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Getting drunk at the pub has gone out of fashion

Oliver Moody

Britain is losing its taste for booze, according to a government report that shows steady falls in the number of drinkers and the amount of alcohol consumed each week.

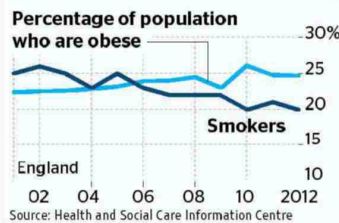
The country is spending slightly more on alcohol for drinking at home than it did at the start of the recession as prices outstrip inflation, but the sums spent on drinking in bars, pubs and restaurants dropped by a tenth in real terms from 2009 to 2012.

The report published yesterday by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) indicates a startling decline in Britain's culture of drinking heavily while out on the town.

The amount of alcohol drunk outside the home has almost halved since its peak in 2001. The average British adult drinks 700ml at home and 355ml elsewhere each week, compared with 735ml and 733ml respectively at the start of the century. Wine and cider sales have been fairly resilient, but beer consumption outside the home has collapsed from 623ml per head to 267ml a decade later.

Britons are also drinking far fewer alcopops, spirits mixed with sugary soft drinks and marketed heavily at younger drinkers. Consumption outside the home has plunged to 2ml per person per week from a peak of 36ml in 2002.

The findings are partly based on a survey carried out in 2012 involving more than 8,000 adults and 2,000 children. The proportion of men saying they had drunk in the week before they were interviewed fell from 72 per cent in 2005 to 64 per cent in 2012, and there



Source: Health and Social Care Information Centre



was a decline among women from 57 per cent to 52 per cent over the same period.

The trend is most marked among schoolchildren. The proportion of 11-to-15-year-olds who said they had drunk alcohol at least once fell over the past decade from 61 per cent to 43 per cent.

By contrast, obesity rates rose over the decade, while smoking has been in steady decline.

Alcoholism still takes a heavy toll on the NHS in England, which last year

spent more than £3 million on prescription drugs for treating the addiction. The sum has doubled since 2004.

Beat Kümin, professor of history and a founding member of the drinking studies network at the University of Warwick, said that the shift from drinking outside the home was partly a result of economics, as wages tightened and alcohol prices rose relative to income.

"What we have seen is a quite unprecedented rise in female and domestic drinking in the recent past," he said.

Young people were also starting to return to the upright attitudes of earlier generations, he said. "The public eye would consider behaviour that was excessive — when you're throwing up in the gutter or unable to stand — unacceptable, especially by your peers. What we are seeing now is a reaction to that, with all the... unpleasant scenes of streets full of drunks. Young people are distancing themselves from an image they are no longer comfortable with."

This tallies with HSCIC data from 2012, covering England, showing that 21 per cent of young adults do not drink alcohol and a further 11 per cent drink less than a unit a week. A report published later that year by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggested that many youngsters had cut their drinking after bad experiences with alcohol.

He cautioned that the UK had swung between eras of liberal attitudes to alcohol and periods of moral pressure, such as the Victorian temperance movement. "We're seeing a cyclical movement of very high concern about alcohol abuse, and then, historically, that tends to lessen again," he said.