

# **drinkaware.co.uk**

**for the facts about alcohol**



## **Alcohol and Soaps**

### **Drinkaware Media Analysis**

### **2010**

## Why Drinkaware commissioned the research

Alcohol plays a key part in soap operas in the UK and there have been some dramatic, high profile alcohol-related storylines recently, bringing the topic to the forefront of people's minds. An investigation of academic literature about alcohol in soaps also raises some important issues.

Previous research shows that when viewers are frequently exposed to portraits of reality presented by television programmes they start to adopt the attitudes and behaviours they have seen on screen, which can result in a distorted world view (Gerbner and Gross 1976). Gerbner and Gross's cultivation theory (1976) also finds that if children are regularly exposed to acts of alcohol consumption, they may form ideas about the importance of alcohol in everyday life, a sentiment which Tucker (1985) confirms. Bandura (2001) shows that children are more likely to replicate acts that are seen to have no clear consequence. A Dutch study also found that frequent viewing of a popular Dutch soap with an average 4.3 drinks per episode was "significantly associated with juvenile alcohol use", particularly among girls (Sheldon 2006). Additionally, Livingstone (1988) finds that realism is one of the main reasons people watch soaps, in fact more than 40% of people say soaps help them solve problems in their own lives. Sumnall (2010) also points out that where alcohol harms are only related to extreme storylines such as alcoholism or violence, it is easy for viewers to think their own behaviour is not problematic.

The influence of soaps on attitudes and behaviour is therefore considered to be important. So Drinkaware wanted to explore how the leading soaps portray alcohol and its negative effects, and with what frequency, with a view to contacting producers about future collaboration on alcohol-related storylines and releasing the key findings to a consumer audience.

Drinkaware commissioned Kantar Media Precis to research the prevalence of alcohol in the top four UK soaps: Coronation Street, Eastenders, Emmerdale and Hollyoaks.

### References

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- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M. et al, 1976. Living with television. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 172/179.
- Livingstone, SM., 1988. Why people watch soap operas: An analysis of the explanations of British viewers. *European Journal of Communications*, 3, 55-80.
- Sheldon, T., 2006. In a lather: do soap operas promote teen drinking? *BMJ*, 333, 759.
- Sumnall, H., Liverpool John Moores University Centre for Public Health, 2010. Alcohol, media and the celebrity effect. Alcohol Concern conference, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010.
- Tucker, LA., 1985. Television's role regarding alcohol use in adolescents. *Adolescence*, 12, 103-118.

## Executive summary

Alcohol plays a key part in UK soap operas and this is illustrated by the fact that 38% of the coverage monitored across the four programmes featured visual or verbal mentions of alcohol. When incidental verbal/visual mentions were excluded, alcohol consumption still made up 17% of the coverage monitored. These “active” depictions of alcohol consumption can be considered more powerful as they are an integral part of the scene and are more likely to leave an impression on the viewer.

Alcohol consumption over the six week monitoring period was generally not portrayed responsibly as the negative consequences were not adequately outlined. Characters were most often depicted drinking while socialising which reinforced the message to the viewer that you need alcohol to “have a good time”. Alcohol was also used by various characters as a crutch to ease stress or as a form of relaxation, particularly in Coronation Street, Eastenders and Emmerdale.

Emmerdale depicted the most alcohol consumption across the six weeks (293 glasses/bottles) and also had the highest average number of drinks consumed per episode (8 glasses/bottles).

The effects of alcohol should be presented more realistically by producers as hangovers only featured in 12 scenes across all four programmes (compared to 383 scenes where alcohol was consumed). This is especially important for younger viewers who are beginning to experiment with alcohol and are not aware of the side-effects of excessive drinking.



## Executive summary continued

Where negative portrayals of alcohol were presented, they were driven by “out of the ordinary” storylines such as Phil Mitchell’s alcoholism and descent into drug addiction in Eastenders or Shadrach Dingle’s death from alcoholism in Emmerdale.

Underage drinking was not a major issue during the monitored period as only Coronation Street generated significant coverage (when Chesney Battersby-Brown smuggled vodka into his 16th birthday party). The majority of characters across the four programmes are above 18 however, so there is not much opportunity to explore this issue unless more younger characters are introduced.

The local pub featured strongly as a key location across all four programmes. It was presented as a hub of the community and a place where people gathered to socialise, further reinforcing the prominence of alcohol in the characters’ lives.

Beer was the most prominent alcoholic beverage in Coronation Street, Eastenders and Emmerdale but white wine and champagne were predominant in Hollyoaks.

Overall, alcohol consumption was depicted in an unrealistic way across the four programmes and negative consequences were rarely represented. An overwhelming number of scenes depicted alcohol consumption as something that aids bonding and socialising or easing stress. The consequences of consistent consumption, such as hangovers, impaired performance at work or alcoholism were not adequately addressed.



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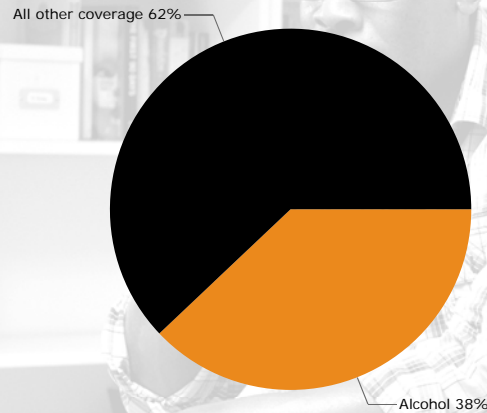
## **Topline Statistics**



# How did the four soaps compare for all alcohol coverage?

Proportion of alcohol coverage in UK soap operas  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol

27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Source: Kantar Media Precis

Coronation Street  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol

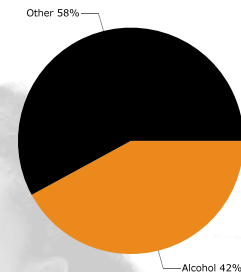
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Source: Kantar Media Precis

Eastenders  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol

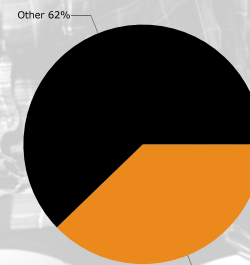
27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Source: Kantar Media Precis

Emmerdale  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol

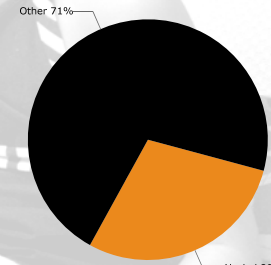
27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Source: Kantar Media Precis

Hollyoaks  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol

27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Source: Kantar Media Precis

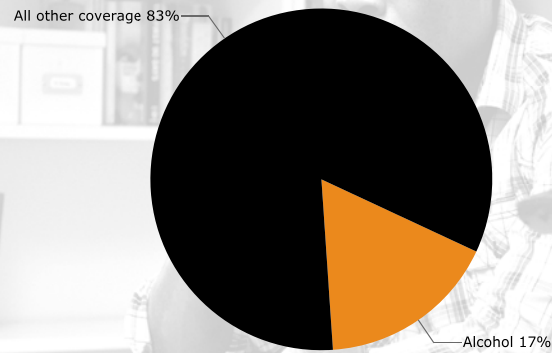
The importance of alcohol to UK soaps is illustrated in the pie chart which reveals that 38% of coverage across the four programmes featured a verbal or visual mention of alcohol. The charts show the proportion of time where alcohol was mentioned or appeared on screen versus all other footage.

Eastenders and Coronation Street saw the most negative coverage as specific storylines dealt with the effects of alcoholism on Phil Mitchell (Eastenders) and underage drinking by Chesney Battersby-Brown (Coronation Street).

Coronation Street featured the highest proportion of on screen alcohol at 44%, and Hollyoaks the lowest at 29%. The high number of pub scenes in Coronation Street and Eastenders meant the alcohol mentions were much higher in these shows.

# How did the four soaps compare for active alcohol coverage?

Proportion of alcohol coverage in UK soap operas  
With incidental verbal/visual mentions removed

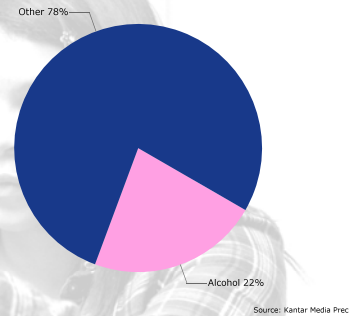


Source: Kantar Media Precis

With incidental verbal mentions and visuals removed, alcohol consumption still plays a prominent part in three of the four soaps, comprising 17% of the coverage across all four programmes.

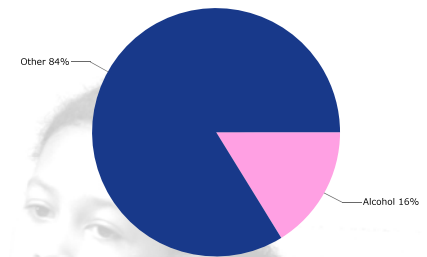
These “active” representations of alcohol are arguably more powerful as they depict characters engaging with alcohol and it becomes an integral part of the scene and therefore leaves more of an impression on the viewer.

Coronation Street  
With incidental verbal/visual alcohol mentions removed



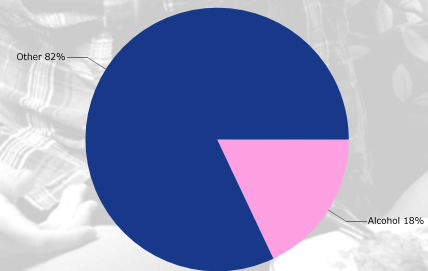
Source: Kantar Media Precis

Eastenders  
With incidental verbal/visual alcohol mentions removed



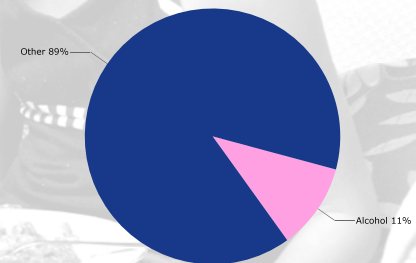
Source: Kantar Media Precis

Emmerdale  
With incidental verbal/visual alcohol mentions removed



Source: Kantar Media Precis

Hollyoaks  
With incidental verbal/visual alcohol mentions removed

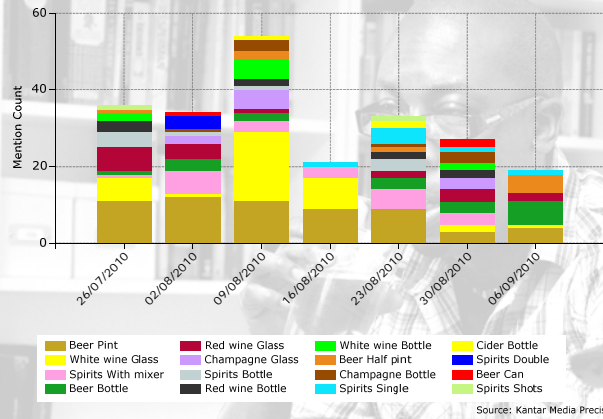


Source: Kantar Media Precis

## How much alcohol was consumed in each show?

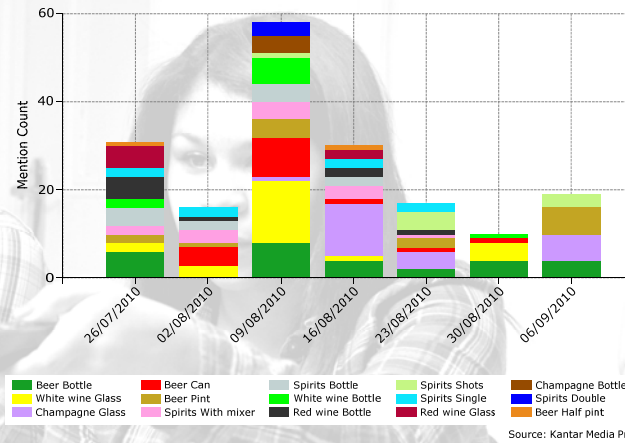
### Coronation Street

Total alcohol consumed by week



### Eastenders

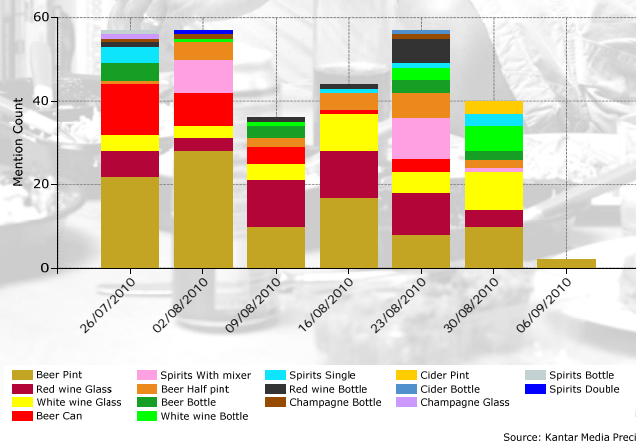
Total alcohol consumed by week



Emmerdale showed the most alcohol being consumed across the six week monitoring period with 293 glasses and bottles. Coronation Street followed with 224, ahead of Eastenders with 181 and Hollyoaks with 138.

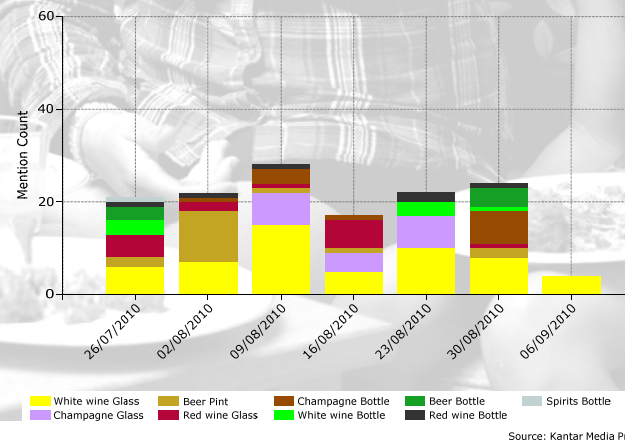
### Emmerdale

Total alcohol consumed by week



### Hollyoaks

Total alcohol consumed by week



Emmerdale had the most episodes during the monitoring period (37) so inevitably depicted the most amount of alcohol being consumed.

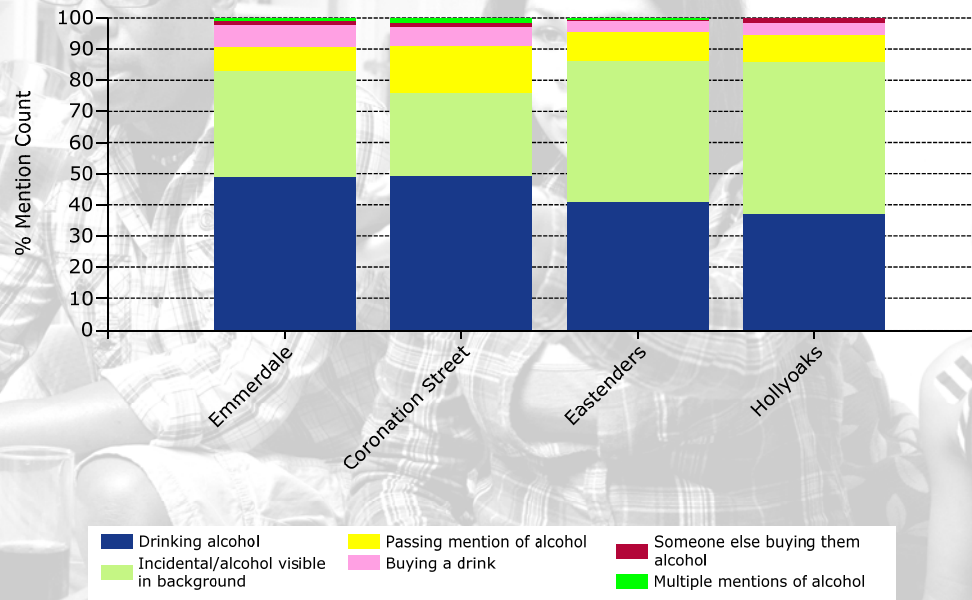
In terms of the average number of drinks consumed per episode, Emmerdale led with eight, followed by Coronation Street and Eastenders with seven and Hollyoaks with four.

## How was alcohol represented across the four soaps?

Breakdown of alcohol coverage in UK soap operas

Verbal/visual mention of alcohol

27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Source: Kantar Media Precis

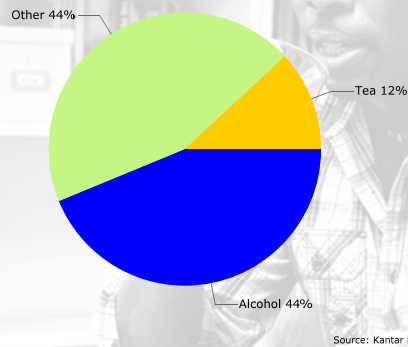
A six point scale was used to track mentions and visuals of alcohol: *buying a drink, drinking alcohol, incidental/alcohol visible in background, multiple mentions of alcohol, passing mention of alcohol and someone else buying them alcohol.*

Alcohol was represented in only 29% of Hollyoaks' coverage and 49% of that was incidental coverage which indicates there is less of a focus on alcohol in this programme.

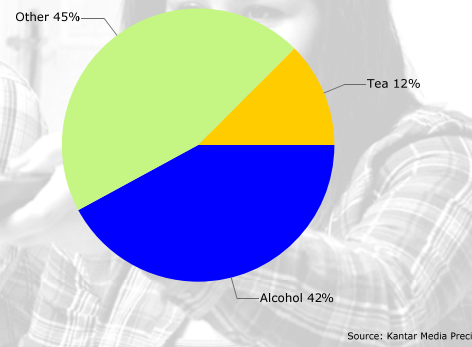
Coronation Street had the highest proportion of characters actively interacting with alcohol (drinking it, buying it or accepting it from someone else) with 58%.

## How prominent was tea versus alcohol?

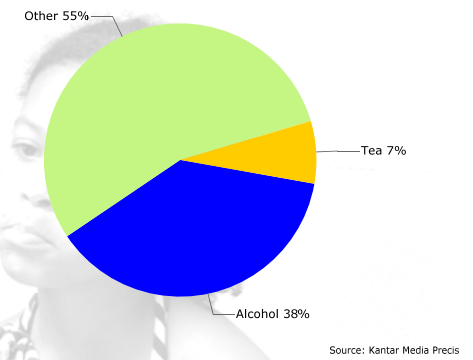
Coronation Street  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol/tea  
27/07/10 - 06/09/10



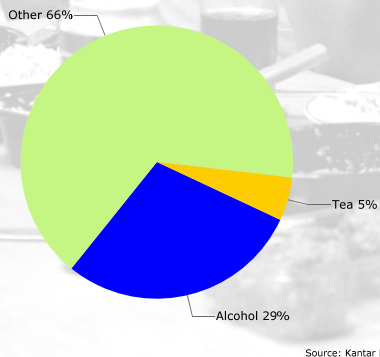
Eastenders  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol/tea  
27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Emmerdale  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol/tea  
27/07/10 - 06/09/10



Hollyoaks  
Verbal/visual mention of alcohol/tea  
27/07/10 - 06/09/10



These charts illustrate the proportion of time that alcohol and tea were seen or heard on screen during the six weeks of monitoring. This includes all passing mentions and incidental/background images of alcohol and tea as well as scenes where characters are interacting with the beverages.

'Other' refers to the rest of the footage that was monitored where alcohol or tea were not seen or heard.

Tea remains a reasonably constant presence throughout all four programmes.