



# **Spanish Alcohol Report 2021**

## **Consumption and consequences**

### **Summary Report**

Alcohol is the most consumed psychoactive substance in Spain. It is one of the main risk factors for global disease burden and, in addition to be an addictive substance that can cause dependence, it contributes to the development of multiple health problems and injuries.

The health risks are proportional to its consumption level and, for certain gastrointestinal diseases, cancer and injuries, there is no safe consumption level. Therefore, it can be stated that there is no risk-free level of alcohol consumption and the only consumption that minimises health loss is zero.

Alcohol consumption is the 4<sup>th</sup> risk factor related to Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in Spain, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> in women and 5<sup>th</sup> in men. Alcohol consumption produced 15,489 annual deaths between 2010-2017, 74% of those in men and 55.7% being premature deaths (before reaching 75 years of age).

To reduce the harm caused by alcohol consumption, a multisectoral approach is necessary and the development of such an approach requires the analysis and use of high-quality information on the characteristics, evolution and consequences of alcohol consumption in different populations. This report is published to contribute to this process, with the aim of bringing together, in a comprehensive document, much of the existing information published by the Government Delegation for the National Plan on Drugs (DGPNSD). It incorporates elements from the information systems of the Spanish Observatory on Drugs and Addictions (OEDA), together with information from other relevant and reliable sources. Thus, it aims to be a useful document for all agents involved, with the objective of being updated periodically to offer the most up-to-date information possible.

#### **Objectives**

The overall objective of this report is to provide an overview of the characteristics, evolution and consequences of alcohol consumption in the Spanish population to support the design and evaluation of policies aimed at preventing alcohol consumption and associated problems.



## Sources of information

This document contains the most relevant information on alcohol consumption published by the DGPNSD from the survey programs and the indicators of problems associated with consumption and addictions of the OEDA, supplemented with other official sources on specific issues.

From this diversity of sources, it is possible to obtain a global vision that allows a multifaceted analysis of the characteristics and consequences of alcohol consumption.

## Alcohol consumption

According to the Survey on Drug Use in Secondary Education in Spain 2018 (**ESTUDES**, for Spanish abbreviations), alcohol consumption is widespread among secondary education students: 77.9% of the students reported alcohol consumption sometime in their life (76.3% of males and 79.4% of females), 77.5% in last 12 months (74.1% of males and 77.5% of females) and 58.5% in last 30 days (57.2% of males and 59.8% of females). It is important to note that the prevalence of consumption for these time periods is higher in girls than in boys. The age for the first drink is 14 years of age for both sexes.

In 2018, a rise in the proportion of students admitting an episode of alcohol intoxication and binge drinking<sup>1</sup> at least once in the last 30 days, was observed in all age groups and in both sexes. From the total number of students who had drunk alcohol during the last month, half of them (55.5%) acknowledged binge drinking and, almost half, an alcoholic intoxication episode, with the percentage being higher in girls than in boys (46.5% of girls compared to 42.3% of boys). It is noteworthy that in the group of minors (14-17 years of age) 47.1% of the boys and 52.3% of the girls have been drunk at some time in their lives.

In Spain, according to the European **ESPAD** survey, in 2019 the prevalence of alcoholic beverages consumption in students aged 15 and 16 years was 78% sometime in their life and 47% within the last 30 days. Both values were similar to the European average. However, the prevalence of binge drinking in the last 30 days was above the European average, being 17% in Spain compared to the European average of 13%.

The practice of “*botellón*”<sup>2</sup> is still widespread despite the fact that it is forbidden in most of Spanish Regions. Girls between the ages of 14 and 17 years practice it more frequently than boys but, at 18 years of age, boys did “*botellón*” more frequently than girls, with very little difference. Regardless of the age group considered, the prevalence of alcoholic intoxications and binge drinking was substantially higher in the group who practiced “*botellón*”.

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<sup>1</sup> Five or more glasses of alcoholic beverages in on the same occasion (about two hours).

<sup>2</sup> Shared consumption of alcoholic beverages on public roads or in open public spaces.



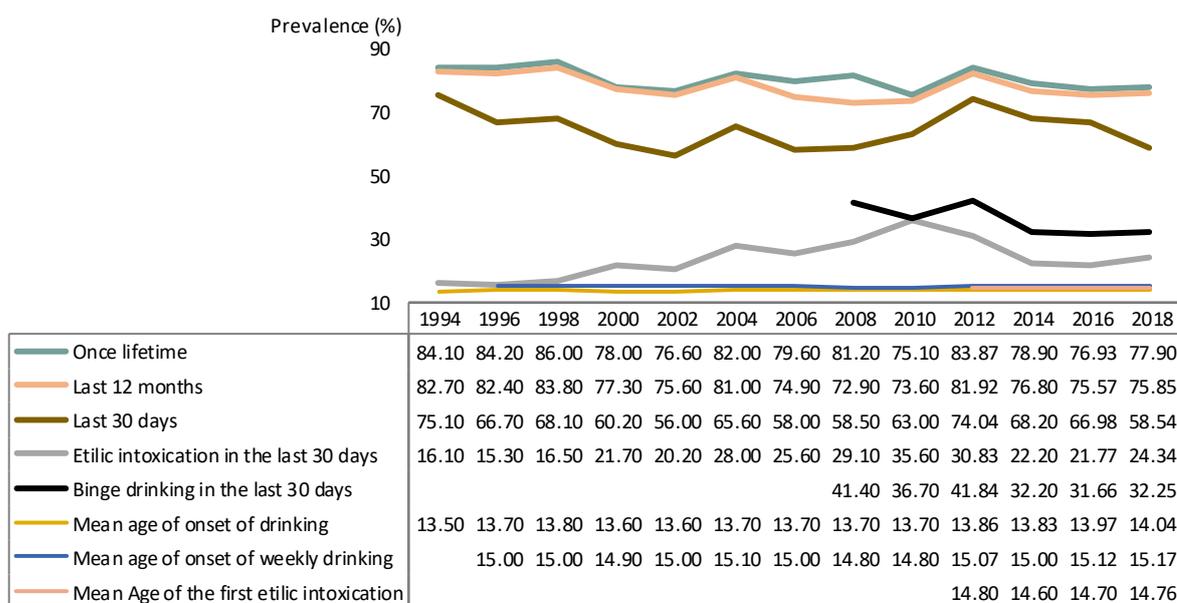
The mixed drinks (soft drinks + spirits) were the preferred alcoholic beverage by students (29%), with a higher consumption observed in girls. This type of drinks is also the most consumed alcoholic beverage by both boys and girls who reported alcoholic intoxication, binge drinking or “botellón”.

Alcohol beverages are perceived to be easy to obtain by 94.9% of the students, regardless if they were or not below legal drinking age (18 years old). A total of 60.3% of minors accessed alcohol directly by themselves (42.4%) or through other minors (17.9%).

Minors purchased drinks in bars or pubs (52.5%), supermarkets (52.4%), local stores (50.8%) or nightclubs (42%) and 21.4% at home. They consume them in the places where they acquired them (bars or pubs, 53.2% or nightclubs, 46.4%) but also in streets, squares, parks, beaches or open public spaces (51.6%) or in other people’s houses (43.6%) and, less frequently, in the house where they live (23.9%).

The students' perception of the risk of consuming alcohol is very low although its consequences are not negligible. Thus, 2.7% have driven a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol within the last 12 months, this figure being higher in the male group (4.0%). Some 17.2% reported having been a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone under the influence of alcohol (20.5% of girls and 17.2% of boys). On the other hand, from those who have been drunk once in the last month, 16.9% admitted having been involved in a fight or assault and 30.6% have had unprotected sex.

Figure 1. Prevalence of alcohol consumption, alcohol intoxication (last 30 days), binge drinking (last 30 days), mean age of onset of alcohol consumption and mean age of onset of weekly consumption, in Secondary School Students aged 14-18 years (%), by year. Spain, 1994-2018/2019.

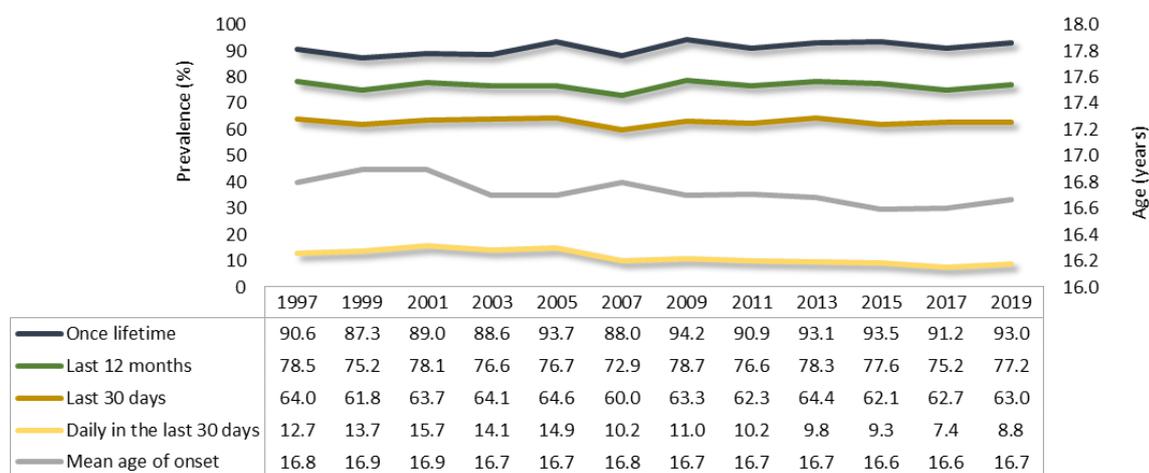


Source: OEDA Spanish Survey on Drug Use in Secondary Education in Spain 2018 (ESTUDES)



According to the Spanish Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs 2019/2020 (**EDADES** for its Spanish abbreviation), alcohol consumption is also widespread among the general population aged 15 to 64 years: 93% of the population had consumed alcohol at some time in their lives, 77.2% in the last year and 63% in the last month, while only 8.8% reported daily consumption. Consumption in the last year among men is highest in the 25-34 age group (86.1%), but in women the highest consumption level was in the 15-24 age group (76.7%). Alcohol intoxication and binge drinking<sup>3</sup> showed an upward trend. They were more widespread in men than in women across all age groups and were more prevalent in the younger age groups.

Figure 2. Evolution of the prevalence of alcohol consumption (%) and mean age of onset in alcohol consumption (years) in the population of 15-64 years (%). Spain, 1997-2019.



Source: OEDA Spanish Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs 2019/2020 (EDADES)

According to the Survey on the use of psychoactive substances in the **workplace** in Spain, working population<sup>4</sup> shows slightly higher alcohol consumption figures than the general population, with higher prevalence among unemployed people than among employed people (10.9% and 9.4% daily consumption, respectively).

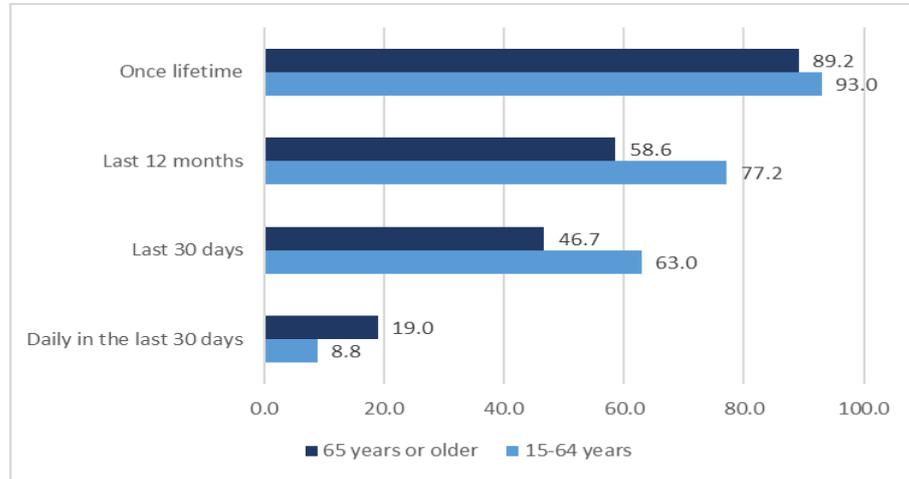
According to the Survey on Alcohol and Drugs and Other Addictions in People over 64 years of age in Spain, 2019/2020 (**ESDAM** for its Spanish abbreviation), in the population over 64 years of age, alcohol consumption is less widespread than in the population aged 15 to 64 years and it is higher among men. This age group shows a with higher level of daily consumption, higher wine consumption and less intensive consumption (binge drinking, alcoholic intoxication and at-risk consumption). The differences in consumption by sex are grater in this older population, as men's consumption in the last year almost doubled that of women.

<sup>3</sup> Five or more alcoholic drinks for men or 4 or more alcoholic drinks for women, on the same occasion (about 2 hours).

<sup>4</sup> Working population: Employed (currently working or temporarily absent) and unemployed (with previous job) from 16 to 64 years of age.



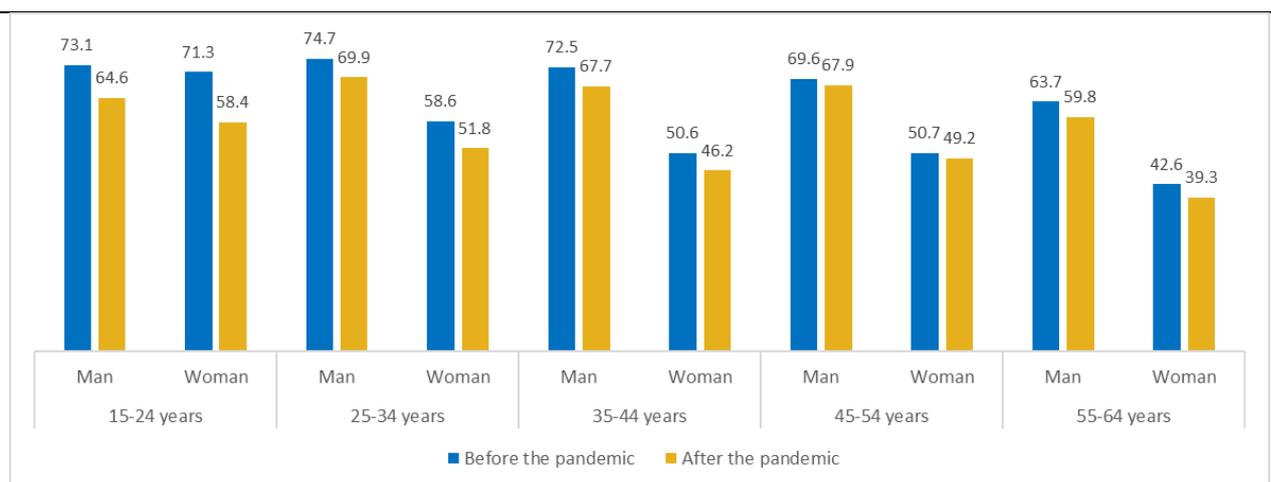
Figure 3. Prevalence of alcohol consumption in the population of 65 years or older and in the population of 15 to 64 years (%). Spain, 2019/2020.



Source: OEDA. Survey on alcohol and drugs in Spain (EADDES-ESDAM).

It is still too early to know the long-term impact of **COVID-19** on population drinking patterns but, during the pandemic, according to the results of the national population-based telephone survey conducted to ascertain this impact in 2020, alcohol consumption declined in both sexes and in all age groups. During the pandemic, a decrease of alcoholic intoxications was observed in both sexes and in all age groups, especially in those under 25 years of age. This reduction in consumption is confirmed by the decrease in the total volume of sales of alcoholic beverages recorded in 2020 compared to 2019, thus breaking the upward trend observed until that year, according to data provided by the Tax Agency.

Figure 4. Prevalence of alcohol consumption before and during the Covid-19 pandemic in the population aged 15 to 64 years, according to age and sex (%). Spain, 2020



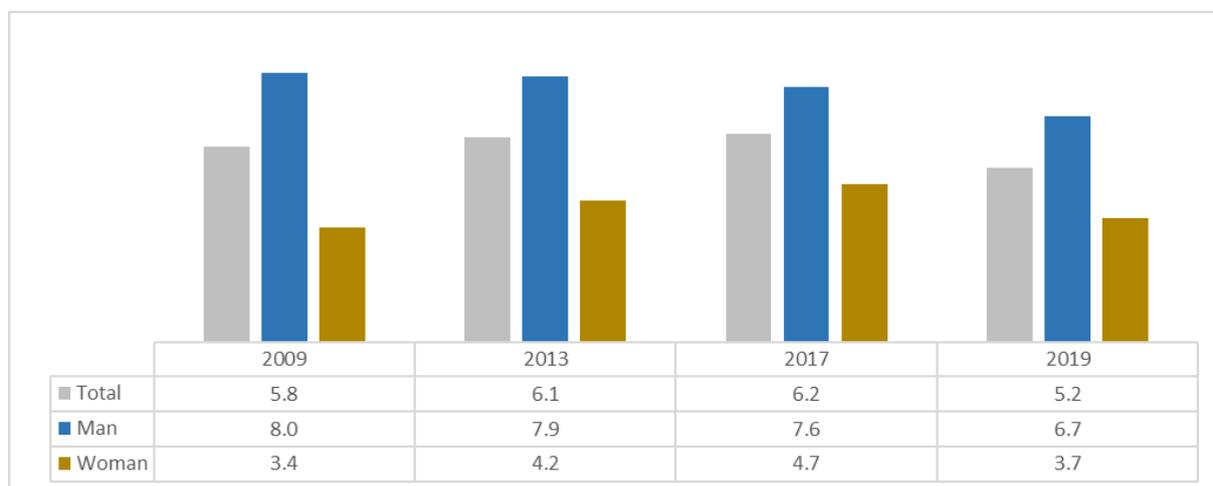
FUENTE: OEDA. Spanish Survey OEDA-COVID 2020 in the population aged 15 to 64 years.



### At-risk consumption

According to the results of the EDADES 2019/2020 survey, 5.2% of the population aged 15 to 64 years presented a pattern of at-risk alcohol consumption estimated on the basis of the AUDIT scale ( $\geq 8$  points in men and  $\geq 6$  in women), with a greater extent among men (6.7%) than among women (3.7%). These figures represent a slight reduction compared to those obtained in 2017/18. Prevalence is higher in younger people and in men but, in the 15-24 age group, the differences within men and women narrows markedly. The prevalence of at-risk consumption estimated from the calculation of Standard Drink (SD)<sup>5</sup> consumed in the last 7 days, stands at 3.8% of the population aged 15 to 64 years, with percentages also higher in younger groups.

Figure 5. Prevalence of at risk alcohol consumption (AUDIT $\geq 8$  in men and AUDIT $\geq 6$  in women) in the total population aged 15-64 years, according to sex (%), per year. Spain, 2009-2019/2020.



Source: OEDA. Spanish Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs 2019/2020 (EDADES)

According to information from the latest edition of the EDADES Survey 2019/20, it is estimated that 18.6% of the population aged 15 to 64 years has an **alcohol consumption above the threshold for low risk<sup>6</sup> average<sup>7</sup> alcohol consumption in Spain**, set at 10 grams/day (1 SD/d) in women and 20 grams/day (2 SD/d) in men. People who consumed alcohol above these limits had a lower average age, especially among women, and tend to show a lower educational level, as well as a higher percentage of binge drinking and at-risk drinking episodes (estimated on the basis of the AUDIT scale).

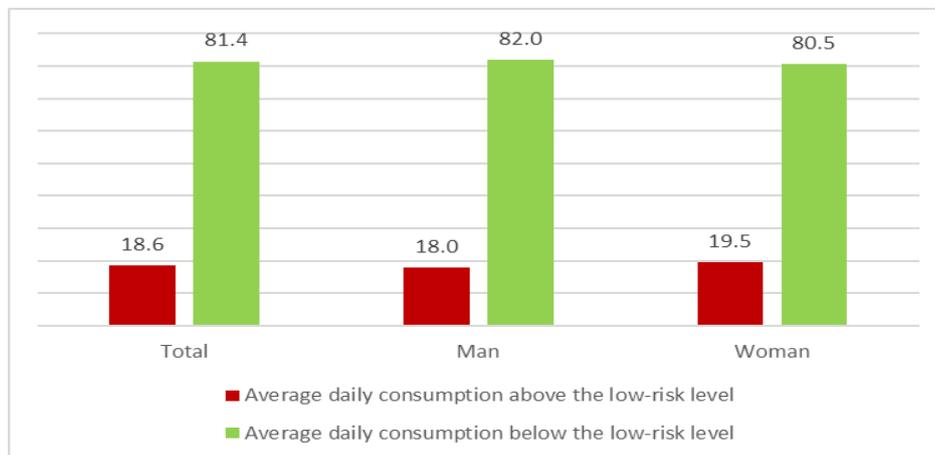
<sup>5</sup> In Spain, SD is equivalent to 10 grams of alcohol, i.e., approximately the average amount of pure alcohol of a glass with 100 ml of wine, 1 glass of 300 ml of beer, or 30 ml of liquor

<sup>6</sup> Average alcohol consumption level from which excess mortality rates increase significantly. This does not mean that there is no excess mortality below that level since the only way of avoiding alcohol-related risks is not to drink alcohol. Considering the physiological differences and the different ability to metabolize alcohol between men and women, the low risk threshold is set to 20 g/d (2 SDs/d) for men and 10 g/d (1 SDs/d) for women, acknowledging that there is no zero risk below those thresholds, unless not drinking any alcohol at all.

<sup>7</sup> Average consumption: Usual consumption by an individual over a period of time, it usually refers to daily or weekly intake.



Figure 6. Prevalence of alcohol consumption above or below the level considered low risk (up to 20 g/day (2UBE/day) in men and up to 10g/day (1 UBE/day in women) in the population aged 15-64 years that has reported the amounts of alcohol consumed, according to sex (%). Spain, 2019/2020.



Source: OEDA Spanish Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs 2019/2020 (EDADES)

### Consequences of consumption

In 2019, the number of reported **treatment admissions for alcohol abuse or dependence** at the Regional Addiction Care Networks was 27,209, a figure that has increased slightly since 2018 due, mainly, to an increase in first-time admissions. Alcohol was responsible for 35.2% of treatment admissions and it is present in the majority of poly-consumption patterns. The profile of this patient is a 46.5 year-old male who lives with his own family (partner and/or children) (25.3%) or with his parents or family of origin (24.9%) who is admitted because of his own initiative or is referred by his family medicine professional or other treatment centres, and who consumes alcohol on a daily basis. The majority (72.6%) do not consume other drugs. Among those who do consume another substance, cocaine and cannabis are the most common.

According to the indicator of **hospital emergencies related to the consumption of psychoactive substances** reporting protocol, information is collected on emergency episodes related to alcohol consumption only when alcohol appears together with another drug, so that the figures recorded represent only partial data on the impact of alcohol consumption in the health emergency services. Nonetheless, alcohol is the psychoactive substance related to the highest number of hospital emergency episodes, being present, in 2019, in 40.3% of the emergencies associated to drug use, a slightly lower figure compared to previous years.

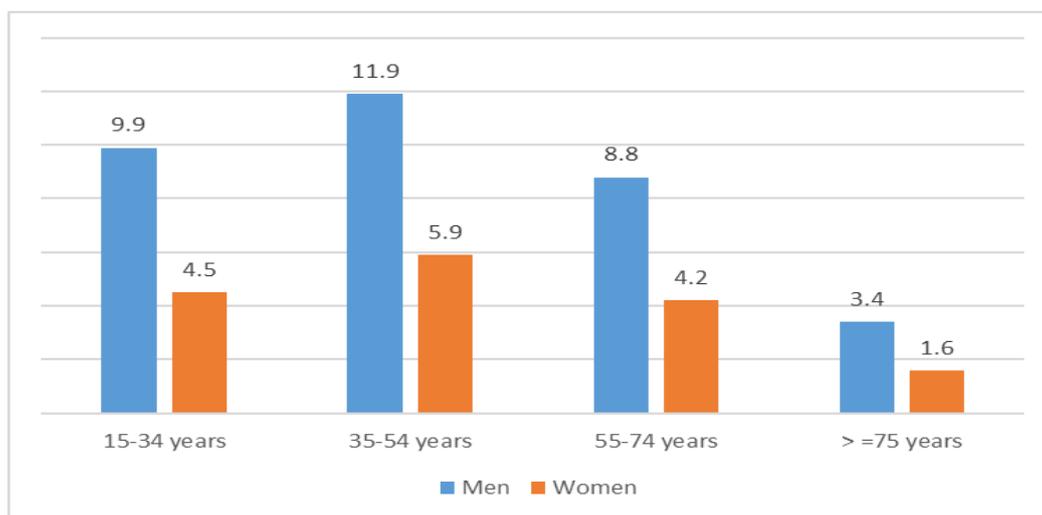
A new national registry of Emergencies health episodes is being deployed in Spain as part of the National Specialized Care Activity Register (**RAE-CMBD** for its Spanish abbreviation). As of 2019, 9,964 episodes with a diagnostic code related to alcohol intoxication have been reported from 8 of the 19 Spanish regions. Of these, men show almost twice as many cases as females and the group under 24 years of age concentrates most of the episodes. This information will be updated when more regional data becomes available.



At the **Specific Register of Mortality due to acute reaction to psychoactive substances**, the presence of alcohol among the deceased is only recorded in case it is accompanied by the presence of other drugs. However, alcohol is one of the substances most present among the deceased, detecting its presence in 39.7% of them (38.7% in men and 43.6% in women).

In the period 2010-2017, an estimated 15,489 deaths per year were attributable to alcohol in Spain, with 73.8% in men. 55.7% of them were premature deaths (in persons under 75 years of age), the latter proportion being considerably higher in men (61.3%) than in women (39.8%).

Figure 7. Proportion of age-standardized deaths that are attributable to alcohol<sup>a</sup> by sex and age (%). Spain, 2010-2017.



a. Percentage of age-standardized deaths attributable to alcohol out of total standardized deaths from any cause (age-standardized alcohol attributable mortality rate/ age-standardized all-cause mortality rate) x 100.

Source: Donat, M., Sordo L., Belza M.J, Barrio G. (2020). Mortalidad atribuible al alcohol en España, 2001-2017. Metodología y resultados. Madrid. Ministerio de Sanidad. Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional sobre Drogas, 2020

Alcohol consumption accounted for 4.0% of the overall mortality risk in Spain. Taking into account the weight of premature deaths and the fact that the estimate is quite conservative, it is clear that alcohol consumption continues to represent an important burden of disease and death. To reduce this burden, it would be necessary to reduce alcohol consumption in the whole population.

In summary, the harm caused by alcohol is directly proportional to the level of consumption, and it should be emphasized that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption. Therefore, in order to reduce alcohol related harm, a multisectoral approach is needed, analyzing available data and knowledge. This monograph may contribute to this process. Its objective is to be a useful document for all actors involved, and it will be regularly updated to provide the most up-to-date information at all times.



MINISTERIO  
DE SANIDAD

SECRETARIA DE ESTADO DE SANIDAD

DELEGACIÓN DEL GOBIERNO PARA EL  
PLAN NACIONAL SOBRE DROGAS

The full report in Spanish is available at:

[https://pnsd.sanidad.gob.es/profesionales/publicaciones/catalogo/catalogoPNSD/publicaciones/pdf/2021\\_Monografia\\_Alcohol\\_consumos\\_y\\_consecuencias.pdf](https://pnsd.sanidad.gob.es/profesionales/publicaciones/catalogo/catalogoPNSD/publicaciones/pdf/2021_Monografia_Alcohol_consumos_y_consecuencias.pdf)