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Recall, understanding and responses to the 'Sensible Drinking message' among supermarket shoppers in Scotland.

A report of a pilot study conducted during July 2005.

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The assistance and support of the management and branch staff at The Scottish Midland Cooperative Society in Edinburgh, Scotland and the donations of ‘Sensible Drinking’ literature and financial support from *Drinkaware UK* are gratefully acknowledged.

This study was conducted with the following general aims;

- To investigate the feasibility of carrying out a questionnaire-based study dealing with issues relating to alcohol drinking within the supermarket setting.
- To document awareness and recall of the UK ‘Sensible Drinking’ message among shoppers.
- To investigate the perceived usefulness of the message and the ability to apply knowledge to personal drinking.
- To monitor awareness of, and response to, the initiative by the Co-operative Society to promote the ‘Sensible Drinking’ message on wine labels.
- To distribute and monitor reaction to ‘Sensible Drinking ‘guidance literature.

Main findings;

- The majority of the sample (94%) bought alcoholic drinks from supermarkets.
- 15% of the sample could not define a unit of alcohol. However among those offering a definition, knowledge was good . Many respondents were able to provide a qualified, more accurate definition.
- Questions relating to daily guidelines caused much confusion. 30% of the sample could not answer this question. Of those who answered many recalled the weekly values and divided by seven. However values were generally conservative, very few participants quoted values exceeding recommended daily guidelines.
- Only 2% of the sample quoted exact daily guidelines for both men and for women.
- A relatively large percentage of men (81%) and women (75%) claimed that they did not use the unit system to monitor their own drinking.
- For women the greatest number not using the unit system were in the younger age groups.
- Wine followed by spirit were the favourite drinks for women. For men lager/beer /cider were the most popular choices.
- Only 21% of wine drinkers could state a unit content for a bottle of wine of between 8 and 10 units.
- Awareness of the Co-op labelling system was around 37% for the sample as a whole. Percentages for stores B and C was around twice that of store A.
- Around 20% reporting awareness of labelling indicated that it did influence their buying. Of those who were not aware of it 37% indicated that they would now use it in the future.
- The sample contained approximately twice as many females as males. The younger age groups were more evident in store C. The two oldest age groups contained the fewest number of members.

Method;

Researchers visited each of three branches of the supermarket chain separately on consecutive weekdays (Tuesday to Thursday) in July 2005. The three sites are described below;

Table 1 Description of participating supermarkets and sampling times

Code	Description	Time visited
A	City centre convenience store.	10.00 to 18.00
B	Large supermarket approximately 1 mile from the city centre.	10.00 to 17.30
C	Small supermarket located within city suburb with adjacent, but separate, off-licence.	13.00 to 18.00 (supermarket) 18.00 to 20.00 (off licence)

A poster was displayed at each supermarket entrance announcing that the study would be taking place. Customers were made aware that any data collected would be treated confidentially and anonymously.

In each supermarket members of the public were approached as they shopped and asked if they could spare a couple of minutes of their time. If they agreed and completed the questionnaire, they were then asked if they would like to receive a small cardboard 'wheel calculator'. This item is produced by 'Drinkaware' and permits the calculation of the UK alcohol unit content of various drink sizes of a wide range of alcoholic drinks. The response to this offer was noted by the researchers.

Questionnaire;

The questionnaire comprised 12 questions and was printed on a single double sided sheet of paper in an attempt to aid compliance. The only demographic data recorded were age and gender. Subjects were excluded if they were under 18 years of age, were tourists visiting the UK or declared themselves to be abstainers (this was defined as drinking less than 1-2 drinks per year). The actual number of participants comprising this final category was noted at sites B and C. At these two sites the number refusing to participate was also noted. The remaining questions investigated recall of the 'Sensible Drinking' message in the UK, ability to report the unit content of the respondent's favoured drink (this was later compared with the theoretical value calculated from manufacturer's literature) and finally awareness and views on the usefulness of drink labels displaying the sensible drinking message. This information is displayed (in addition to the ABV (alcohol by volume) and alcohol unit content) on all wine bottles retailed by the supermarket chain when sourced from its own supplier.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University.

Conflicts of interest;

Neither the Supermarket management nor *Drinkaware UK* influenced the design phase or the data collection period of this study. The Supermarket management team were shown the copy of the questionnaire prior to the study. They asked for one small name change to one question. This related to their parent company trading name. *Drinkaware UK* supplied the alcohol unit 'wheel calculators' which were distributed to all participants. They also provided funds to finance data entry. Data were analysed using Excel and SPSS.

Results;

1. Sample demographics;

Table 2 Study participants

Supermarket	Declined (n)	Abstainers (n)	Participated (n)	Total	Response rate (%)
A	nr*	nr	78		
B	86	31	121	238	51
C	45	4	64	113	57
total			263		

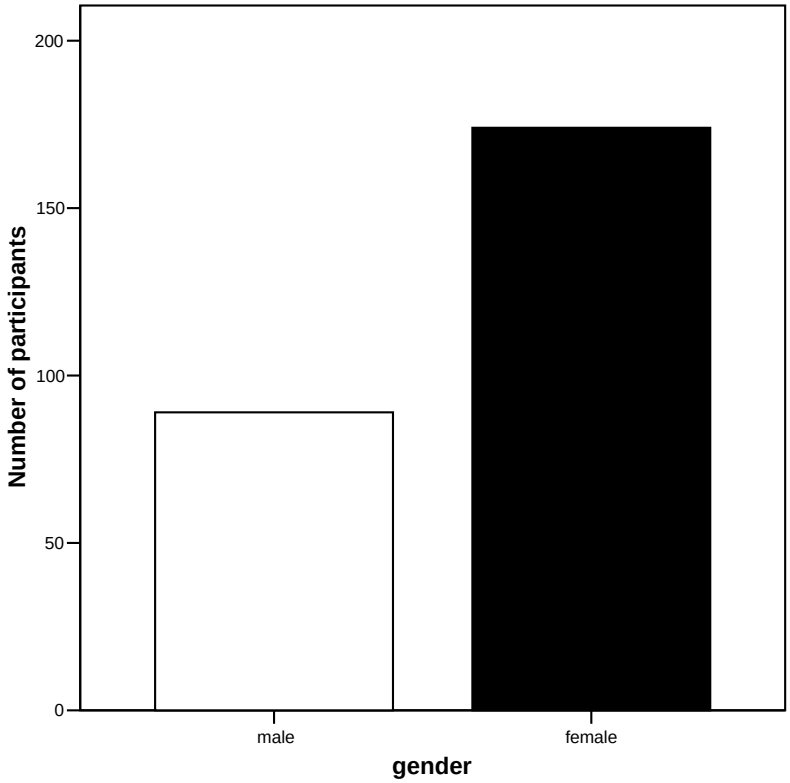
* nr = not recorded.

In store C, 47 respondents participated within the supermarket, 17 within the associated off-licence.

The total number of participants was 263. The average response rate recorded at supermarkets B and C was 54%.

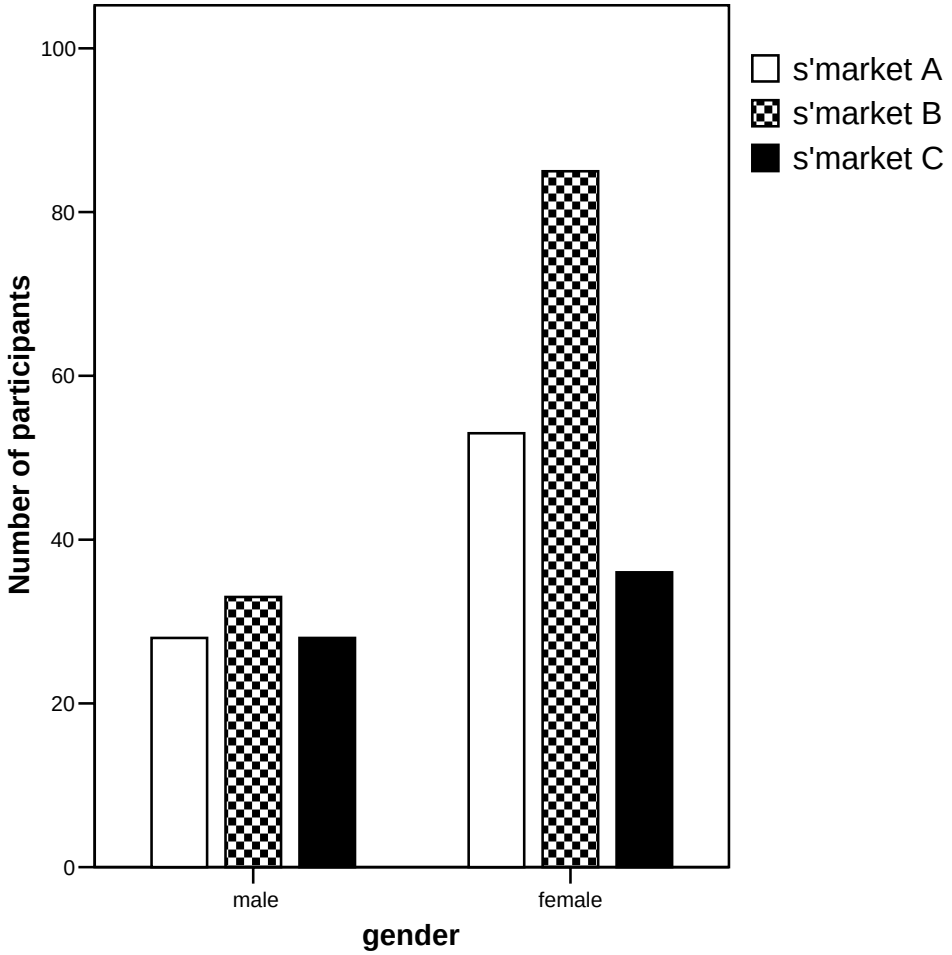
The ratio of females to males was approximately 2:1. Male participants accounted for 33.8% (n=89) of the sample while 66.2 % were female (n=174). In all three participating supermarkets the majority of participants were female. (See Figure 1.)

Fig. 1 Number of male and female participants in total sample.



This gender difference was evident in each of the three supermarkets sampled (see Figure 2 below).

Fig. 2 Numbers of male and female participants. Grouped according to supermarket.



Abstainers;

The UK General Household Survey (2004) suggests that abstainers account for 15 % of the general population. This value is similar to the figure of 13% recorded at store B. The value at store C (3%) is lower. However, in this supermarket 27% of the participants were approached within a separate off-licence section. This fact may account, partially, for the lower recorded abstention rate.

Age range

The percentage of males and females belonging to each age group is shown in Table 3 and for each of the three supermarkets in Table 4. For both genders the greatest number of participants belonged to the youngest age group. The smallest number of participants was in the male age group 56-65 years.

Table 3 Percentage of respondents belonging to each age group for males and females. Actual number of participants is shown in brackets.

Age range	Males (n=89)	Females (n=174)
18-25	29% (26)	24% (41)
26-35	24% (21)	18% (31)
36-45	19% (17)	14% (24)
46-55	8% (7)	21% (37)
56-65	6% (5)	13% (22)
0ver 65	15% (13)	11% (19)
Total	100%	100%

Table 4. Number of participants belonging to each of the six age distributions at the three store sites.

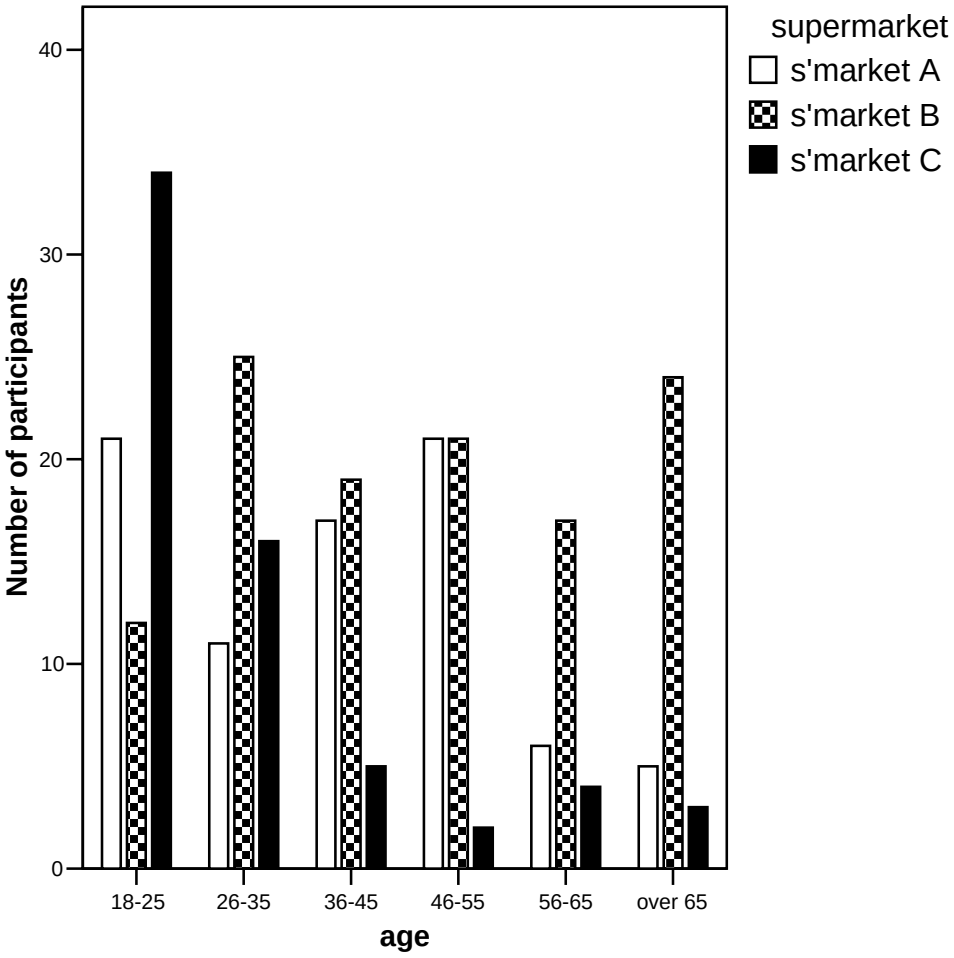
Age Group	Store			Total
	A	B	C	(n=263)
	(n)	(n)	(n)	
18-25	21	12	34	67
26-35	11	25	16	52
36-45	17	19	5	41
46-55	21	21	2	44
56-65	6	17	4	27
Over 65	5	24	3	32
Total	81	118	64	263

All three sites had representatives from all age ranges. Overall the greatest number of members of the 18-25 year old age group participated at store C while the greatest number belonging to the two older age groups participated at store B. In store C 78% of the sample were aged 35 or less (see Fig.3).

Table 5 Age distribution across the three supermarket sites; expressed as a percentage of the total sample group for each store.

Age Group	Store A (n=81)	Store B (n=118)	Store C (n=64)
18-25	26	10	53
26-35	14	21	25
36-45	21	16	8
46-55	26	18	3
56-65	7	14	6
Over 65	6	20	5
Total	100%	100%	100%

Fig. 3 Bar chart to show numbers of participants in each age group at each of the three supermarkets



2. Alcohol drink-related knowledge;

In response to the question 'Do you ever buy alcoholic drink from a supermarket or off licence?, 94% of the sample (n=248) replied 'Yes', 6% (n=15) replied 'No'.

Definition of a unit

Responses to the request to define a unit of alcohol revealed some misunderstandings. Some respondents did not understand the term. Some couched their answer in terms of mls of spirit drink or 'nips'. Of females 14% (n=24) and of males 17% (n=15) could not define a unit. The somewhat elastic term a 'glass' of wine was a common answer however some respondents were quick to qualify their answer as a *small* glass of wine and to recognise that a unit of beer would depend on the strength of the brand. Around 5% of the sample wrongly equated 1 pint of beer with one unit.

In keeping with their stated preferred drink, the majority of women who correctly quoted the definition of a unit did so in terms of wine or spirit while men related it to beer or lager primarily.

Daily guidelines

The daily guidelines suggested by study participants for women (Table 6) and men (Table 7) are shown below. Within the total sample 30.4% (n=80) could not quote a daily limit for women (43% of those were male).
Only 8% (n=21) quoted the correct value of 2-3 units. However only 5% (n=13) quoted values which exceeded the daily limit while 55.1% recorded values of less than 2-3 units. Many respondents were confused by the question and more readily quoted weekly values which they then divided by seven.

Table 6 Daily guidelines for women reported by total sample. n =262 (One non response).

day limit for women	Number of participants
don't know	80
1 unit	21
1-2 units	12
2 units	83
2-3 units	21
3units	26
3-4 units	7
4 units	2
5 units	1
over five units	1
not detailed but less than men	2
half unit	2
what you can get away with	1
1-3 units	1
2 pints	1
2-4 units	1

Within the total sample 31% (n=80) did not know the daily guidelines for men. (See Table 7.) Of those 64% were female. Only 12 (4.6%) gave the correct answer. However, again a relatively large percentage (33.2%) supplied a value below that of the male UK daily limit of 3-4 units. Only 13% gave an answer which exceeded the daily guideline, while 6.9% could not state a numerical value but knew that it was greater than that for women. Again many respondents hesitated before supplying an answer and preferred to divide the weekly figure by seven.

Table 7 Daily guidelines for men reported by total sample (n=262) (One non response).

	day limit for men
	Count
don't know	80
1 unit	5
1-2 units	4
2 units	15
2-3 units	7
3 units	54
3-4 units	12
4 units	30
4-5 units	4
5 units	14
over five units	13
not detailed but more than women	18
half unit	1
what you can get away with	1
1-4 units	1
2-3 pints	1
3 pints	1
4-6 units	1
999	1

Those who did not know the daily guideline for women were also likely to not know daily guidelines for men. 64 participants were within this category and this represented 31% of all men and 21% of all women.

Only 6 respondents were able to correctly identify both male and female daily guidelines. Three were from age group 1, and one was from each of age groups 4, 5 and 6. Two were male, four were female.

Use of Unit system;

Respondents were asked if they used the UK alcohol unit system to monitor their own drinking or that of friends or to gauge if they should drive. Their responses are shown below. Of interest is the finding that around 75% of women and 81% of men reported that they did not use the unit system to monitor their own drinking.

Only 11.4% of males and 20.6 % of females claimed to do so. A small percentage in each group linked the use of the system to the ability to judge whether or not you should drive.

Five members of the group (n=64) who could not quote daily guidelines for either males or females in the previous question, claimed in this next question, nevertheless, to use the unit system. Three individuals within this same group claimed to use it when deciding whether or not to drive.

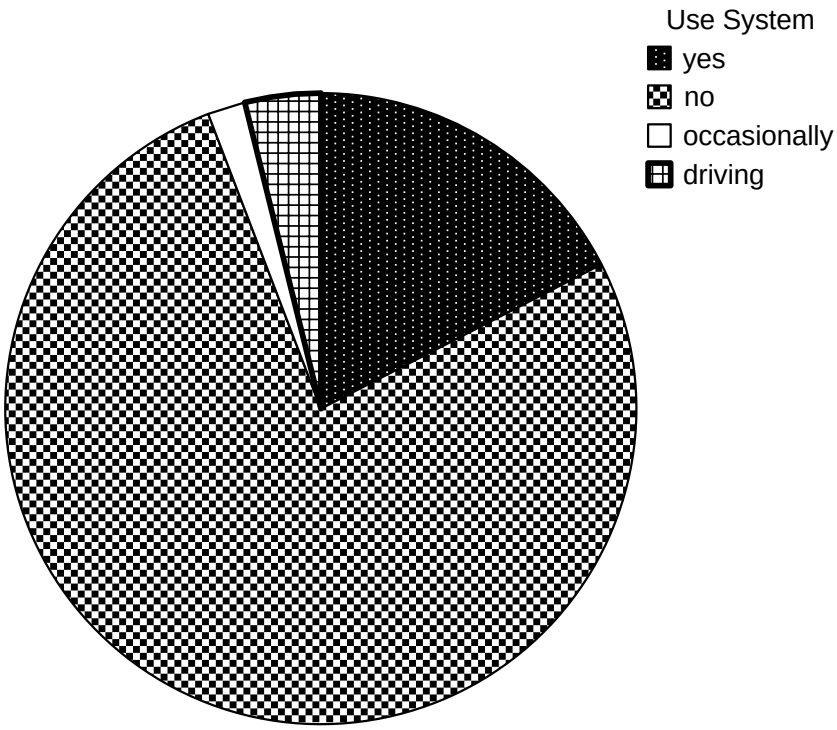
Some respondents claimed that the availability of price offers on alcoholic drink was a greater influence on beverage choice than unit content etc.

Table 8 Responses of each gender to the question asking if they used the unit system to monitor their own drinking. Results are expressed as a percentage of the total number of respondents belonging to each gender. (Non-respondents =5)

		gender	
		Male (n=88)	**Female (n=170)**
use system	yes	11.4	20.6
	no	80.7	74.7
	occasionally	3.4	1.2
	driving	4.5	3.5

Of the six respondents who correctly identified both female and male daily drinking guidelines in the previous question, not one claimed to use the unit system.

Fig.4 Use of the unit system for monitoring alcohol intake. Responses are shown as a percentage of the total sample.



Male and female responses are displayed separately in the following tables (Tables 13-14).

Table 13 Responses of male participants (n=89) to the question asking whether or not they used the unit system to monitor their own drinking when buying alcohol or socialising etc. Stratified according to age group.

	Age Range (years)					
Number of males;	**18-25**	**26-35**	**36-45**	**46-55**	**56-65**	**Over 65**
using the unit system	2	3	3	1	0	1
Only using to judge if safe to drive or not	3	1				
Not using unit system	20	16	13	6	5	11
Occasional use	1	1	1			
(1 non response)						

For men, among those claiming to use the unit system, the greatest number was in the first three age groups. (However the total number within this category is small). Of those claiming not to use the system the majority were in the same first three age groups, and the oldest.

Table 14 Responses of female participants (n=174) to the question asking whether or not they used the unit system to monitor their own drinking when buying alcohol or socialising etc . Stratified according to age group.

	Age Range (years)					
Number of females;	**18-25**	**26-35**	**36-45**	**46-55**	**56-65**	**Over 65**
using the unit system	5	6	6	9	5	4
Only using to judge if safe to drive or not	2	2	2			
Not using unit system	34	20	15	28	17	13
Occasional use		1	1			
(4 missing data)						

Among women, the numbers claiming to use the unit system were distributed across the age groups. 25% of this group were in the in the 46-55 age group. The greatest number of those not using the system (n=34 i.e. 27 % of the 'non-users') were found in the youngest age group.

Favoured drink;

The favourite (preferred) drinks reported by participants are presented in the following figure and tables.

Fig. 5 Number of respondents identifying particular favourite drinks at each of the three supermarket sites. (1 non response)

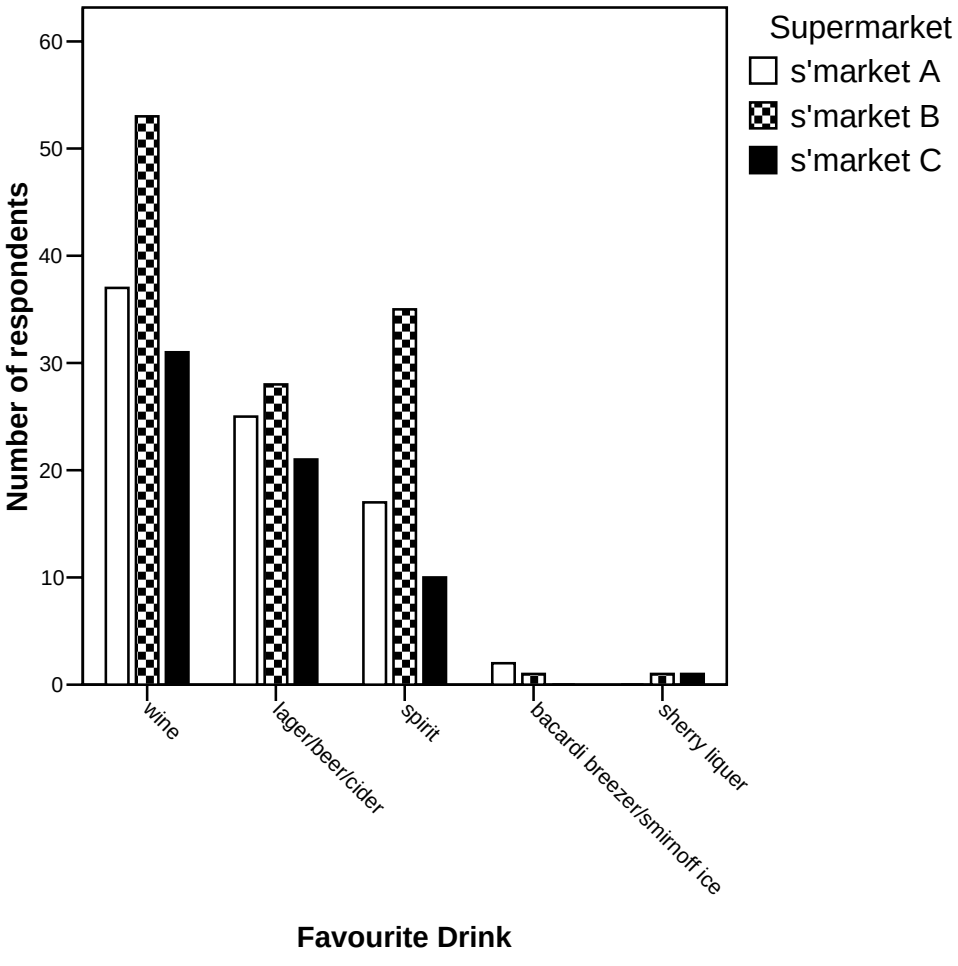


Table 15 Number of respondents identifying particular favourite drinks at each of the three supermarket sites. (1 non response)

		Favourite drink					Total
		wine	lager/beer/ cider	spirit	Bacardi breezer/Smir noff ice	Sherry/ liquer	
Supermarket	A	37	25	17	2	0	81
	B	53	28	35	1	1	118
	C	31	21	10	0	1	63
Total		121	74	62	3	2	262

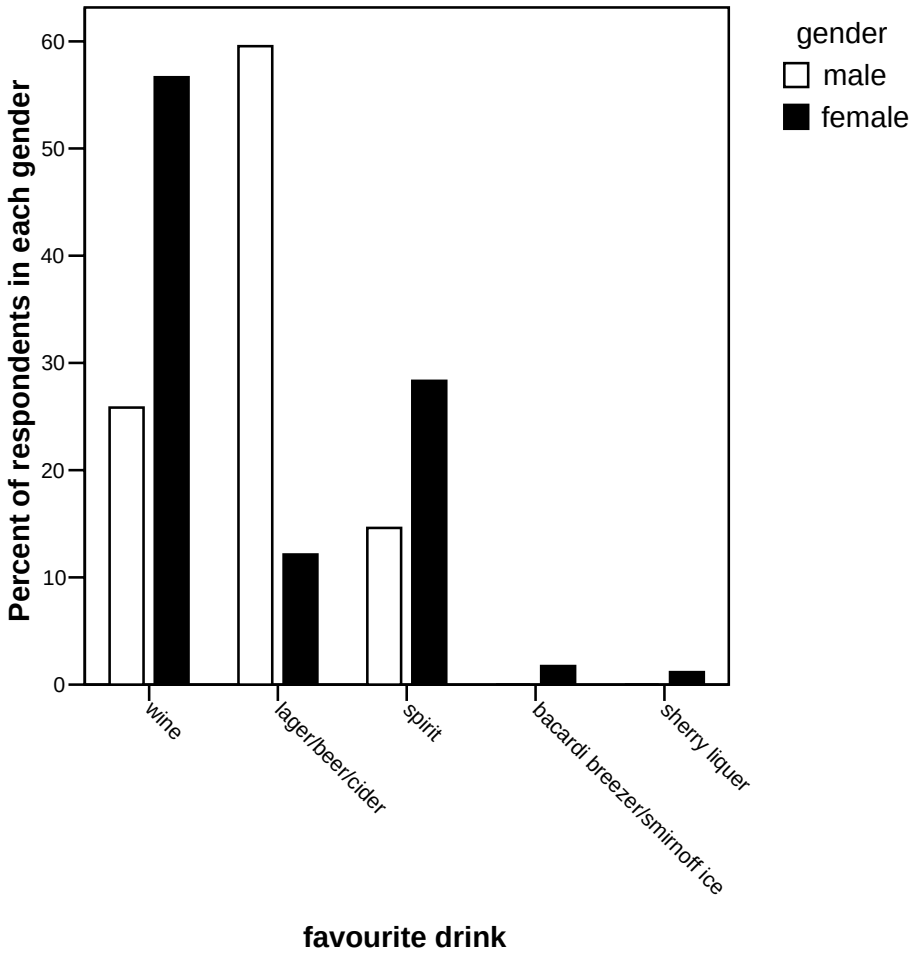
The data can also be displayed to show gender preferences for favourite drinks.

Table 16 Numbers of male and female respondents identifying their preferred drink (1 non response)

Count

		Preferred drink					
		wine	lager/beer/ cider	spirit	Bacardi breezer/Smirnoff ice	sherry liqueur	Total
gender	male	23	53	13	0	0	89
	female	98	21	49	3	2	173
Total		121	74	62	3	2	262

Fig. 6 Bar chart of percentage of male and female respondents reporting various drinks as their favourite or preferred drink.



The most popular drink among women was wine – 57% reported this as their favourite drink. The next most common was spirit – 28%. For men, lager/beer/cider were the most popular choices (60% reported these options as their preferred drink).

Ability to identify unit content of commercially available bottle/can of favourite drink.

Among those who identified wine as their favourite drink (n= 121), 27 (22%) could not suggest how many units of alcohol were in a bottle of wine.
The average strength of wine sold in the UK is 11.85% (HM Customs and Excise, 2004) and a bottle would contain 8.9 UK standard units. Of those wine drinkers who did offer an answer to this question, 60% suggested a value of 7.0 or fewer units. A greater percentage of women than men formed this group who under estimated the unit content of a wine bottle; (26% of male wine drinkers and 69% of women wine drinkers). The most common answer (26% of respondents) was 6 units. 27% of responders suggested an answer of 9 or more units per bottle.

15% of all males and 28% of all females identified spirit as their preferred drink (n=62). The majority, approximately two thirds of this group (65%) could not suggest how many units were in a bottle of whisky. Among those who did offer an answer, only 29% suggested a value within the range of 26-30 units. (A 700ml bottle of whisky sold within the UK is likely to contain 28 UK standard alcohol units).

Awareness of Co-op label

Table 17 Responses given by total sample to question relating to awareness of the co-op labelling system for wine. (3 missing values)

	number	As a percentage of total sample (n=263)
Aware of label	98	37.3%
Not aware of label	124	47.1%
Never buy wine	35	13.3%
Not sure	3	1.1%
Total	260	

Table 18 Type and number of responses given by total sample to question relating to awareness of Co-op labelling system on wine bottles cross-tabulated with store location. (3 missing values)

		Co-op label				Total
		yes	no	not sure	never buy/drink wine	
supermarket	**A**	17 (21%)	54	1	8	80
	B	50 (43%)	41	2	23	116
	C	31 (48%)	29	0	4	64
Total		98	124	3	35	260

Awareness of the Co-op wine labelling system was around 37% for the sample as a whole. It was higher in stores B and C. The adjacent Off-Licence within store C may partially explain this difference. In addition the customer type in store A – convenience, day-time purchaser may be relevant.

Fig. 8 Awareness of Sensible drinking message promoted on wine bottles obtained by the supermarket from its own suppliers.

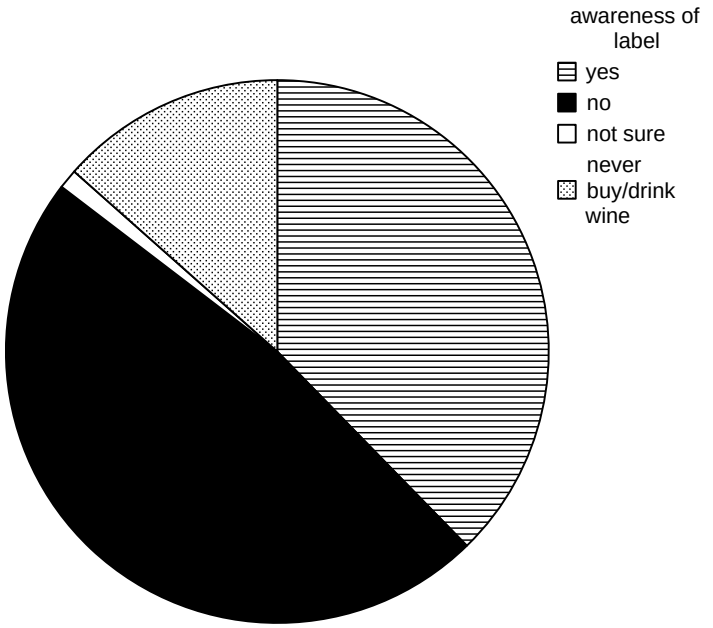


Table 19 Awareness of Co-op label according to gender (n=260) (3 missing data).

Count

		Co-op label				Total
		yes	no	not sure	never buy/drink wine	
gender	male	33 (38%)	37 (43%)	1(1%)	16 (18%)	87 (100%)
	female	65 (38%)	87 (50%)	2 (1%)	19 (11%)	173 (100%)
Total (n)		98	124	3	35	260

Generally awareness was approximately equal between the two genders.

Table 20 Awareness of Co-op labelling system for wine for each gender expressed as a percentage of all individuals within the age group.

Age Group	Expressed as a percentage of total number of males in each age group	Expressed as a percentage of total number of females in each age group
18-25	50	46
26-35	48	45
36-45	18	50
46-55	0	24
56-65	40	32
Over 65	38	21

For males awareness seemed to be greatest amongst the lower and higher age groups (but the relatively small numbers within some male age groups compromise this conclusion – see Table 3).
For females awareness was higher among the first three age groups.

Table 22 Opinions of those who said that they were aware of the label (n=98).

20%	Said it did influence their buying
59%	Said it did not influence their buying
8%	'Occasionally' it influenced their buying.
1%	Don't know
11%	No response

A comment occasionally given was that buying was more often influenced by 'offers' rather than label information. Others commented that they did inspect labels but because of an interest in nutritional information generally.

Table 23 Opinions amongst those who said that they were not aware of the label (n=124) in response to the question 'Would you use in the future?

37.1%	Said yes they would use in the future
40.3%	No , they would not use in the future
10.5%	Occasionally might use in future
12.1%	Didn't know or missing data

The very last question on the questionnaire asked "Do you think this labelling could be extended to other drinks, bottles and/or cans?".

Four respondents did not give an answer to this question, therefore the figures below relate to the 259 people who responded. The vast majority were in favour, with 195 (75.3%) saying they thought labelling was a good idea, and should be extended.
Some qualified their support:
"good idea – every beverage should be marked clearly"
"yes, people are interested in information"; "useful for people who might want the info"
"more on spirits"; "spirits are dangerous – don't know how much"
"yes, should be, especially for the young"; "more for young people"

“definitely for people drinking at home – when introduce no smoking in pubs, they will increase”
“absolutely – people drinking other drinks (other than wine) could lose out if don’t have info”
“should be a bit more obvious”

A further 38 people (14.4%) were more ambivalent:
“could use it, but not sure how many people would use it or read the information”
“won’t necessarily make a difference”
“labels can be misleading”
“not sure – would people read it anyway?”
“if people are worried it could be useful”

Twenty six people (10%) said they were not in favour either of labelling, or extending existing labelling:
“never heard of a unit”
“not really – people not really bothered”
“no – common sense prevails – know when to stop”

The response to the offer of a calculator wheel was generally positive. Sometimes they were taken ‘ to give to someone else’. 82% of those sampled (n=248) accepted the calculator wheel. (15 missing data).

Table 24 Percentage of each gender expressing interest in the calculator wheel at each supermarket site.

	Percentage expressing interest in wheel	
Supermarket	**Males (n=83)**	**Females (n=165)**
Store A	68	82
Store B	83	86
Store C	72	88
Total	75	86