

Survey of European and US drinking habits

The Wall Street Journal commissioned market-research firm GfK to poll inhabitants in 13 European Union countries, plus the US, Russia, Turkey and Switzerland on their drinking habits. GfK asked more than 17,000 people to describe how often they drink, what they drink and how alcohol affects their lives.

Almost one-third of respondents in Western Europe said they never drink alcohol. In Italy, 53% of those surveyed said they are teetotalers, while in Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, 83% said they don't drink at all. Italy, however, was also among the countries with the largest group of frequent drinkers, with 16% of respondents saying they drink alcohol at least once a day. The Netherlands led this category, with 17% saying they drink at least once a day. In Russia, Poland and Sweden, all vodka-making countries, only 1% of respondents said they drink at least once a day.

The survey showed that while young people in most European countries are drinking less frequently than their parents and grandparents, they are consuming more alcohol each time they drink. In France, 25% of respondents over 50 said they consume alcohol at least once a day, while only 3% of the respondents between the ages of 14 and 29 drink at least once a day.

43% of French survey respondents aged 14 to 29 said they consume five or more drinks before they become intoxicated (which the survey defined as "meaning you have lost some physical or mental control or judgement"). Among

French respondents over 50 years old, 21% gave the same answer.

The country with the largest share of heavy younger drinkers is Belgium, where 56% of the respondents in the 14 to 29 age range said they need five or more drinks before they are intoxicated. In the US, 33% of the younger respondents gave the same answer. By contrast, only 20% of young Swiss respondents and 29% of Germans said they consume more than five drinks before they are intoxicated.

With the combination of high-frequency drinking and little variation in consumption patterns across age categories, the Netherlands scored as the heaviest-drinking country in the survey. In total, 40% of Dutch respondents said they can consume five or more drinks before they are intoxicated, the highest level in the survey.

Turkish respondents were at the opposite end of the spectrum — though those Turks who do drink also do so heavily, with 38% saying they have five or more drinks before they are intoxicated.

In addition to drinking habits at the national level, the survey also looked at differences in the way men and women drink in each country. Broadly speaking, women are more moderate drinkers than men. In Western Europe, 40% of women said they never drink, while only 22% of male respondents said they are teetotalers. In Central Europe, 48% of the women surveyed said they never drink, while 24% of the male respondents gave the same answer.

The highest share of female teetotalers outside of Turkey (where 92% of women said they never drink) was in Portugal, where 72% of the women surveyed said they don't consume alcohol. At the opposite end of the spectrum, only 16% of Swedish women and 20% of Dutch women said they never touch alcohol.

Overall, 10% of women are worried about how alcohol affects their personal relationships, compared to 15% of men. In Central European countries, however, slightly more women (13%) than men (12%) said they are worried about alcohol affecting their personal relationships.

Italian men (43%) and women (39%) were the most worried overall about how alcohol affects their personal relationships. Swedish men (6%) and women (1%) were the least worried.

Men are consistently more troubled by how alcohol affects their lives. 13% of men are worried about how alcohol affects their work, compared to 8% of women. Italian men (38%) were the most worried about alcohol's effect on their jobs, while Greek women (34%) edged out Italian women (32%) in this category.

30% of Europeans and a quarter of US respondents replied that alcohol had no effect on their mood. Only one out of seven Americans stated that alcohol made them feel funny, compared to a quarter of Europeans. The corresponding figure for Germany is well above average, with a total of 41% expressing that they feel funny under the influence of alcohol.

Survey of European and US drinking habits (continued)

One in four American respondents believe that alcohol makes people friendlier. In Europe, only one in six respondents agreed with this statement. Hardly any respondents expected alcohol to have a positive effect on their sensuality. Only 3% of all respondents feel amorous when they have been drinking. By contrast, one out of ten Europeans and one in six Americans feel tired after consuming alcohol.

The statements made about the negative effects of alcohol consumption are noteworthy. Almost three out of ten Europeans indicated that they only start to feel a negative physical or mental effect after drinking five units of alcohol. Two in ten assume that three units are sufficient to make them feel worse and 12% stated that they feel a negative physical or mental impact after two glasses.

In Italy 88% of respondents over 50 years old said their favourite tittle

is wine. But among Italians aged 14 to 29, only 29% prefer wine, while 43% say beer is their favourite drink. Preferences are also changing in France. Here, 68% of those over 50 say their favourite drink is wine, while only 24% of those aged 14 to 29 gave that response; most French young people (29%) chose beer as their favourite drink.

The survey suggested that drinkers generally shift to wine from beer as they get older. But France and Italy, where the overall survey results showed wine is still more popular than beer, soon could follow other classical wine regions such as Spain and Portugal, where beer drinking has overtaken wine.

In historically beer-making countries, including the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands, drinkers now prefer wine to beer, the survey showed. In Russia, 35% of drinkers say their favourite drink is beer, while (30%) say they prefer

wine. Germany and the Czech Republic still prefer beer to wine.

Only 10% of Europeans and Americans indicated spirits such as whiskey, gin and vodka as their favourite drinks. By comparison, these types of alcoholic drinks are extremely popular in Russia, where a total of 30% of respondents are most likely to drink spirits with high alcohol content. In Russia vodka is as popular as wine and almost as popular as beer.

Sweet and mixed alcoholic drinks are well-liked in the USA and Turkey. Approximately one in five respondents in these countries opts for sweet alcoholic drinks, such as cocktails and alcopops.

There are differences between men and women in terms of preferences. While men aged 50+ are most likely to choose a mixed drink in Turkey, in the USA these drinks are favoured by girls and young women aged 14 to 29. In the rest of Europe, an average of only 7% of respondents has a preference for such drinks.

Liqueurs and fortified wines are the least popular drinks. In Europe and in the USA, they are far down the preference ranking with a value of around 5%. The French make an exception, with a total of 12% of respondents preferring fortified wines and liqueurs. These kinds of drinks are particularly popular with women in the 50+ age group.

For further information, visit <http://www.gfk.com>

Figures in %	Beer	Wine	Liqueurs and fortified wines	Spirits	Cocktails/ alcopops
What is your favorite tittle? (Only one response possible)					
All countries	36	33	4	16	9
Western Europe	34	43	6	9	8
Belgium	35	50	6	4	5
Germany	48	39	4	2	7
France	16	50	12	14	8
Greece	33	35	3	21	7
UK	27	38	5	14	10
Italy	25	62	3	5	5
Netherlands	32	44	8	5	12
Portugal	47	38	5	8	2
Sweden	40	39	2	8	8
Switzerland	23	62	1	6	5
Spain	49	24	4	15	8
Central/ Eastern Europe	50	22	4	10	6
Poland	51	15	5	12	6
Russia	35	30	4	30	2
Czech Republic	51	34	3	4	8
Turkey	65	5	0	10	20
Hungary	45	35	5	7	5
Europe overall	36	40	5	9	7
USA	37	28	3	10	22

Source: GfK "Alcohol consumption" survey 2008, GfK Custom Research/ WSJE