

# Drinking through the pandemic

## Drinkaware Monitor 2021

October 2021

 Prepared by  
PS Research

 drinkaware

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# Introducing the research

**Monitor and online community**

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# Introducing the report

## Introducing the research

This report brings together two key research sources to look at drinking in the UK:

**Monitor** - a UK representative survey to find out who's drinking, how much and why

**Online community** - an asynchronous qualitative research study with 30 UK drinkers

## What does the report cover?

This report looks at the state of UK drinking, drinking through the pandemic, high risk drinkers and other groups of interest, drinking and deprivation.

## What *doesn't* the report cover?

The [Drinkaware Monitor 2021 survey](#)<sup>1</sup> covers more topics than are covered in this report. For example, the survey asks questions to understand drinking expectancies, moderation techniques, alcohol marketing and stigma. The full data tables and an interactive library of historical Monitor data will be published on the Drinkaware website in winter 2021. Drinkaware welcomes secondary analysis of its data, please contact [research@drinkaware.co.uk](mailto:research@drinkaware.co.uk).

The [technical report](#)<sup>2</sup>, produced by YouGov, includes a copy of the questionnaire.

## Acknowledgements

Drinkaware would like to thank Professor Derek Heim and Dr. Rebecca Monk at Edge Hill University for their input and advice in the questionnaire's development; YouGov for conducting the survey; PS Research for analysing the survey data, conducting and analysing the online community, and for writing this report; and the participants of the online community for giving their time and being so open and honest.

## How to cite this report

Pearson A., & Slater, E. (2021, October). *Drinking through the pandemic. Drinkaware Monitor 2021*. PS Research and Drinkaware.

### Viewing the charts

Many of the analysis charts in this report are interactive.



#### Hover

Hover over bars or maps to display data and hover over legend labels to highlight one set



#### Select

Click on a legend label to select or de-select data in the chart you are viewing

# Understanding the language

Throughout the report a number of technical terms are used to analyse the results of the Monitor. A [glossary](#) is included in the Appendix.

The most commonly used are:

**AUDIT and AUDIT-C** are [methods of screening](#) for excessive drinking developed by the World Health Organization<sup>3</sup>. AUDIT is a 10-question method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment. AUDIT-C is a shorter method of screening, consisting of three consumption-related questions on the AUDIT questionnaire that relate to drinking frequency, units consumed on a typical occasion and frequency of drinking six units or more (for women) or eight units or more (for men) at a single session. The full 10-question AUDIT was included in the Drinkaware Monitor for the first time since 2017. Throughout the report, AUDIT-C is used for any analysis over time or headline findings. The full AUDIT assessment is used when looking to understand more about particular drinking groups, with the additional risk questions bringing out more significant differences than AUDIT-C.

The **Index of Multiple Deprivation** is a [measure of relative deprivation](#) for small areas (neighbourhoods) across the UK<sup>4</sup>. Throughout the report, analysis by deprivation refers to the 'least deprived' and 'most deprived' areas. These are based on Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles, with the 'least deprived' being those living in areas in the lowest 20% of deprivation and 'most deprived' being those who live in areas in the highest 20% of deprivation.

**Social Grades** are reported using a [classification system](#) based on occupation (AB are managerial and professional occupations; DE are semi and unskilled manual workers)<sup>5</sup>

Where differences between sub-groups are discussed, only those differences that are statistically significant are reported (unless otherwise stated). These differences are statistically significant to a confidence level of 95%. Please also note that throughout the report we use rounded percentages. Figures may not always sum to 100% due to this rounding, but will remain within a percentage point.

# Drinkaware Monitors



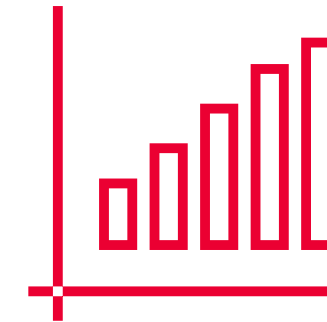
## What is the Monitor?

Drinkaware is committed to ensure our work is informed by up-to-date evidence on UK drinking attitudes and behaviours.

Every year, Drinkaware commissions a representative survey to understand the UK's drinking behaviours and motivations. A core subset of questions are included in the questionnaire every year to understand changes in key variables over time. Other questions are developed to reflect that year's theme. The theme of the 2020 and 2021 Monitors has been drinking during the coronavirus pandemic.

Since 2017, the Monitors have been conducted by YouGov on behalf of Drinkaware, and before that by Ipsos Mori (2009-14). Where appropriate, findings from the 2021 Monitor have been reported in the context of those from previous waves.

Drinkaware welcomes secondary analysis of its data, please contact the research team on [research@drinkaware.co.uk](mailto:research@drinkaware.co.uk) to find out more.



## Monitor Methodology

- UK wide sample of 9,137 adults aged 18 to 85 were interviewed, including 5,934 in England, 1,245 in Wales, 1,349 in Scotland and 609 in Northern Ireland
- The sample was drawn from the YouGov research panel, with responses collected between 11 June 2021 and 4 July 2021
- Using data from the Office for National Statistics, the results were weighted to be representative of the UK adult population according to age, gender, social grade and region
- The sampling and weighting process is exactly consistent with that used in the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 Drinkaware Monitors

More information on the Methodology can be found in the [technical report<sup>2</sup>](#).

# Identifying key groups of interest

From the results of the 2020 Monitor and other research<sup>6</sup>, Drinkaware identified **four priority groups** who reported drinking more during lockdown than usual or whose change in drinking behaviours over the pandemic are cause for concern:

## Higher risk drinkers



Drinkers who score eight or more on the AUDIT-C tool

## Facing redundancy/job uncertainty



People who had been made redundant or who were in the consultancy process for redundancy

## Mental health most impacted by the pandemic



Those who felt their mental health had been negatively impacted by the pandemic to a large/very large extent

## Parents of under 18s



Parents of at least one child under the age of 18



Qualitative research was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of what alcohol consumption during the pandemic looked like for these four groups, how their drinking changed across the pandemic and to explore the potential reasons driving this change.



# The online qualitative community



In June 2021, Drinkaware commissioned PS Research to conduct qualitative research to gather the stories of people from the four groups of interest.

**Methodology:** An online community lasting seven days from 19th to 25th July 2021.

Participants were asked to complete a series of tasks including:

- A daily alcohol diary
- A card sort activity around socially acceptable situations in which to drink alcohol
- A graph and video activity to ‘map your mood and your drinking across the pandemic’
- A card sort activity around motivations to drink alcohol

**Participants:** A total of **30 participants** took part in the online community; 14 males, 16 females.

All participants had to be aged 18 or over, score a minimum of five or more on AUDIT-C and agree that their alcohol consumption had increased in either amount or frequency during the pandemic (either over the entire course of the pandemic or at specific points such as during lockdowns).

Participants had to belong to one of the four key priority groups and minimum quotas were set on demographic criteria to ensure a mix of participants. More information on the methodology can be found in the Appendix.





# Highlights

## Summary of key findings

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# What did we find in 2020?

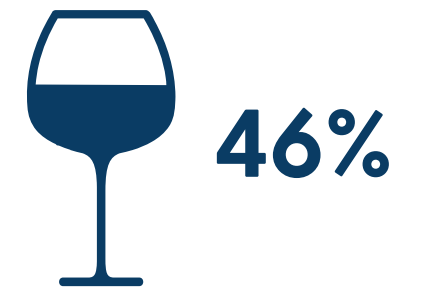
As reported in Drinkaware's Impact Report 2021,<sup>6</sup> research commissioned by Drinkaware during 2020 highlighted specific trends and areas of concern:

## Polarisation and changes of concern among high-risk drinkers

- Research throughout the first six months of the pandemic showed similar proportions of UK drinkers reporting drinking more than they would usually prior to the pandemic and less than they would usually.
- Those most likely to be drinking less were already more likely to be drinking within the UK Chief Medical Officers' low-risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week. Those who increased their consumption were more likely to be already drinking at harmful levels.
- There does not appear to have been small increases in alcohol consumption across the board, but larger increases among a smaller proportion of high risk drinkers (i.e. those considered to be most at risk of alcohol-related harm based on an AUDIT-C score of between 8-12). This is of serious concern given that this has the potential to create significant additional health issues and resource implications in the future.

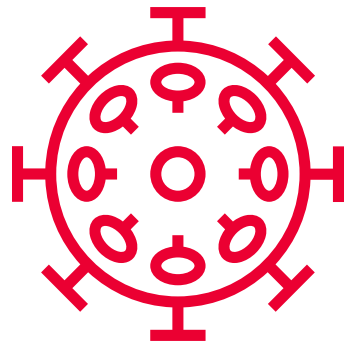
## Identifying other groups of interest

- In addition to high risk drinkers, research in 2020 uncovered other worrying changes in drinking habits within some specific groups: people who have faced redundancy due to COVID-19, those whose mental health and wellbeing was negatively affected by the pandemic to a large/very large extent and parents of at least one child under the age of 18.
- Drinking alcohol as a coping mechanism (such as 'to forget about problems' and 'to help when feeling depressed or nervous') was a common thread amongst those drinking 'more than usual' since the pandemic began.



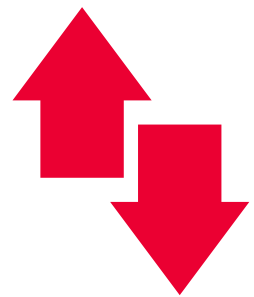
**In 2020, almost half (46%) of high-risk drinkers reported drinking more than their usual amount during the first national lockdown (March-June)**

# 2021: the story in a nutshell



## The increase in overall drinking levels seen in 2020 has not continued into 2021

- The increase in the proportion of adults drinking two or more times a week in July/August 2020 does not appear to be a continuing trend; drinking levels in May/June 2021 have dropped back to 2019 levels.
- Drinkers reported that the pandemic, and particularly times of increased restrictions/lockdowns, caused periods of high stress, anxiety, isolation and boredom, and that some turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism.



## However, the polarisation of high risk and low risk drinkers continues

- Whilst the proportion of low risk drinkers and adults who don't drink is increasing, the level of high risk drinkers remains largely unchanged.
- High risk drinkers are the most likely to report drinking more, more often and in different situations than usual compared to before the pandemic.



## The deprivation paradox

- Analysis by levels of deprivation shows that adults in the most deprived areas are less likely to drink alcohol, but those that do drink are more likely to be high risk drinkers (and therefore more likely to suffer alcohol-related harm).

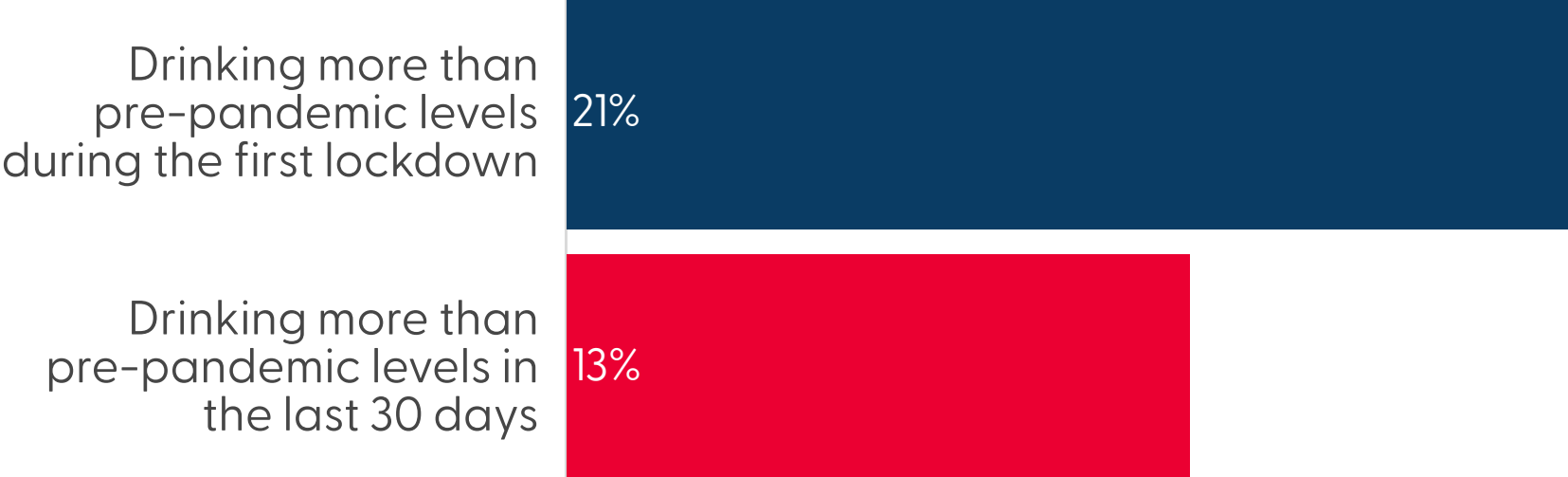
# How have drinking habits changed during the pandemic?



**A spike in drinking frequency in 2020 has dropped back to 2019 levels**

41% of UK adults were drinking 2+ times a week in 2020 compared to 38% in 2019<sup>2</sup> and 2021

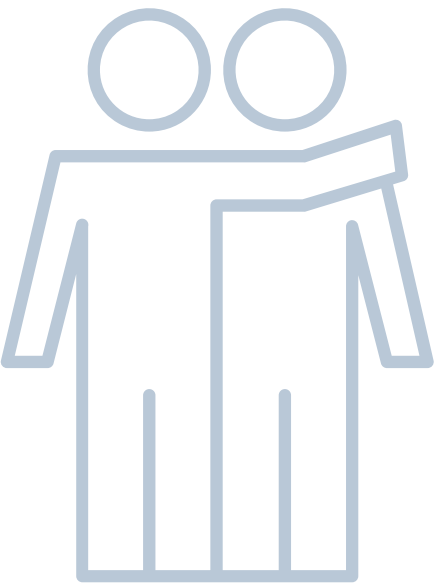
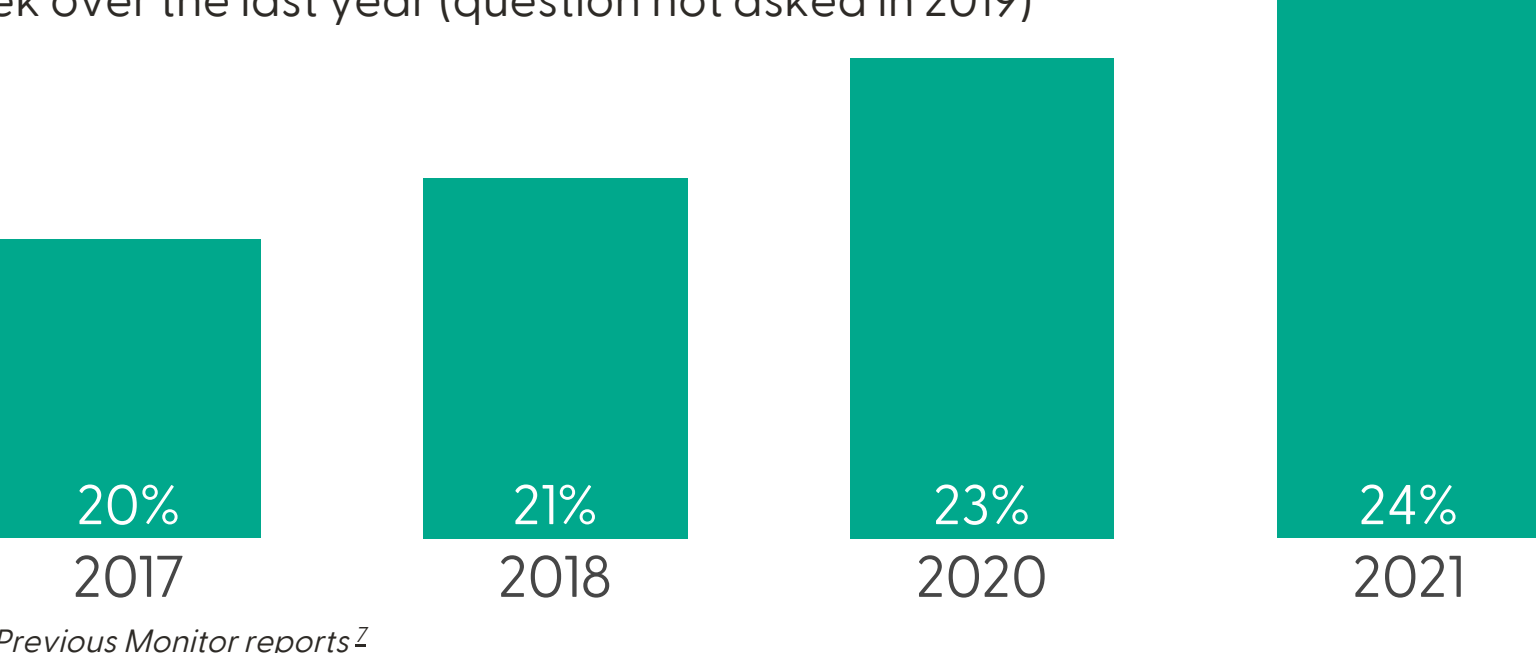
**People reported drinking more than their usual amount during the first lockdown (March to June 2020) than in the last 30 days (May/June 2021)**



**But more people overall were drinking less than pre-pandemic levels and half were drinking about the same amount as before**

**People drinking at home alone increased during the pandemic in 2020 and that has continued in 2021**

24% of drinkers in 2021 reported drinking at home alone at least once a week over the last year (question not asked in 2019)



**Those drinking much more during the March 2020 lockdown struggled to resist when their partner/spouse was drinking**

45% of drinkers who drank much more during the first lockdown were probably, most likely or very sure they could not resist drinking in this situation

# The pandemic 'forced' drinkers to drink in different situations



**During lockdowns and periods of increased restrictions, the pandemic removed many of the usual situations in which people would drink alcohol, 'forcing' people to drink in different situations**

Participants in the **online community** spoke of drinking more/more frequently:



**Alone** (particularly for those living alone)



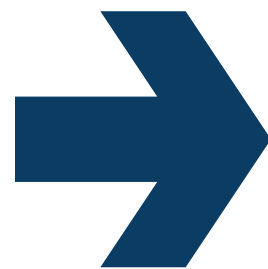
**While socialising virtually** (e.g Zoom parties)



**At home**



**When restrictions eased** - celebrating when they were able to see friends and family and when hospitality venues opened



There is some indication amongst the community participants that drinking in these situations has become **more socially acceptable**. Whilst it is too early to tell whether these changes in drinking behaviours have become normalised, it will be interesting to monitor this trend going forward.

# Why have some people drunk more than usual during the pandemic?



## The pandemic caused periods of high stress, anxiety, isolation and boredom...

- The online community spoke of suffering from anxiety over COVID-19, stress caused by work situations and home schooling, difficult periods of isolation and intense boredom.

## ...whilst simultaneously removing many existing coping mechanisms and eroding barriers to drinking

- Restrictions meant people lost the routines and structure of their busy lives, such as spending time with other people, going to the gym, travelling to work, taking children to activities, going to events/venues etc.
- Loss of routine and lower responsibilities made drinking harder to resist for some

**Drinkers often turned to alcohol as a method of helping them to 'get through' these difficult times**



**31% of high risk drinkers (full AUDIT) say that most or all of the time they drink, they do so because it helps them when they feel depressed or nervous (compared to 4% of low risk drinkers)**

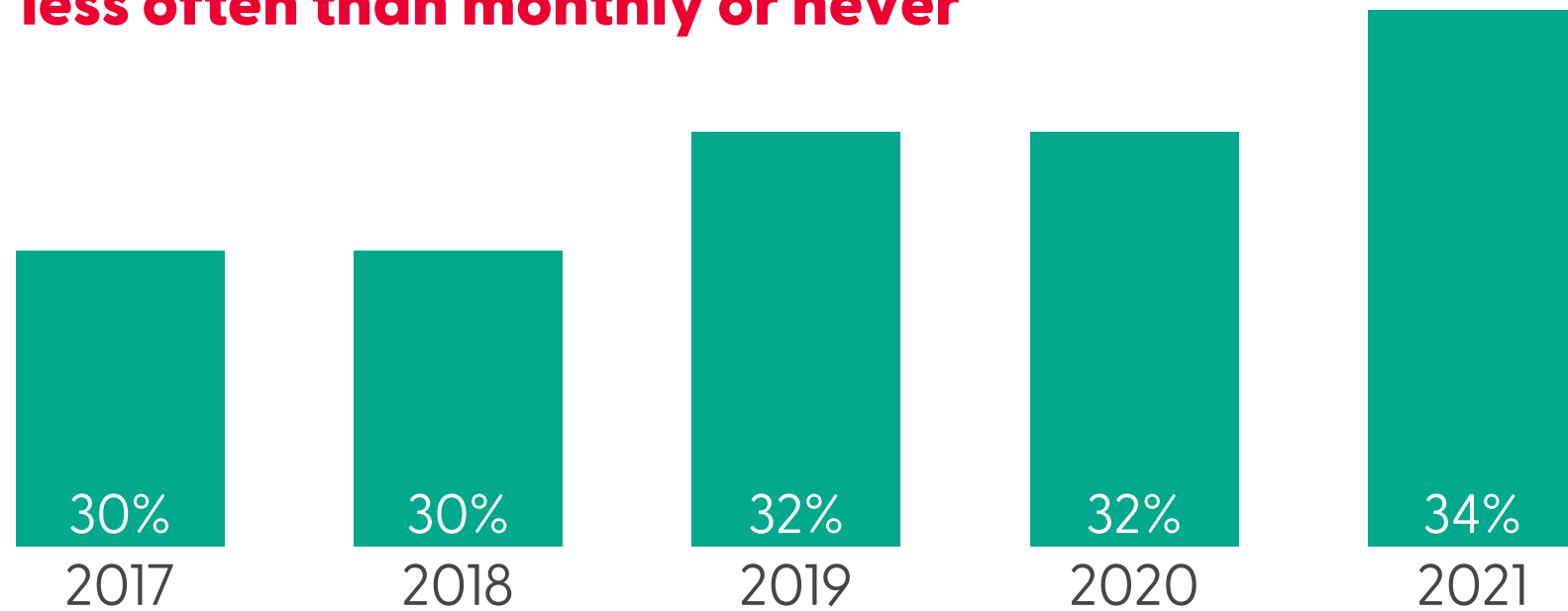


**27% of high risk drinkers (full AUDIT) say that most or all of the time they drink, they do so to cheer them up when they are in a bad mood (compared to 3% of low risk drinkers)**



# There are some positive trends in UK drinking

## An increasing number of UK adults are drinking alcohol less often than monthly or never



Previous Monitor reports<sup>7</sup>



## The number of drinkers who are drinking at low risk levels is on the rise too

56% of drinkers are low risk based on the AUDIT-C screening tool, up from 53% in 2019

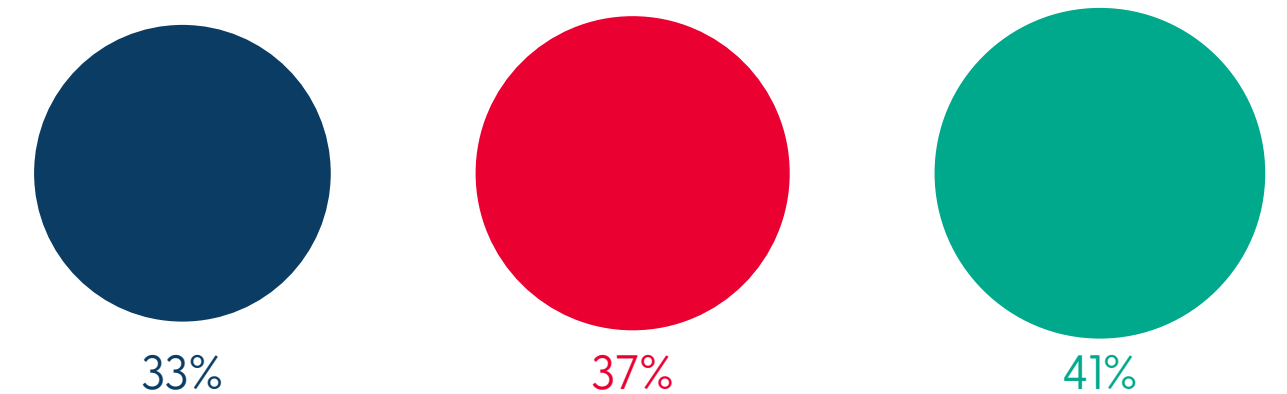
According to the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines<sup>8</sup>, to keep health risks from alcohol to a low level, it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week, and to spread drinking evenly over three or more days.



## More drinkers are having less than 15 units of alcohol in a week

78% of drinkers are drinking within the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines of 14 units a week, up from 70% in 2017 (14 units is the equivalent of approximately seven double whiskeys)

## The amount of drinkers never having more than 6/8 units on a single occasion (considered binge drinking) has increased significantly



● 2019 ● 2020 ● 2021

# However many drinkers are still drinking at high risk levels

Using the 10-item AUDIT, which includes questions on consumption, indicators of dependency and harmful alcohol use, 6% of UK drinkers are classified as high risk. As shown below, the full AUDIT highlights significant differences by individual demographics, characteristics and experiences...



## Male

68% of high risk drinkers are male, compared to 45% of low risk drinkers



## Aged 18 to 34

45% of high risk drinkers are aged 18 to 34, compared to 26% of low risk drinkers



## Children aged 18 or under at home

30% of high risk drinkers have children aged 18 or under, compared to 19% of low risk drinkers



## Live in the top 20% most deprived areas

26% of high risk drinkers live in the most deprived quintile, compared to 16% of low risk drinkers



## Mental health negatively impacted by pandemic

31% of high risk drinkers indicated that the pandemic has had a very large or large negative impact on their mental health, compared to 16% of low risk drinkers



## Made redundant (or in process) during the pandemic

24% of high risk drinkers were made redundant (or in the process) during the pandemic, compared to 9% of low risk drinkers

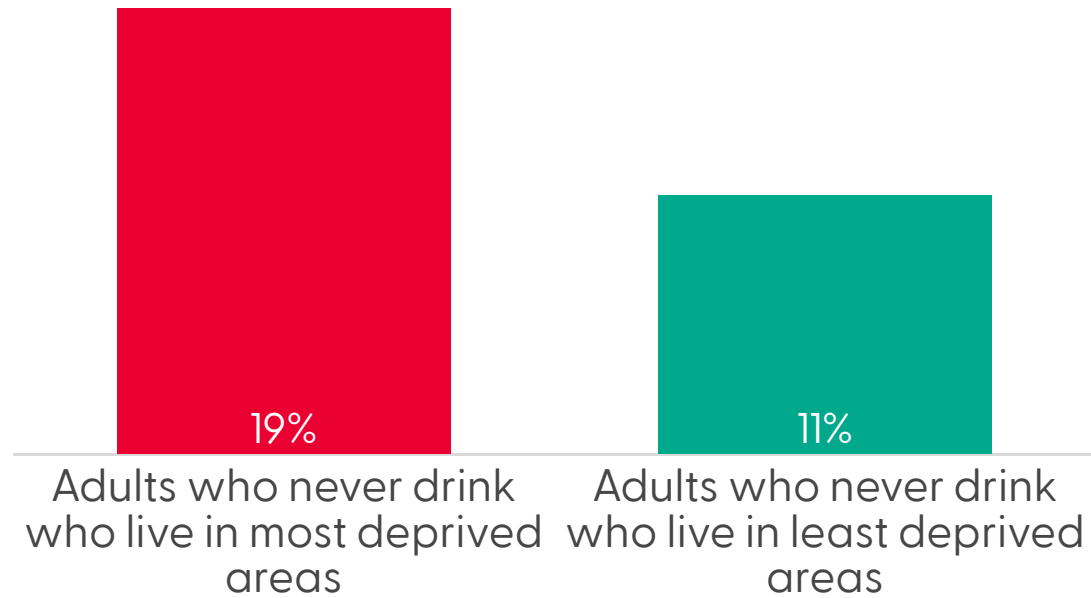


## Pandemic had very negative impact on romantic relationships

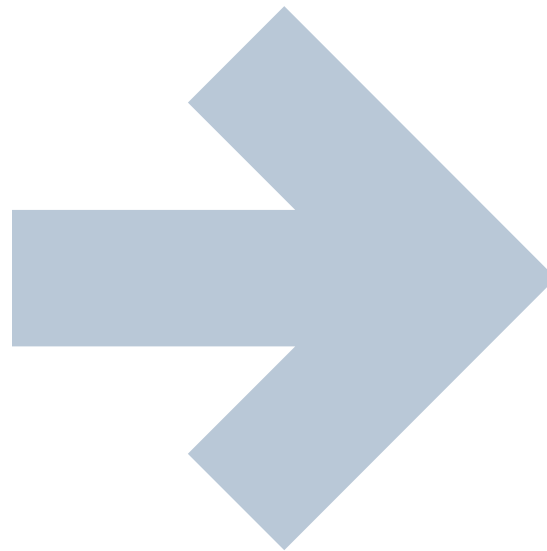
16% of high risk drinkers indicated that the pandemic had a very negative impact on their romantic relationships, compared to 8% of low risk drinkers

# And some of the biggest differences are by level of deprivation

Adults in the most deprived areas are more likely to not drink alcohol

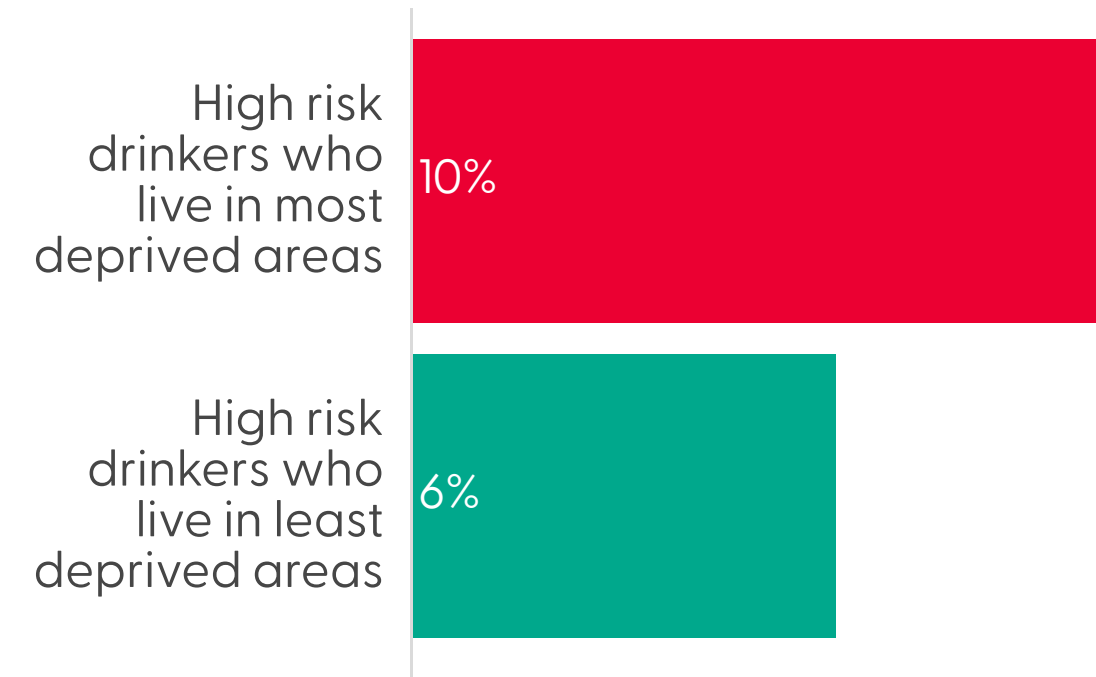


BUT...

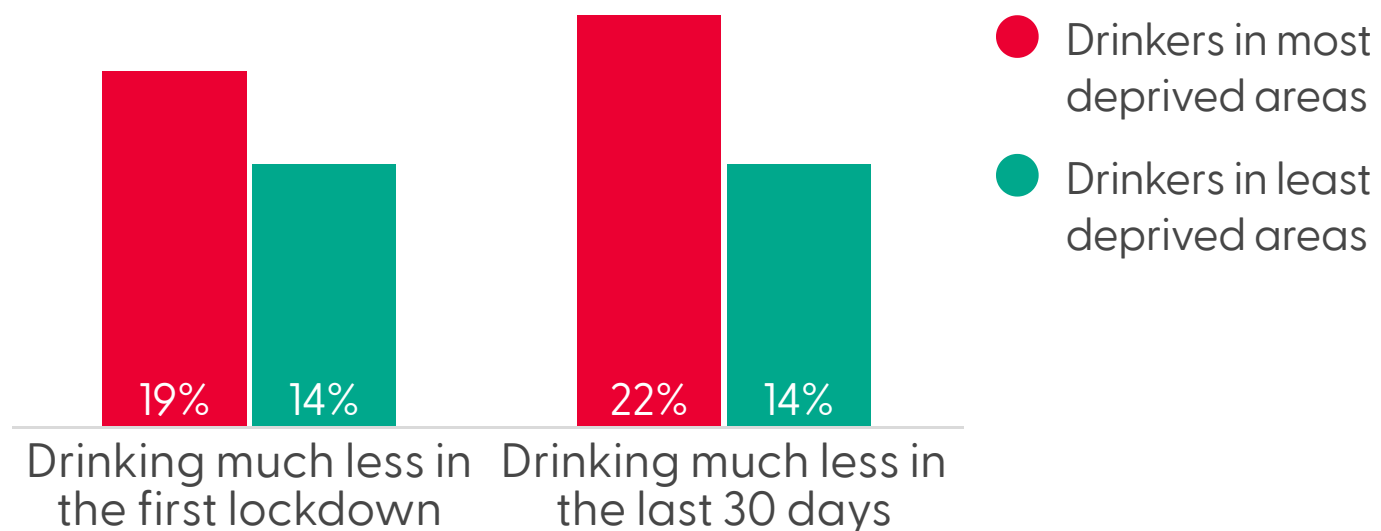


Those that do drink are more likely to be high risk

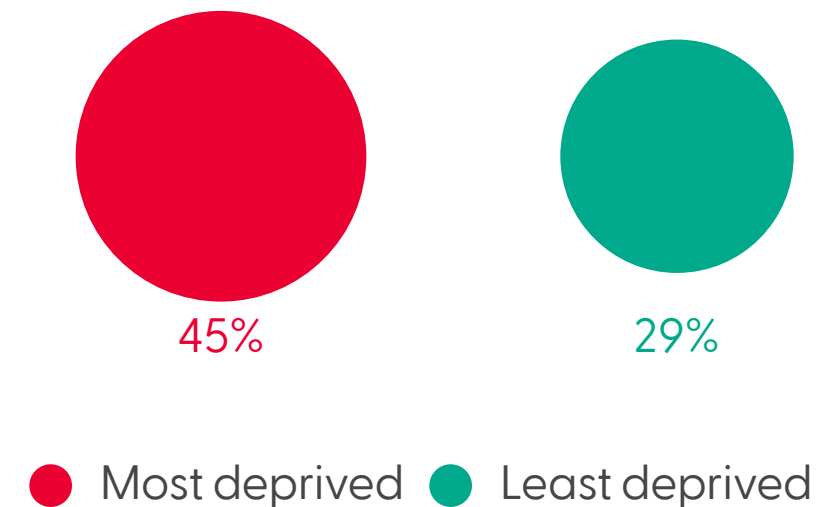
Based on the full AUDIT assessment



And drinkers in the most deprived areas were drinking less during lockdown than their usual amounts



And they are more likely to have been drinking alone in the last seven days



# Drinking in the UK in 2021

## Alcohol consumption, risk and comparisons

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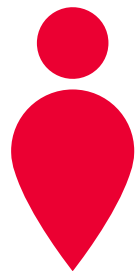
# Drinking in the UK in 2021: **what to look out for**



On average, the amount people are drinking in a typical day hasn't changed over the last five years.



Nearly four in five UK drinkers (78%) drink within the Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units a week.



Male drinkers drink more units, drink more frequently and are more likely to be classed as high risk drinkers than females.

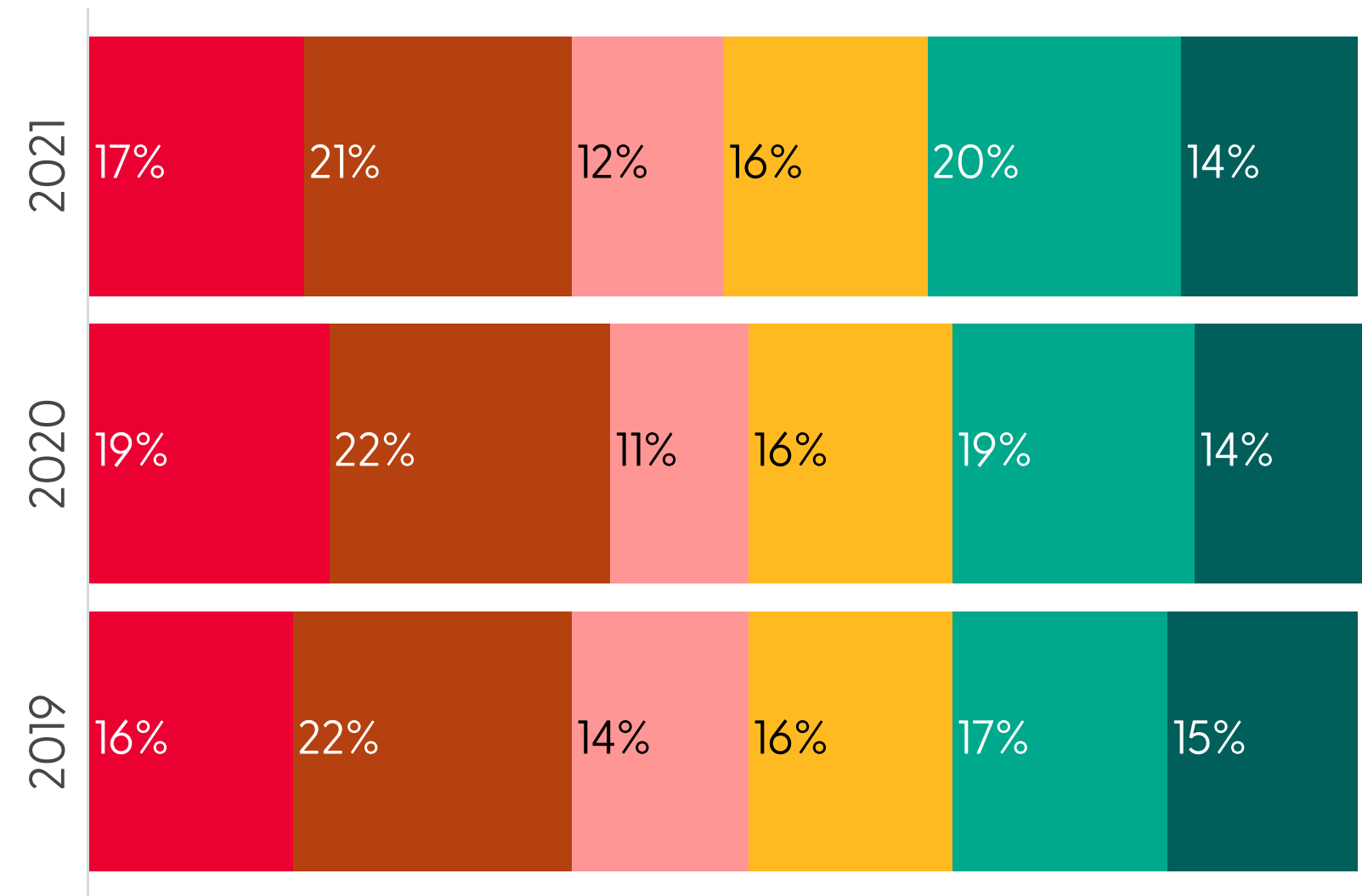


Levels of high risk drinkers differ by region, with the highest proportions of high risk drinkers in the North West of England.

# How often do UK adults have a drink containing alcohol?

The spike in UK adults drinking twice a week or more observed in 2020 has returned to a level similar to 2019

*Previous Monitor reports<sup>2</sup>*



● 4 or more times a week ● 2-3 times a week ● Once a week  
 ● 1 to 3 times a month ● Less often than monthly ● Never

Drinking frequency. Base: all UK adults, 2021 (n=9,137); 2020 (n=9,046), 2019 (n= 2,145)



There are more UK adults drinking less often; those drinking less often than monthly or never has increased from 30% in 2017 to 34% in 2021

## Who are the people most likely to drink alcohol four or more times a week?



### Retired

27% of people who are retired drink alcohol 4+ times a week, compared to 7% of full time students and 16% of adults who work (either full time or part time)



### Aged 55+

26% of people aged 55+ drink alcohol 4+ times a week, compared to 7% of those aged 18 to 34 and 16% of those aged 35 to 54



### AB Social Grade

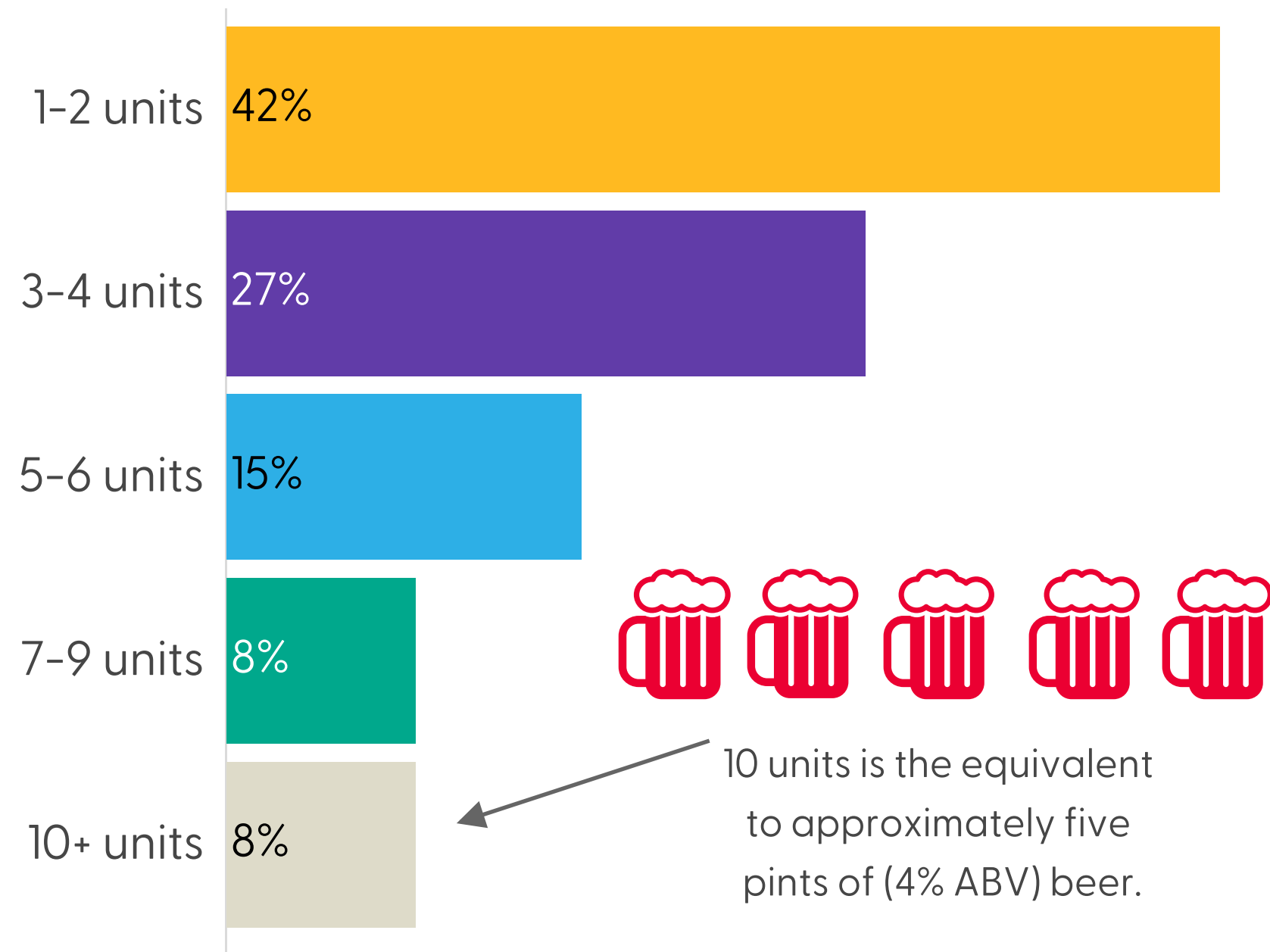
24% of people with an AB social grade drink alcohol 4+ times a week, compared to 13% of those with a DE social grade



# How many units of alcohol do people drink in a typical day when drinking?

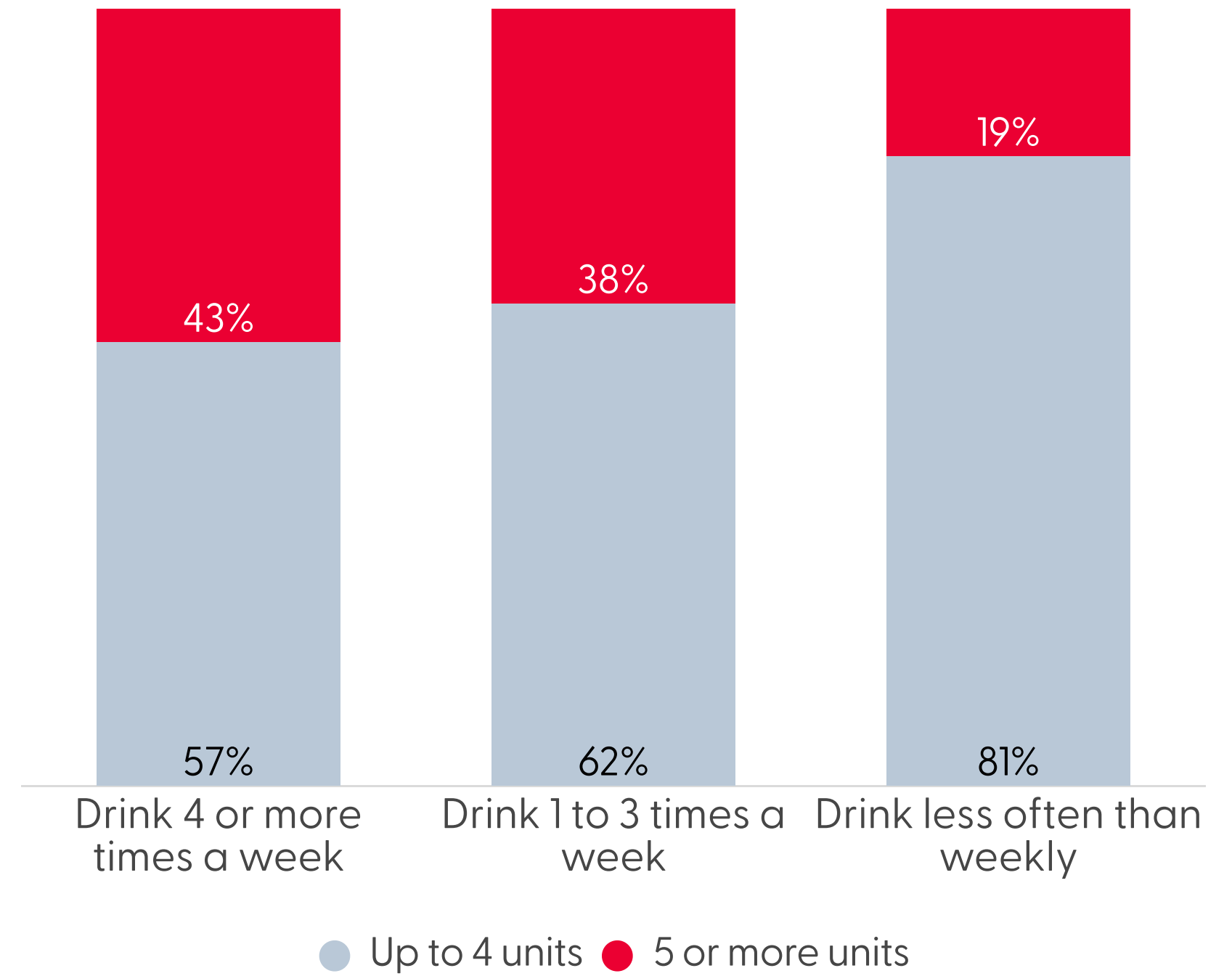
**Four in ten UK drinkers (42%) consume 1-2 units in a typical day when drinking**

Breakdown of units in a typical day in 2021



Units in a typical day. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=7,911)

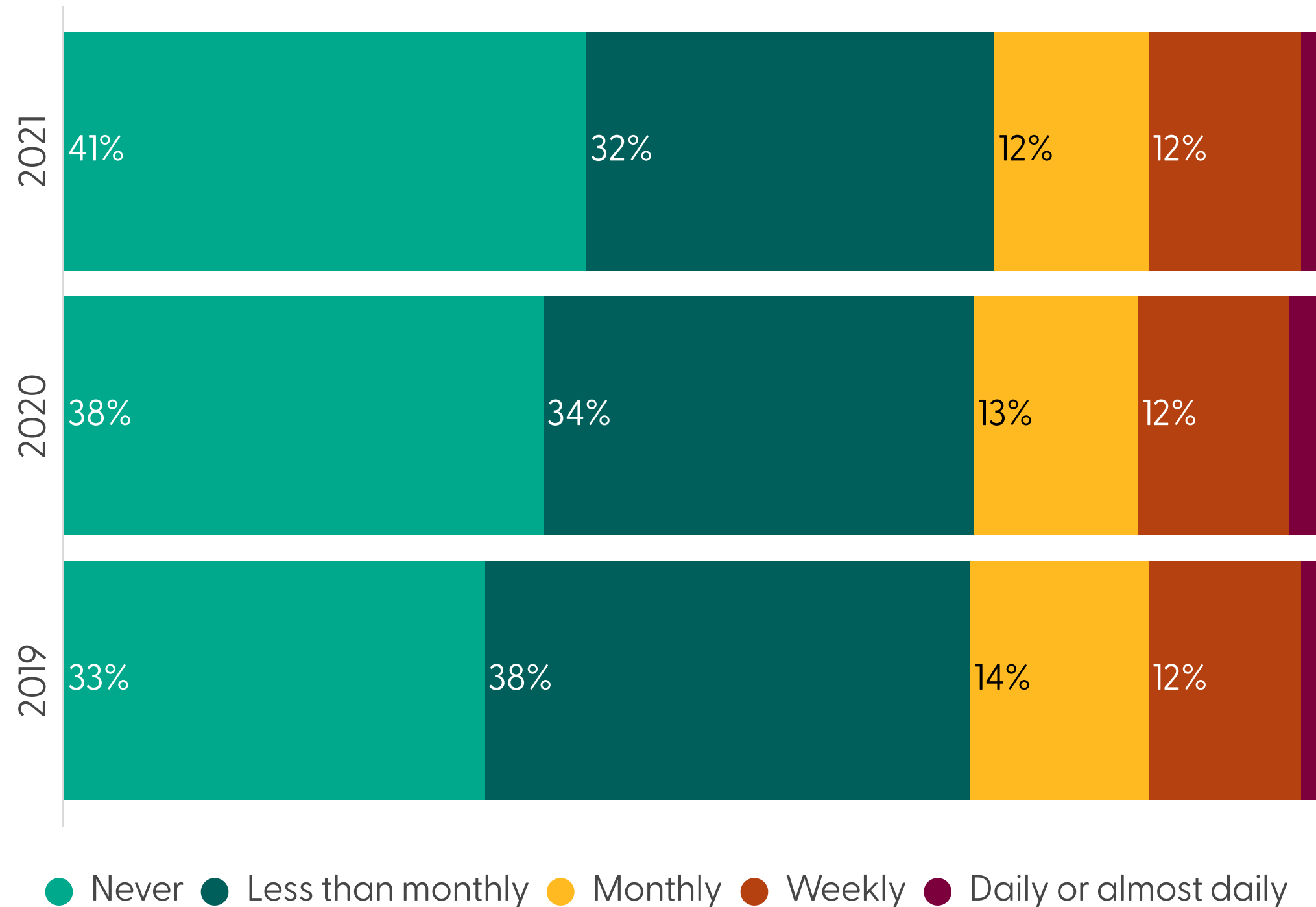
**Overall, those who drink on more days also drink more units in a typical day when drinking**



Drinking frequency by Units in a typical day Base: all UK adults who drink 4 or more times a week (n=1,545); all UK adults who drink 1-3 times a week (n=3,066); all UK adults who drink alcohol and do so less often than weekly (n=3,300)

# How often do UK drinkers binge drink?

The proportion of drinkers never binge drinking (drinking more than 6/8 units\* in a single occasion) has increased over the last three years



\*6 units for females; 8 units for males

Frequency binge drinking. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, 2021 (n=7,911); 2020 (n=7,834), 2019 (n= 2,145)

## Who is least likely to binge drink?



### Retired

56% of drinkers who are retired never drink more than 6/8 units in a single occasion, compared to 33% of students and 34% of adults who work (either full time or part time)



### Female

45% of female drinkers never drink more than the 6/8 units in a single occasion, compared to 37% of males

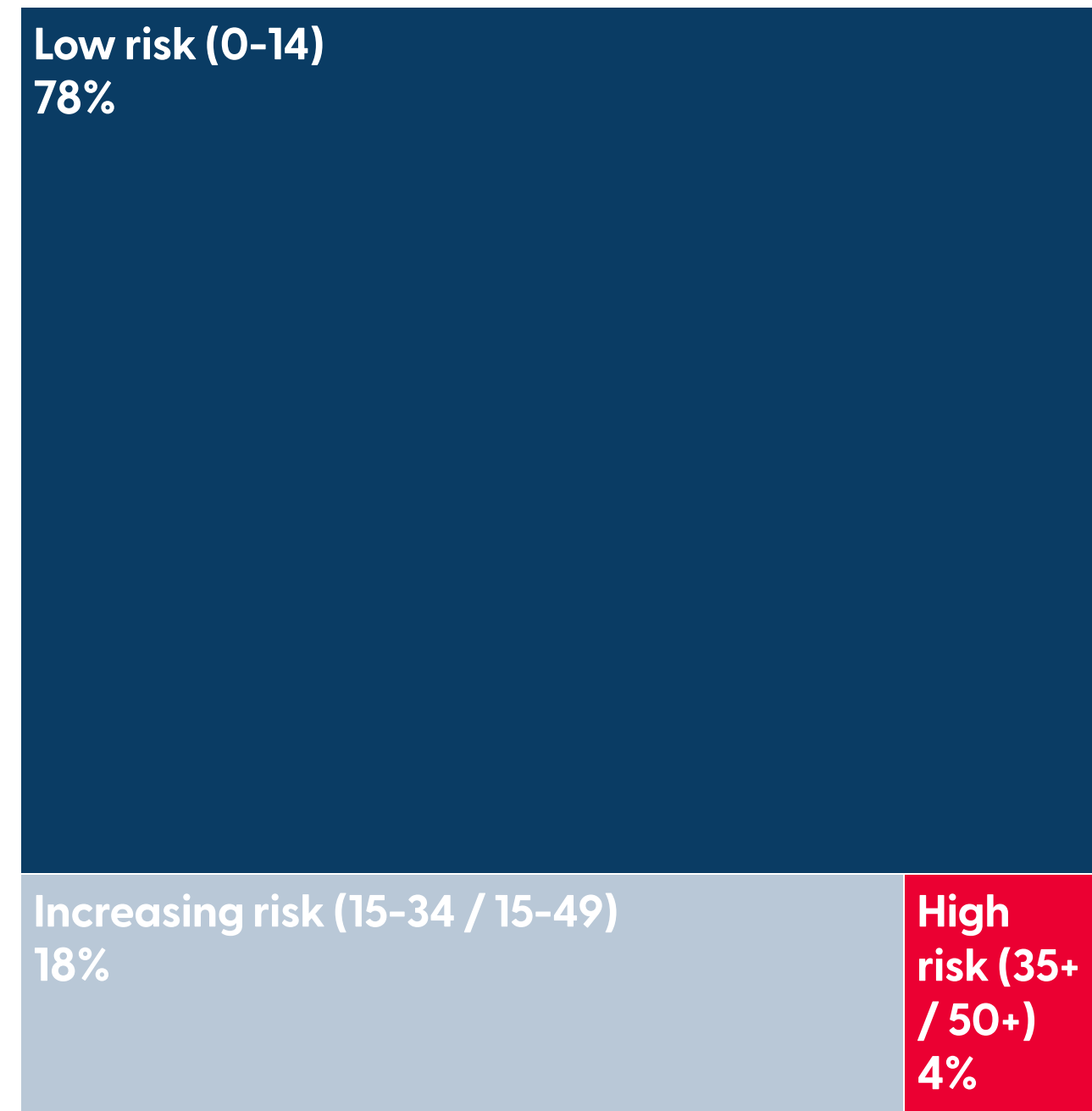


### DE Social Grade

45% of drinkers who are in the DE social grade never drink more than 6/8 units in a single occasion, compared to 39% of AB social grade

# How many units do drinkers consume in a week?

Nearly four in five UK drinkers (78%) drink within the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week<sup>8</sup>



The proportion of UK drinkers drinking within the UK Chief Medical Officer's low risk guidelines of 14 units of alcohol a week has risen from 70% in 2017 to 78% in 2021



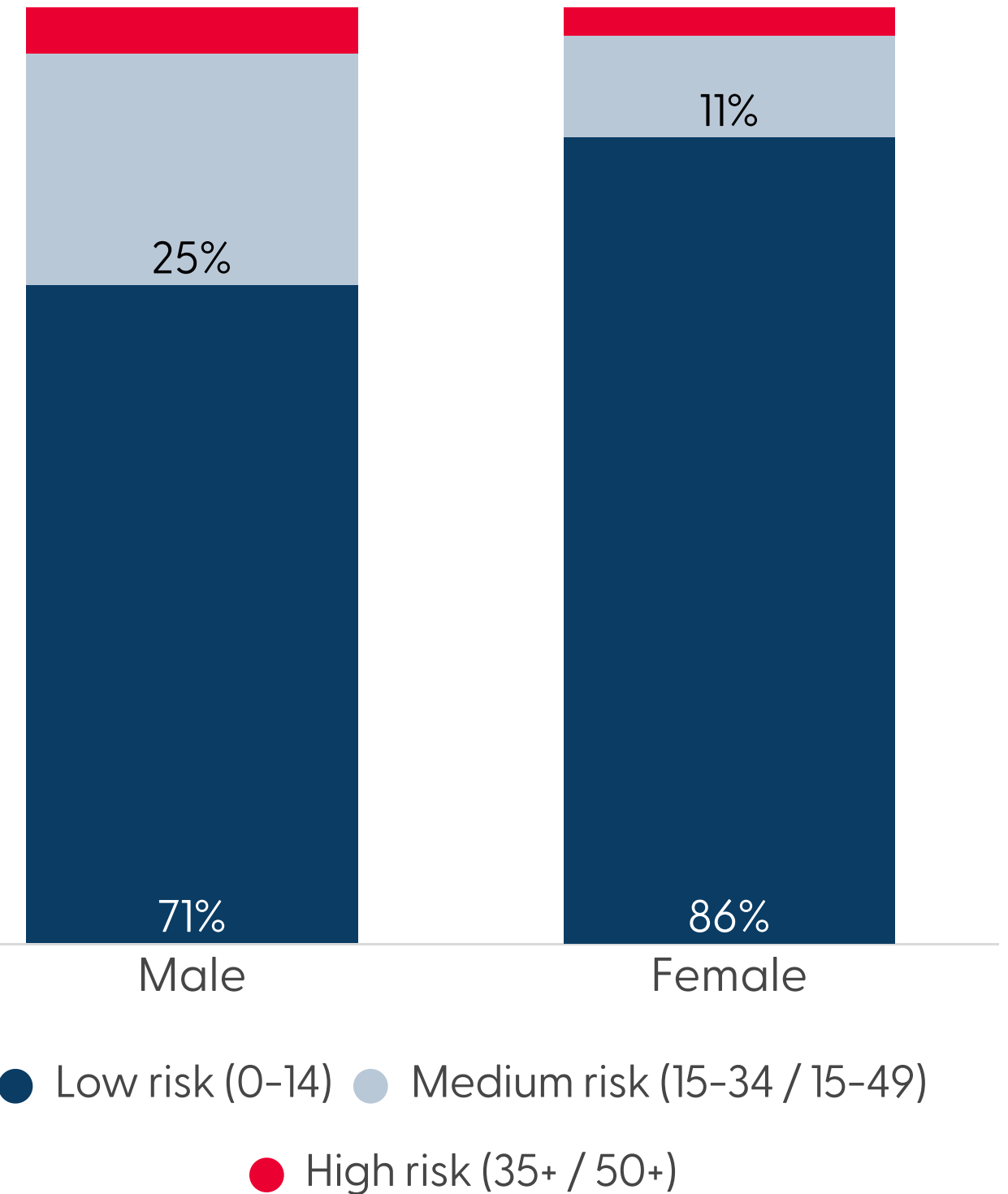
## Useful to know

Weekly units of alcohol are grouped into three risk categories: low, increasing and high. Low risk is 0 to 14 units while increasing and high risk differs by gender:

- **Females** who drink between 15 and 34 units are increasing risk, 35+ are high risk
- **Males** who drink between 15 and 49 units are increasing risk, 50+ are high risk

'Risk' refers to risk of harm from alcohol

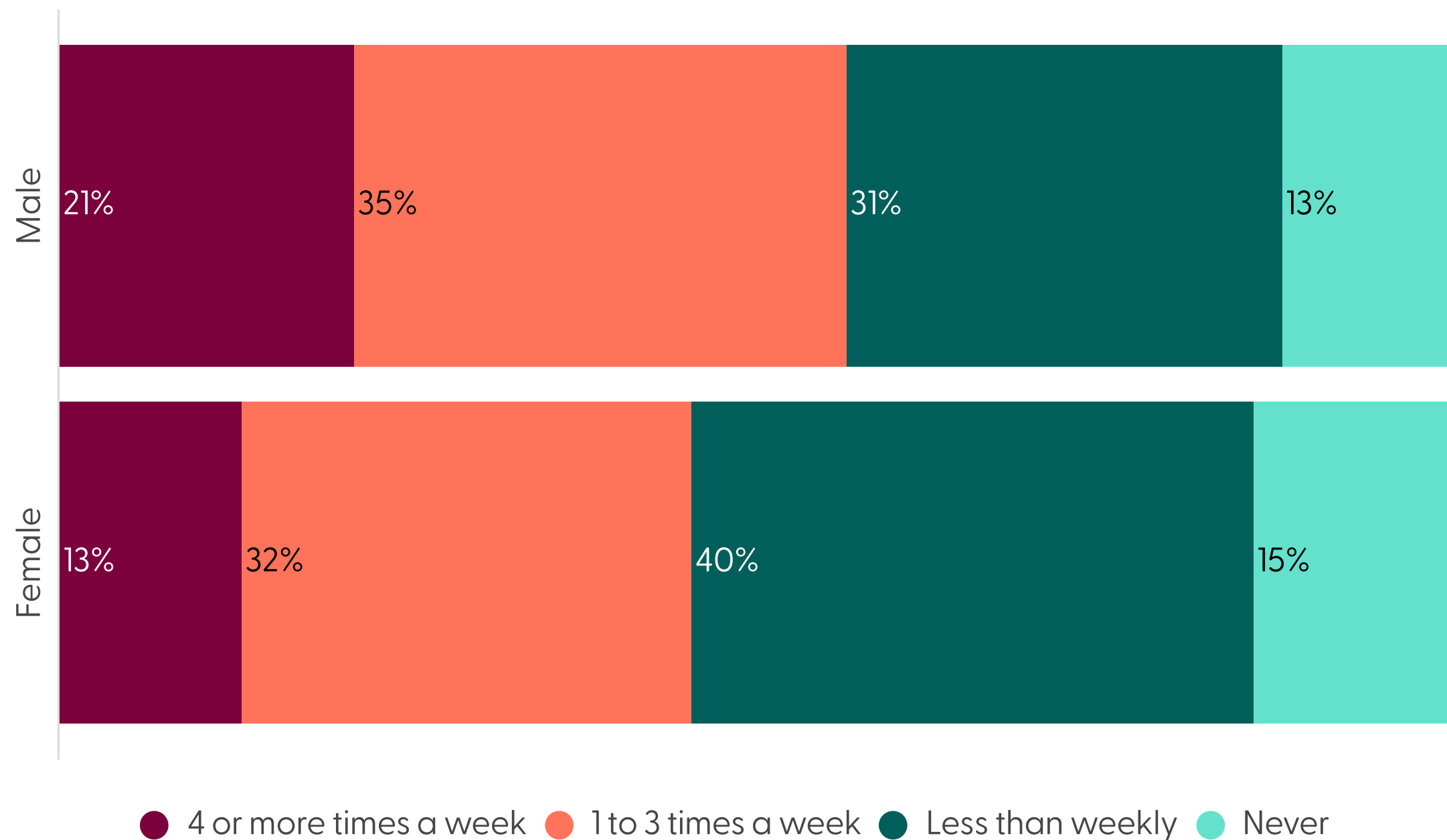
Male drinkers are consuming more units of alcohol in a week than females



# How do males and females compare in other drinking behaviours?

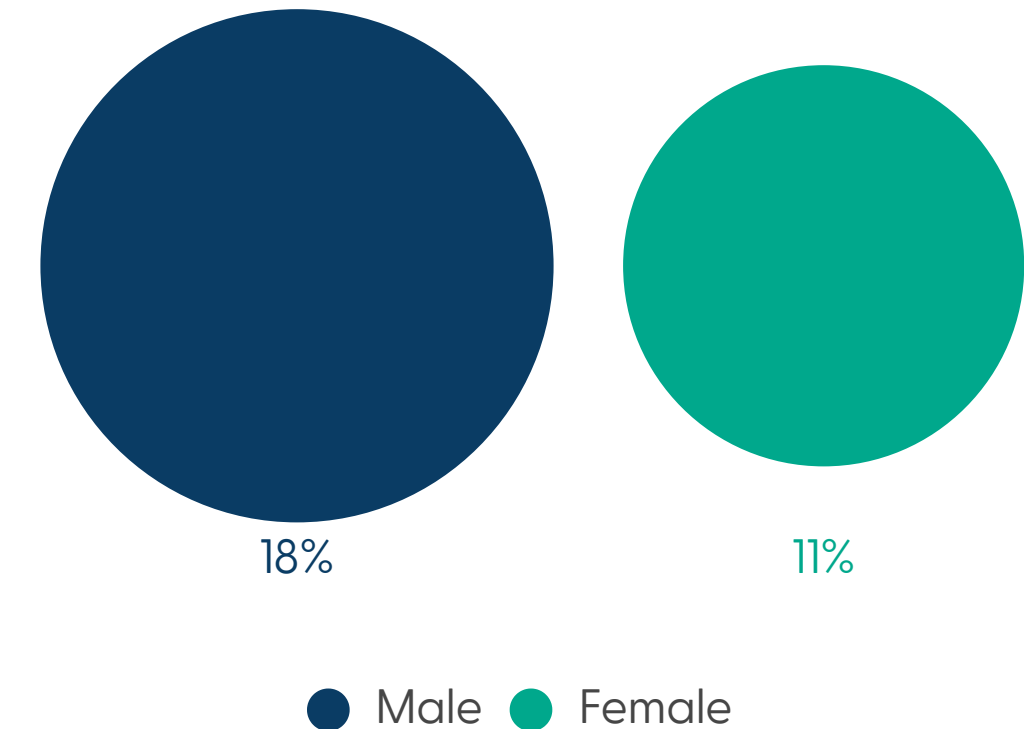
## Male adults are more likely than females to drink more often

21% of males drink four or more times a week, compared to 13% of females. 41% of female adults report drinking less often than weekly, compared to 31% of males.



Drinking frequency. Base: all UK adults, Males (n=4,450); Females (n=4,554)

## 18% of male drinkers binge drink at least once a week



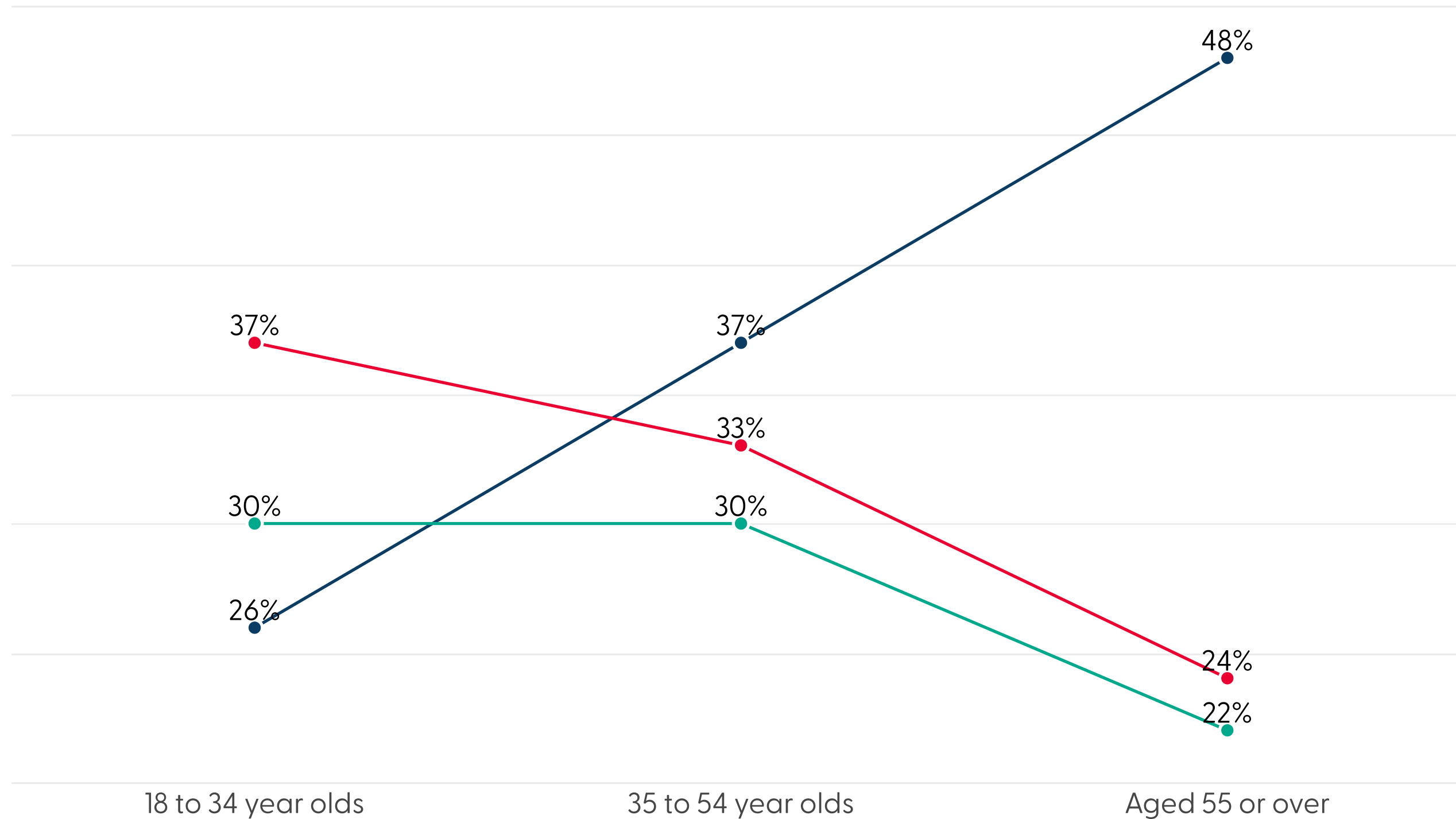
## Males are more likely than females to drink at home alone

29% of male drinkers have a drink at home alone at least once a week (compared to 18% of female drinkers)

# How drinking behaviours change as we get older

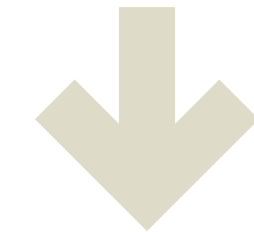
Comparing a range of drinking behaviours by age group reveals some significant differences

- People who drink 2+ times a week
- Drinkers who have 5 or more units of alcohol on a typical drinking day
- Drinkers who binge drink at least once a month



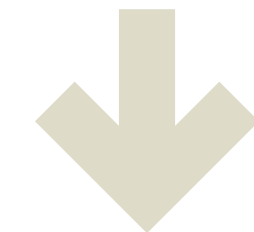
## As we get older, we drink more often

48% of people aged 55+ reported drinking alcohol two or more times a week; 14% drink six or more times a week



## But we drink less on a typical drinking day

24% of drinkers aged 55+ reported drinking five or more units in a typical day when drinking; 52% have one or two units



## And we are less likely to binge drink

52% of drinkers aged 55+ reported never having more than 6/8 units of alcohol on a single occasion over the last year

# Introducing the alcohol risk AUDIT screening test

The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)<sup>3</sup> is a series of questions used to understand someone's alcohol use.

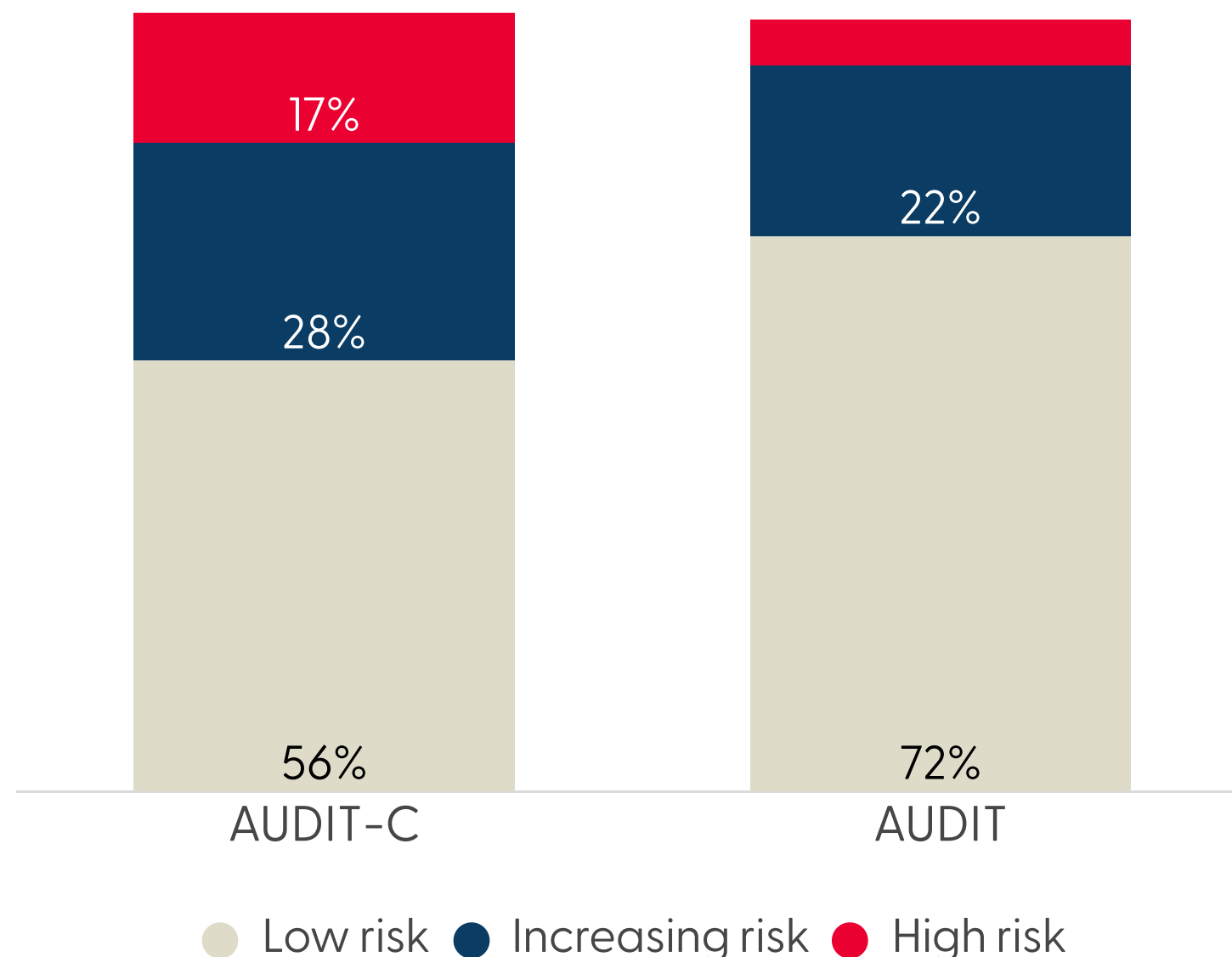
The AUDIT was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a simple, 10-question method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment.

The AUDIT assesses three domains: alcohol intake, dependence, and adverse consequences. Each item receives a score of 0–4, with a total possible score of 40.

A score of 0–7 indicates low risk, 8–15 indicates increasing risk, 16–19 indicates higher risk and a score of 20 or more indicates possible dependence.

The **AUDIT-C** is a shortened version of the 10-item AUDIT and asks the three consumption-related questions only. A score of 0 to 4 indicates low risk; 5 to 7 indicates increasing risk; 8 to 10 indicates higher risk; and 11 to 12 indicates possible dependence.

## How levels of risk amongst drinkers compare between AUDIT-C screening and the full AUDIT assessment



Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=7,911)



## AUDIT Risk Classifications

### Low risk

Low risk of causing future harm to themselves

### Increasing risk

Drinking at a level that increases the risk of damaging their health and could lead to serious medical conditions

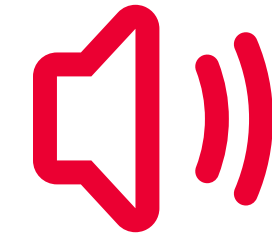
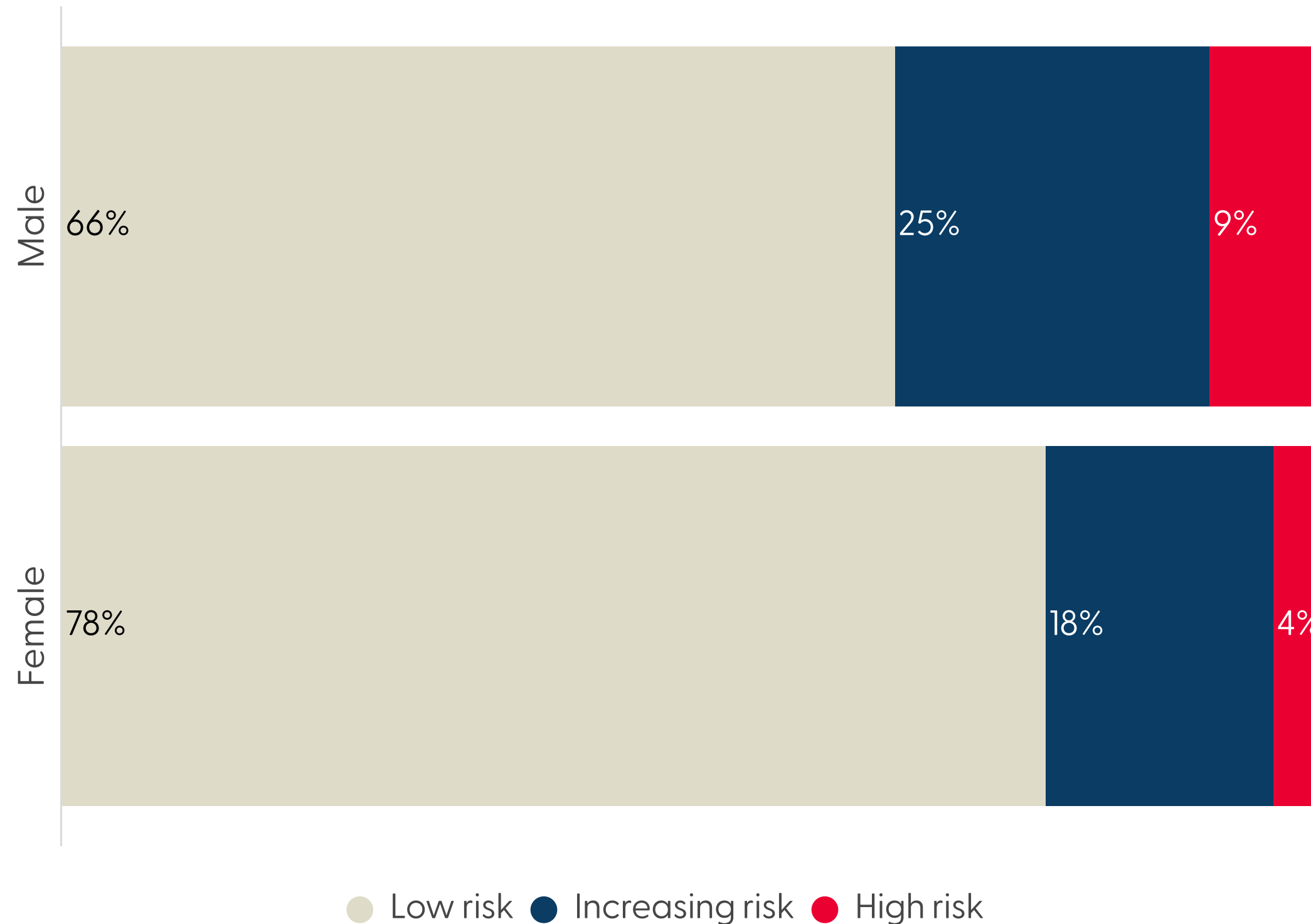
### High risk (or possible dependence)

This level of drinking has the greatest risk of health problems



# AUDIT alcohol risk levels by gender

Male drinkers are more likely to be high or increasing risk than female drinkers



## Observation

Using the full AUDIT assessment, 9% of male drinkers are high risk and 25% are increasing risk compared to 4% and 18% of female drinkers respectively.

22% of male drinkers are high risk based on the AUDIT-C, compared to 12% of female drinkers.



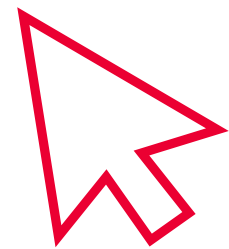
AUDIT. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, Males (n=3,960); Females (n=3,951)

# Where in the UK is alcohol risk highest?

Map of UK regions showing the proportion of adult drinkers categorised as increasing or high risk using the full AUDIT

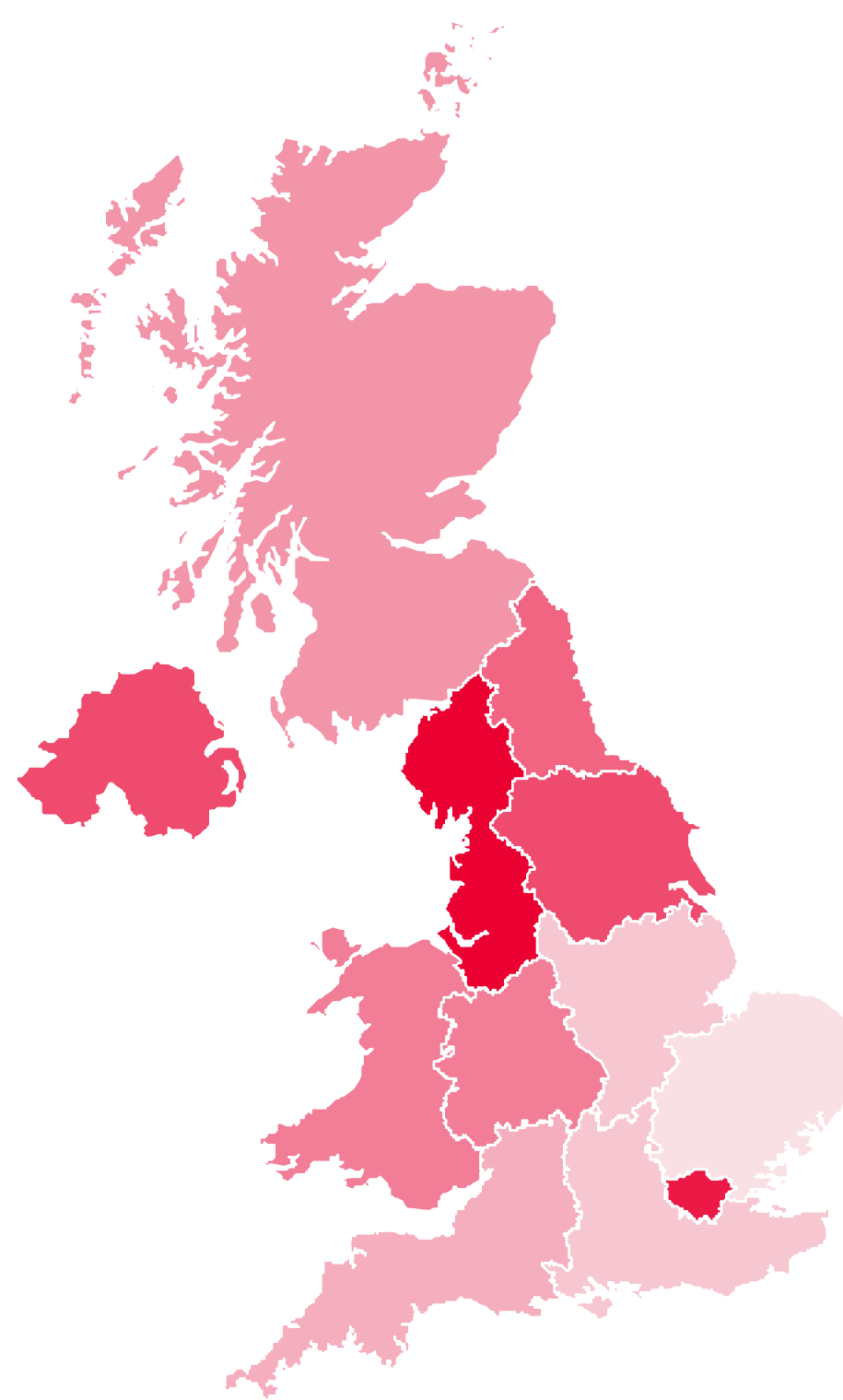


**28% of drinkers across England are increasing or high risk based on the full AUDIT assessment**



## Hover

Hover over a region to display data



## Observation

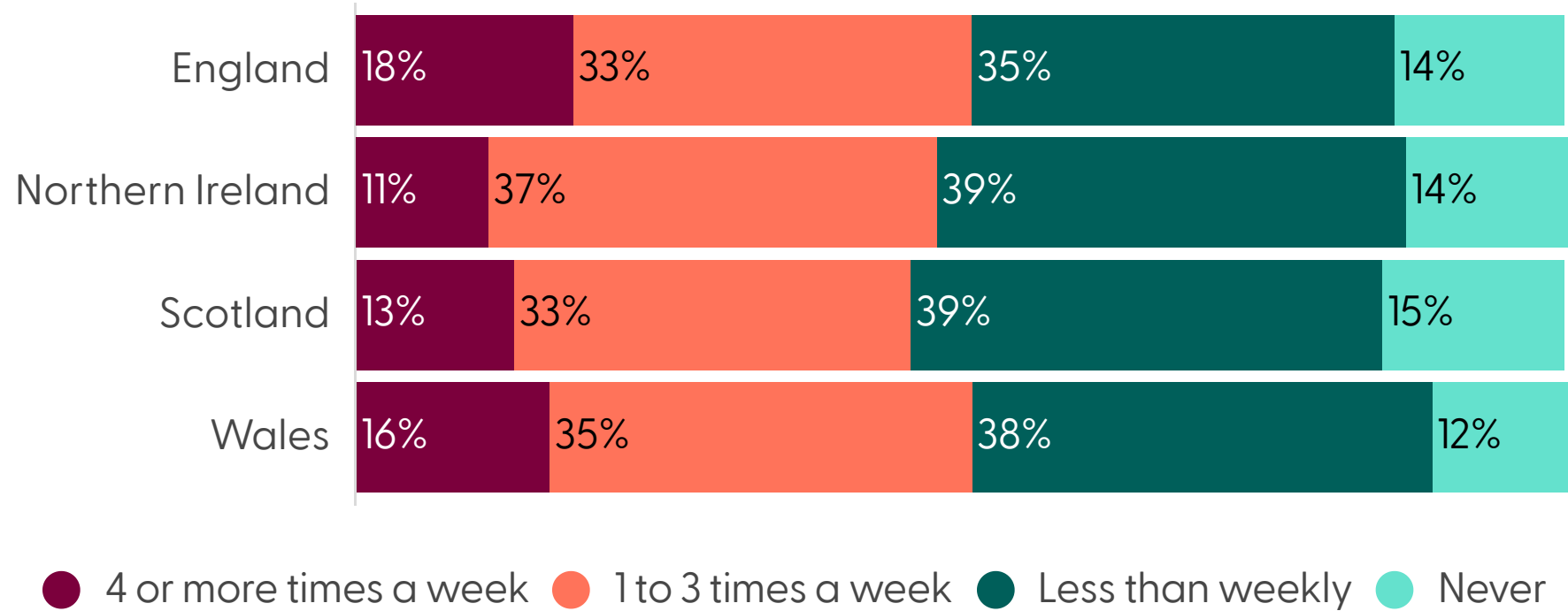
A third (33%) of drinkers in the North West are increasing or high risk based on the full AUDIT assessment, closely followed by London (32%).

Three in ten drinkers (30%) in Northern Ireland are or increasing or high risk based on the full AUDIT.

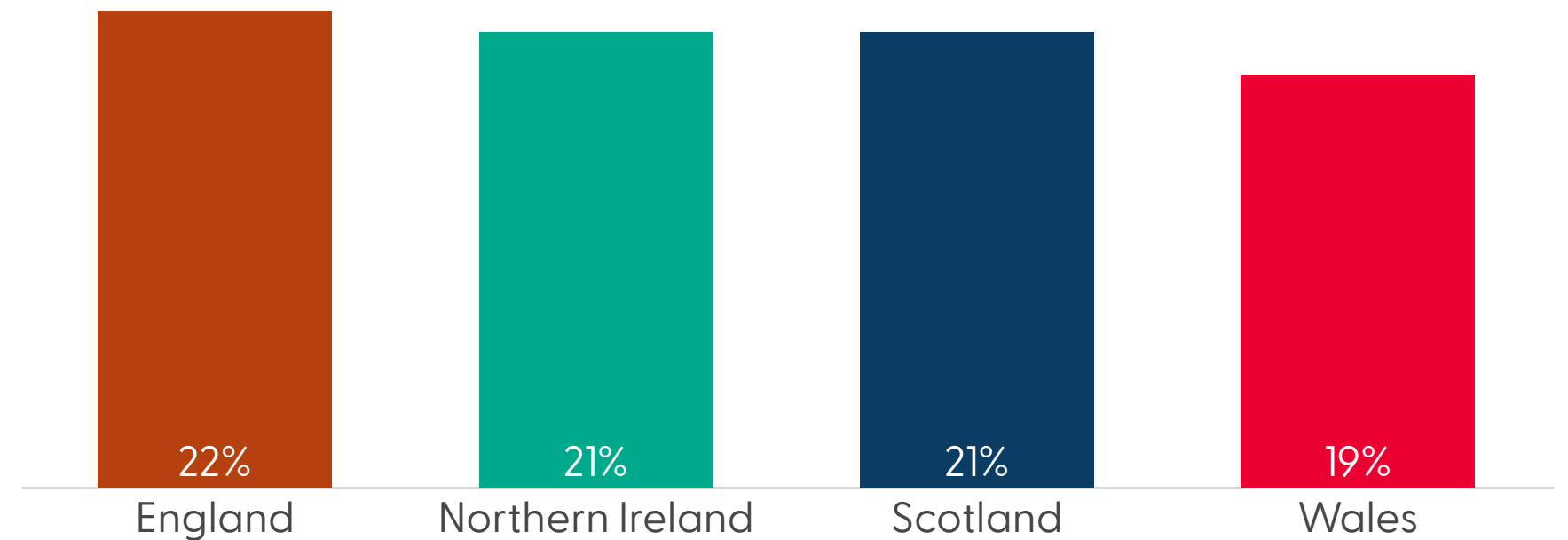


# How do drinking behaviours look across UK countries?

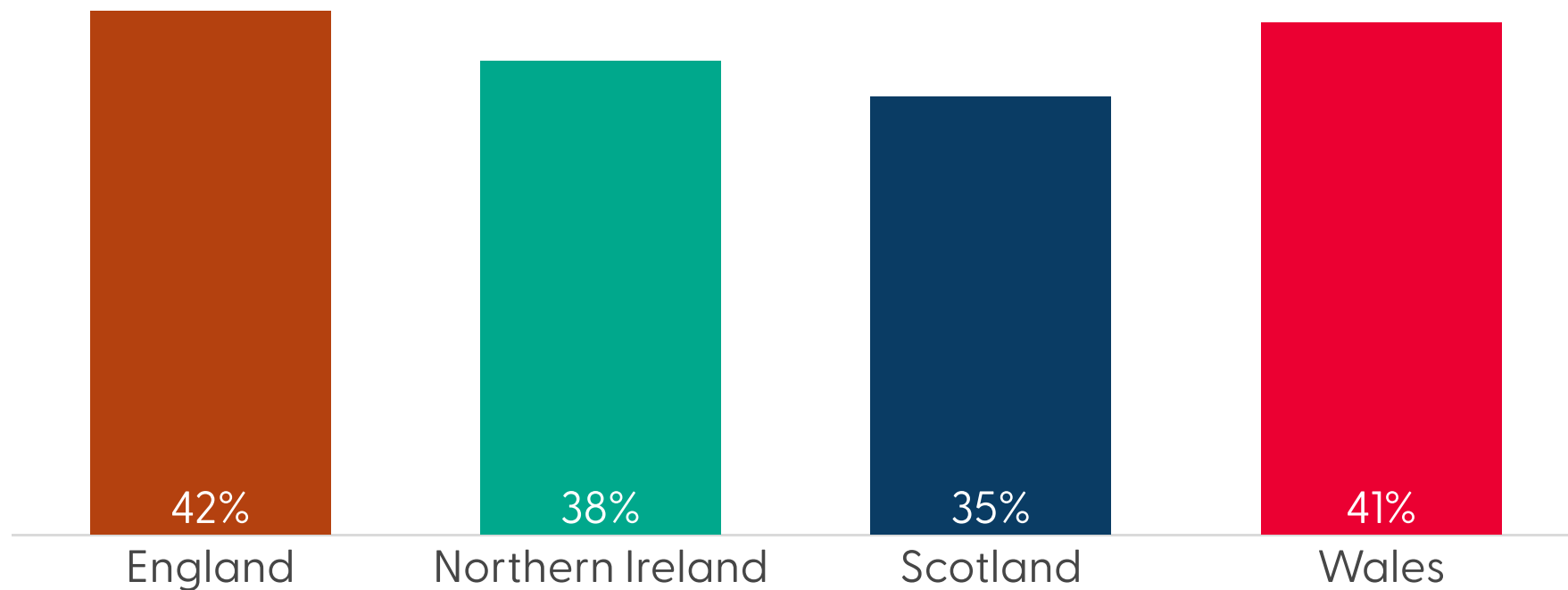
## How frequently all adults drink alcohol



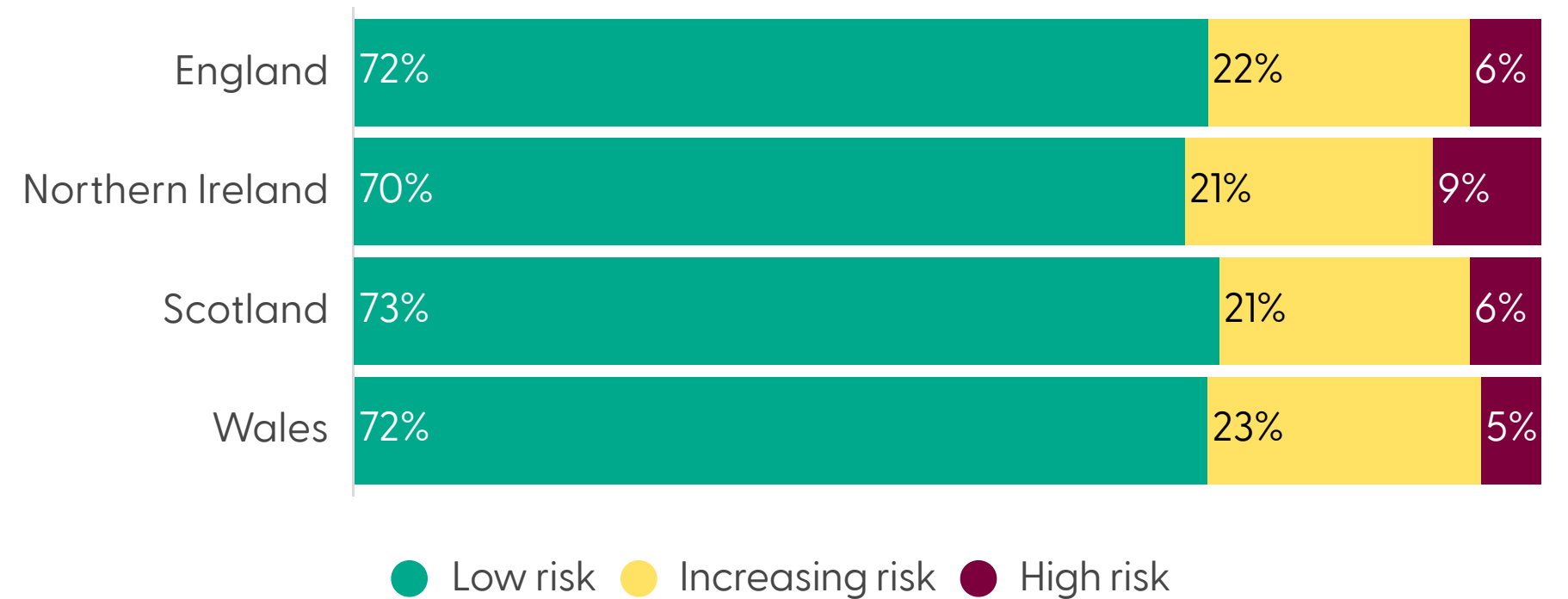
## % of drinkers who drink more than the Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week



## % drinkers who never binge drink



## AUDIT assessment alcohol risk classifications



# How has the pandemic impacted drinking?

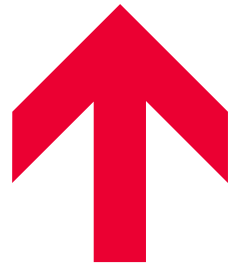
**Monitor data and online community insights**

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# The impact of the pandemic: **what to look out for**



More people were drinking more than usual during the first lockdown (March-June 2020) compared to May-June 2021.



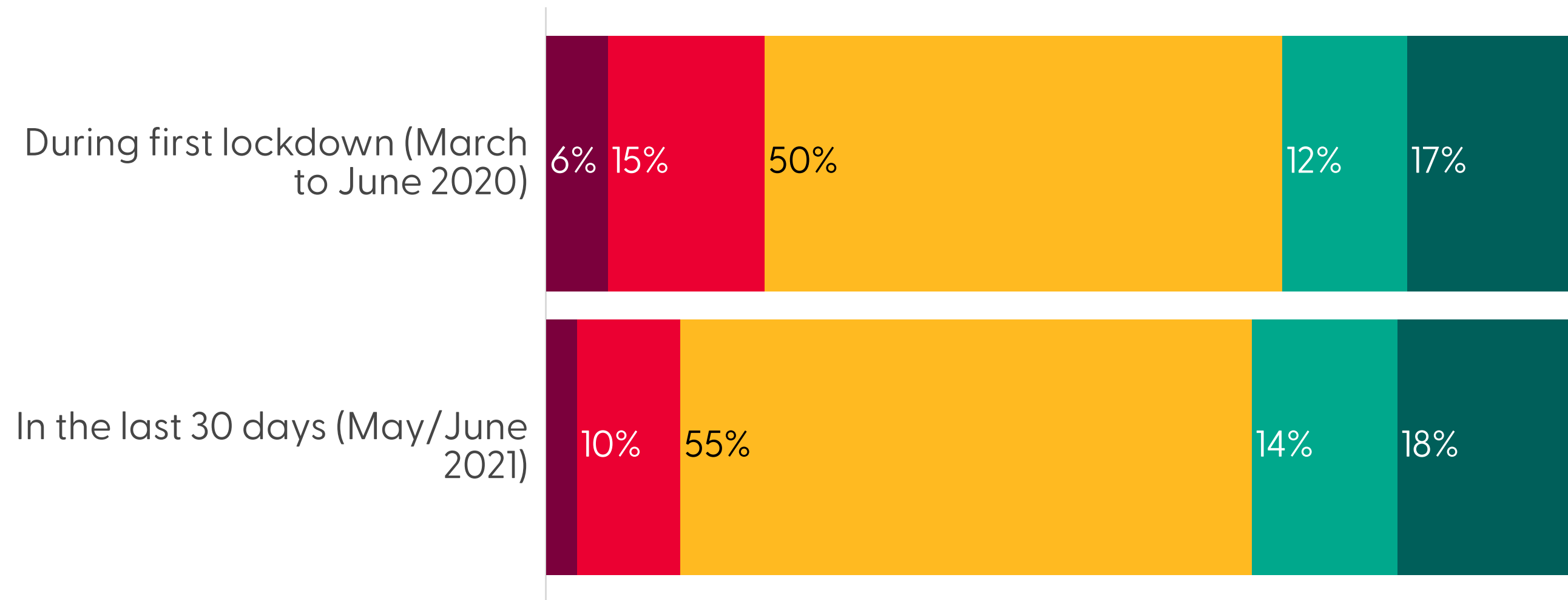
A fifth (21%) of drinkers across England reported drinking more in the first national lockdown than they usually would have before the pandemic; this was highest amongst drinkers in the North East.



The pandemic, and particularly each lockdown, created periods of extreme emotion whilst stripping people of their usual coping mechanisms and removing many self-imposed barriers to drinking, which led some drinkers to turn to alcohol as a form of coping and/or entertainment.

# How does pandemic drinking compare to pre-pandemic drinking?

The clear polarisation of change in drinking behaviours during the first national lockdown has become less prominent, with many drinkers reporting either a return to pre-pandemic drinking levels or drinking less than they usually would have in the last 30 days (May/June 2021)



## Observation

21% of drinkers reported drinking more than they would have usually between March and June 2020 compared to before the pandemic. This has dropped to 13% who are drinking more than pre-pandemic levels during the previous 30 days (May/June 2021).

Half of UK drinkers did not change their drinking levels during the first lockdown.

- Much more than before the pandemic
- Slightly more than before the pandemic
- About the same amount
- Slightly less than before the pandemic
- Much less than before the pandemic

Drinking compared to before the pandemic. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol excluding don't know and prefer not to say (during first lockdown n=7,702; in the last 30 days n=7,696)

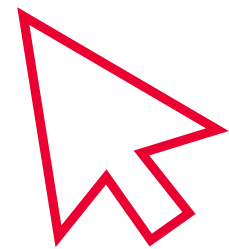


# Where in the UK were people drinking more in lockdown?

Map of UK regions showing the proportion of drinkers who reported drinking more than they usually would have pre-pandemic during the first lockdown (March-June 2020)

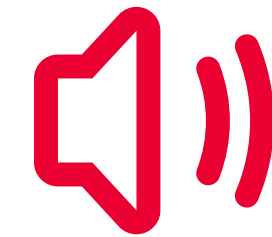
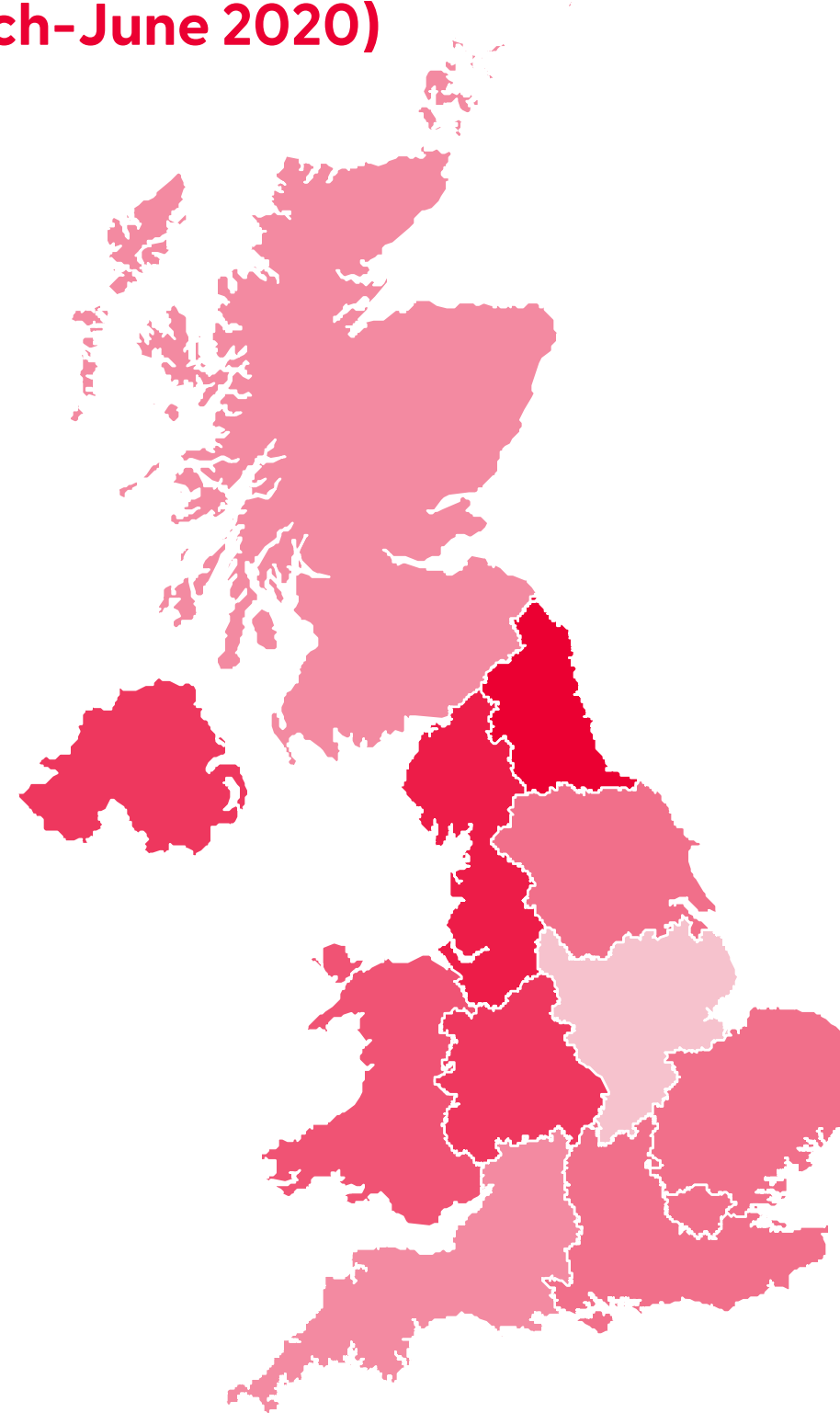


**21% of drinkers across England reported drinking more in the first national lockdown than they usually would have before the pandemic**



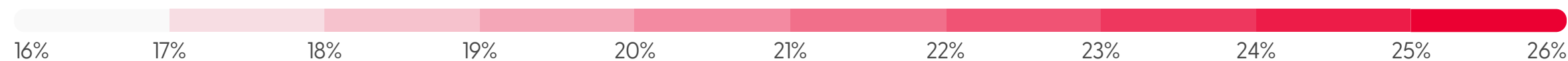
## Hover

Hover over a region to display data



## Observation

The North East has the highest proportion of drinkers who reported drinking more during the first national lockdown than they usually would have (26%); the East Midlands has the lowest proportion (18%).



# The online community: the impact of the pandemic

For many, the pandemic created periods of extreme emotion whilst stripping people of their usual coping mechanisms

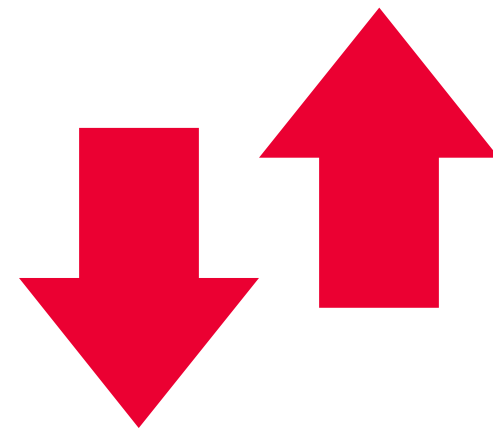
## Dealing with extremes of emotion

Through the pandemic, people had to deal with periods of extreme emotions, including loneliness, high levels of stress and anxiety and boredom.

## Loss of alternative coping mechanisms

The pandemic stripped many people of existing coping mechanisms, such as spending time with others and taking part in different activities.

For some, and particularly high risk drinkers, alcohol often became a key method of coping with their emotions through the pandemic.



## Fewer barriers to drinking

The loss of usual routine and structure appeared to erode self-imposed barriers to drinking, e.g. driving, going into work or spending time on other activities.

## New drinking situations/occasions

The pandemic also created new situations or increased the frequency of occasions in which people were drinking:

- Virtual socialising
- Drinking at home (for those who did not do so previously)
- Drinking in public places (e.g. in public parks)
- Drinking with housemates/neighbours (e.g. in the garden/street)

“ During the pandemic, I lacked a normal routine or structure. Once I had finished working from home, done the housework and dinner and got my daughter to bed, I feel like pouring a drink made me feel settled and added some structure and something to look forward to in the evening. I am a very routine person, so the lack of structure with normal working conditions, school drop off, attending the gym really affected me. I feel having a drink added some structure to my day.

*Female, 25-34, Parent U18, High Risk drinker, N.Ireland*

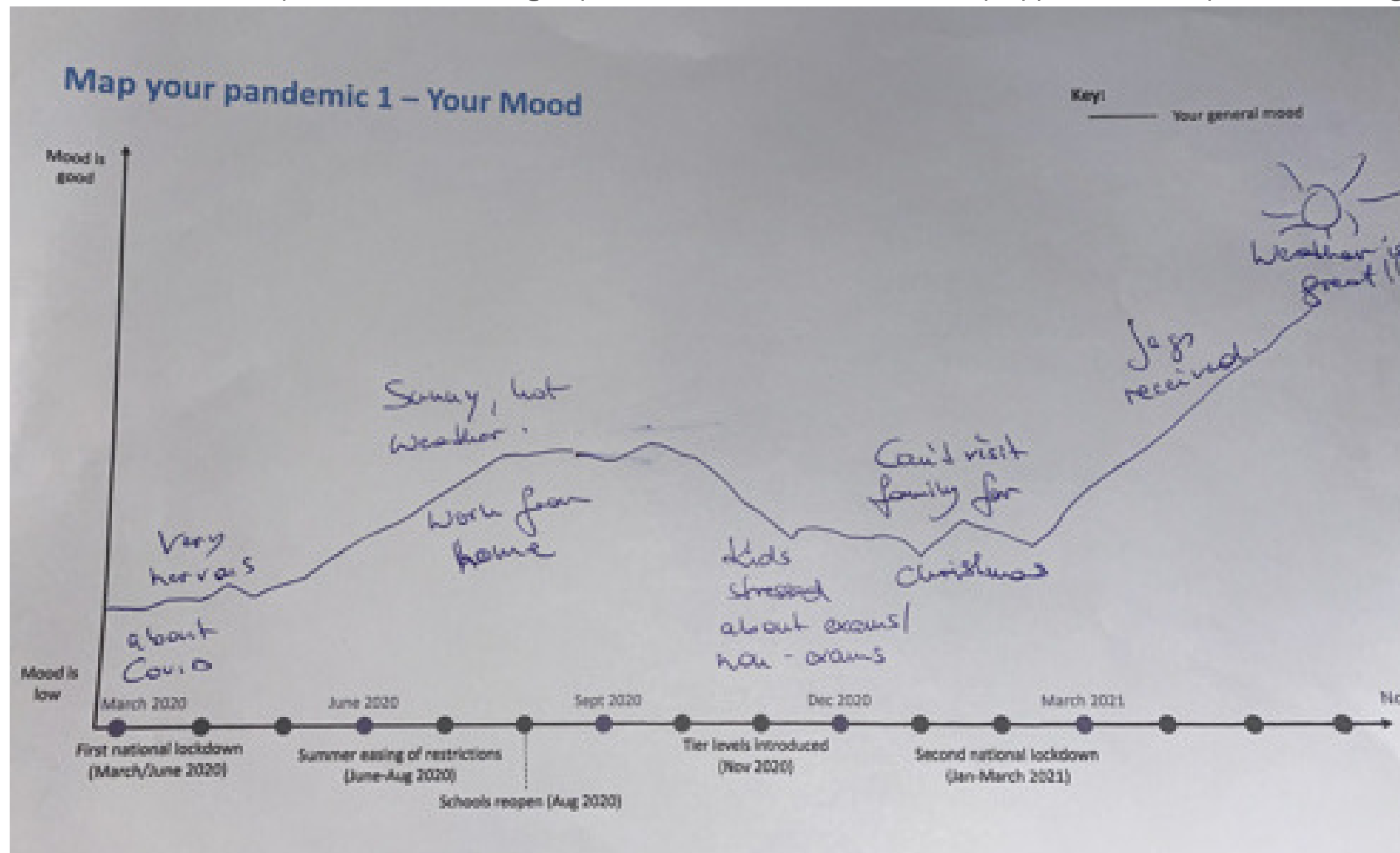
”

# The online community: extremes of emotions

Several community participants experienced very low moments during the pandemic, particularly towards the end of the first lockdown and the first few months of 2021; moods often improved when restrictions were eased

## Mapping changes in mood over the pandemic

The online community were asked to draw graphs to show how the pandemic affected their mood and how their alcohol consumption changed over the course of the pandemic. The graph below illustrates a fairly typical example of the highs and lows experienced by participants.



“ At the start, I felt really nervous and scared because we didn't know what to expect. By June 2020, the sun started to come out and we were allowed to meet outside with friends and celebrate. In September, the kids exams were cancelled, that was really stressful. And the whole home schooling thing impacted my mood.  
*Female, 35-44, Parent U18, Scotland* ”

# Reasons given for drinking

## Motivations and community insights

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# Reasons given for drinking: **what to look out for**



People are more likely to report that they drink for enhancement and social reasons rather than coping or conformity.



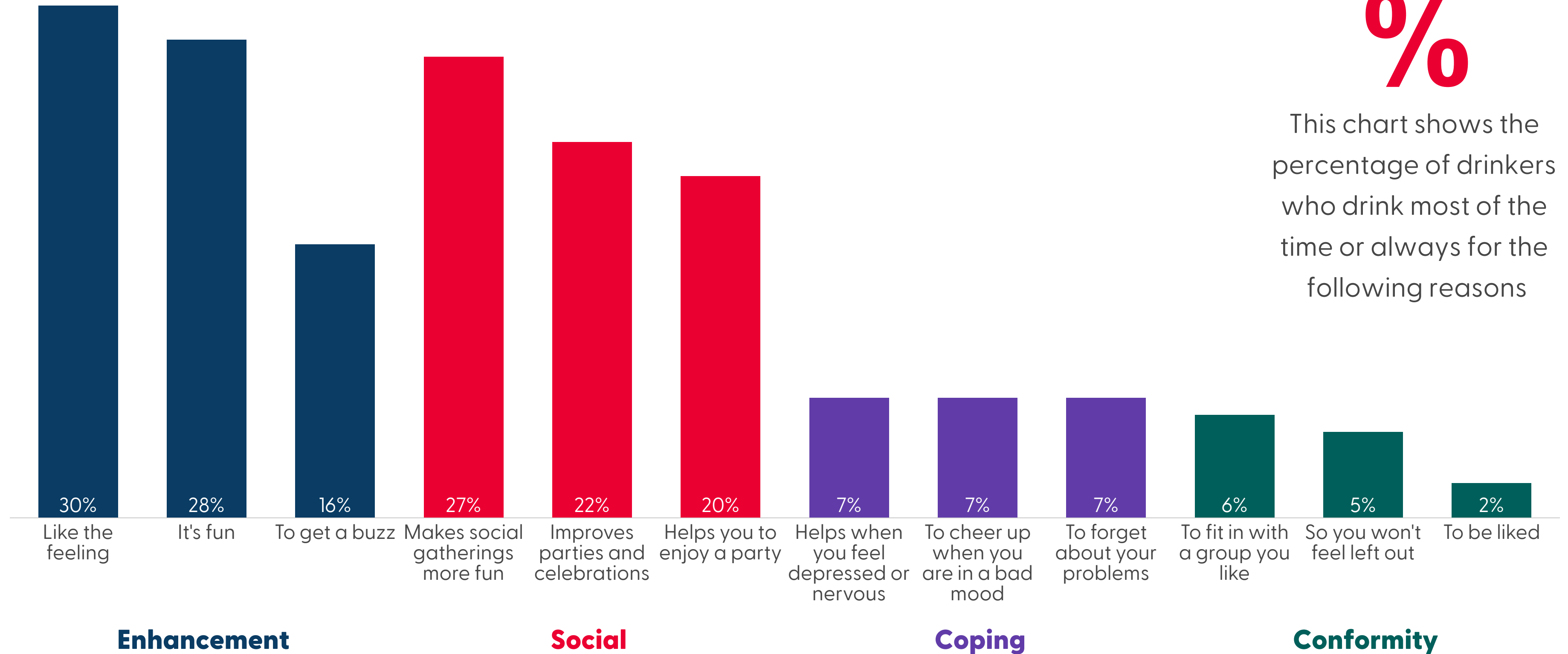
Those who reported drinking much more during the first lockdown compared to pre-pandemic levels were much more likely to cite drinking alcohol for coping reasons than those who reported drinking less.



Within the online community, increased levels of drinking over the course of the pandemic were often prompted by periods of intense boredom, isolation and high levels of stress and anxiety.

# What are people's motivations to drink alcohol?

People are most likely to drink for enhancement and social reasons

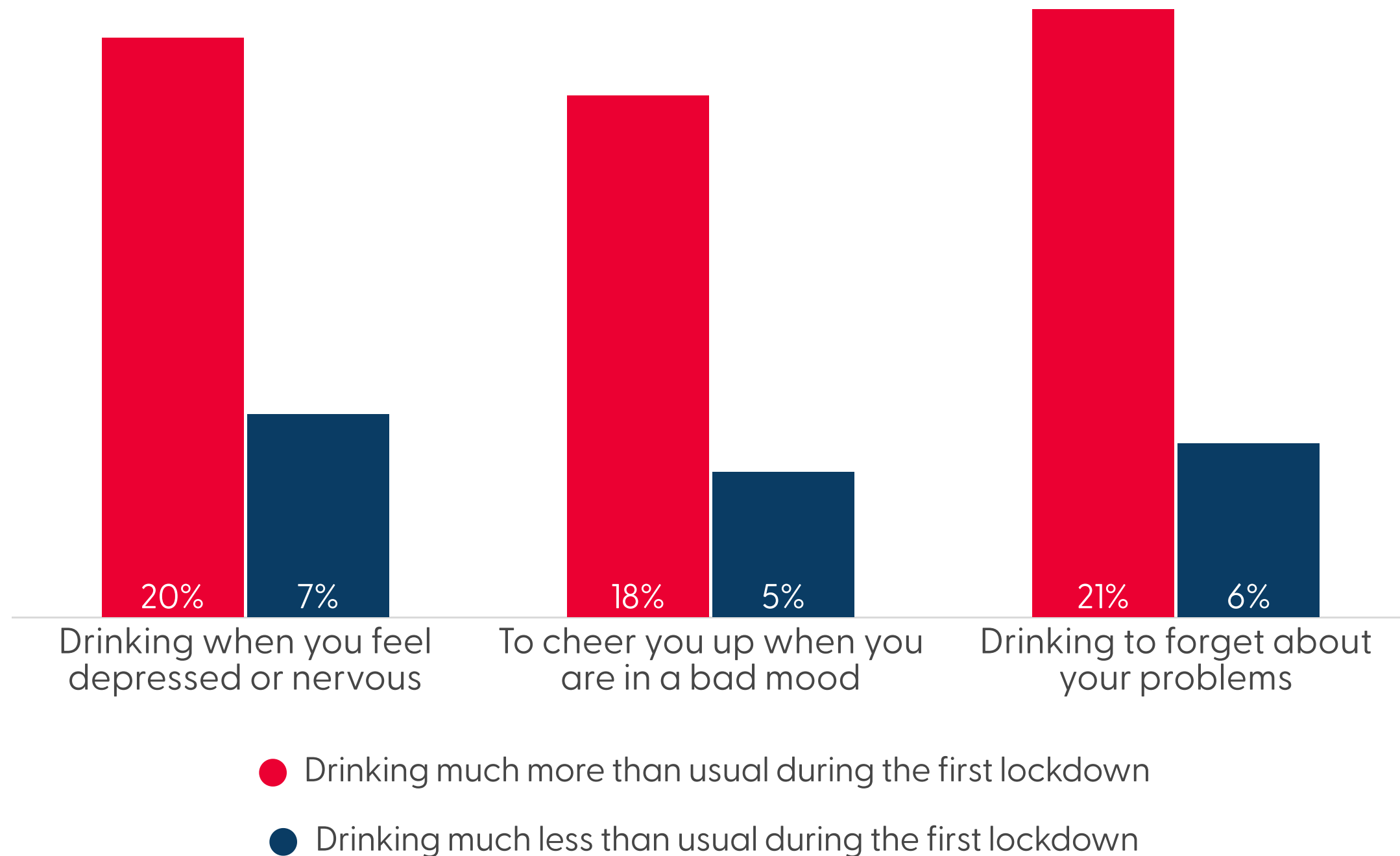


Drinking motivations. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=7,911)



# Drinking to cope during the pandemic

Those drinking much more than usual during the first lockdown were much more likely to drink alcohol for coping reasons most of the time or always



Drinking motivations by Drinking in lockdown compared to before the pandemic.. Base: all UK adults who reported drinking much more than usual during the first lockdown (n=507); all UK adults who reported drinking much less than usual during the first lockdown (n=1,307)

## Who are the people drinking to cope?



### Most deprived

10% of people who live in the most deprived areas drink to forget about their problems, compared to 5% of least deprived



### Aged 18 to 24

12% of 18 to 24 year olds who drink because it helps when they feel depressed or nervous, compared to 5% of those aged 55+



### Made redundant

12% of people who were made redundant (or in process of) during the pandemic drink to forget about their problems, compared to 5% of drinkers still in employment

%s refer to drinkers who selected most of the time or always

# Drinking more to 'help with stress or anxiety'

The pandemic caused high levels of stress and anxiety for many whilst simultaneously removing methods of relieving stress/improving anxiety, leading some drinkers to rely more heavily on alcohol as a coping mechanism



In the 2020 Monitor<sup>9</sup>, 37% of those who drank more during lockdown did so 'to help with stress or anxiety'



Many experienced periods of high stress and anxiety during the pandemic

Common reasons for higher than usual stress/anxiety levels:

- Loneliness/isolation
- Anxiety over catching COVID-19/loved ones catching COVID-19
- Job uncertainty/redundancy
- Increased workload
- Homeschooling (particularly when also working)
- Unsuitable working environment (e.g. working from home in shared accommodation/studio flat)

“

Right at the beginning of the pandemic was quite stressful. No-one knew what was going on, how long the situation would last. My company was struggling, and a huge number of redundancies were announced. I think as a result, I did start drinking more.

*Male, 25-34, Mental Health impact, England*

”

“

I was in shared accommodation and I wasn't getting on very well with my housemate. At that time it was really stressful because you couldn't just go looking for a different house. It was really scary, you couldn't go anywhere or do anything so after work I stayed at home in my bedroom and drank wine at the height of it all.

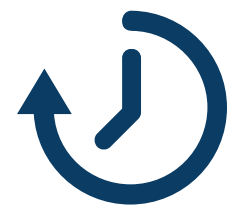
*Female, 35-44, High Risk drinker, Mental Health impact, Northern Ireland*

”

# Drinking more due to a lack of routine/more time available

For many, having more time available, being unable to take part in other activities and losing structure to their day led to increased drinking; losing routines appears to have eroded barriers to drinking

Key reasons given for drinking more than usual during lockdown (in the 2020 Monitor<sup>2</sup>):



'Having more time available/not occupied with other activities' (52%)



'Less structure to my day/week' (50%)

**In the 2021 Monitor, 17% of people who work from home have been drinking on more days a week since the pandemic began (compared to 13% of those who work at their usual place of employment)**



**The lack of a normal routine removed self-imposed barriers to drinking**

Being unable to continue with many aspects of their usual routine, such as working outside the home, going to the gym, going to events etc. eroded self-imposed barriers to drinking.

Many participants drank more due to:

- not having to drive to work/to kids' activities/to see friends
- working from home - not commuting, not having to see people in person, starting the evening earlier
- every day feeling like a weekend/a holiday (especially if they were not working)
- having more alcohol than usual in the house (due to bulk buying)

“ We all did hard days working from home. By three o'clock, instead of getting a glass of water as I would in the office, I was getting a refreshing Jack Daniels and Cola to drink while I responded to any outstanding emails.

*Male, 44-54, High Risk drinker, Wales*



# Drinking more to 'relieve boredom/for something to do'

People found themselves with more time and less structure to their days and often turned to alcohol to help pass time

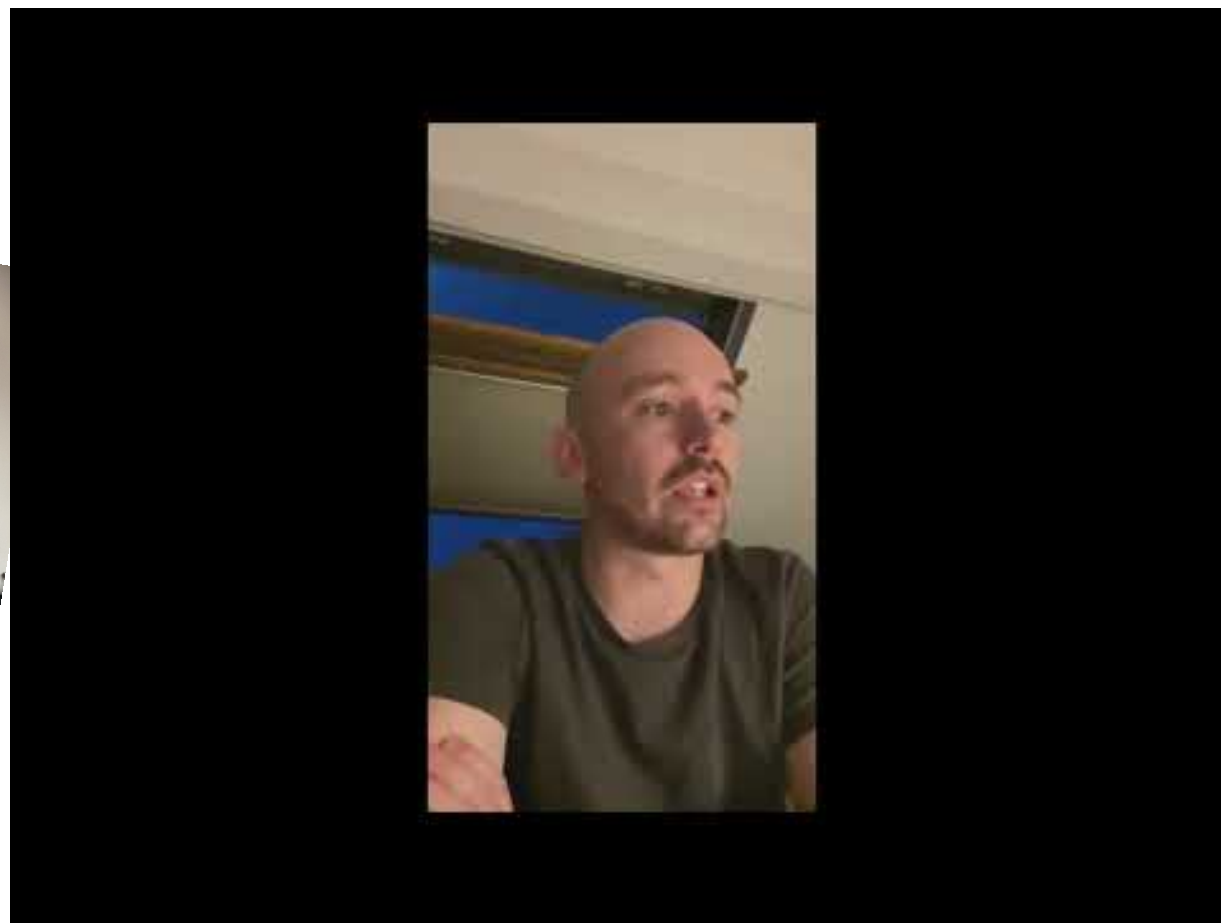


In the 2020 Monitor<sup>2</sup>, 36% of those who drank more during lockdown did so 'to relieve boredom/for something to do'



Drinking alcohol was seen as an 'easy' way to relieve the monotony and pass time

With restrictions removing people's usual activities and routines, many participants drank alcohol as 'something to do' or as a way to make time pass quicker.



“ Personally, one of the reasons I have been drinking more is because I am bored and have nothing else to do. I used to go and see friends, go swimming, go to the cinema. Now, and especially during lockdown, I finish work and I have nothing to do until it's time to go back to work. There have been many times, especially over the weekends when I have been drinking with the intention of getting drunk to make the time pass quicker.

*Female, 35-44, High Risk drinker, Mental Health impact, N.Ireland*”

# Drinking behaviours

When and where and how much people drink

---

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# Drinking behaviours: **what to look out for**



A tale of two extremes: a similar proportion of UK drinkers reported drinking on more and less days than usual during the pandemic.



Four in five drinkers (80%) had a drink at home in the last seven days (during May/June 2021).

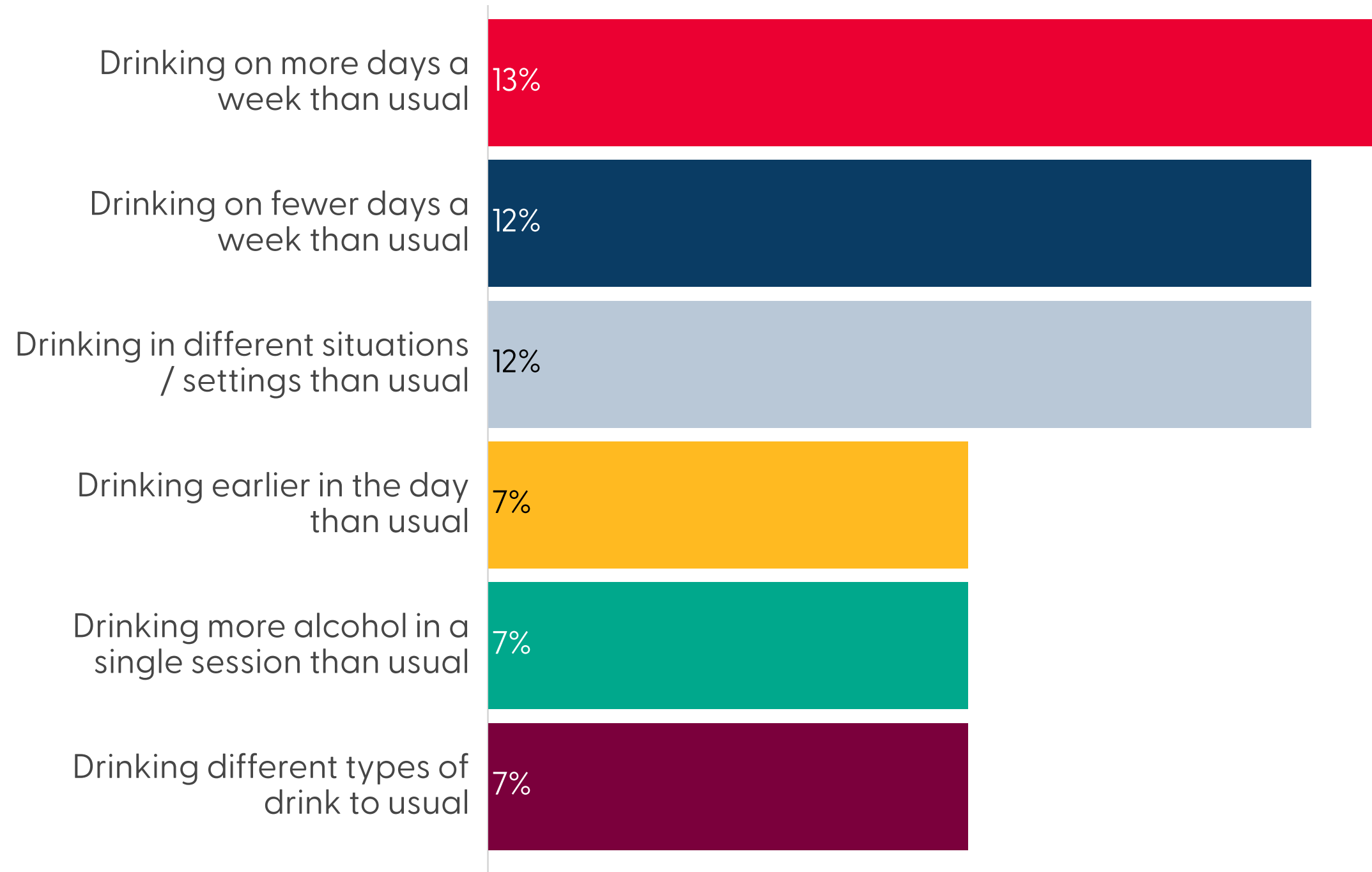


A third of people (34%) who had a drink in the last seven days did so alone.




# How have drinking behaviours changed?


**A similar proportion of UK drinkers reported drinking on more and fewer days than usual during the pandemic**




**Students appear to have changed their drinking behaviours most over the pandemic compared to other UK drinkers**

 **20%**  
Drinking on more days a week than usual (compared to 13% of all UK drinkers)

 **28%**  
Drinking in different situations / settings than usual (compared to 12% of all UK drinkers)

 **14%**  
Drinking different types of drink to usual (compared to 7% of all UK drinkers)

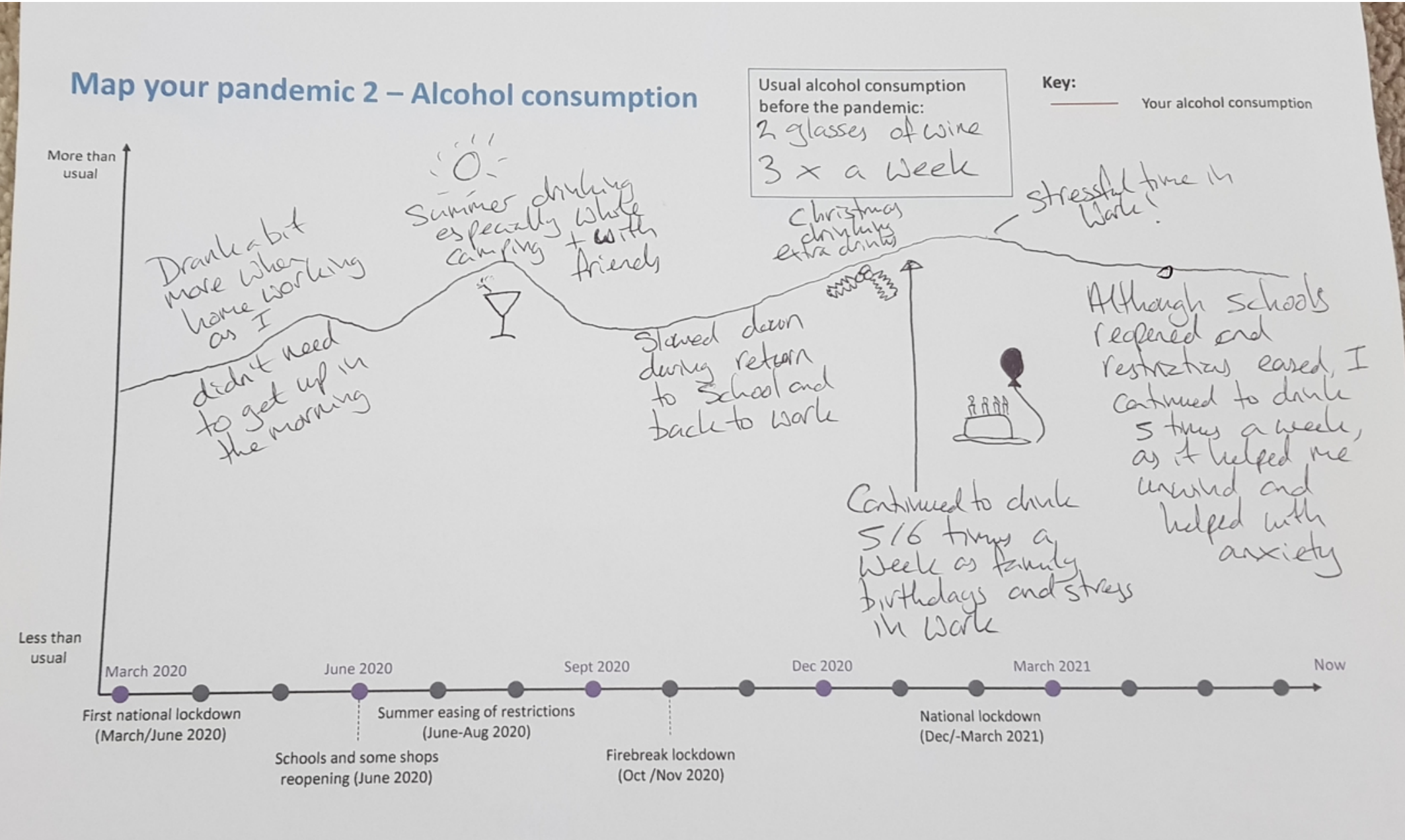
 Drinking behaviour since pandemic began. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=7,911)

# Drinking more, more often and earlier in the day

**For some members of the online community, drinking more often and earlier in the day compared to before the pandemic was a gradual process, for others this occurred during specific periods during the pandemic**



Whilst some people were drinking more/more frequently during specific periods, others found their drinking steadily increased over the entire pandemic. Drinking levels often spiked at specific points, particularly during the first national lockdown (March-June 2020) and the lockdown in January-March 2021, during summer as restrictions eased and over Christmas.



## Mapping changes in alcohol consumption over the pandemic

“

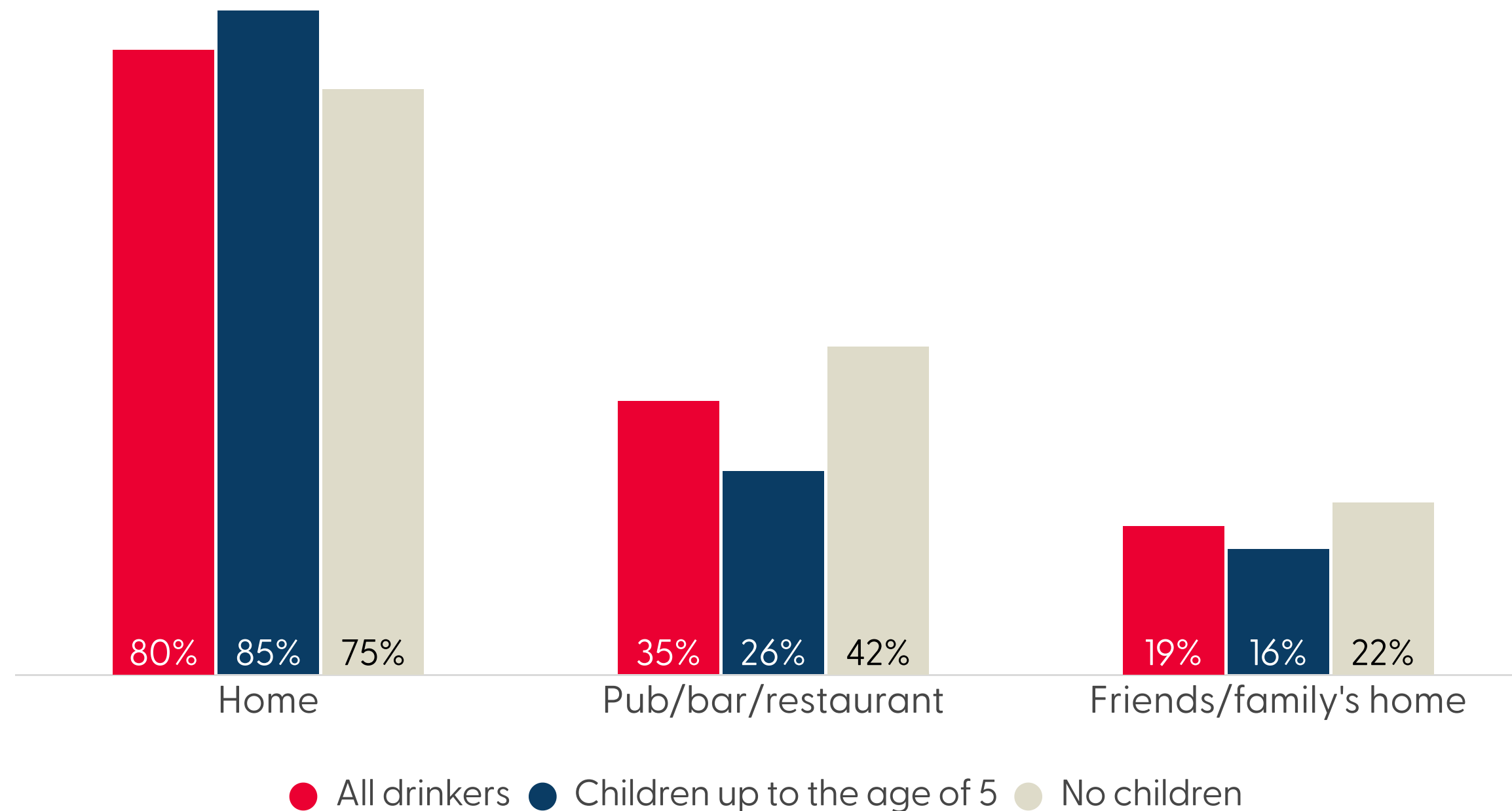
My drinking first increased because I didn't need to travel to school or work, probably an extra glass or two of wine a week. Then in between January and March [2021] it was very stressful with work and home schooling, I did start to drink more, about 5 or 6 times a week. It might just be a glass of gin and lemonade or a glass of wine, just something to help me unwind after a busy day.

*Female, 35-44, Parent U18, Wales*

”

# Where were people drinking in May/June 2021?

Four in five drinkers (80%) had a drink at home in the last seven days (at a time when the hospitality industry had reopened, but restrictions, e.g. a maximum of six or two households indoors still remained); drinkers without children were more likely to have gone out to the pub or someone else's home for a drink



## What else do we know about where people have been drinking?

38% of drinkers with an AB social grade had a drink at a pub, bar or restaurant in the last seven days, compared to 30% of those with a DE social grade.

86% of retired drinkers had a drink at home in the last seven days, compared to 65% of full-time students. Over half of students (52%) had a drink at a pub, bar or restaurant compared to 29% of retired drinkers and 37% of drinkers who work (either full time or part time).

Where drank in last seven days. Base: all UK adults who drank alcohol in last seven days (n=5,721); Children up to the age of 5 (n=424); No children (n=2,574)

# Drinking in new situations

The pandemic removed some of the usual drinking situations but also created new ones



In 2021, 21% of high risk drinkers (full AUDIT) have been drinking in different situations/settings during the pandemic compared to 9% of low risk drinkers



Those who previously had only/mainly drunk when socialising outside the home started to drink at home

“ The past year and a half has forced people to change their habits completely and people have become comfortable drinking at home and drinking alone. People may also still be reluctant to go out drinking with others if they are still concerned about the virus. I think people will notice an impact on their bank balances once they start going out to drink again and perhaps choose to stick with supermarket deals in the comfort of their own home. ”

*Female, 25-34, High risk drinker, Redundancy, Mental Health impact, England*



People adapted to changed circumstances and created new 'normal' drinking situations

**Virtual socialising:** Using virtual communication, such as Zoom, to socialise with others increased exponentially during the pandemic and became a normal occasion/situation in which to drink alcohol.

People also drank in other situations during the pandemic that they would not have done previously, such as:

- Drinking with friends/dates in public places, e.g. in parks
- Drinking with housemates/neighbours in a shared space
- Drinking at home

“ People had to find a way to go on dates. It very quickly became acceptable to meet up with someone at midday and go and get drunk in a park or even do a zoom date. I didn't want to be out with someone I hadn't met before in the dark. Pre-COVID, this is something I would never considered or even thought of. ”

*Female, 25-34, High Risk drinker, Redundancy, England*



# Drinking alone

There appears to have been an increased acceptability for drinking alone as a result of the pandemic



**34% of people who had a drink in the last seven days did so alone**



**24% of all drinkers drank alone at home at least once a week last year**



**Drinking alone was seen as more socially acceptable during the pandemic given that many people had 'no other option'**

Community participants generally feel that **drinking alone has become more socially acceptable** during the pandemic. The stigma or negative connotations of drinking alone appear to have lessened as socialising became more difficult.

Pre-pandemic, some participants who live alone tended to only drink or drink most often when with other people, whereas during the pandemic, they drank when alone at home.

“

As most of us have spent a long time in isolation or away from friends and family, having a drink on your own has been more understood. People accept that it has been challenging times and whilst most pleasures/hobbies have been taken away during the pandemic, drinking has been seen as a way to get through tough times.

*Male, 35-44, High Risk drinker, Parent U18, England*

”

# How confident are people in refusing a drink?

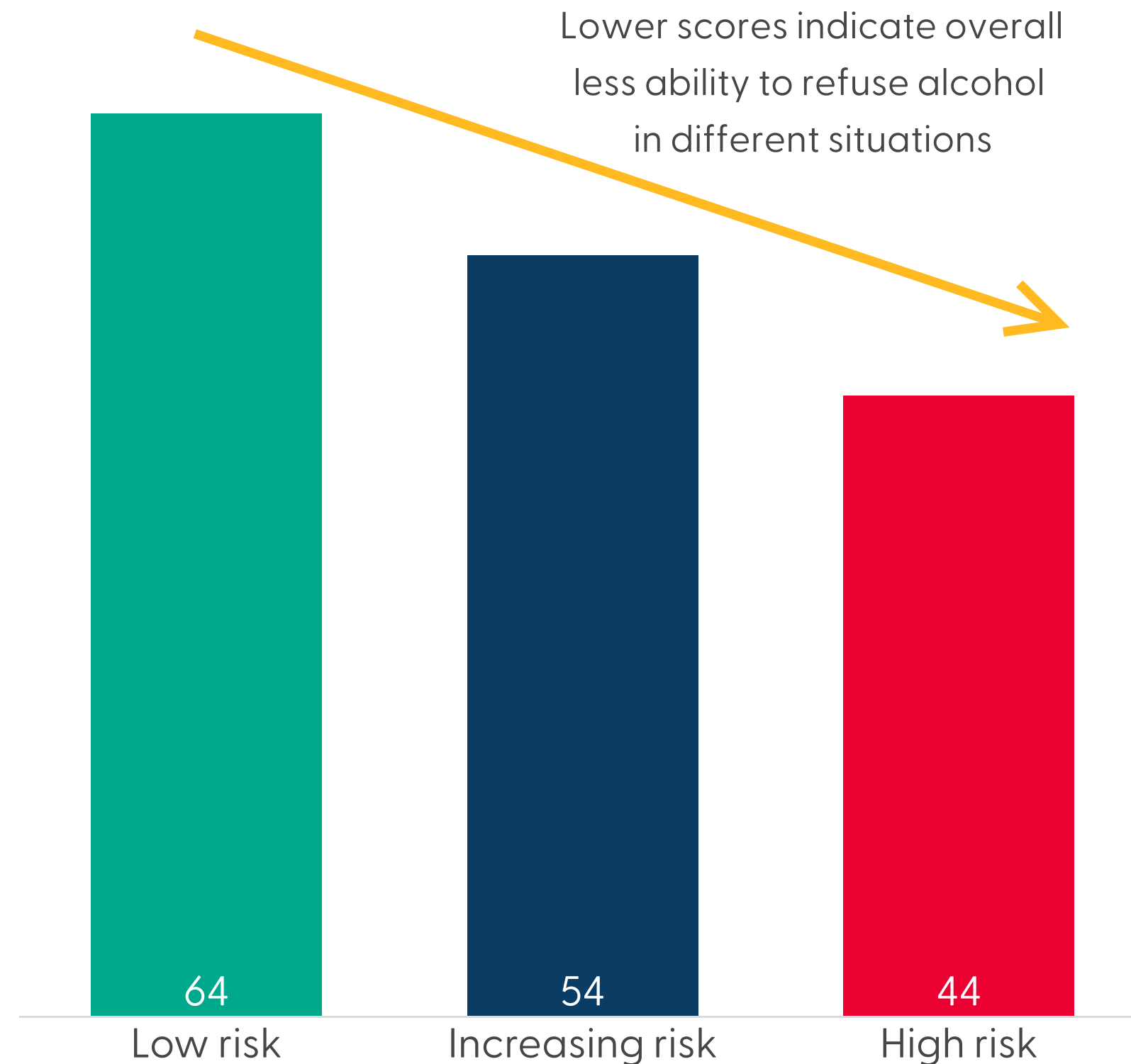
Drinkers' confidence in refusing a drink drops the higher risk they are in the AUDIT classification



## Observation

Overall, drinkers in 2021 scored an average of 60 for the DRSEQ-R, with scores ranging from 12 to 72.

High risk drinkers have a lower Social Pressure score, indicating less ability to refuse alcohol in social situations (12 compared to 19 for low risk).



## What is it?

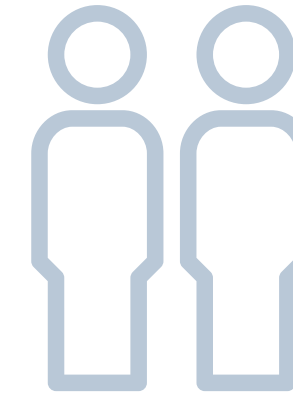
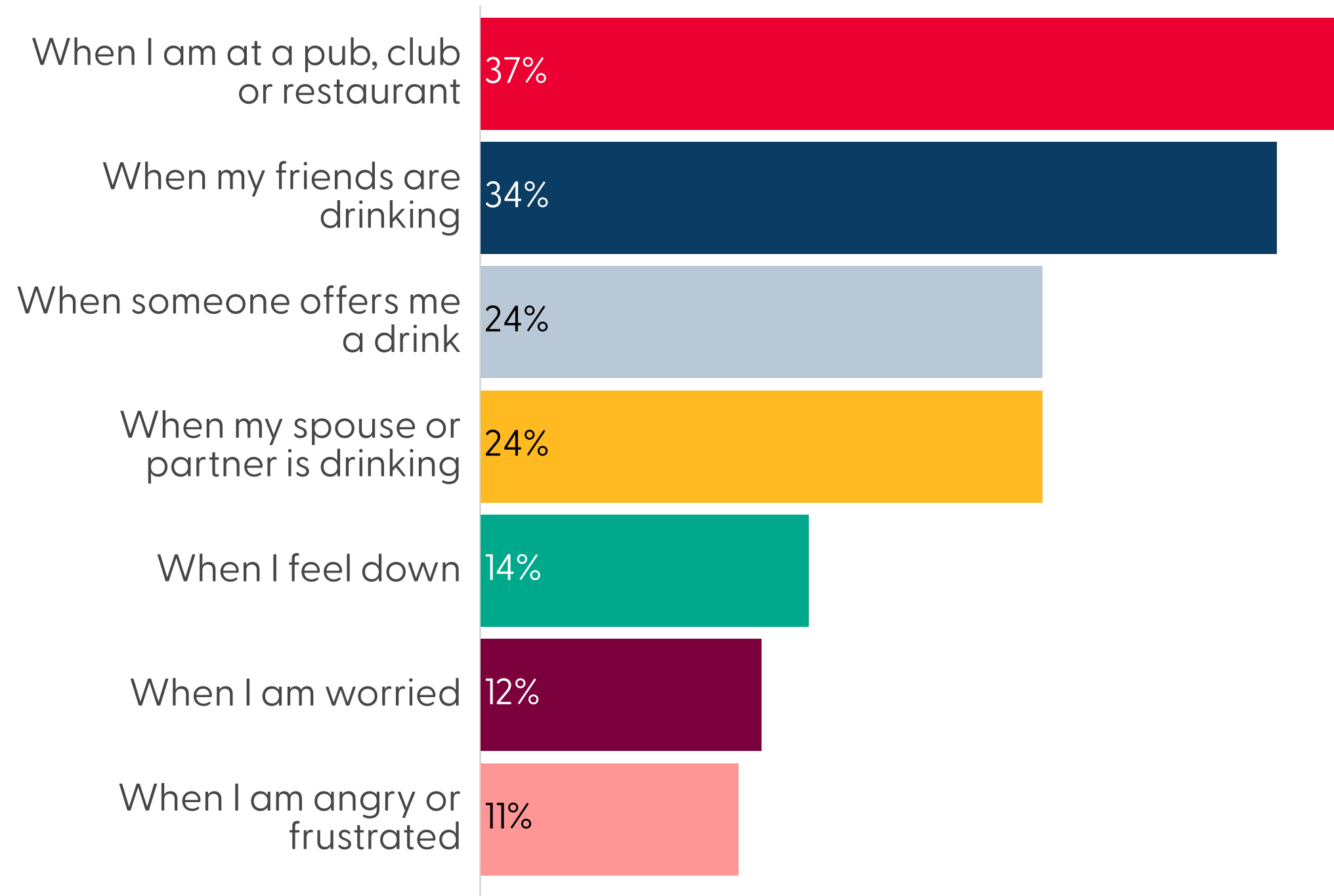
The Monitor uses a reduced and adapted version of the 19 item **DRSEQ-R**, which assesses participants' confidence she/he can refuse consuming alcohol across a variety of settings. More information on items and scoring can be found in the technical report<sup>2</sup>.

A total score and three factors can be generated:

- **Social Pressure**, e.g. when someone offers you a drink
- **Emotional Relief**, e.g. when you are angry, frustrated or worried
- **Opportunistic Relief**, e.g. when you are watching TV or out for dinner

# Situations that drinkers can't resist

**People are least likely to resist a drink when they are at the pub or when their friends are drinking  
(% probably, most likely or very sure they could not resist drinking)**



**45% of people drinking much more during the first lockdown report not being able to resist drinking when their spouse or partner is drinking**

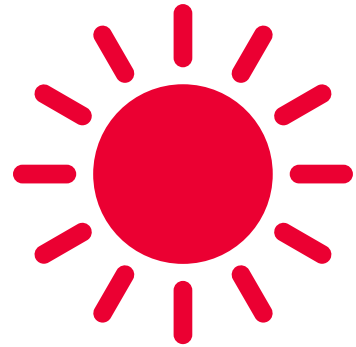
“ While living with my partner and her family during the pandemic, if someone was opening a beer or having a wine, I'd more often than not have one with them.  
*Male, 25-34, High Risk drinker, Scotland* ”

“ Last Friday night I didn't have to drink and I didn't really want to drink as I was so hungover, but as other people I was with were drinking, I wanted to too. I ended up drinking Prosecco all night.  
*Female, 25-34, High Risk drinker, Redundancy, England* ”



# Difficulties resisting a drink in other situations

Online community participants spoke of other situations where it is difficult to resist a drink



**Many say drinking is difficult to resist when the weather is particularly good**



**Each time restrictions eased and people were able to socialise again was seen as a 'cause for celebration' and reason to drink**



**Some mention finding it harder to resist drinking when watching sport, or after taking part in sport/exercise**

“ I would say I have been drinking more in the sun with friends during the pandemic. We took every opportunity to meet up in the sun and have a drink together whenever restrictions allowed.  
*Female, 35-44, Parent U18, Scotland* ”

“ Nothing tastes better than a cold pint after 65 miles of cycling!  
*Male, 45-54, High Risk drinker, Wales* ”

# Drinking during the Euros?

The Monitor survey revealed that males aged 18 to 24 increased their drinking over the last 30 days, with the data collection period\* coinciding with the Euro 2020 men's football tournament



**25% of males aged 18 to 24 who drink reported drinking more during June 2021 than what they were drinking before the pandemic (compared to 13% of all drinkers)**



## What else do we know about males aged 18 to 24 who drink?



### Typically drink less often than older males

7% typically drink four or more times a week compared to 20% of males aged 35-54 and 32% of males aged 55+



### But they are more likely to have been to the pub or a friend's

54% had been to the pub in the last week (compared to 35% all drinkers); 30% to a friend's or family's home (compared to 19% all drinkers)



### They are more likely to drink because it improves celebrations and makes social gatherings more fun

41% drink to make social gatherings more fun most of the time or always (27% all drinkers); 35% drink because it improves parties and celebrations (22% all drinkers)



“ On most occasions when I was drinking, it was after being offered a drink by someone. Like at my uncle's house, we were watching a Euro football game with family and friends so we had a whiskey and coke.

*Male, 18-24, High Risk drinker, England*



\* The Monitor data collection period ran from 11 June 2021 to 4 July 2021, with Euro 2020 starting on 11 June 2021.

# High risk drinkers

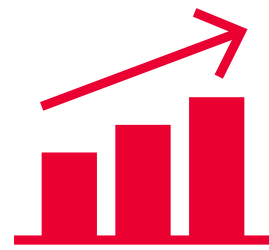
**Understanding those at greatest risk of harm from alcohol  
and focusing on groups of interest**

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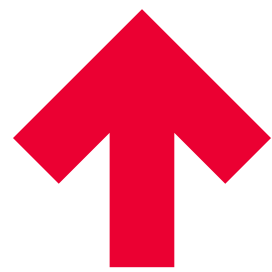
**Take me to...**

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2021](#) | [How has the pandemic impacted drinking?](#) | [Reasons given for drinking](#) | [Drinking behaviours](#) | [High risk drinkers](#) | [Groups of interest](#) | [Drinking and deprivation](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [Appendix](#)

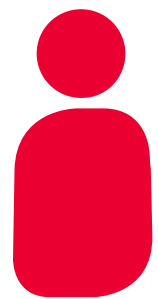
# High risk drinkers: **what to look out for**



High risk drinkers were more likely to have been drinking more during the first lockdown than they were pre-pandemic when compared to other drinkers: drinking on more days than usual, earlier in the day and drinking more in a single session.



A third of high risk drinkers (31%) reported that they were still drinking more in the May/June 2021 than they were before the pandemic.



Two in five (42%) high risk drinkers drank alone in the last seven days, compared to 29% of low risk drinkers.



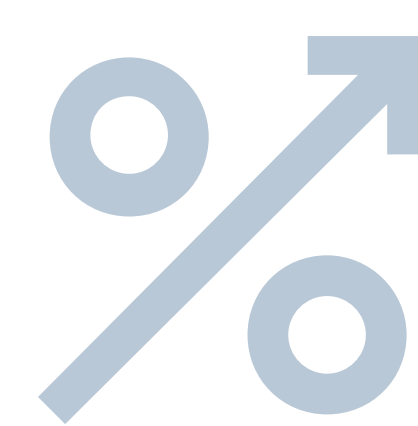
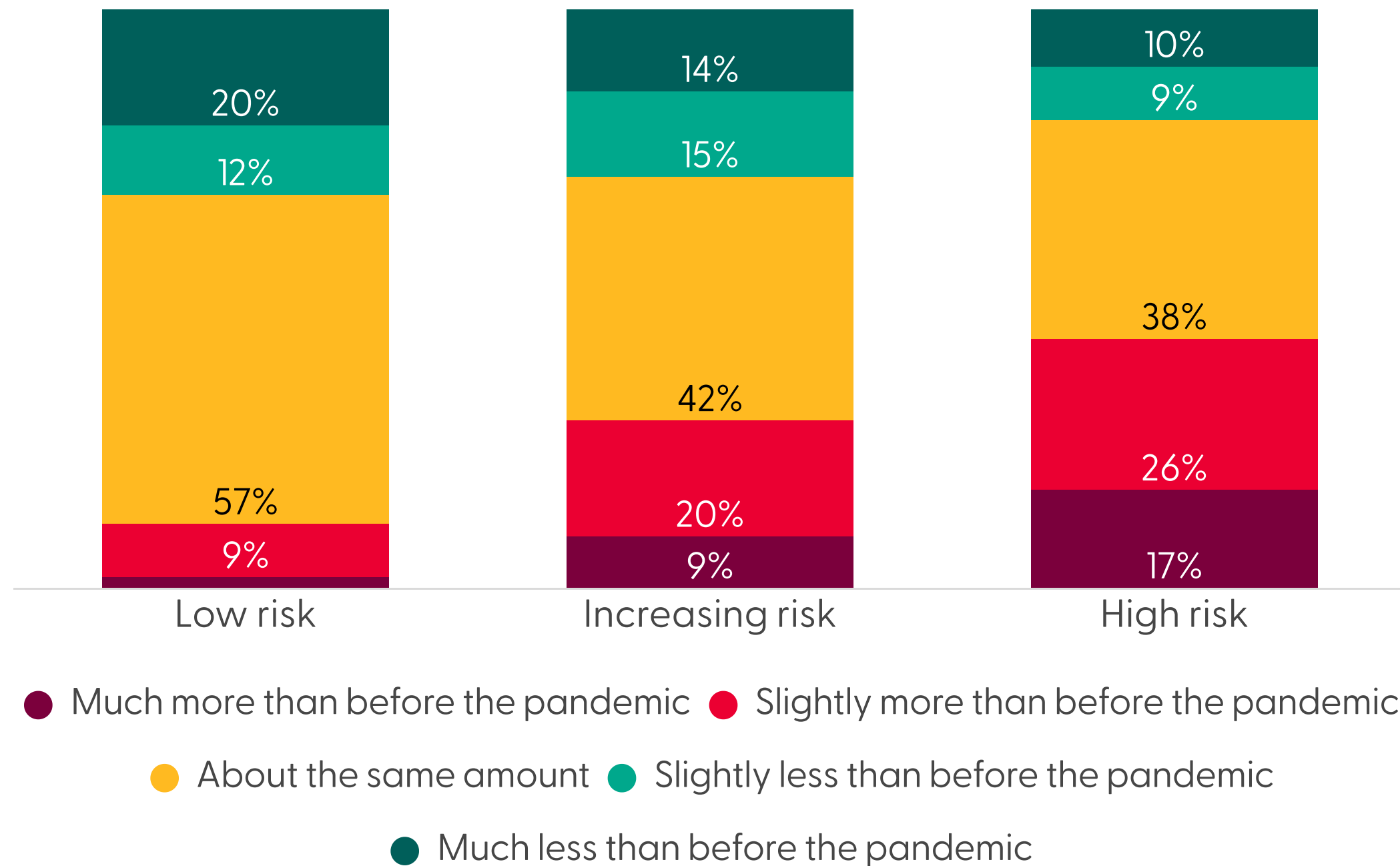
## **Analysis using the AUDIT-C tool**

In this section, 'high risk drinkers' refers to those people who score eight or above on the AUDIT-C tool.

The AUDIT-C tool has been used here to identify high risk drinkers as this group of interest was first identified through research conducted in 2020 using the AUDIT-C tool.

# High risk drinkers: impact of the first lockdown

High risk drinkers were more likely to have been drinking more than their usual amount during the first lockdown than other drinkers



43% of high risk drinkers drank more than their usual amount during the first lockdown than they were pre-pandemic, compared to 11% of low risk drinkers



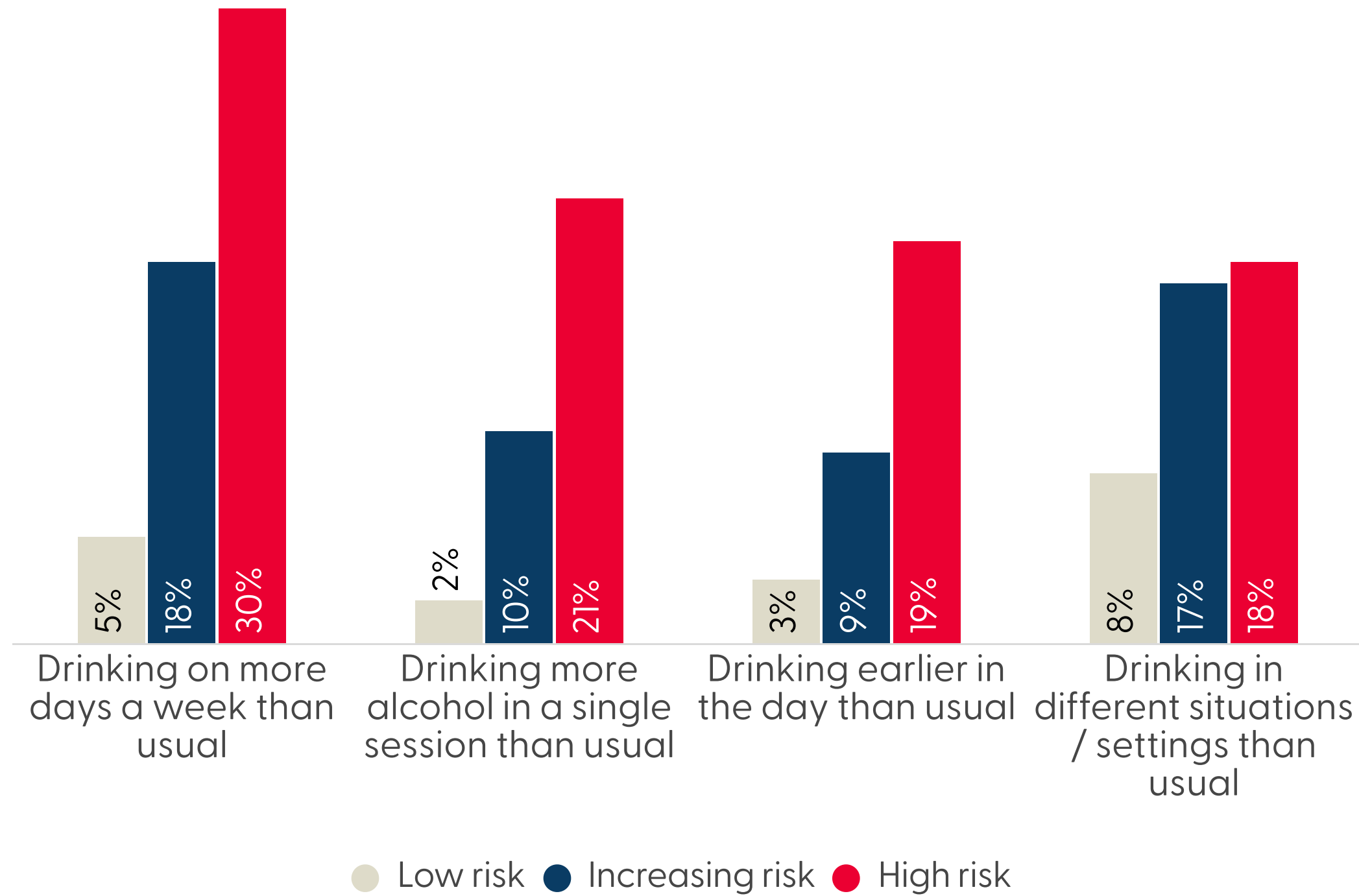
**Mixed emotions during the initial lockdown: some found the new situation fun; others felt anxious**

“ The first lockdown felt very novel to begin with. People were not used to being at home early afternoon during the week. I chose to drink and enjoy the fact that I was at home and able to do so.  
*Male, 25-34, High Risk drinker, Parent U18, England* ”

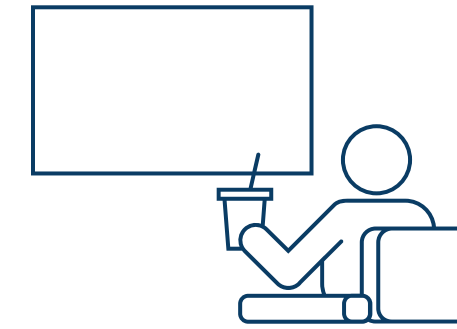
AUDIT-C risk by Drinking in lockdown compared to before the pandemic. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, Low risk (n=4,228); Increasing risk (n=2,179); High risk (n=1,295)

# High risk drinkers: different drinking habits

High risk drinkers were drinking on more days a week than usual and were drinking earlier in the day



AUDIT-C risk by Drinking behaviour since lockdown. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, Low risk (n=4,372); Increasing risk (n=2,225); High risk (n=1,314)



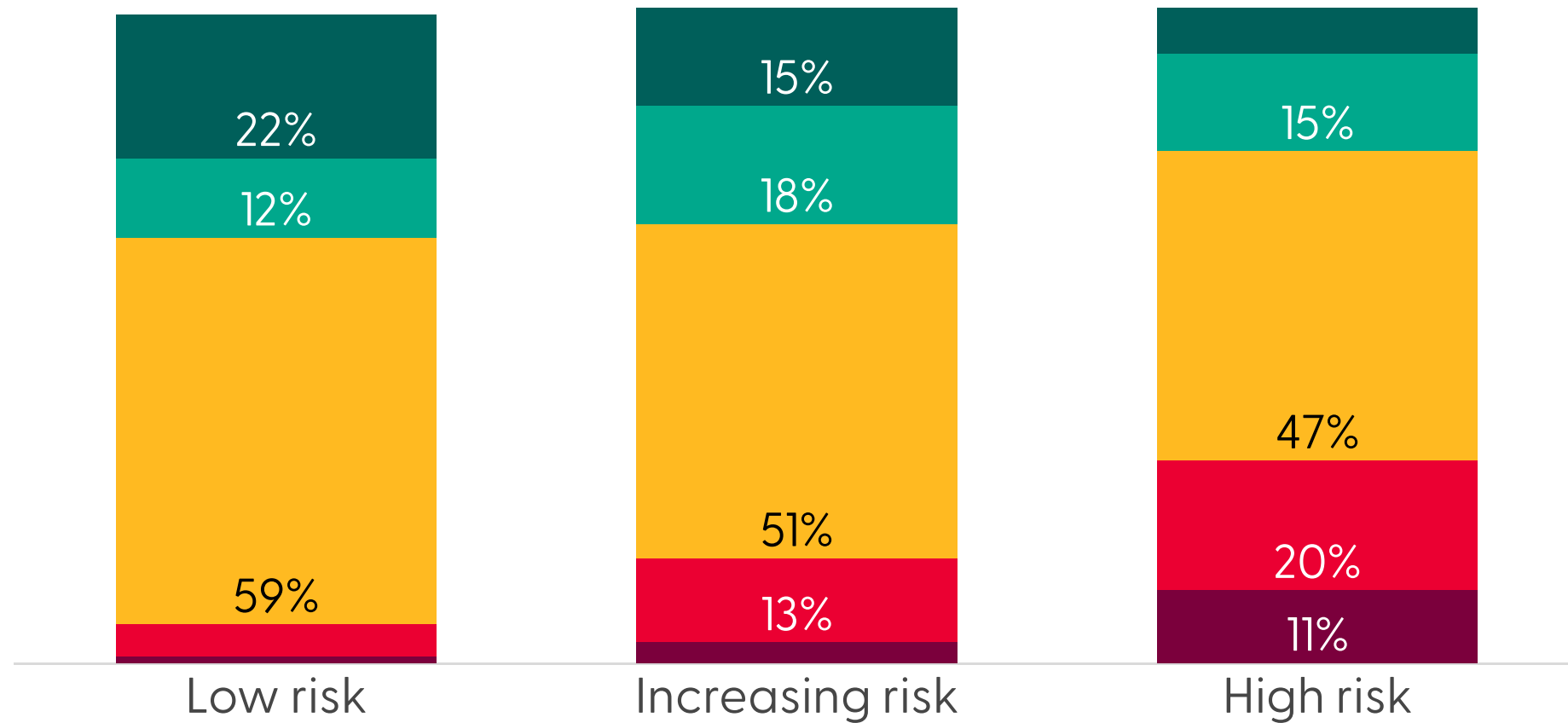
**42% of high risk drinkers drank alone in the last seven days, compared to 29% of low risk drinkers**



“I live alone and have had to shield for much of the last 18 months, so for me, drinking alone became my default way of drinking. Male, 45-54, High Risk drinker, Mental Health impact, England”

# Many high risk drinkers still report drinking more than usual

A third of high risk drinkers (31%) were drinking more than they usually would in the last 30 days (May 2021) than they were before the pandemic



- Much more than before the pandemic
- Slightly more than before the pandemic
- About the same amount
- Slightly less than before the pandemic
- Much less than before the pandemic

AUDIT-C risk by Drinking in last 30 days compared to before the pandemic. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=7,911); Low risk (n=4,372); Increasing risk (n=2,225); High risk (n=1,314)



36% of high risk drinkers report that they intend to cut down on drinking when pandemic restrictions ease, although 42% indicated the same in 2020<sup>2</sup>



“Social drinking is an integral part of the culture within Scotland, and with the best will in the world, it's often tricky to refrain from drinking. With the return to normality, I will be drinking less during the week but this will probably balance out with the alcohol I will be having at the weekends when the pubs and nightclubs are open without restrictions!

*Male, 25-34, High Risk drinker, Scotland*





# A minority of community participants intend to cut down

Whilst a minority of high risk drinkers within the online community intend to cut down or have already started to decrease their alcohol consumption, others expect their drinking levels will stay the same or increase

## A minority of participants have already started to decrease their drinking levels

In order to lose weight/improve overall health, a small number of participants from the online community have already taken **steps to reduce their alcohol intake**, and others say they intend to do this.

Steps taken include:

- Drinking lower alcohol/alcohol free drinks
- Limiting the number of days when alcohol is consumed
- Reducing the amount of alcohol consumed in each session

“Initially, I found I was drinking far more units than I wanted, and had to come up with strategies to limit my intake. I tried to set rules around when I would allow myself to have my first drink.

*Male, 45-54, Mental Health impact, England*

”

## However, several expect their alcohol consumption to stay the same or even increase as restrictions ease further

“I don't expect my drinking to change much over the next few months, as it has become a big part of my social life. Especially over the next few months I am hoping to travel a bit with friends and to attend some gatherings where the key element of socialising and networking is around drinking alcohol. I am trying to consciously reduce my drinking habit to only drink socially but it's been difficult.

*Female, 25-34, High Risk drinker, Mental Health impact, England*

”

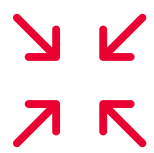
# Alcohol free and lower strength alcohol drinks as an option for cutting down

## Consumption of alcohol free or lower strength drinks by level of risk (AUDIT-C)



### Increasing risk drinkers are the most likely to have consumed alcohol free or lower strength drinks

30% consumed some alcohol free or lower strength drinks in the last 12 months (compared to 25% of high risk drinkers and 22% of low risk drinkers)



### High risk drinkers mainly have them to cut down on alcohol generally

Half who had alcohol free or lower strength drinks in last 12 months did so for this reason (compared to 23% of low risk drinkers)



### But they are less likely to drink them because they like the taste

18% of high risk drinkers said the main reason for drinking alcohol free or lower strength drinks is the taste (compared to 33% of low risk drinkers)



“

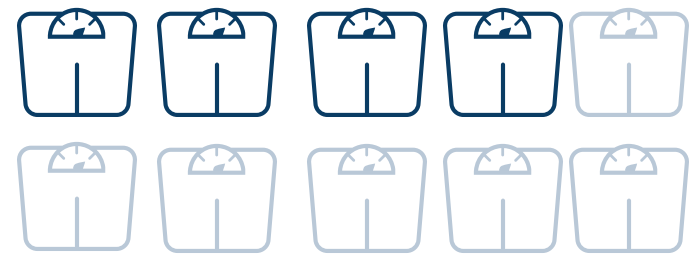
I had a realisation that I needed to reduce my alcohol intake. I started to discover there are **lots of really good alcohol free beer available**, so I started to incorporate that into my drinking routine.

*Male, 45-54, Mental Health impact, England*

”

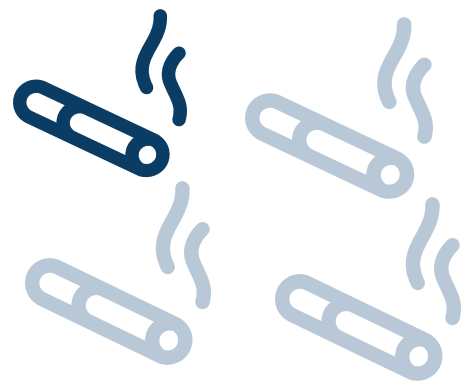
# High risk drinkers: other unhealthy behaviours

High risk drinkers often have other unhealthy behaviours; for many the pandemic exacerbated this situation



**43% of high risk drinkers (AUDIT-C) feel they have put on weight during the pandemic**

compared to 36% of low risk drinkers



**25% of high risk drinkers (AUDIT-C) also smoke**

compared to 11% of low risk drinkers

**38% of high risk drinkers (AUDIT-C) report that they have been smoking more compared to before the pandemic**

compared to 27% of low risk drinkers



**For many drinkers, the pandemic made it even harder to adopt healthy lifestyles**



I put on over two stone last year. I wasn't exercising, I've no gym, I don't live in a mansion, I only have a horrible park near me, I don't drive and I was a bit apprehensive about going on public transport. Pre-COVID, I would always walk home from work. But I think the main thing was my drinking that just escalated.

*Female, 35-44, High Risk drinker, Mental Health impact, England*



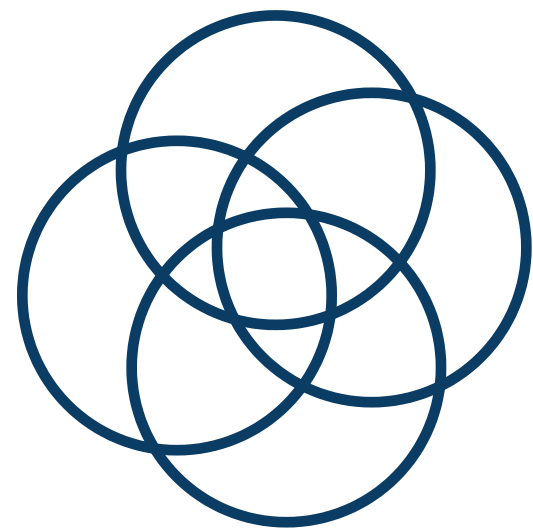
I'm working from home, I wasn't not able to get out at night. For that downtime, instead of going to the gym or going out for food or socialising, it was a drink. I put weight on and felt constantly unhealthy during the pandemic.

*Female, 35-44, High Risk drinker, Parent U18, England*



# Many high risk drinkers also fall into another 'group of interest'

Both the Monitor data and the online community show that people often fall into more than one of Drinkaware's key priority groups ; it is therefore not always possible to isolate the underlying driving factors behind any change in drinking behaviours



For example, in the 2021 Monitor data, of those whose **mental health has been negatively impacted** by the pandemic to a very large/large extent:

- 21% are also parents of children aged 18 and under
- 20% fall into the 'High risk drinkers' group
- 16% have also been made redundant during the pandemic/are in the process of redundancy



In the online community, 21 of the 30 participants are classified as 'High Risk drinkers'. Of these:

- 11 say their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic to a very large/large extent
- 11 are parents of under 18s

## Other groups of interest: **what to look out for**



Adults whose mental health has been most impacted by the pandemic are more likely to drink when they feel depressed or nervous than those less impacted.



Those who had been made redundant (or were in the process of) during the pandemic were more likely to be aged 18-24 and have a DE social grade compared to employees who haven't faced redundancy.



Parents with children aged 18 and under at home are more likely to report drinking more than usual during the March-June 2020 lockdown than they did pre-pandemic, but drinking levels in the last 30 days (May/June 2021) have dropped and are similar to those without children at home.



### **A change in analysis to using the full AUDIT**

When we move from the AUDIT-C screening tool to the full AUDIT assessment, drinkers in all these groups of interest are more likely to be high risk drinkers when compared to UK adults who do not fit into these groups.

For this reason, any analysis by alcohol risk or references to 'high risk' in the remainder of this report is based on the full AUDIT assessment.

**Understanding:**

**People whose mental health has been most impacted by the pandemic**



# Mental health impacted: a snapshot

## What do we know about those whose mental health has been most negatively impacted by the pandemic?



**10%**

Are students (compared to 2% of those reporting no mental health impact)



**37%**

Drink five or more units in a typical day when drinking (compared to 28% of those reporting no mental health impact)



**22%**

Drinking more in the past 30 days compared to before the pandemic (compared to 7% of those reporting no mental health impact)



**52%**

Have gained weight during the pandemic (compared to 26% of those reporting no mental health impact)



**22%**

Feel they are likely to have increased health problems if they keep drinking at this level (13% of those reporting no mental health impact)

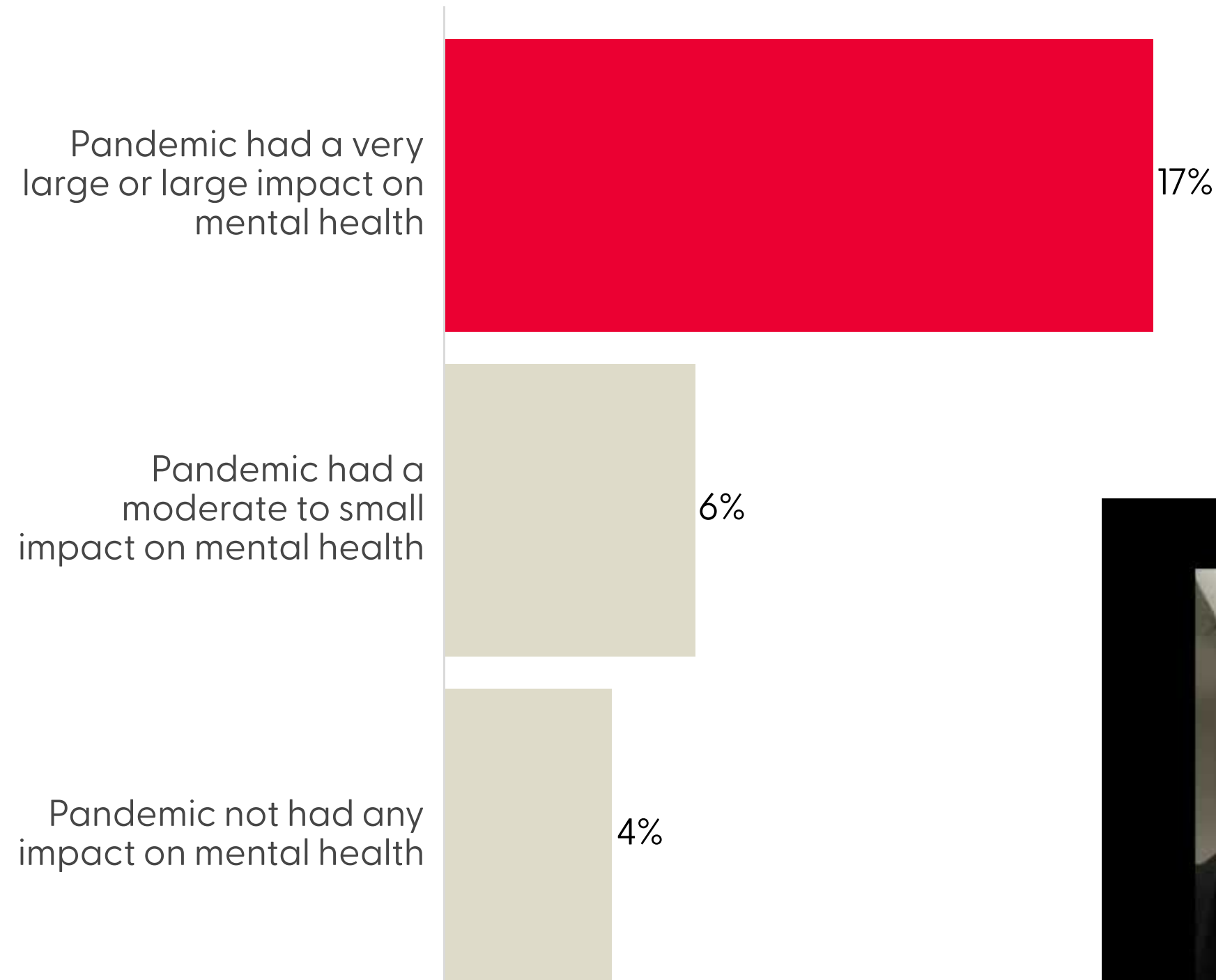


“ I was getting tired of seeing the same person, tired of my own company and to pass the time I was starting to drink more, especially in the evenings and especially after I'd finished work and done my uni stuff. I was drinking at least 5 days a week, half by myself and half with my housemate. And even in the daytime, I was finding excuses, to do something to entertain myself, I was drinking more during the day.  
*Male, 18-24, High Risk drinker, Mental Health impact, England* ”

Impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing. Base: all UK adults (n=9,137); Very large/large impact (n=1,646); No impact (n=2,156)

# Mental health impacted: drinking to 'cope'

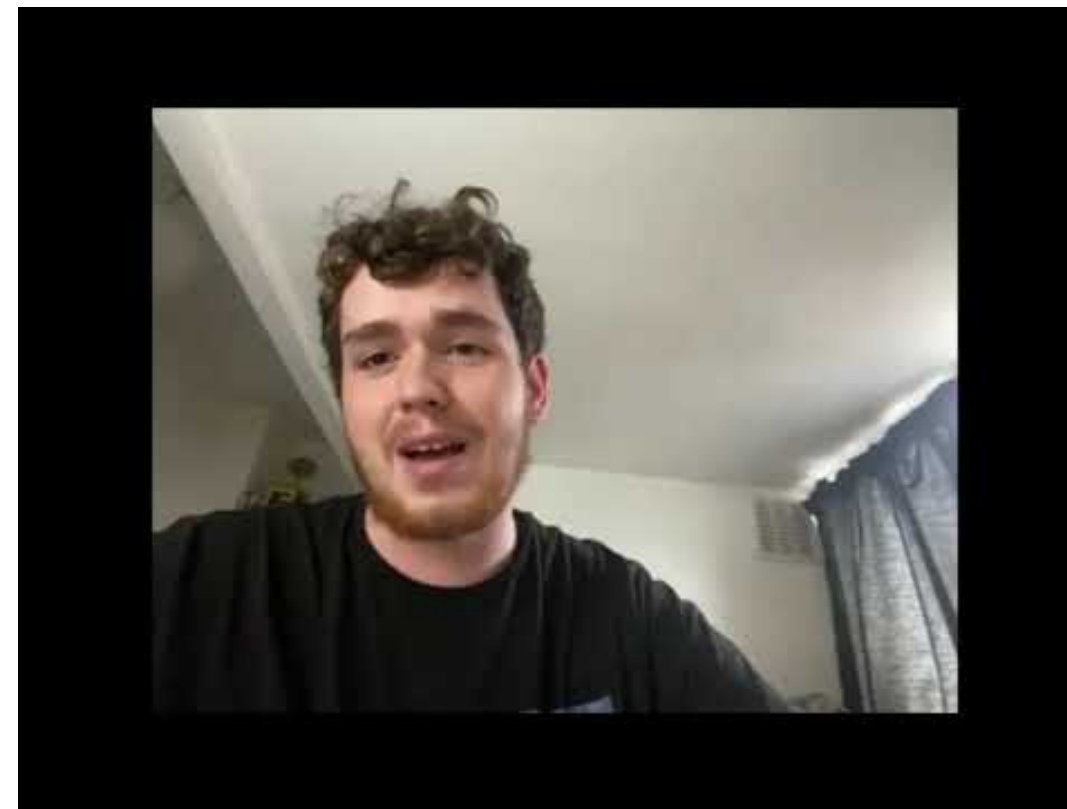
People whose mental health has been most impacted by the pandemic are more likely to drink when they feel depressed or nervous



Drinking motivations: Base: all UK adults who drink most/all of the time because it helps them when they feel depressed or nervous (n=576)



14% of drinkers whose mental health was most negatively impacted by the pandemic cite drinking to forget about their problems as one of the reasons they drink (compared to 4% of drinkers whose mental health has not been impacted by the pandemic at all)



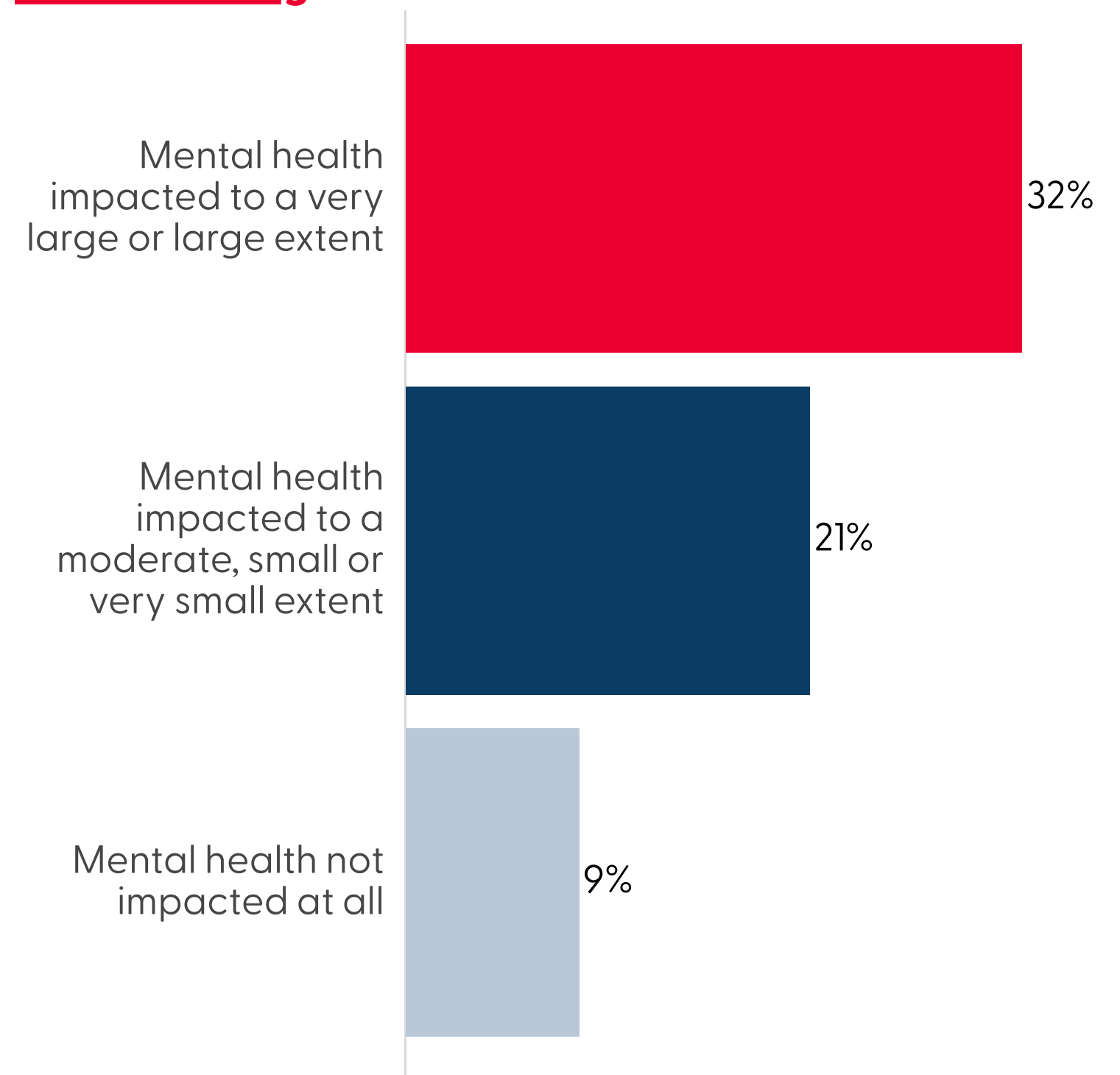
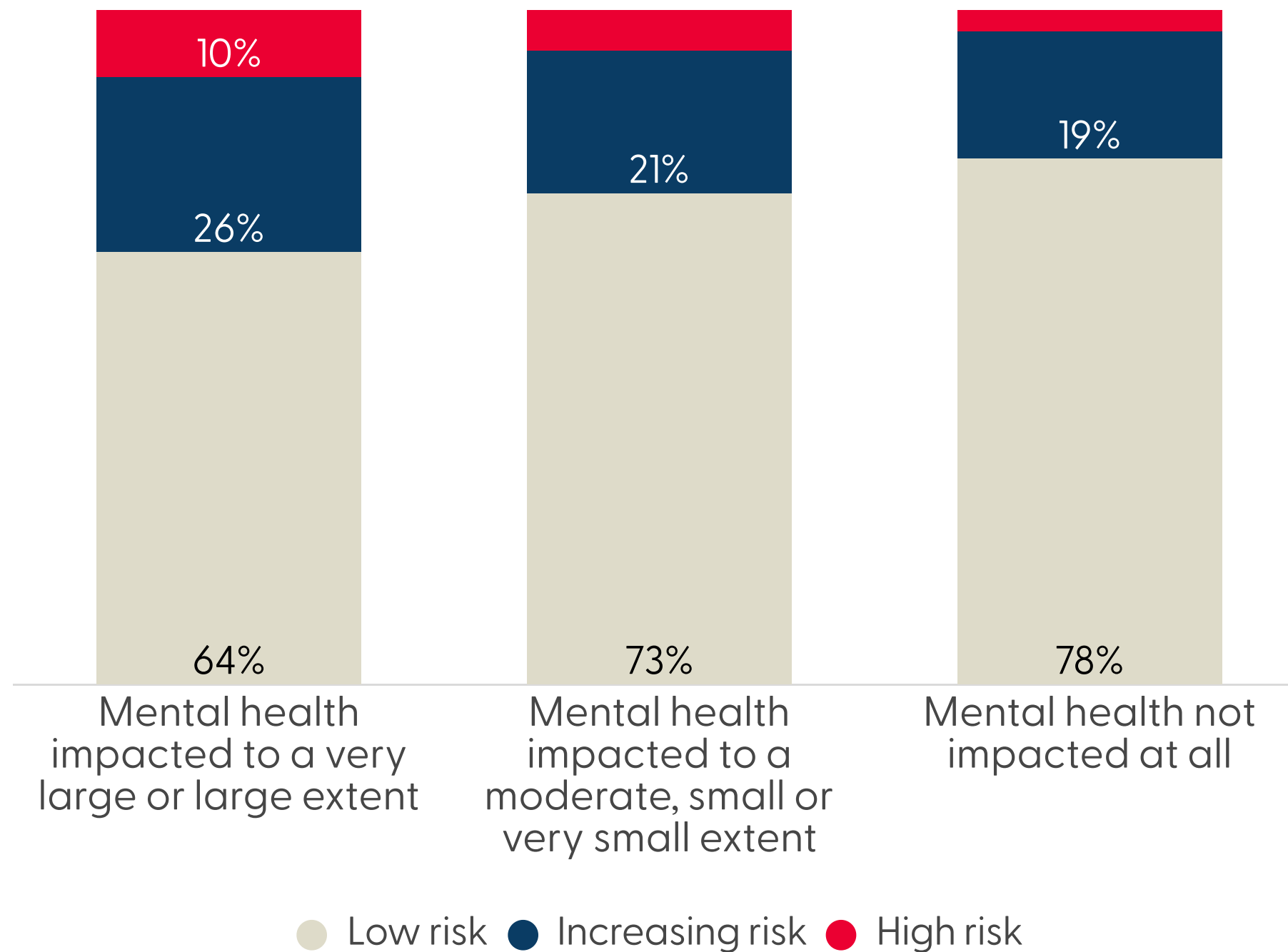
“I was just so bored and so sick of everything. I came to university to experience new things, meet new people and I couldn't really leave my room. I ended up stuck in my room, trying not to tear my hair out. And that resulted in me drinking more often.  
*Male, 18-24, Mental Health impact, England*

”

# Mental health impacted: drinking risk

People whose mental health has been most impacted are more likely to be high risk drinkers based on the full AUDIT assessment

A third of drinkers (32%) whose mental health has been most impacted during the pandemic have felt guilt or remorse after drinking at least sometimes over the last 12 months



AUDIT risk by Impact of the pandemic on mental health. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol; Very large or large extent (n=1,373); Moderate, small or very small (n=4,412); Not impacted at all (n=1,881)

**Understanding:**

**People who have gone through or are  
at risk of redundancy**

# Faced redundancy (or in the process of): a snapshot

## What do we know about those who faced redundancy during the pandemic?



**15%**

Are aged 18 to 24 (compared to 8% of employees who haven't faced redundancy)



**30%**

Have a DE social grade (compared to 15% of employees who haven't faced redundancy)



**15%**

Have been drinking earlier in the day than usual (compared to 8% of employees who haven't faced redundancy)



**16%**

Agree that drinking makes them feel calm (compared to 8% of employees who haven't faced redundancy)



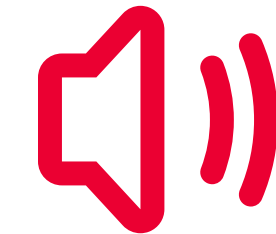
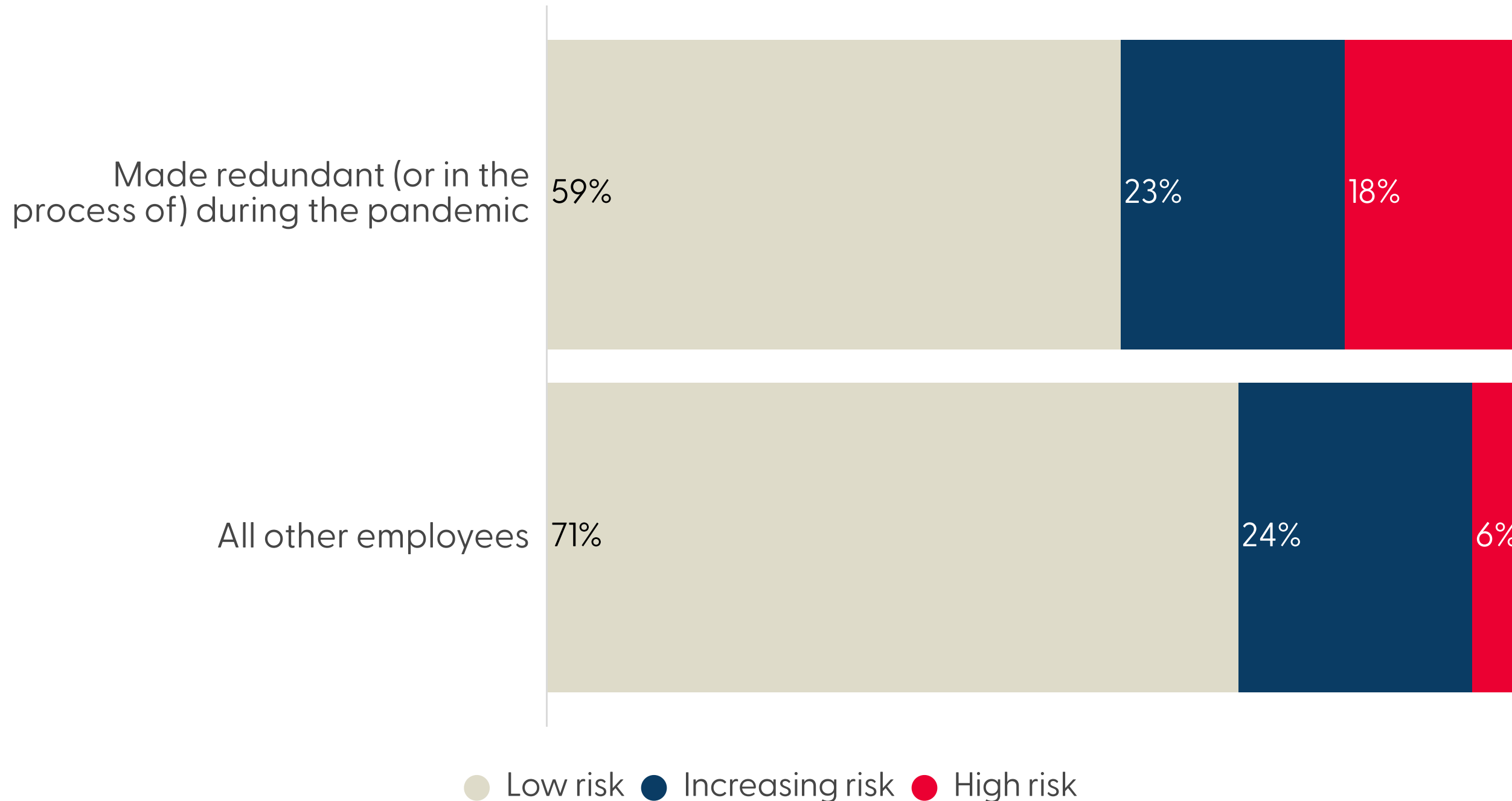
“ When I lost my job, I found a glass of wine or a pint of beer really did help to ease my stress levels, but I know this didn't help me mentally.

*Female, 18-24, Redundancy, England*



# Faced redundancy: drinking risk

People who were made redundant during the pandemic are more likely to be high risk drinkers based on the full AUDIT assessment



## Observation

18% of drinkers who were made redundant (or are in the process of) during the pandemic are categorised as high risk based on the full AUDIT assessment, compared to 6% of all other employees not affected by redundancy.

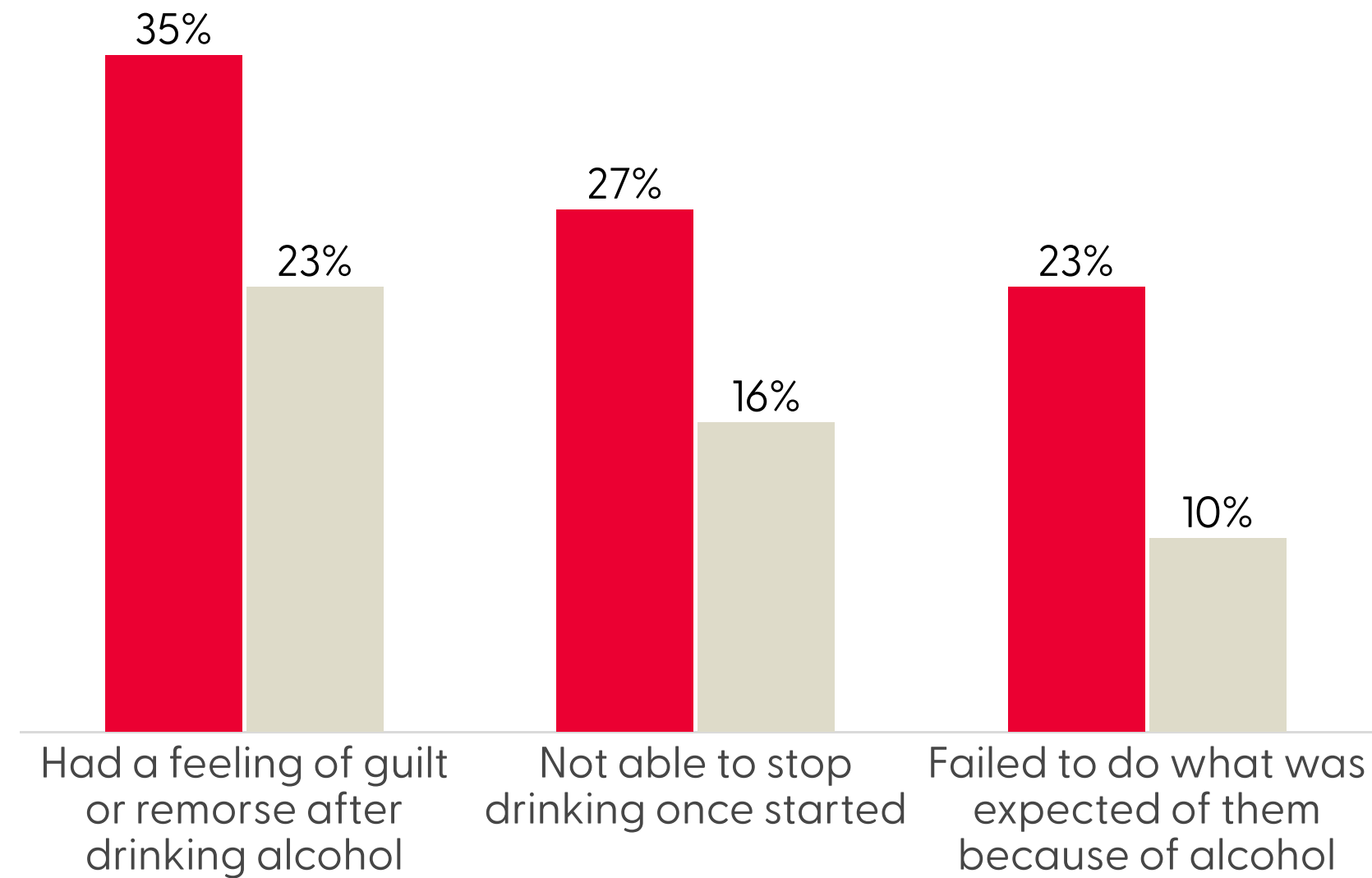


AUDIT risk by whether they were made redundant during the pandemic. Base: Made redundant (n=390); All other employees (n=2,574)



# Faced redundancy (or in the process of) during pandemic

Those who had been made redundant (or in the process of) during the pandemic were more likely to have felt guilty after drinking and report failing to do what was expected of them because of alcohol



- Made redundant or in the process
- Employees not affected by redundancy

Individual AUDIT questions by whether they were made redundant during the pandemic. Base: Made redundant (n=390); All other employees (n=2,574)



“ I was drinking to forget about my problems. I was placed on furlough from my work at a travel company, and there was a lot of uncertainty. Then later on I was made redundant. Recently, I drank because I was feeling down after realising how many unsuccessful job applications I had submitted.  
*Male, 35-44, Redundancy, England* ”

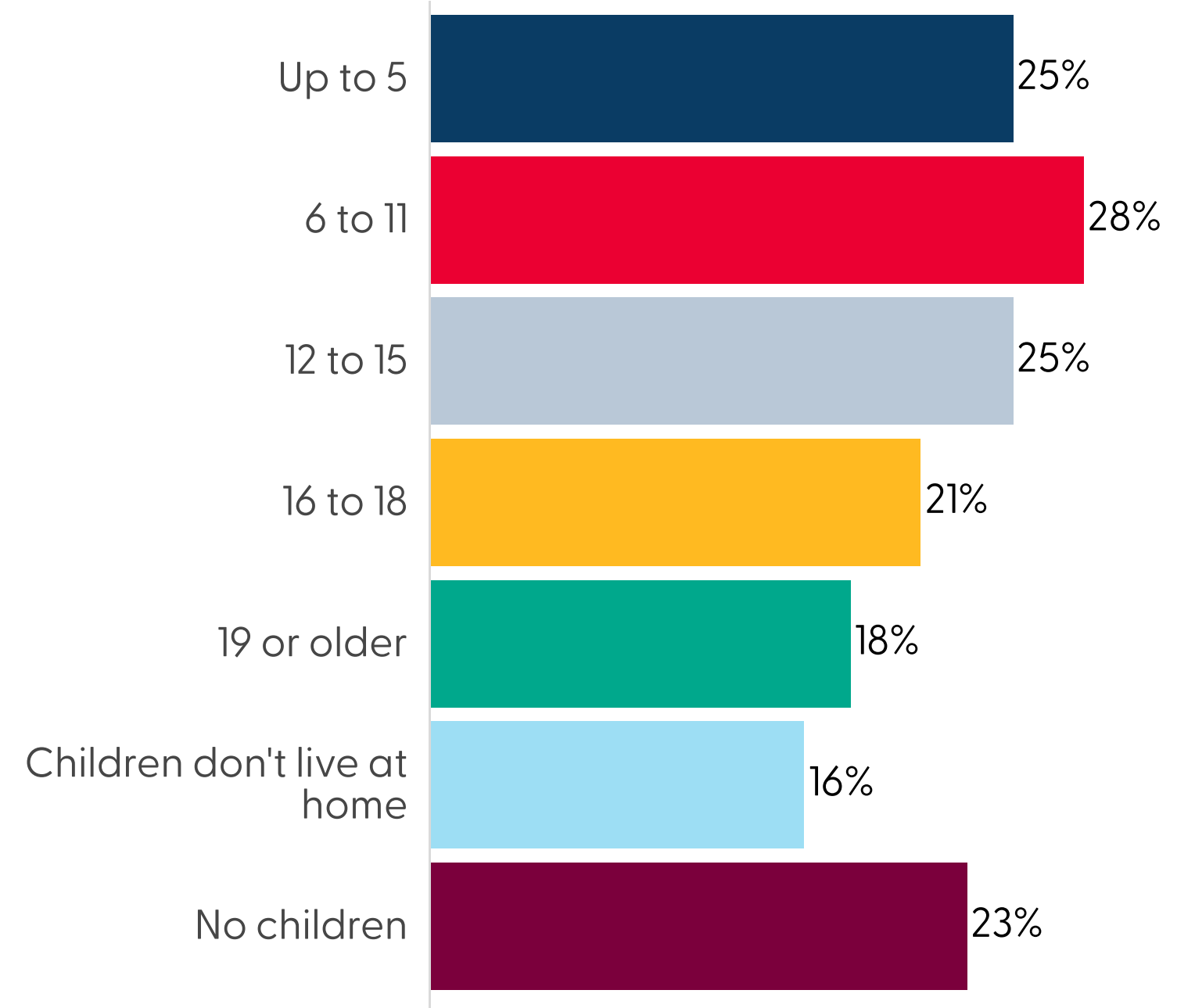
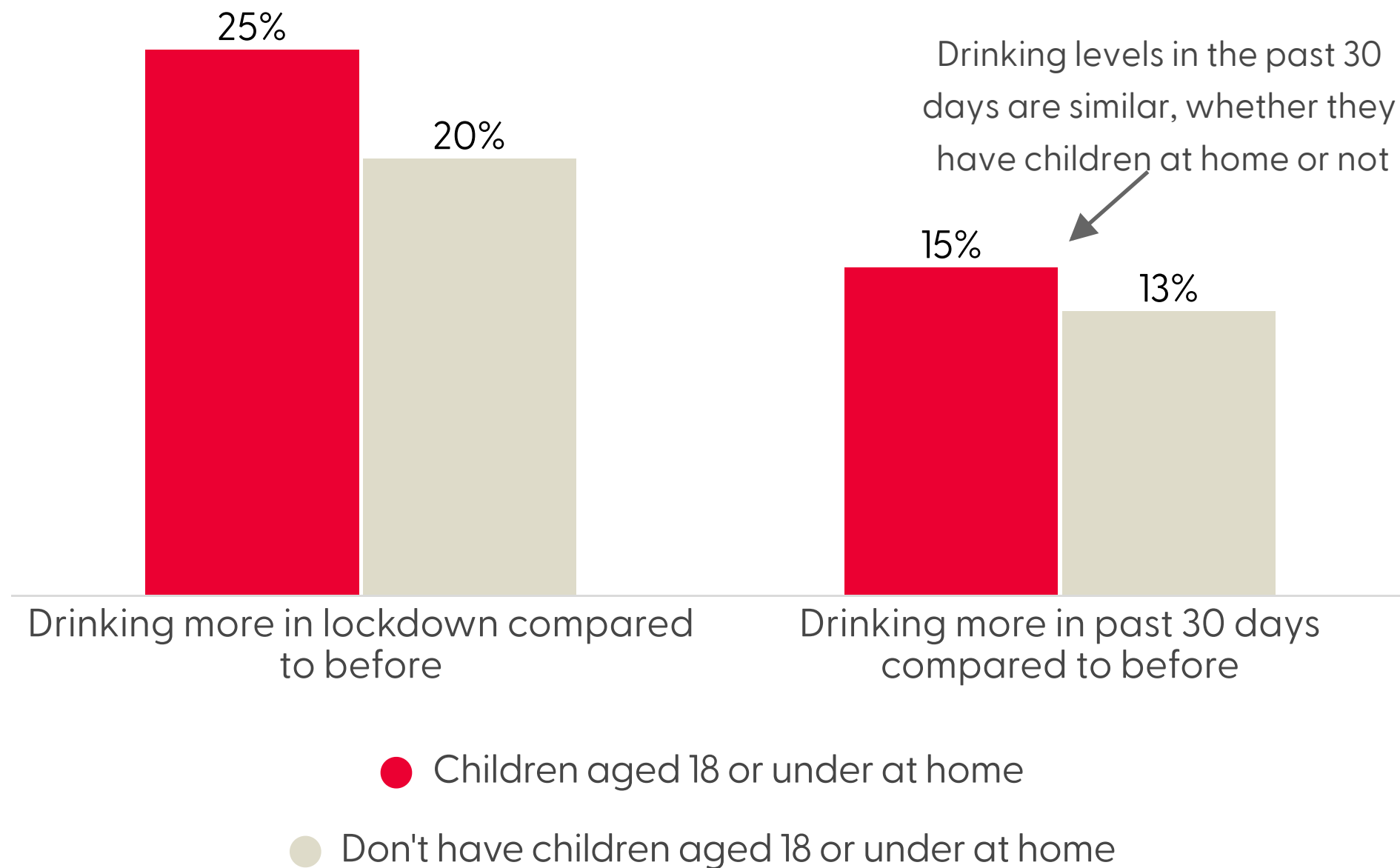
**Understanding:**

**Parents of under-18s**

# Parents who live with children aged 18 or under

25% of parents with children aged 18 or under at home drank more during the first lockdown (March to June 2020) than pre-pandemic

29% of parents with children aged 6 to 11 at home drank more than pre-pandemic levels during the first lockdown

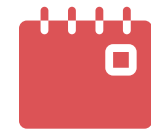


Drinking compared to before the pandemic by Children aged 18 or under at home. Base: all UK adult drinkers with a child aged 18 or under at home (n=1,470); Adult drinkers with no children aged 18 or under at home (n=6,362)

Drinking compared to before the pandemic by Children at home. Base: all UK adults who report drinking more alcohol compared to before the pandemic (n=1,649)

# Parents: what else do we know?

Parents were more likely to report eating less healthily and gaining weight during the pandemic



18%

Drink on the weekend only (compared to 14% of those who don't have children aged 18 or under at home)



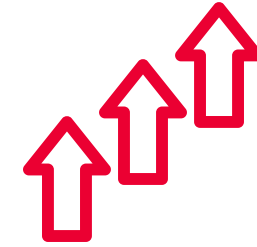
28%

Have been eating less healthily during the pandemic (20% of those who don't have children at home)



42%

Have gained weight during the pandemic (36% of those who don't have children at home)



20% of parents of 6 to 11 year olds are high risk drinkers

Compared to 13% of parents of under 6 year olds, based on the AUDIT-C



48% of parents (of children aged 18 or under at home) say responsibilities relating to childcare/homeschooling have negatively impacted their ability to do their job during the pandemic



“

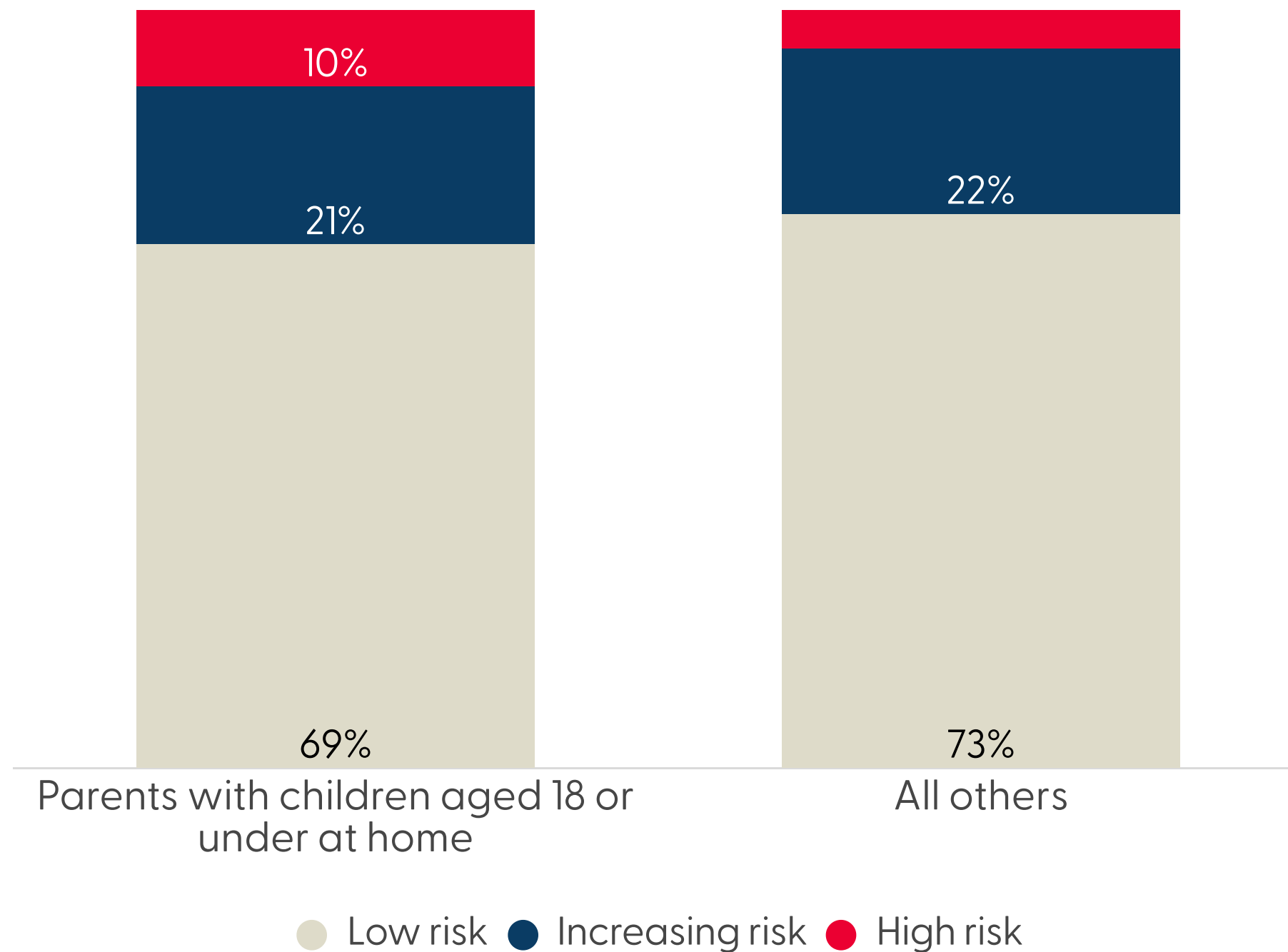
With both myself and partner working from home, juggling home schooling with two young children - it felt like once they had gone to bed and we could sit down and enjoy ourselves this would involve having a "well earned" drink. A glass of wine or even just a shot of rum in my normal diet coke as that treat or reward for managing another stressful and difficult day and a difficult time.

*Female, 25-34, Parent U18, England*

”

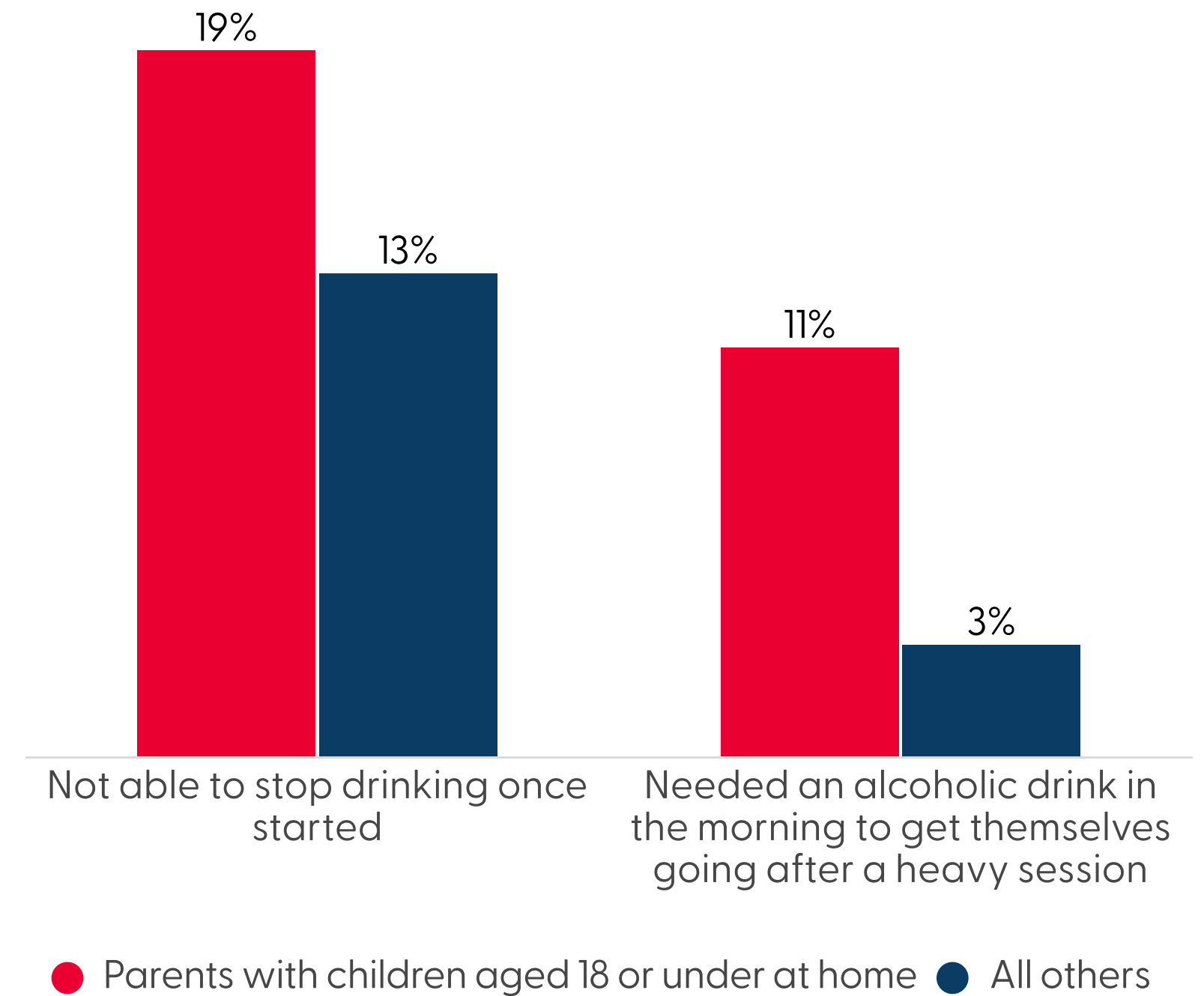
# Parents: drinking risk

Parents with children aged 18 or under at home are more likely to be high risk drinkers based on the full AUDIT assessment



Base: all UK adults who drink (n=7,911); Parents with children aged 18 or under at home (n=1,525), All others (n=6,386)

One in five (19%) of parents who drink reported not being able to stop drinking once they started at least sometimes in the last 12 months



Base: all UK adults who drink (n=7,911); Parents with children aged 18 or under at home (n=1,525), All others (n=6,386)

# Drinking and deprivation

Analysis by the Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>4</sup> quintiles

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**Take me to...**

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2021](#) | [How has the pandemic impacted drinking?](#) | [Reasons given for drinking](#) | [Drinking behaviours](#) | [High risk drinkers](#) | [Groups of interest](#) | [Drinking and deprivation](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [Appendix](#)

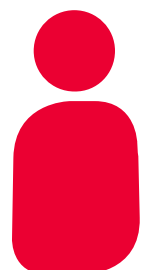


# Drinking and deprivation: **what to look out for**

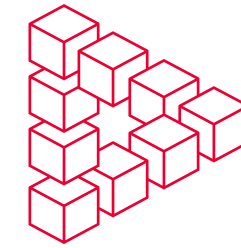


Adults in the most deprived areas are more likely to not drink alcohol and were more likely to report drinking less during the first lockdown (March-June 2020) than their usual amounts.

**BUT...**



Drinkers in most deprived areas are more likely to be classified as high risk drinkers (on the full AUDIT assessment) and are more likely to have had a drink alone in the last week than those in the least deprived areas.



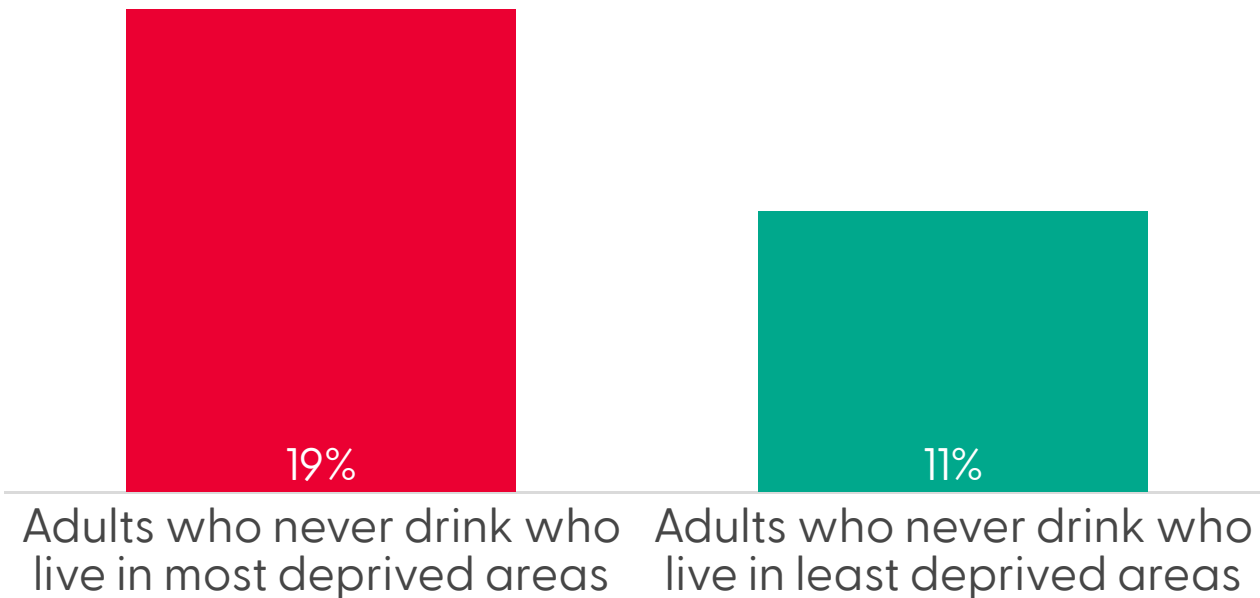
## The Alcohol Harm Paradox

The alcohol harm paradox is the finding that people from lower socio economic groups, or more deprived neighbourhoods, suffer more harm from alcohol than those from higher socio economic groups, despite consuming the same or less alcohol.

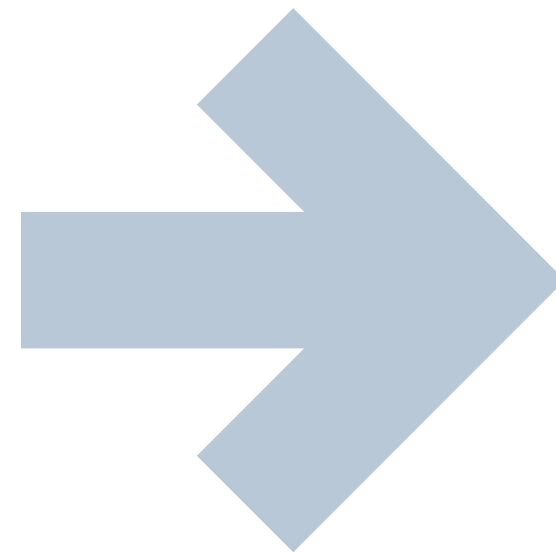
Possible reasons given for this paradox are the combination of drinking with other unhealthy behaviours (such as smoking), differences in drinking patterns, and access to health-care resources. More information on the alcohol harm paradox can be found on [Drinkaware's website](#)<sup>10</sup>.

# 2021 Monitor findings support the alcohol harm paradox

**Adults in the most deprived areas are more likely to not drink alcohol**

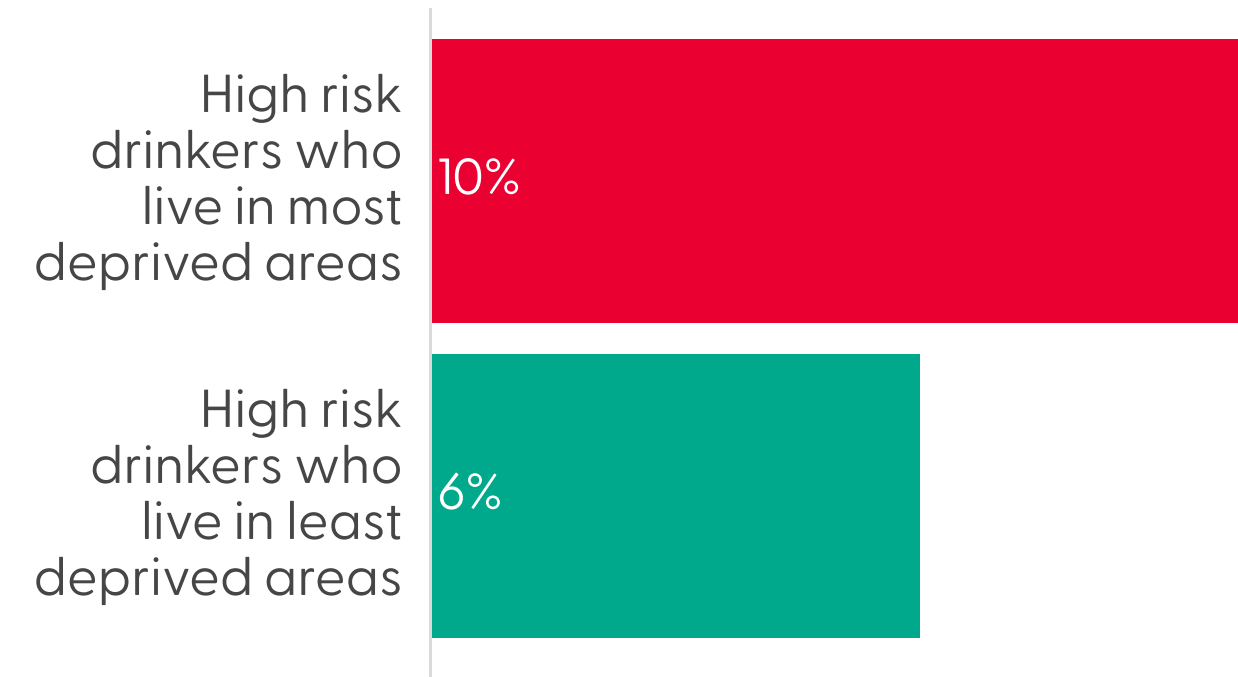


**BUT...**

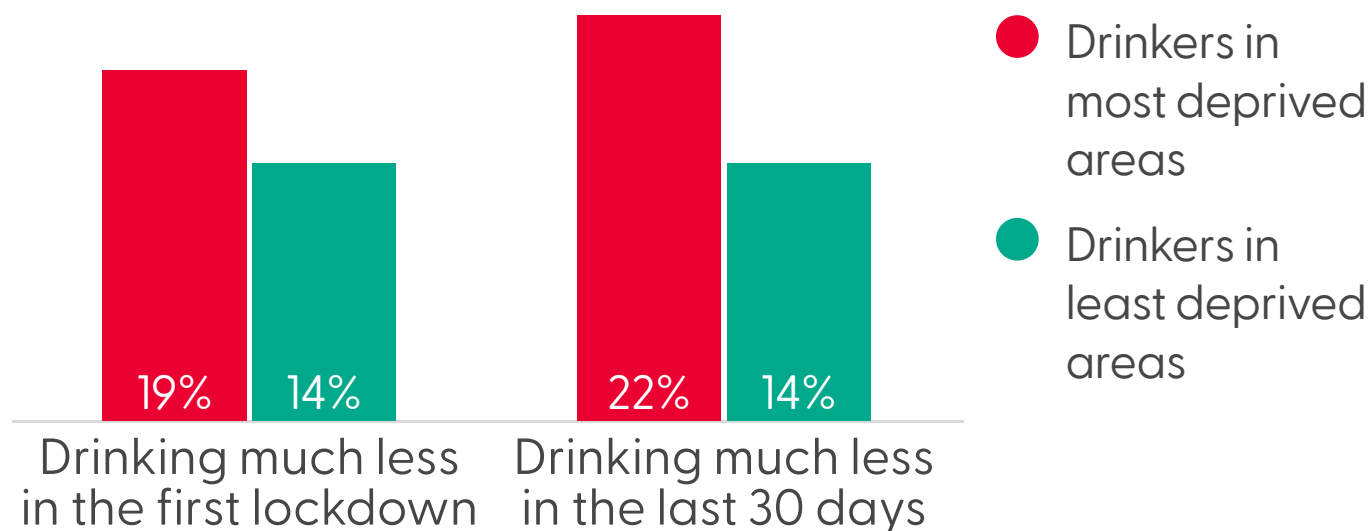


**Those that do drink are more likely to be high risk**

Based on the full AUDIT assessment



**And drinkers in the most deprived areas were drinking less during lockdown than their usual amounts**

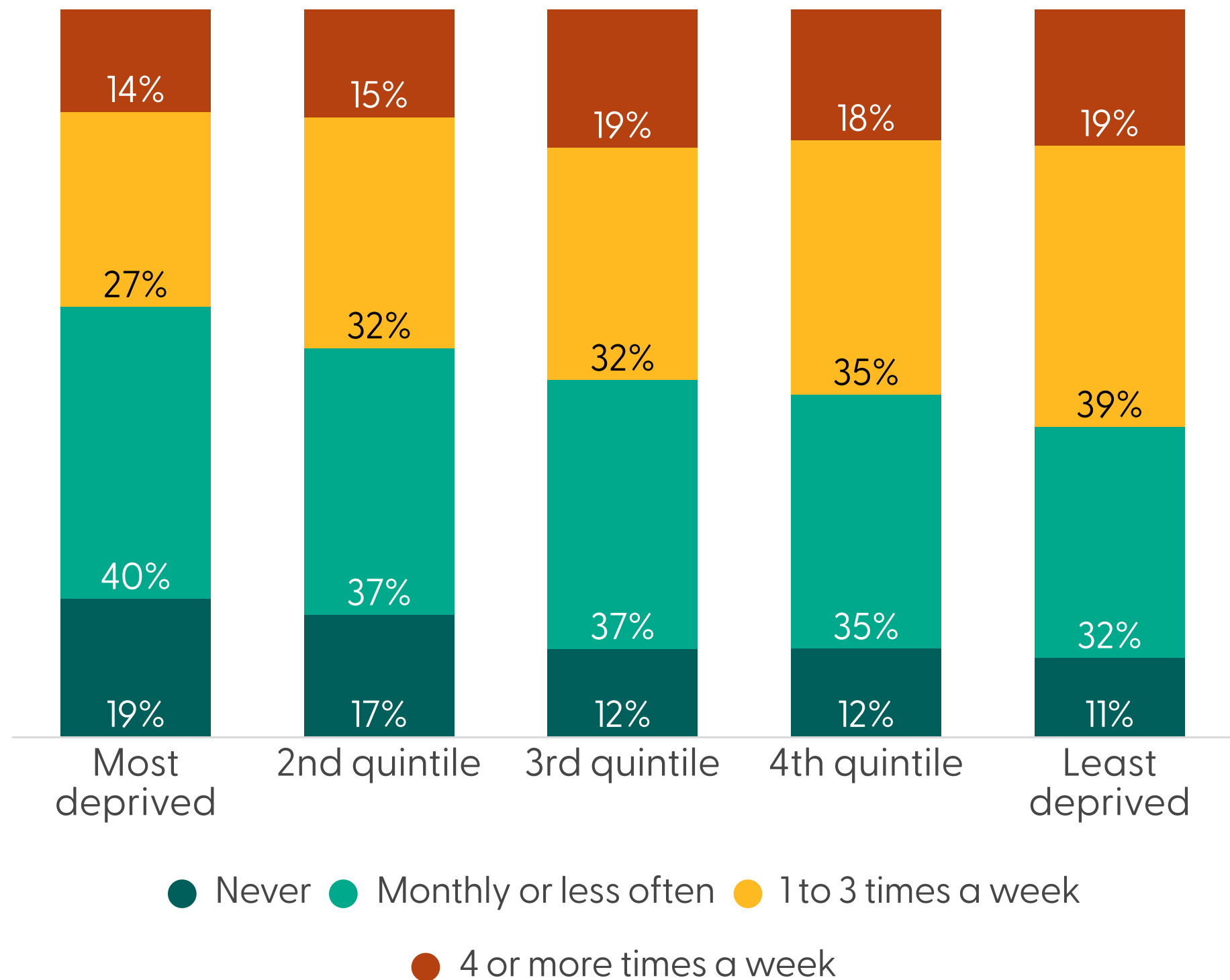


**And they are more likely to have been drinking alone in the last seven days**



# How often people drink alcohol by level of deprivation

Findings reiterate the consumption patterns outlined in the alcohol harm paradox



**58% of adults in the least deprived quintile drink at least once a week, compared to 41% in the most deprived quintile**

**19 in every 100 adults in the top 20% most deprived areas of the country never drink alcohol**

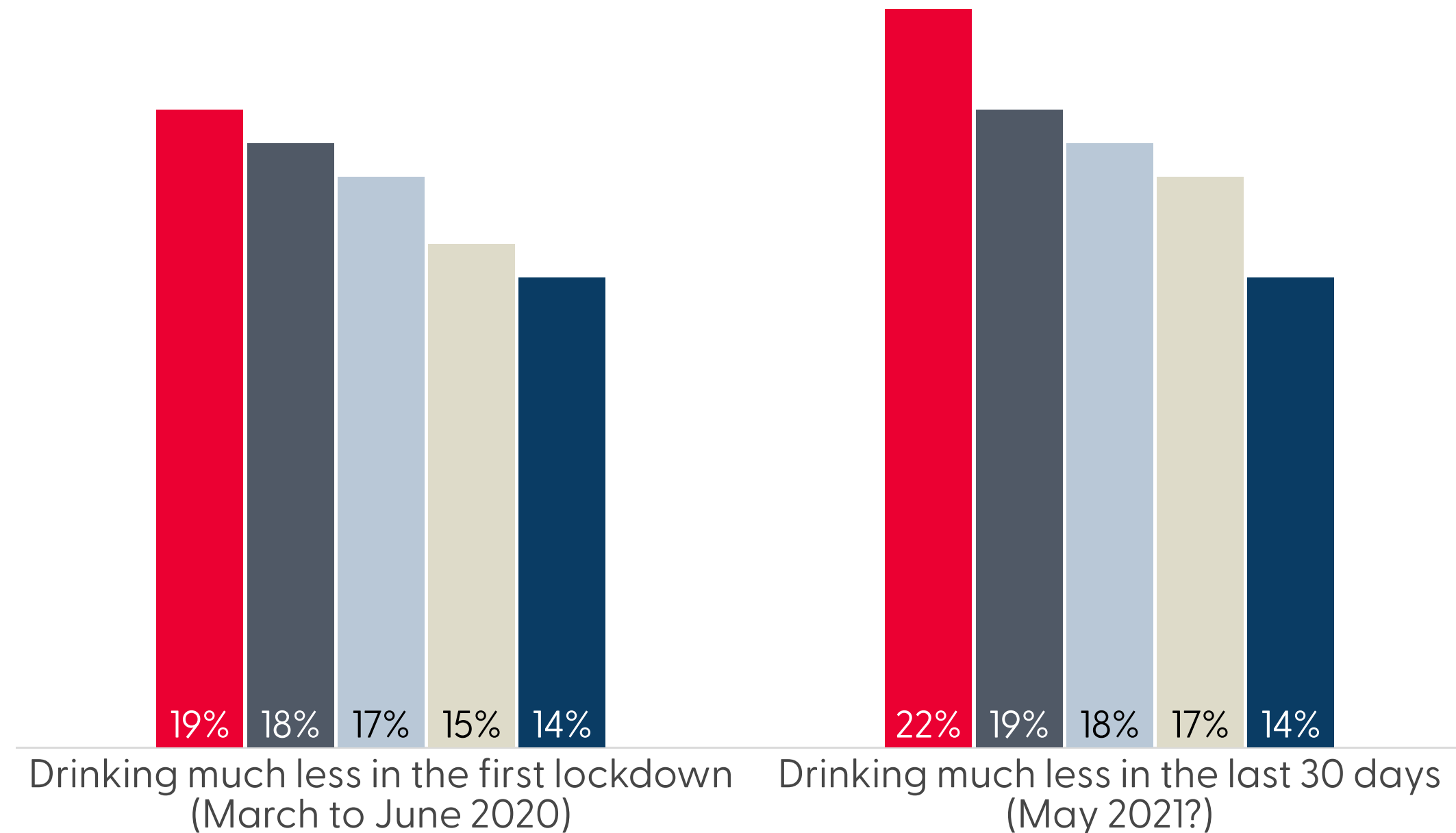
The proportion of people drinking alcohol four or more times a week is broadly the same for anyone living outside of the 40% most deprived areas of the country.

39% of people in the least deprived quintile of the country report drinking one to three times a week, higher than any other quintile.

Drinking frequency by Levels of deprivation. Base: all UK adults (n=9.137)

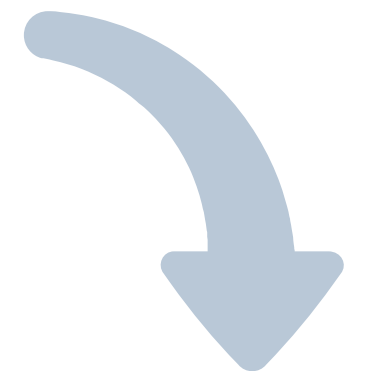
# Drinking during lockdown compared to pre-pandemic

**Drinkers in the most deprived areas were more likely to report drinking much less than before the pandemic, both in the first lockdown and over the last 30 days**



**19% of drinkers living in the most deprived quintile reported drinking much less in the first lockdown, compared to 14% of drinkers in the least deprived areas**

**22% of drinkers living in the most deprived quintile reported drinking much less in the last 30 days, compared to 14% of drinkers in the least deprived areas**



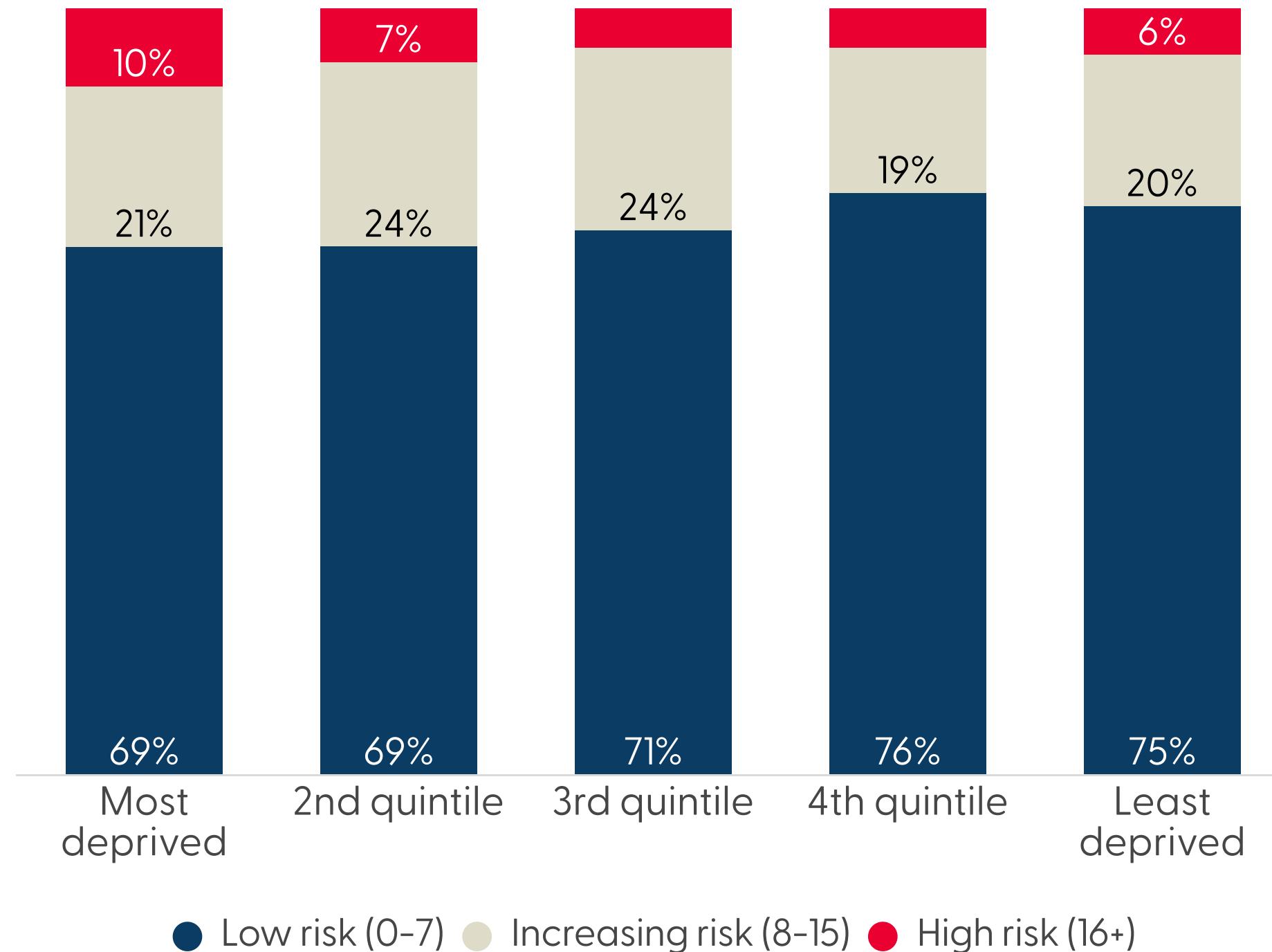
● Most deprived ● 2nd quintile ● 3rd quintile ● 4th quintile ● Least deprived



Drinking during lockdown by Levels of deprivation. Base: all UK adults who drink (n=7,860)

# Difference in alcohol risk level between most and least deprived

Drinkers in more deprived areas are more likely to be high risk drinkers (based on the AUDIT assessment)



## The difference in risk level between the most and least deprived is clear in the full AUDIT assessment

1 in 10 drinkers in the 20% most deprived areas of the country are higher risk or possibly dependent drinkers.

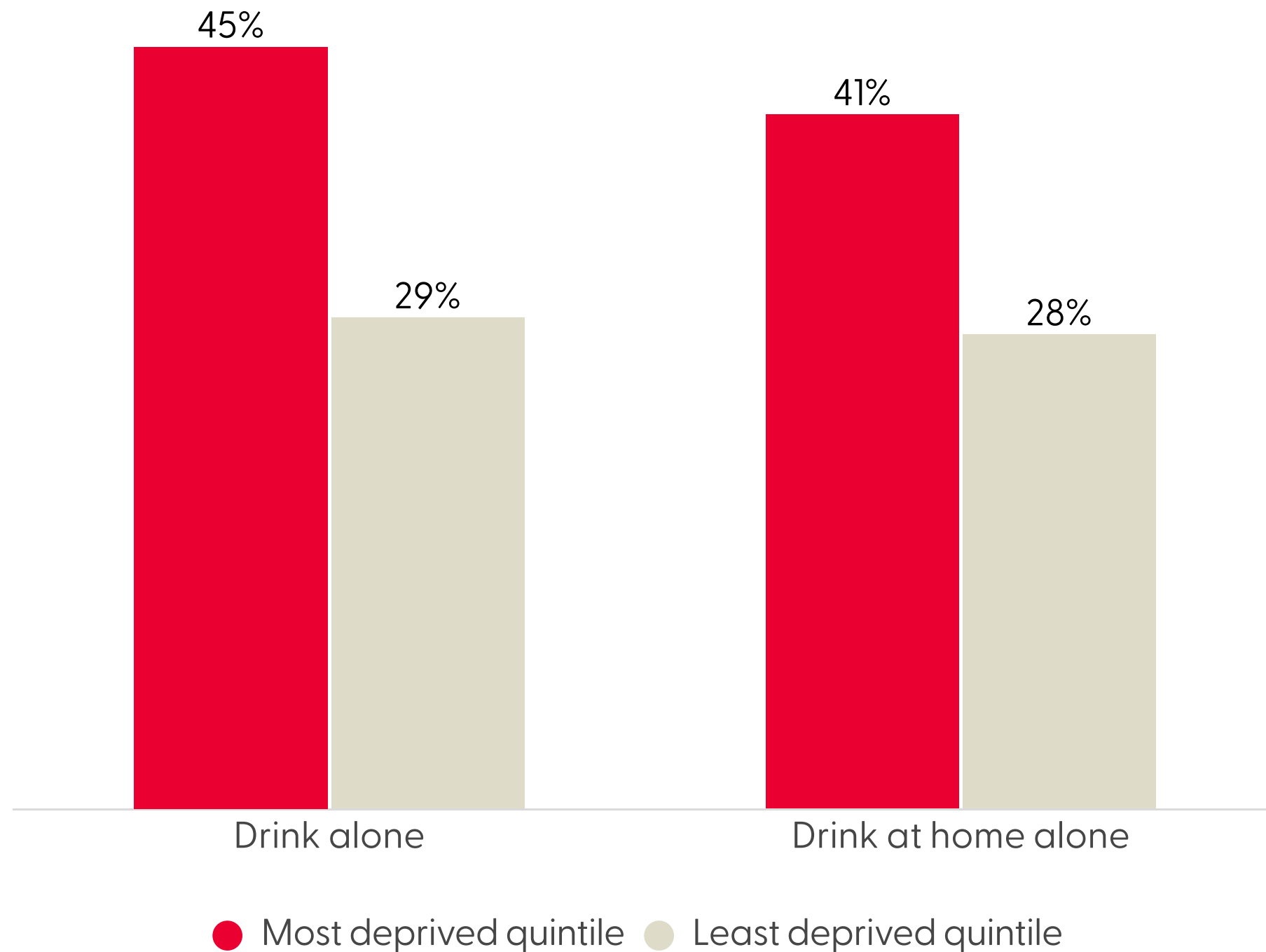
75% of drinkers in the 20% least deprived areas of the country are low risk, compared to 69% in the most deprived.


There are very few significant differences by quintile deprivation levels when looking at the shorter AUDIT-C screening scores.

Full AUDIT by Levels of deprivation. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=7,911). Low risk (n=5,690); Increasing risk (n=1,725); Higher risk and possible dependence (n=496)

# What else do we know about drinkers in the most deprived areas?

## More likely to have had a drink alone in the last week



 Drunk alone in last seven days by Levels of deprivation. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol alone in last seven days (n=1,896); all UK adults who drank at home alone in last seven days (n=1,792)

## More about their living circumstances



**20%**

Have children under the age of 16 at home (compared to 17% of those in the least deprived quintile)



**10%**

Drink to forget about their problems most or all of the time (compared to 5% of those in the least deprived quintile)



**19%**

Also smoke (compared to 9% of those in the least deprived quintile)



**21%**

Pandemic negatively affect their mental health to a very / large extent (compared to 16% of those in the least deprived quintile)



**14%**

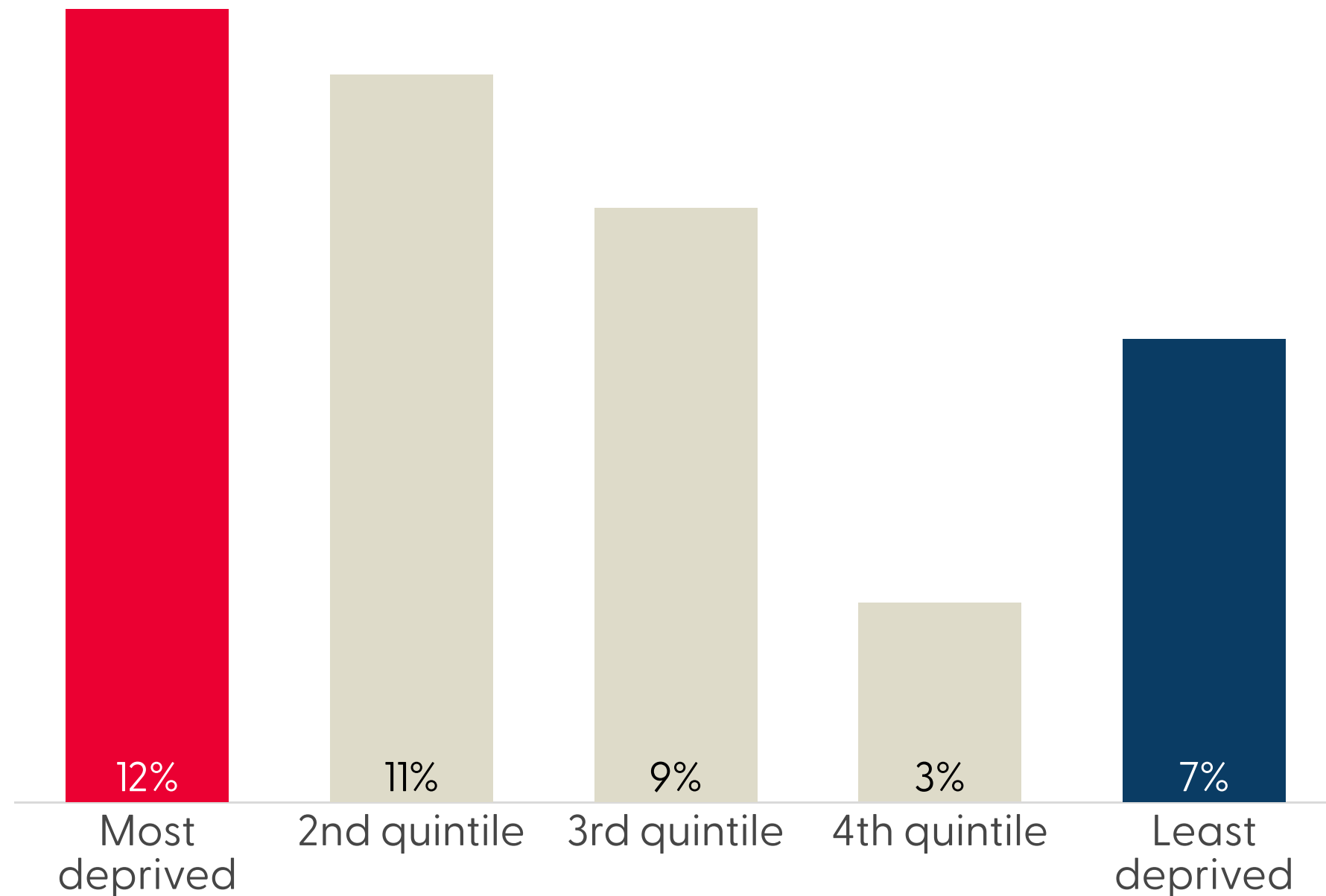
Are unemployed (compared to 5% of those in the least deprived quintile)



# Individual AUDIT questions reveal more about deprivation

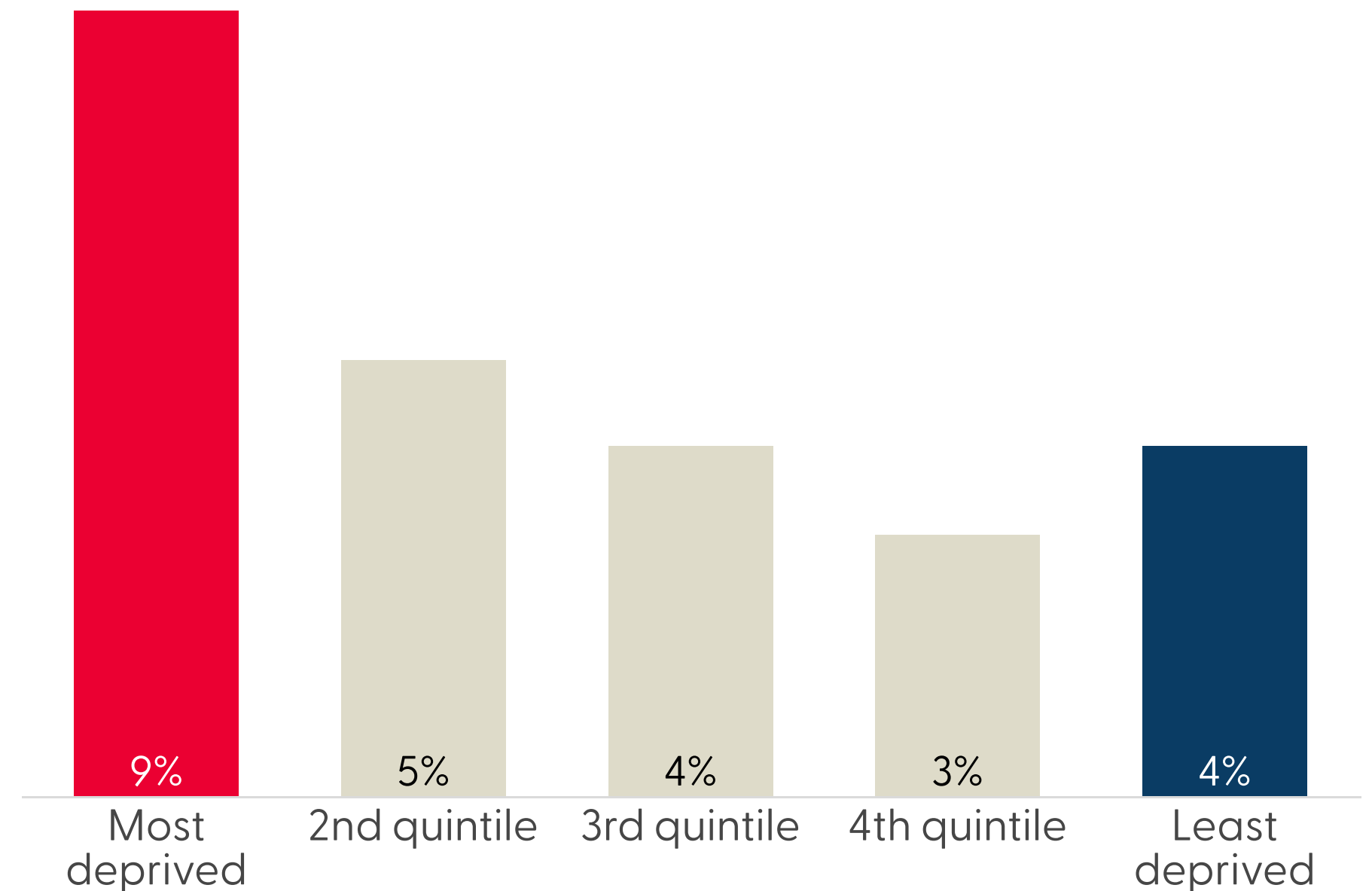
The differences in high risk drinking between AUDIT-C and the full AUDIT assessment suggest that it is not the consumption of alcohol that sets drinkers in the most and least deprived areas apart, but the symptoms of alcohol dependence or harmful alcohol use

12% of drinkers in the most deprived areas reported failing to do what was expected of them due to alcohol at least sometimes



Full AUDIT (failed to do what was expected) by by Levels of deprivation. Base: all UK adults who reported failing to do what was expected of them due to alcohol at least sometimes (n=721)

9% of drinkers in the most deprived areas reported needing a drink in the morning to get over a heavy session



Full AUDIT (needing a drink in the morning by by Levels of deprivation. Base: all UK adults who reported needing an alcoholic drink in the morning to get going after a heavy drinking session at least sometimes (n=363)

# Final reflections

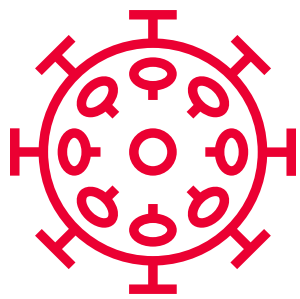
And how to find out more

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**Take me to...**

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2021](#) | [How has the pandemic impacted drinking?](#) | [Reasons given for drinking](#) | [Drinking behaviours](#) | [High risk drinkers](#) | [Groups of interest](#) | [Drinking and deprivation](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [Appendix](#)

# The impact of the pandemic and looking to the future



## The situation created by the pandemic has had an impact on drinking behaviours

The pandemic created new and unique situations for many people, and this has had an impact on UK drinking levels and behaviours. For a significant proportion of the UK adult population, reported alcohol consumption increased in amount and/or frequency during the initial national lockdown in March/June 2020.

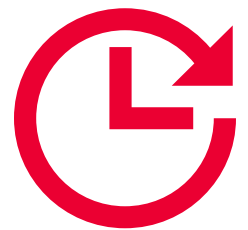
The pandemic created or increased certain drinking behaviours, such as drinking alone at home or in public places, and there are indications that these situations were deemed more socially acceptable during the pandemic.

With reported drinking levels in May/June 2021 back down to pre-pandemic levels, the data suggests that, on average, this spike in 2020 is an anomaly caused by the unprecedented situation presented by COVID-19. However, many high risk drinkers are still reporting drinking more than they were pre-pandemic, which is a particular cause for concern given that this group is most at risk from alcohol harm.



## Wider contextual and lifestyle factors also impact drinking behaviours

The data and qualitative research suggests that drinking behaviours are also impacted by life stage and wider contextual factors such as good weather or a successful national football campaign.



## Looking to the future

Over the next 12 months, it will be interesting to track to what extent recent changes in drinking behaviours become normalised and if there is a return to stricter restrictions, to see what impact these have on drinking levels.

# Interested to find out more?



**More on Drinkaware**



## About Drinkaware

Drinkaware is an independent charity which aims to reduce alcohol-related harm.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/about-us>



**More Drinkaware research**



## Research and Impact | Drinkaware

Drinkaware ensures our work is founded in research and evidence to further promote how to reduce alcohol misuse and harm in the UK.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research>



**Advice and support**



## Advice and support

We can help you learn about the impact of alcohol on you, your family or friends. Here we'll support you with advice, information and strategies to help reduce alcohol consumption and improve your health.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice>



# About PS Research

## Introducing PS Research

We're Adam and Emma: two experienced research specialists based in the North of England.

**Adam** specialises in quantitative research. He spent almost a decade working in local authorities and delivering research projects across the public sector. Adam is a Certified Member of the MRS (Market Research Society) and was named the UK's New Freelancer of the Year in 2019 by IPSE (the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed).

**Emma** specialises in qualitative research. She spent several years working agency-side for a couple of large, international market research agencies. Emma is a member of the AQR (Association of Qualitative Research).



PS Research is an accredited Market Research Society Company Partner, demonstrating our commitment to quality research and compliance, working to the MRS Code of Conduct.

# Appendix

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# References

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2: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/drinkaware-monitors/drinkaware-monitor-2021>

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5: <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>

6: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/media/tl2np2c5/impact-report-2020.pdf>

7: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/drinkaware-monitors>

8: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/alcoholic-drinks-and-units/low-risk-drinking-guidelines#thecmoguidelines>

9: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/drinkaware-monitors/drinkaware-monitor-2020-drinking-and-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

10: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/research-and-evaluation-reports/understanding-the-alcohol-harm-paradox>



# Glossary

**Alcohol dependence:** This is a medical definition. Alcohol dependence is defined as behavioural, cognitive and physiological factors that typically include a strong desire to drink alcohol and difficulties in controlling its use. Someone who is alcohol-dependent may persist in drinking, despite harmful physical and mental health consequences.

**AUDIT:** The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a simple, 10-question method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment. It provides a framework for intervention to help hazardous and harmful drinkers to reduce their drinking, or to stop drinking. AUDIT is designed to help health practitioners in particular identify hazardous drinking, harmful drinking and possible dependence. Drinkaware's Alcohol Self-Assessment is based on the AUDIT screening questionnaire.

**AUDIT-C:** This refers to the three consumption-related questions on the AUDIT questionnaire that relate to drinking frequency, units consumed on a typical occasion and frequency of drinking six units or more (for women) or eight units or more (for men) at a single session. A score of 0 to 4 indicates low risk; 5 to 7 indicates increasing risk; 8 to 10 indicates higher risk; and 11 to 12 indicates possible dependence.

**Binge drinking:** This term has a medical definition. Binge drinking is defined by the NHS for men as drinking more than eight units of alcohol in a single session, and more than six units for women.

**Harmful drinking:** 'Harmful drinking' means drinking in a way that is likely to cause or has already caused harm, i.e. a strong likelihood that damage to health – physical or mental – has already been caused.

**Hazardous drinking:** 'Hazardous drinking' means drinking in a way that may put your mental and/or physical health at serious risk; depending on patterns of drinking and other factors, this can include social consequences.

**Increasing and high risk:** These terms have specific meanings in relation to an AUDIT-C score. A score of 0 to 4 indicates low risk; 5 to 7 indicates increasing risk; 8 to 10 indicates higher risk; and 11 to 12 indicates possible dependence. Note these scores are indicative as a screening tool and not diagnostic.

# Online community minimum quotas: Key priority groups

The qualitative research was not designed to be representative, however some minimum quotas were set to ensure a mix of participants:

Key priority group	Minimum quota	Achieved*
High risk drinker	7	22
Parents of Under 18s	7	11
Been made redundant/at risk of redundancy	7	6**
Mental health impact	7	11

\*Participants could fit into one or more key priority groups

\*\*7 participants were originally recruited to this group, however one participant chose to withdraw from the community part way through

**Note:** 32 participants were originally recruited to cover the eventuality that some participants may choose not to take part/to withdraw from the study.

Quota criteria:

- **High risk drinker:** scores 8 or more on Audit-C
- **Parents of Under 18s:** has a child/children living at home either all of the time or some of the time
- **Mental health impact:** Feel that their mental health and wellbeing has been negatively impacted since the Coronavirus has impacted the UK to a very large or large extent
- **Been made redundant/at risk of redundancy:** Either has been made redundant/in the consultation process for redundancy since the Coronavirus outbreak started in the UK or is currently on furlough

# Online community minimum quotas: Demographic quotas

The qualitative research was not designed to be representative, however some minimum quotas were set to ensure a mix of participants:

Region	Minimum quota	Achieved
England	2	22
Wales	2	2
Scotland	2	2
Northern Ireland	2	4

Age	Minimum quota	Achieved
18-24	1	4
25-34	2	11
35-44	2	9
45-54	2	4
55+	2	2

Socioeconomic group	Minimum quota	Achieved
A/B	2	2
C1/C2	2	22
D/E	2	4

[More information on Social Economic Group classifications](#)