



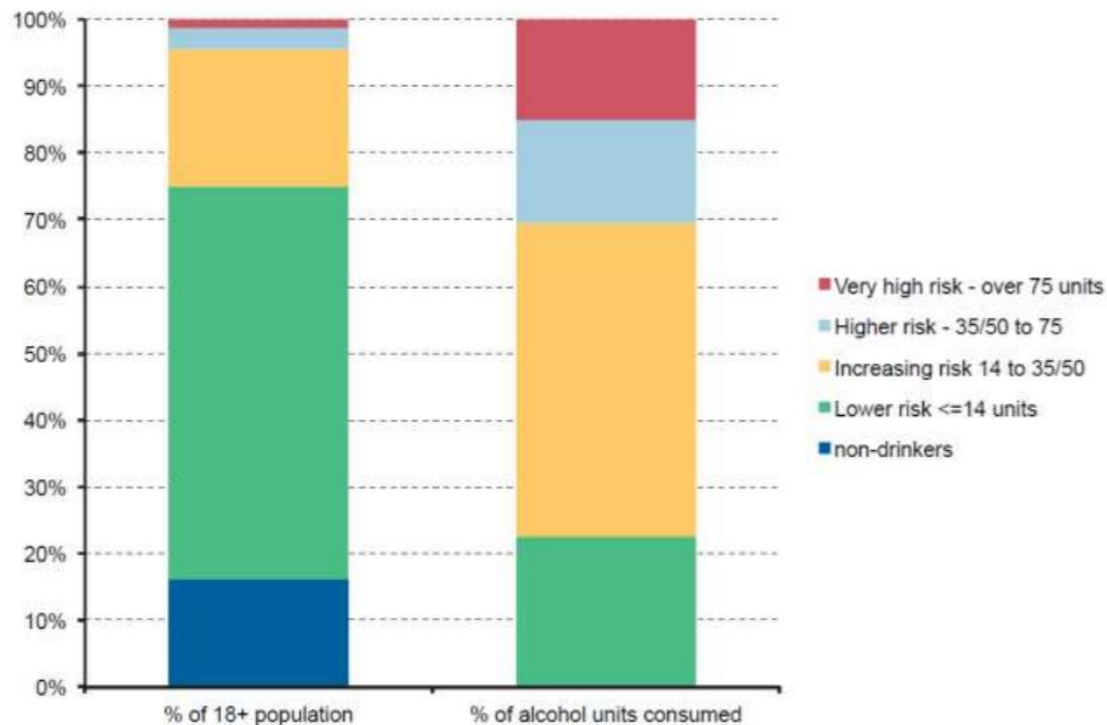
Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Alcohol and substance use – a safeguarding issue

Andrew Brown – Senior Programme Manager (ADTJ)

Prevalence - alcohol



4 in 5 people (82%) in England report drinking in the last year.

About 4% of drinkers consume 30% of the alcohol drunk in England.

About 600k adults in England are estimated to be dependent on alcohol

Prevalence – drugs

- 1 in 11 (9.4%) adults aged 16 to 59 had taken a drug in the last year, which equates to around 3.2 million people.
- Around 1 in 20 adults (5.0%) aged 16 to 59 said they had taken a drug in the last month, equating to around 1.7 million people.
- 2.4 per cent of all adults aged 16 to 59 years were classed as ‘frequent’ drug users (had taken a drug more than once a month in the last year). This equated to around 811,000 people.

Around

301,000

people in England are opiate and/or crack cocaine users

The most deprived local authorities have the highest prevalence of problematic drug users

41%

of women and

27%

men reported problematic drug use on arrival at prison

Characteristics of dependence

The characteristic features of alcohol and drug dependence are a strong internal drive to use, which is manifested by:

- impaired ability to control use,
- increasing priority given to use over other activities and
- persistence of use despite harm or negative consequences.

These experiences are often accompanied by a subjective sensation of urge or craving to use alcohol or drugs.

The features of dependence are usually evident over a period of at least 12 months but the diagnosis may be made if alcohol or drug use is continuous (daily or almost daily) for at least 1 month.

High prevalence of intimate partner abuse (IPA) risk factors among men receiving treatment for substance use



7 in 10 experienced childhood abuse



8 in 10 experienced violence between parents



8 in 10 experienced violence towards other men

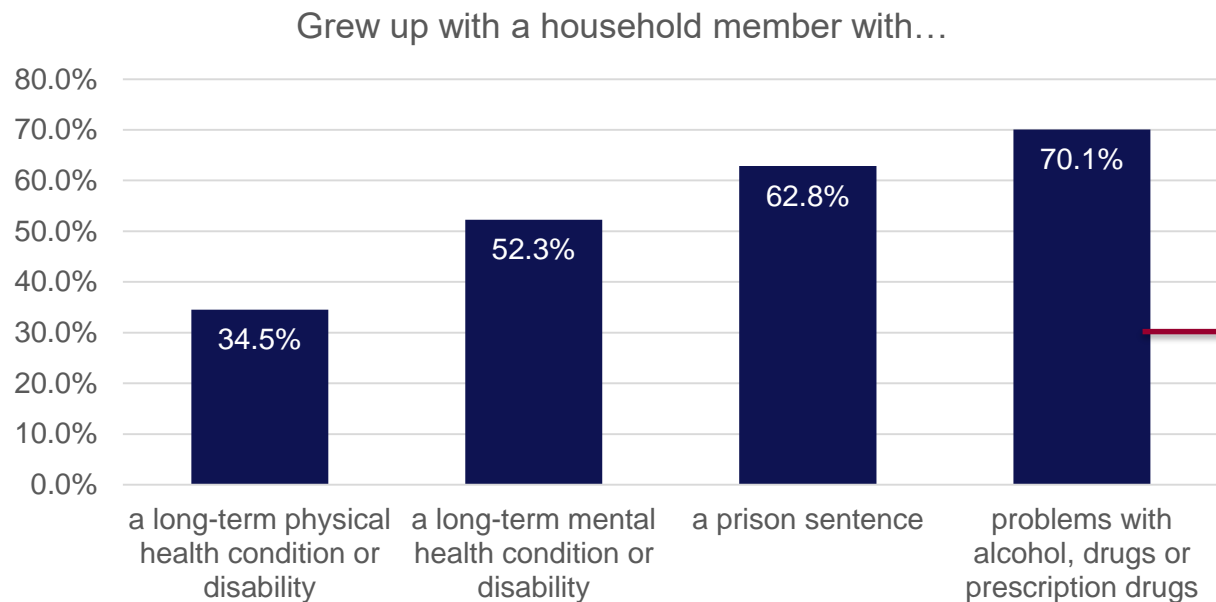


5 in 10 are currently experiencing depression

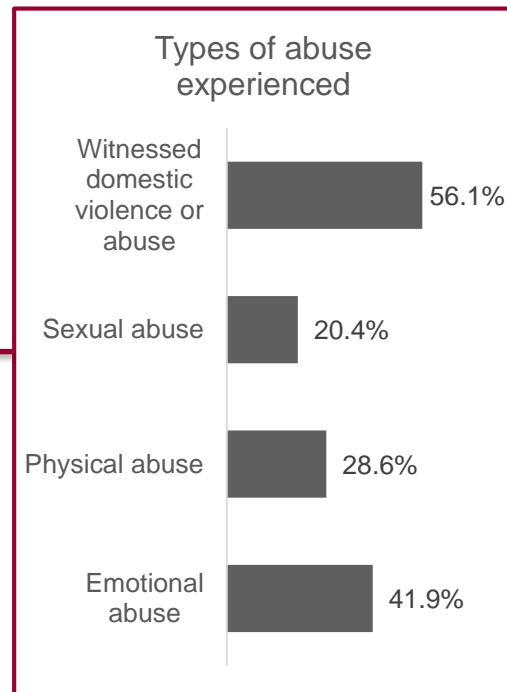


7 in 10 are currently drinking at high risk or above

Proportion of adults in England and Wales who experienced any abuse before the age of 16



Source: Child abuse extent and nature – Appendix tables (ONS, 2020)

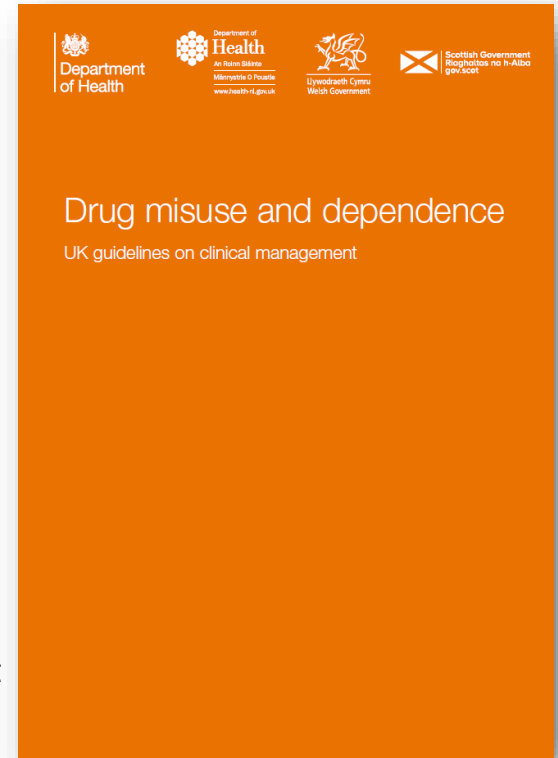


Clinical guidelines

Adults at risk may not ask for, or feel able to ask for, the help they need. Careful consideration needs to be given to the possibility that adults with problems with drug misuse and dependence may be at risk. This is a first step to identifying people who are currently at risk and who may need actions to safeguard them, and allows discussion with them about the possibility of, and options for, actions to minimise their risks.

It is important to consider whether an adult at risk has the capacity to make decisions about safeguarding themselves. Lack of capacity may affect the actions that can be taken and will be covered by local policies, guidance and training on capacity.

In many cases, however, adults attending for treatment of drug misuse and dependence will retain legal capacity for decisions they wish to make in relation to safeguarding. This does not limit the duty on clinicians to support the patient in minimising their risks.



Alcohol and adult safeguarding

“The overarching finding was that, perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the adults featured in these reviews had multiple complex needs in addition to alcohol misuse, including mental health problems, chronic physical health conditions, neurological conditions caused by alcohol, self-neglect, exploitation by others, unfit living conditions, and experiences of a past traumatic event such as bereavement and physical or sexual abuse. In almost all cases, support services failed to cope with that complexity.”

“Learning from tragedies” Alcohol Change UK (2019)



In 11 out of 41 serious case reviews alcohol was relevant to the main incident. In every one of those cases, the serious incident was the death of the adult being safeguarded.

What's coming up?

Alcohol clinical guidance – covers all settings in which alcohol treatment takes place (community, prisons, primary and secondary health care, etc.)

Spring Budget - £260m (over 3 years) to support systems meeting the alcohol and drug needs of people experiencing rough sleeping

NHS Long Term Plan – optimisation of Alcohol Care Teams in hospitals (meeting the needs of alcohol dependent patients)

NHS CQUIN programme – indicator around liver health pathway for patients identified as alcohol dependent