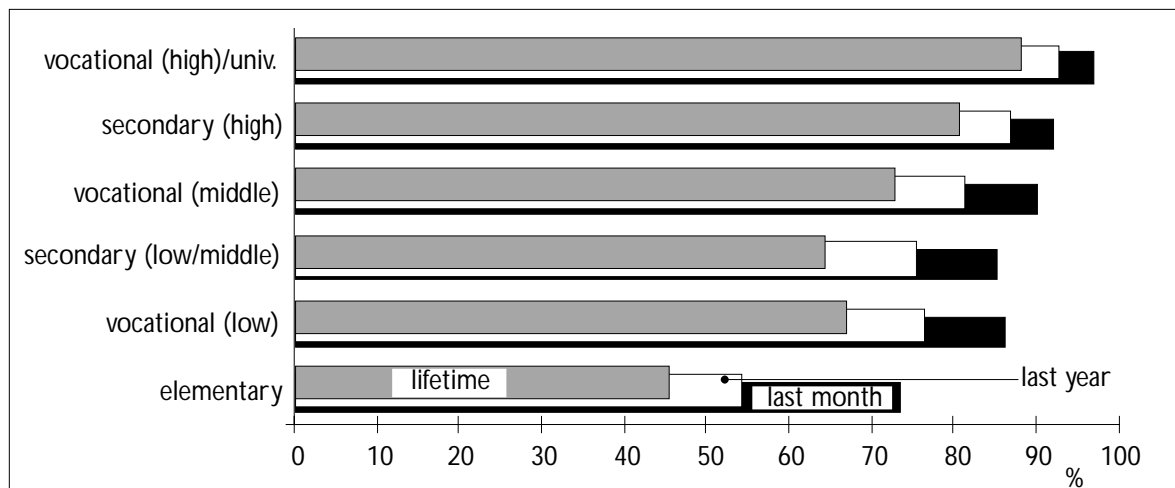
Differences between types of household are minor. As was the case with smoking, those living with their parents have low prevalence figures. Relatively high figures were found for singles and couples without children.

#### 5.4 The socio-economic aspects of drinking alcohol

Drinking is strongly related to level of education. Strikingly, there is a high level of alcohol consumption among highly educated people. Accordingly, people with elementary school have very low prevalence figures. Although the majority had tried alcohol at least once, less than half had had a drink in the month prior to the interview. It is important to keep in mind that low levels of education are not independent of other variables that influence drinking behaviour (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity).

A higher level of education can also be associated with more frequent drinking. In spite of this, there is no difference between the categories where it concerns the

Figure 5.7 Lifetime, last year and last month prevalence of alcohol use by level of education



number of glasses consumed. All educational classes drank around 1.6 glasses of alcohol a week on average.

Occupational position shows some differences in that people with a job (full-time or part-time) and especially students have higher levels of prevalence. Students, however, showed unexpected results as regarding the frequency of drinking behaviour and the number of glasses: in both cases their mean alcohol consumption was quite modest. There was an indication that a relatively large group of students drink in 'peaks': instead of drinking small amounts on a very regular basis, they drank large amounts on a few single occasions.

The relation between occupational status and alcohol consumption is reflected in the relation between income and alcohol consumption. The lowest incomes (students) and highest incomes (full-time and part-time working) also had the highest levels of prevalence.

## 5.5 Summary

Drinking is deeply rooted in society as a whole. The habit is generally picked up during adolescence, when it starts with low quantities and low frequency. A substantial proportion of the population continues drinking, often at an increasing pace. The 'top-years' of drinking generally fall between 30 and 40. Furthermore, characteristics that can be associated with drinking include: single or living with partner, highly educated, working, and of Dutch origin. The respondents of Moroccan or Turkish origin, especially females, had low prevalence figures.

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1 'Substantial' or 'heavy' drinking is defined as drinking more than 6 glasses on a single occasion.



## 5.6 Tables regarding the use of alcohol

Table 5.1 Use of alcohol by age group and gender

age group	lifetime			last year			last month			N		
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
12-15 yrs	41.9	35.6	39.1	25.7	32.2	28.6	11.4	17.2	14.1	105	87	192
16-19 yrs	79.5	72.7	75.8	71.1	65.7	68.1	59.0	45.5	51.6	83	99	182
20-24 yrs	93.5	88.4	90.5	89.0	82.7	85.3	80.0	77.3	78.4	155	225	380
25-29 yrs	92.6	89.3	90.9	88.1	83.3	85.6	91.9	73.2	78.1	285	299	584
30-34 yrs	91.5	86.6	89.1	87.4	80.3	83.9	84.8	71.0	77.9	270	269	539
35-39 yrs	93.2	88.9	90.9	85.8	80.7	83.1	79.9	69.5	74.5	219	243	462
40-49 yrs	92.5	87.1	89.7	85.8	78.0	81.8	82.5	67.7	75.0	359	372	731
50-59 yrs	84.7	88.9	87.0	75.8	79.7	77.9	68.4	73.3	71.0	190	217	407
60-69 yrs	91.4	83.6	87.3	80.0	66.2	72.8	74.6	57.7	65.8	185	201	386
70 yrs a.o.	88.1	78.7	82.0	74.6	59.0	64.5	67.2	51.2	56.9	177	324	501
total	88.2	83.8	85.8	80.4	73.9	76.9	74.4	64.5	69.1	2 028	2 336	4 364
sign. T-test	p<.05	n.s.	p<.05	n.s.	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	n.s.			

Table 5.2 Use of alcohol by ethnicity and gender

ethnicity	lifetime			last year			last month			N		
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
Dutch	92.6	89.4	90.9	86.1	79.2	82.4	80.8	71.0	75.5	1 617	1 926	3 543
Sur./Ant.	87.1	78.2	81.9	74.8	65.8	69.6	59.2	44.6	50.7	147	202	349
Moroccan	32.6	3.0	19.7	16.3	1.5	9.9	10.5	0.0	5.9	86	66	152
Turkish	61.1	20.8	42.2	46.3	18.8	33.3	42.6	8.3	26.5	54	48	102
Europ./USA	91.2	86.8	89.1	78.9	79.2	79.1	73.7	62.3	68.2	57	53	110
Other	74.6	48.8	64.8	65.7	41.5	56.5	61.2	29.3	49.1	67	41	108
Total	88.2	83.8	85.8	80.4	73.9	76.9	74.4	64.5	69.1	2 028	2 336	4 364
sign. Chi-sq.	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05			

Table 5.3 Use of alcohol by type of household

type of household	lifetime		last year		last month		N
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	
single	1 251	92.3	1 136	83.8	1 041	76.8	1 355
single parent	210	84.7	183	73.8	158	63.7	248
couple	871	91.0	783	81.8	713	74.5	957
couple with children	694	80.6	625	72.6	569	66.1	861
living at home	313	64.5	264	54.4	197	40.6	485
other	407	88.9	367	80.1	337	73.6	458
total	3 746	85.8	3 358	76.9	3 015	69.1	4 364
signif. Chi-square		p<.05		p<.05		p<.05	

Table 5.4 Use of alcohol by level of education

level of education		lifetime		last year		last month		N
		abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	
elementary	LO	450	73.9	331	54.4	279	45.8	609
vocational (low)	LBO	489	86.4	433	76.5	380	67.1	566
secondary (low)	MAVO	513	85.2	455	75.6	388	64.5	602
vocational (middle)	MBO	372	90.3	336	81.6	301	73.1	412
second. (middle/high)	HAVO/VWO	612	92.4	576	87.0	536	81.0	662
voc. (high)/University	HBO/WO	1 146	97.0	1 099	93.1	1 043	88.3	1 181
other		164	49.4	128	38.6	88	26.5	332
total		3 746	85.8	3 358	76.9	3 015	69.1	4 364
signif. Chi-square		p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		

Table 5.5 Use of alcohol by position on the labour market

position at labour market	lifetime		last year		last month		N	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%		
employed full time	1 282	94.1	1 211	88.8	1 137	83.4	1 363	
employed part time	508	92.2	475	86.2	425	77.1	551	
unemployed < 2 years	141	89.2	129	81.6	109	69.0	158	
unemployed > 2 years	93	82.3	80	70.8	68	60.2	113	
retired	477	86.9	388	70.7	349	63.6	549	
work disability	172	85.6	144	71.6	124	61.7	201	
student	181	96.3	172	91.5	159	84.6	188	
other	892	71.9	759	61.2	644	51.9	1 241	
total		3 746	85.5	3 358	76.9	3 015	69.1	4 364
significance		p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		

Table 5.6 Use of alcohol by household income

income (Dutch guilders)	lifetime		last year		last month		N	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%		
< 750	75	89.3	70	83.3	64	76.2	84	
750-1250	282	91.1	247	80.5	215	70.0	307	
1250-1500	221	79.2	190	68.1	165	59.0	279	
1500-2000	431	78.6	368	67.2	319	58.2	548	
2000-2500	410	89.9	373	81.8	333	73.0	456	
2500-3000	370	91.4	334	82.5	310	76.4	405	
3000-4000	438	91.3	401	83.5	371	77.2	480	
4000-5000	363	94.5	331	86.2	309	80.5	384	
>5000	432	97.3	415	93.5	398	89.6	444	
unknown	724	74.1	629	64.4	531	54.4	977	
total		3 746	85.5	3 358	76.9	3 015	69.1	4 364
significance		p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		