

Alcohol and Older People

Is there a problem and, if so, what does it look like?

Vintage Project

EU Public Health Programme 2008 – 2011

Promote healthy ageing

Prevent harmful alcohol use among older people including the transition period from work to retirement

Establish good practice and formulate prevention guidelines and policies

Rationale of project:

Ageing population of EU – growth in absolute numbers

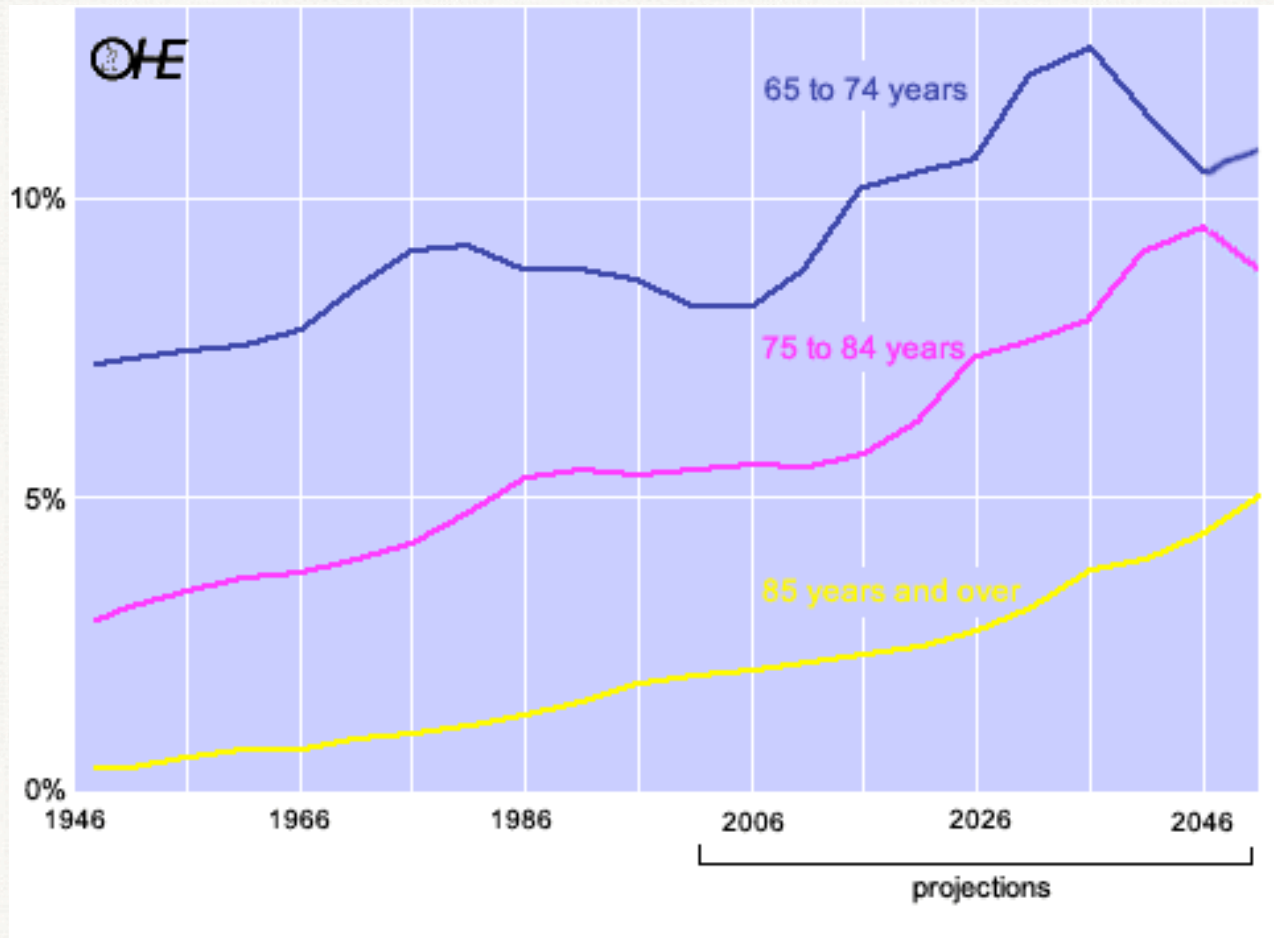
Alcohol use disorders common in older people

27% of 55+ consumer 50g of alcohol at one sitting at least once per week



Growth of UK elderly population as percentage of total UK population

% of UK population





$\frac{1}{3}$ population aged 50 or over

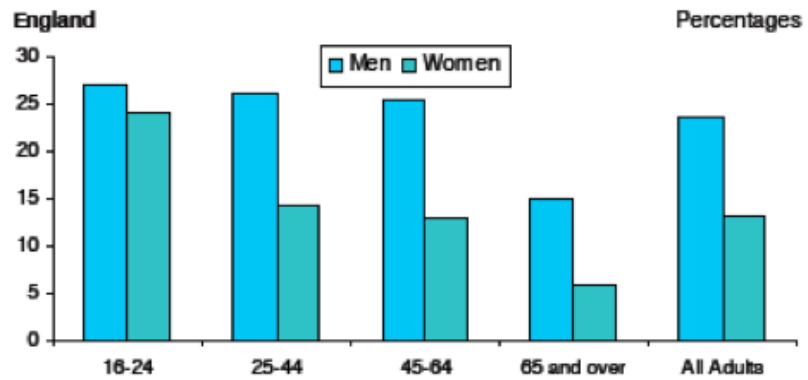
2007 11.58 million pensioners

19% of population

More pensioners than children aged under 16

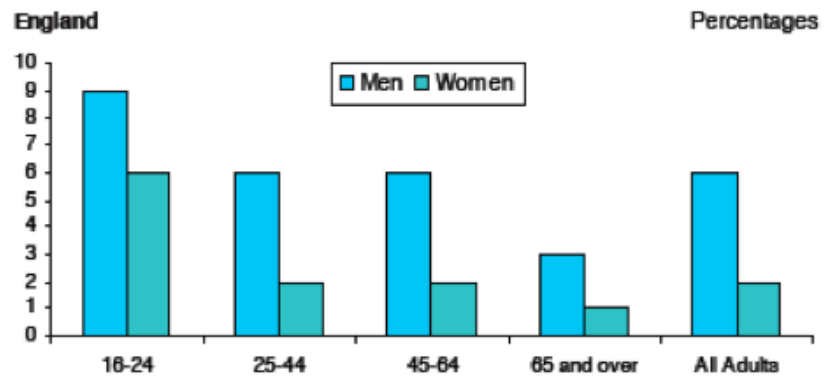


Adults whose average weekly consumption was over 21 units (men) or 14 units (women) 2005¹³



Source: General Household Survey, 2005. Office for National Statistics

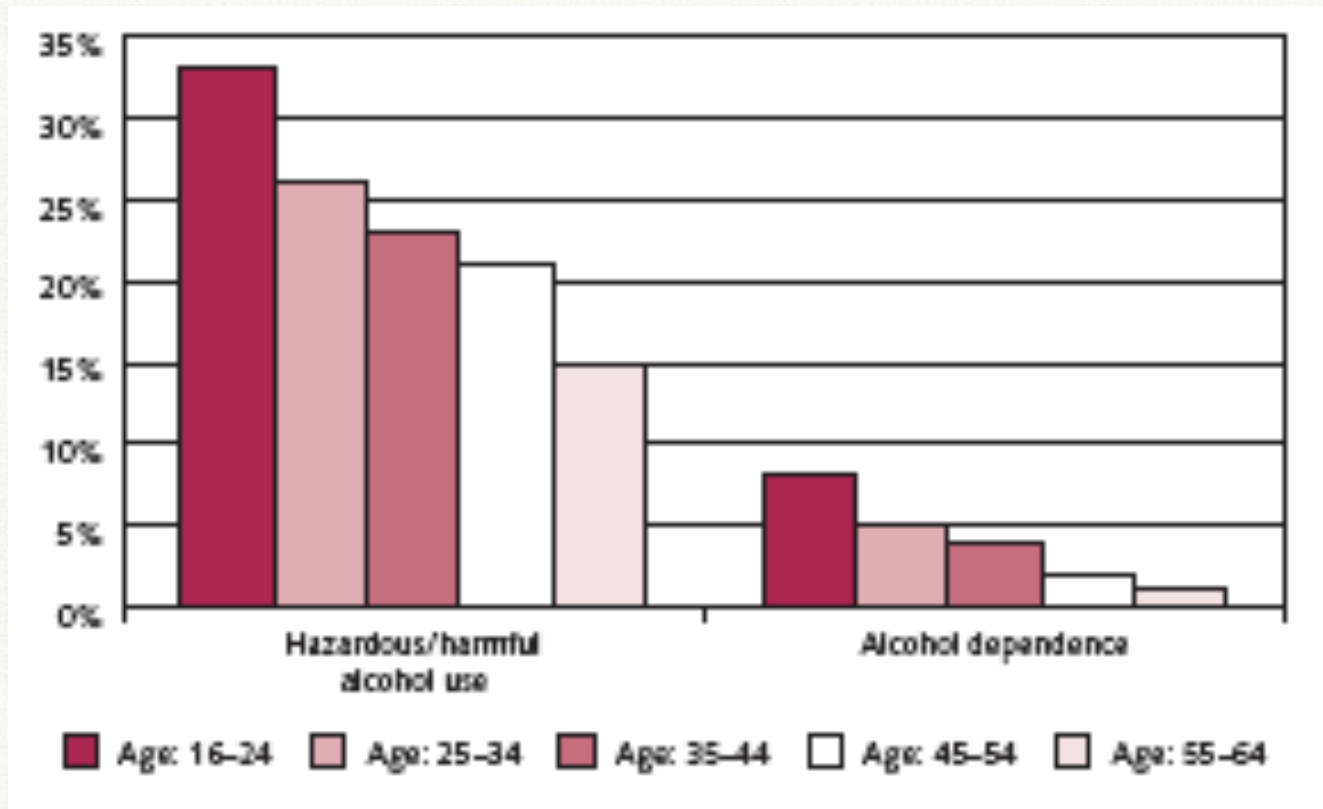
Adults whose average weekly consumption was over 50 units (men) or 35 units (women) 2005¹³



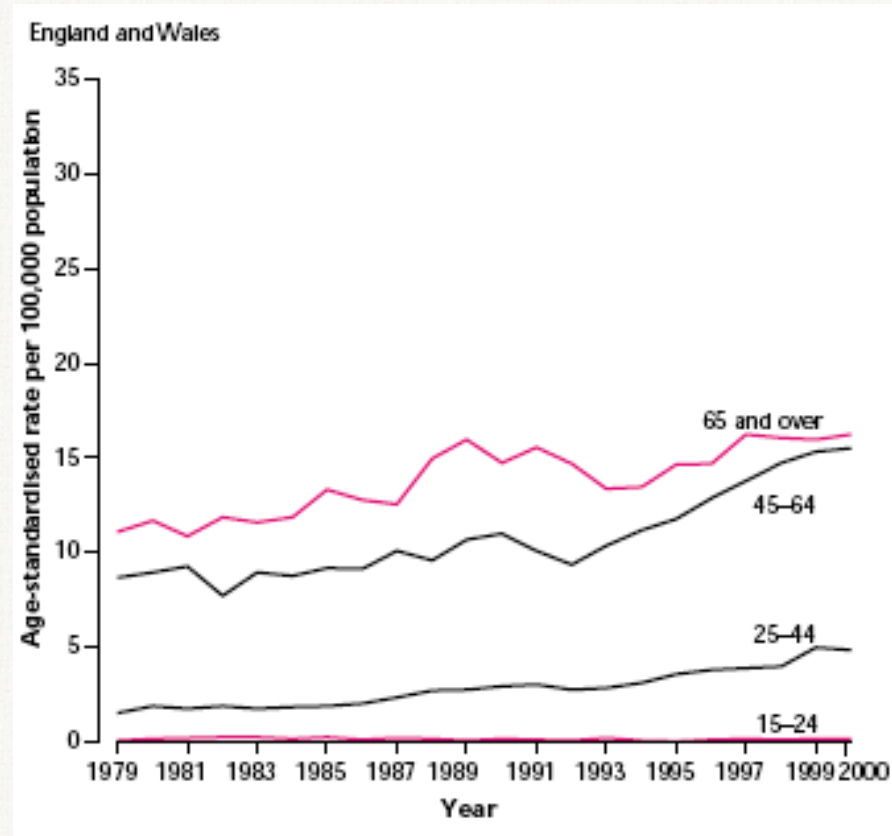
Source: General Household Survey 2005, Office for National Statistics



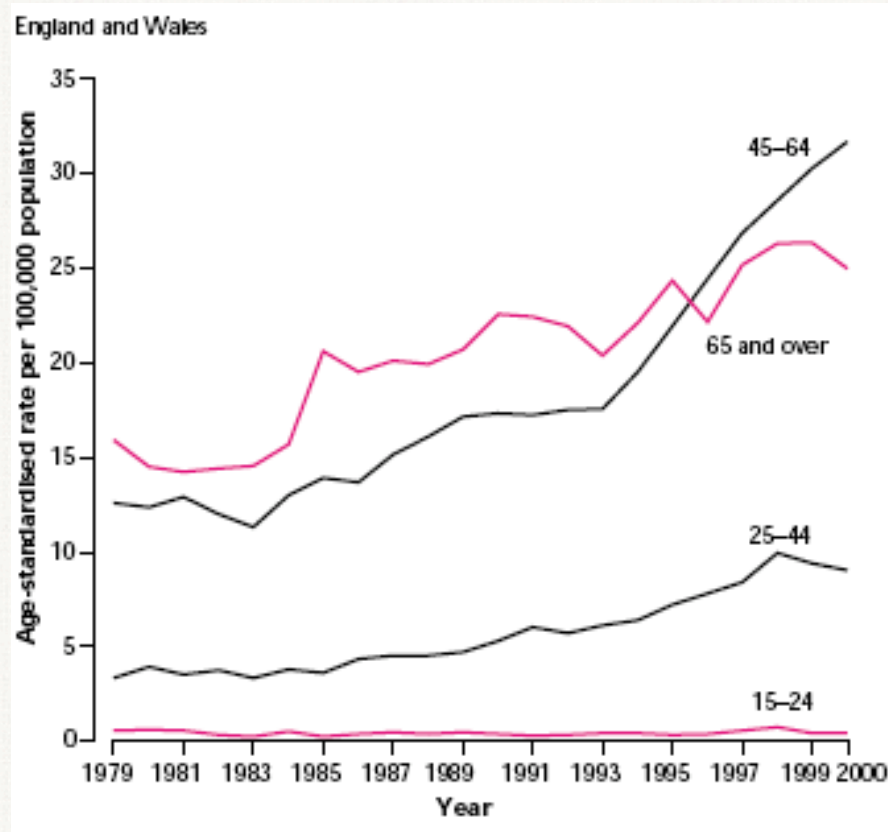
Percentage of people in England with an alcohol use disorder by age



Female alcohol-related age-specific death rates, 1979-2000



Male alcohol-related age-specific death rates, 1979-2000



Special needs of older people undergoing a programme of treatment for alcohol abuse

Loss – of people, vocation, status, independence

Social isolation and loneliness

Major financial problems, poverty

Dislocation of habitat

Family conflict and estrangement

Burden of time management (boredom)

Physiological changes affecting the action of alcohol and drugs

Complex medical problems

Multiple medications

Sensory deficits

Reduced mobility

Cognitive impairment

Impaired self-care

Loss of appearance

Reduced self-regard, demoralisation

Source: Atkinson et al 1998: 198





Early onset drinkers (survivors)

Late onset drinkers (reactors)

Impaired survivors



‘Given the neurotoxic effects of alcohol and the inexorable increase in per capita consumption, future generations may see a disproportionate increase in alcohol-related dementia. This could be compounded by the effects of increasing use of recreational drugs such as ecstasy, whose long-term effects on cognition are still uncertain.’

Dr S Gupta, Specialist Registrar, Adult & Old Age Psychiatry, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
‘Alcohol-related dementia: a 21st-century silent epidemic?’ – British Journal of Psychiatry (2008)



Individual Risk Factors

Early onset

Tolerant attitudes towards consumption/heavy consumption

Mental health problems

Family history

Family fragmentation/separation and divorce

Social isolation



'Loneliness' indices by BBC TV areas

BBC TV Area	Anomie % (2001)	Anomie % (1991)	Anomie % (1981)	Anomie % (1971)
BBC East	25.0	25.4	18.5	18.6
BBC West	25.8	24.7	18.8	18.5
BBC South West	28.9	27.3	20.3	19.9
BBC South	27.1	27.3	20.2	21.1
BBC Yorkshire	24.8	23.4	18.9	16.7
BBC North East & Cumbria	24.5	23.8	18.9	17.3
BBC North West	25.1	23.3	19.0	17.5
BBC Scotland	28.5	24.5	18.8	18.5
BBC Wales	24.8	23.0	18.0	16.5
BBC West Midlands	23.4	22.4	17.7	17.0
BBC East Midlands	25.5	23.6	18.6	17.5
BBC London	29.8	28.3	21.2	21.4
BBC South East	25.4	25.1	19.7	18.8
BBC East Yorkshire & Lincs.	25.8	24.4	18.9	18.3
BBC Northern Ireland	21.1	20.8	-	-
Britain	26.2	25.0	19.3	18.7
Range (excluding Northern Ireland):	6.4	5.9	3.5	4.9



Individual Risk Factors

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Increased availability

Ethnic/cultural diversity?

Affluence/affordability?

