**Heavy drinkers fuel alcohol industry**

**Link:** **https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/23/alcohol-revenue-would-decline-13-billion-drinkers-stuck-recommended/**

Research finds the 4% of the population whose drinking is considered harmful account for almost a quarter of revenue Credit:  GARO/PHANIE

* [Telegraph Reporters](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/authors/telegraph-reporters/)

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Alcohol revenue would decline by two-fifths, or £13 billion, if all drinkers were to comply with the [recommended consumption limits](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2018/04/12/drinking-five-glasses-wine-week-could-knock-years-life-study/), according to a study.

The research found that about two-thirds of alcohol sales in England are to heavy drinkers.

Drinkers who consume more than the Government's low-risk guideline of 14 units a week make up 25% of the population but provide 68% of alcohol industry revenue, according to a paper published in the journal Addiction.

The 4% of the population whose drinking is considered harmful - more than 35 units a week for women and more than 50 for men - account for almost a quarter (23%) of revenue, analysis by researchers at the Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) and the University of Sheffield's Alcohol Research Group suggests.

The report said the findings "raise serious questions about the conflicts of interest inherent to voluntary schemes and self-regulation".

The study also found that 81% of sales in supermarkets and off-licences are to those drinking above guideline levels compared with 60% in pubs, bars, clubs and restaurants, and that heavy drinkers generate a greater share of revenue for producers of beer (77%), cider (70%) and wine (66%) than spirits (50%).

Aveek Bhattacharya, policy analyst at the IAS and the lead author of the paper, said: "Alcohol causes 24,000 deaths and over 1.1 million hospital admissions each year in England, at a cost of £3.5 billion to the NHS.

"Yet policies to address this harm, like minimum unit pricing and raising alcohol duty, have been resisted at every turn by the alcohol industry. Our analysis suggests this may be because many drinks companies realise that a significant reduction in harmful drinking would be financially ruinous.

"The Government should recognise just how much the industry has to lose from effective alcohol policies, and be more wary of its attempts to derail meaningful action through lobbying and offers of voluntary partnership."

Colin Angus, research fellow at the Sheffield Alcohol Research Group and a co-author on the paper, said: "These figures highlight an important conflict of interest in the UK Government's approach to reducing alcohol problems.

"Its decision to work in partnership with the alcohol industry is unlikely to lead to effective policies when heavy drinkers provide a large share of the industry's revenue."

John Timothy, chief executive of the Portman Group, the alcohol industry's self-regulatory marketing body, said: "In the last decade or so binge drinking has fallen by nearly a quarter and alcohol-related violence, drink-driving casualties and acceptance of drinking among children have also fallen significantly.

"Drinks producers have contributed to this decline through their commitment to encouraging moderation through the development of a wide range of low and no-alcohol products and the removal of over one billion units of alcohol from the market.

"These actions have been welcomed by Government and leading charities and the industry will continue to work alongside public and third sector partners to further reduce alcohol-related harms."

