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# What changes social norms? Alcohol consumption trends in the UK and their drivers

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ScHARR, University of Sheffield



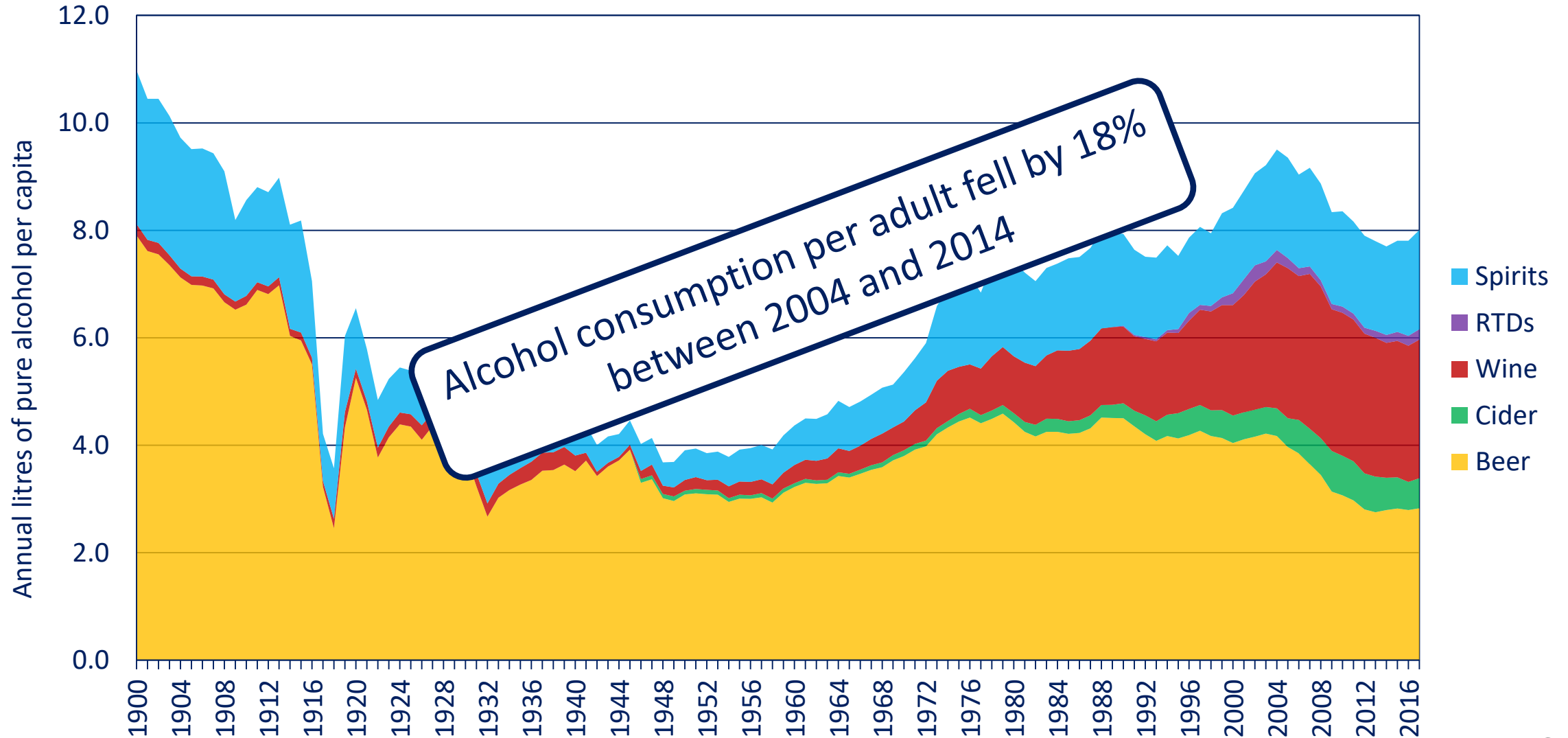


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# HOW HAS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION CHANGED IN THE UK?

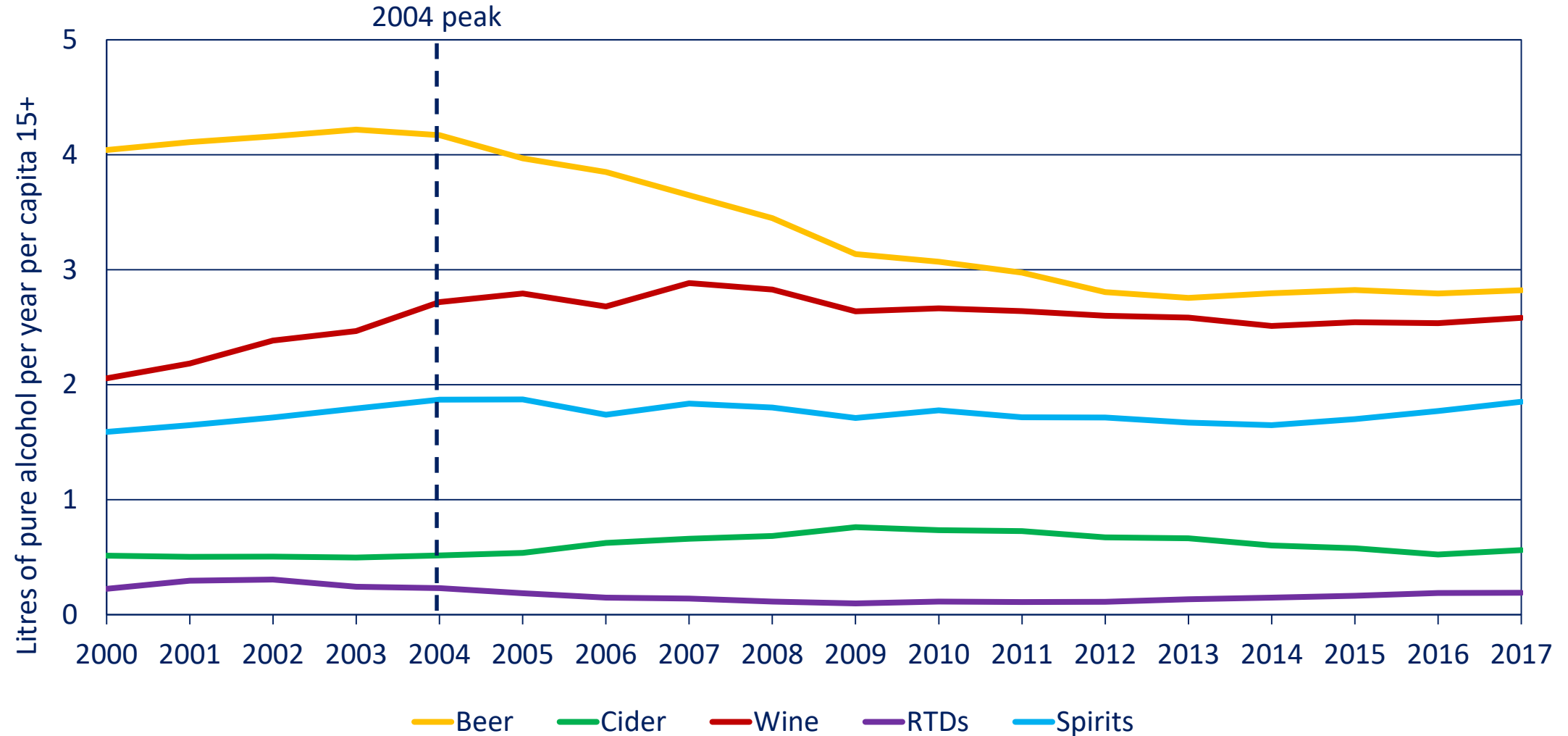


# Alcohol consumption in the UK: the long-term trend



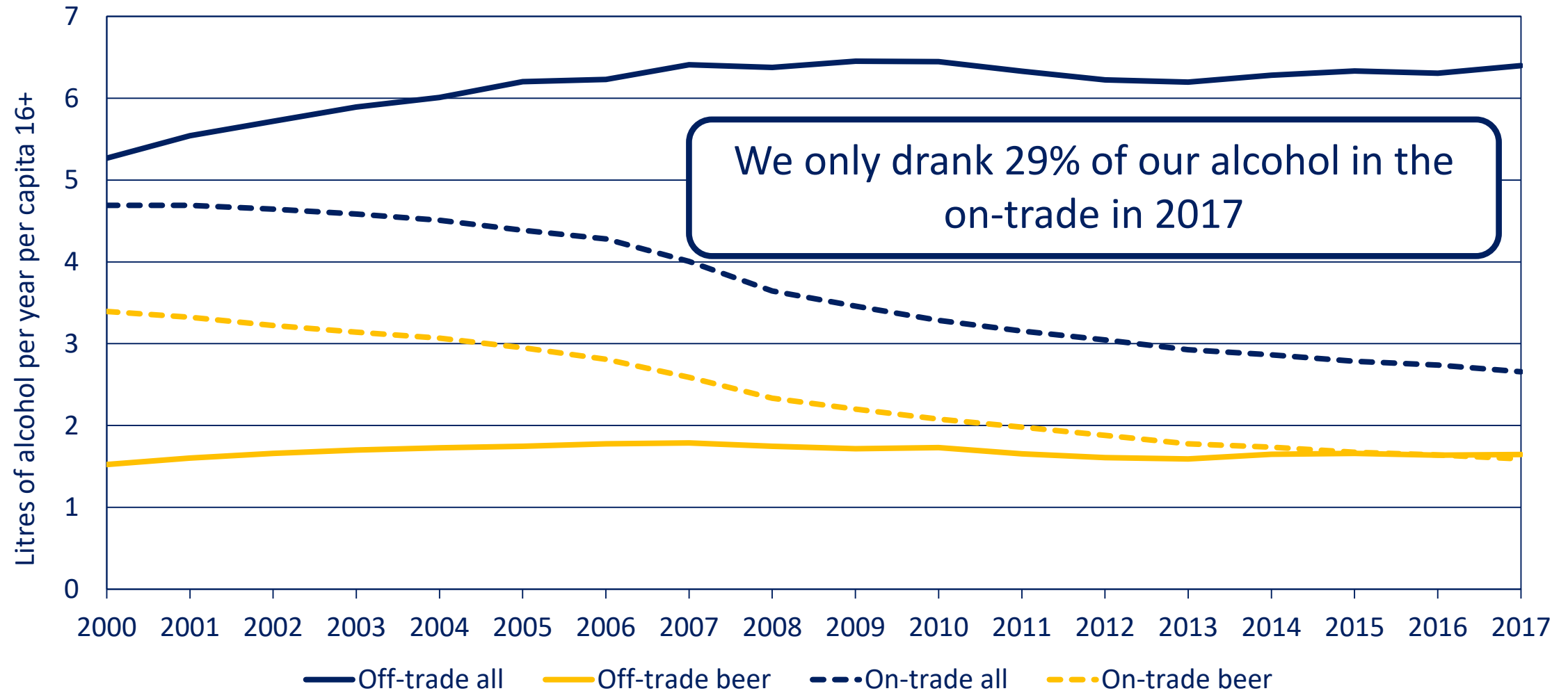


# Beverage-specific alcohol consumption in the UK, 2000-2016



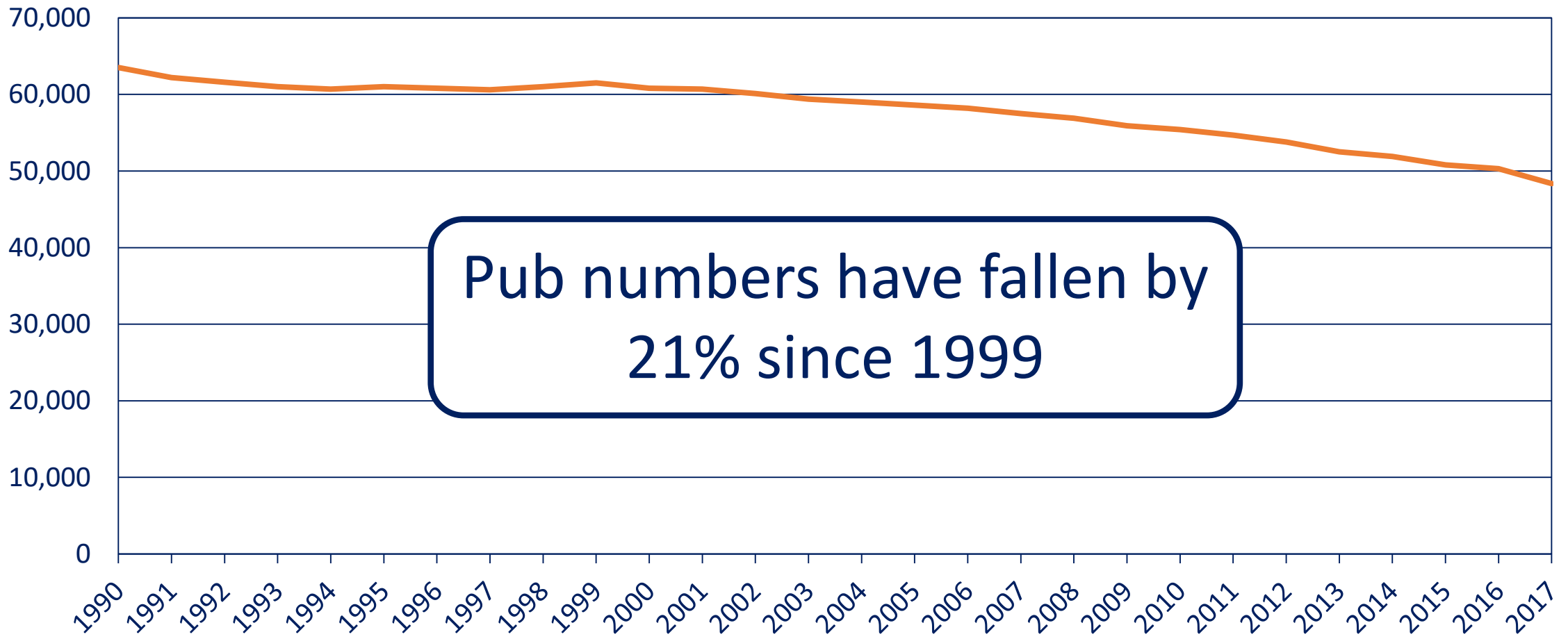


# GB alcohol consumption and beer consumption by trade-sector, 2000-2017





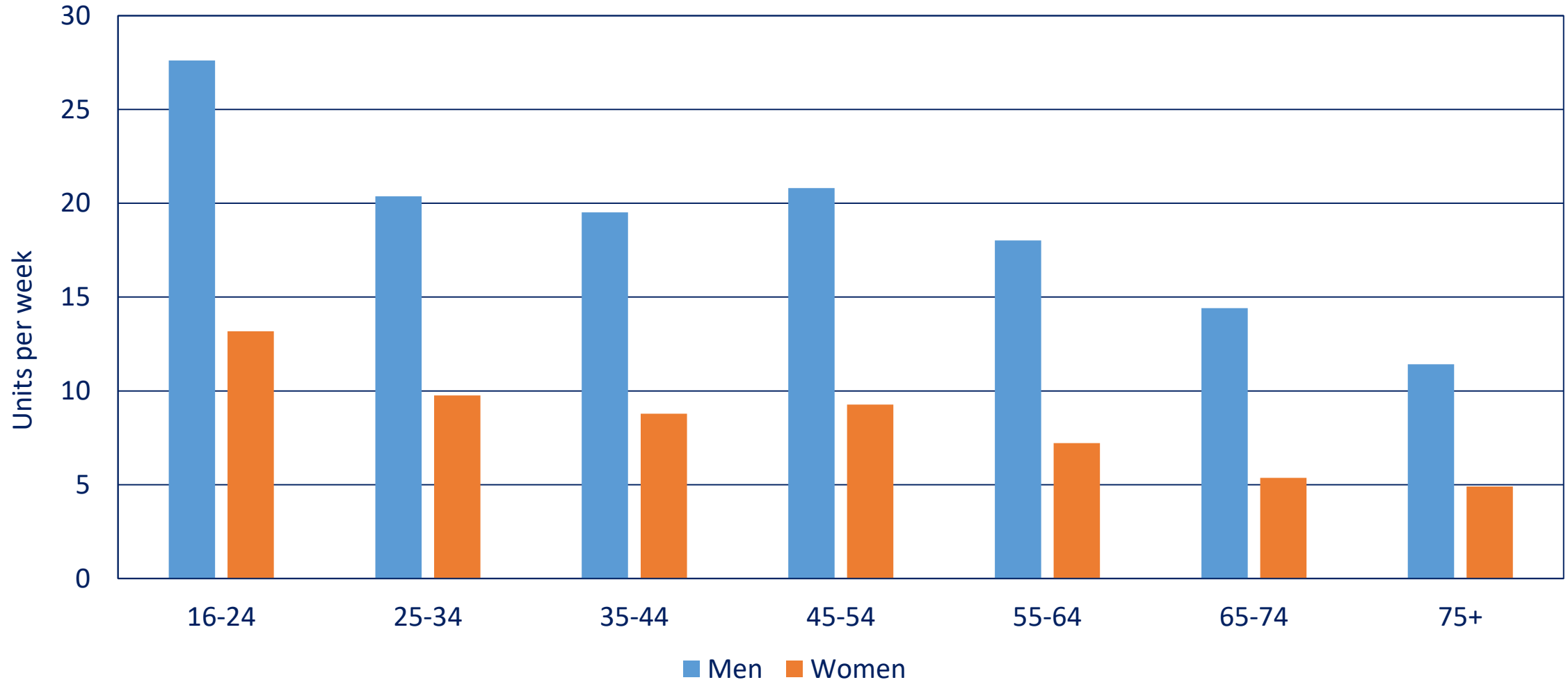
# Number of pubs in the UK





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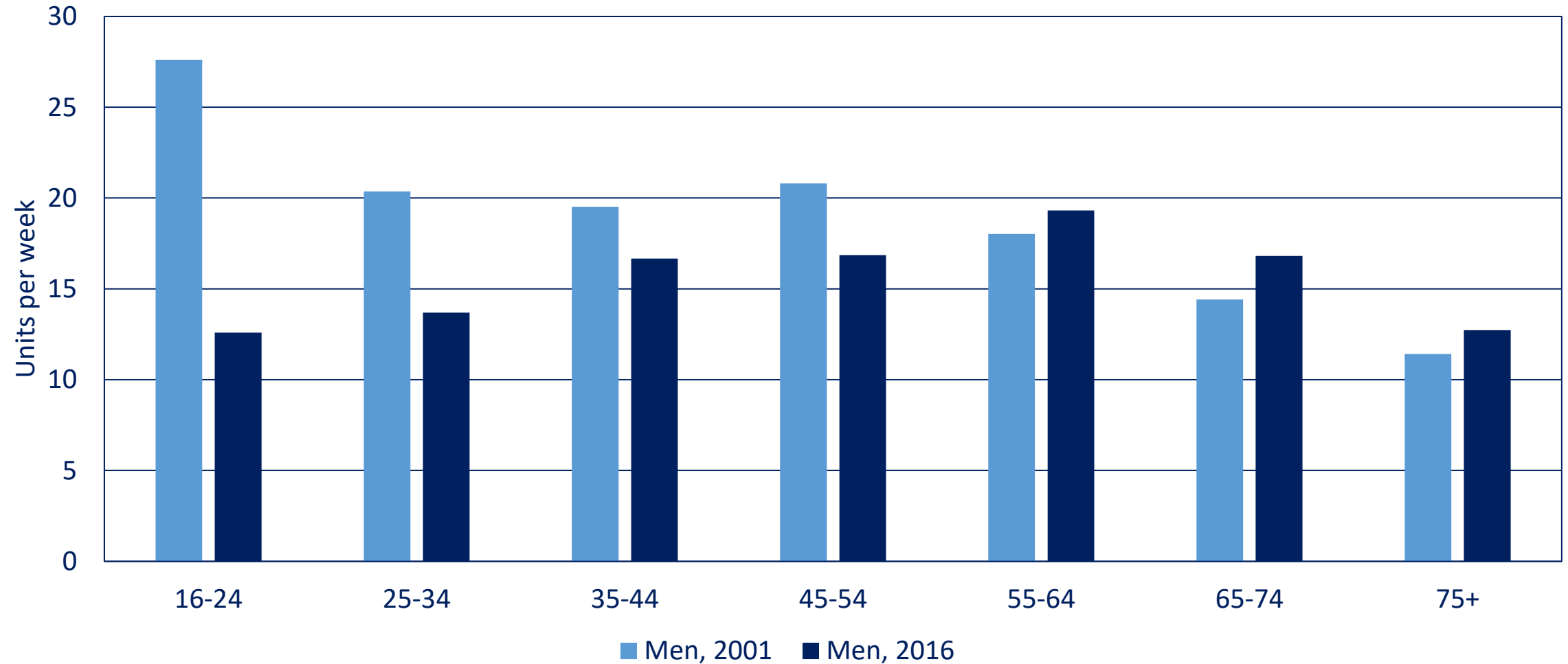
# Units consumed per week by age and gender: England, 2001





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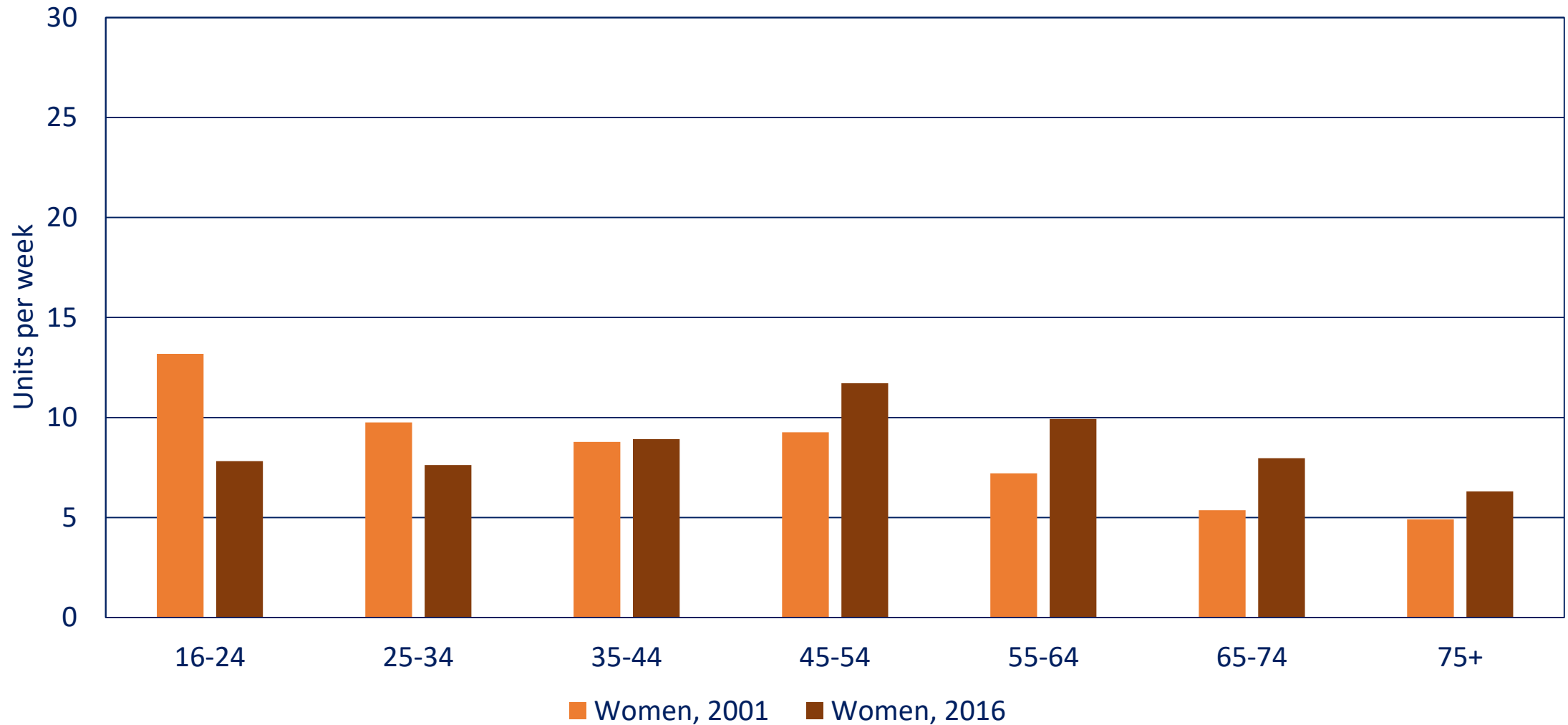
# Units consumed per week among men by age: England, 2001 & 2016







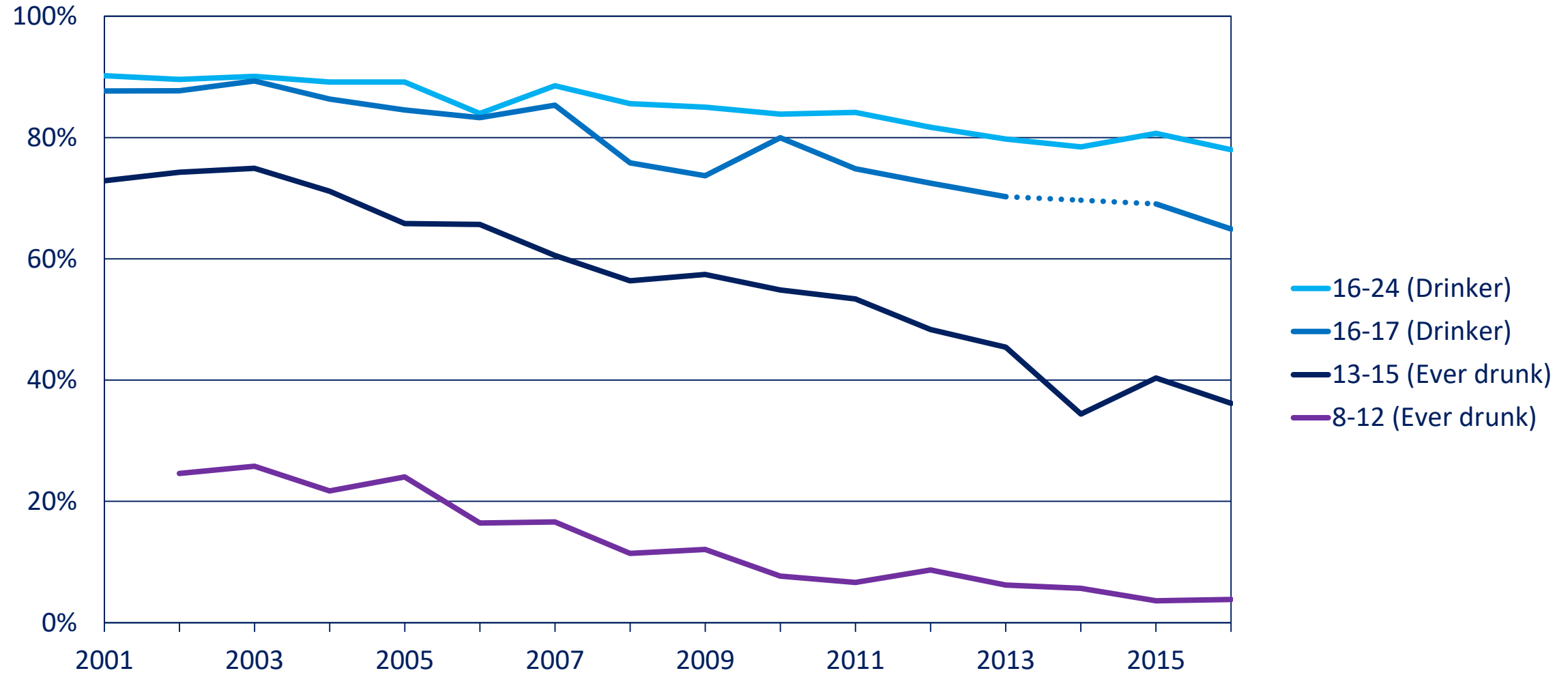
# Units consumed per week among women by age: England, 2001 & 2016



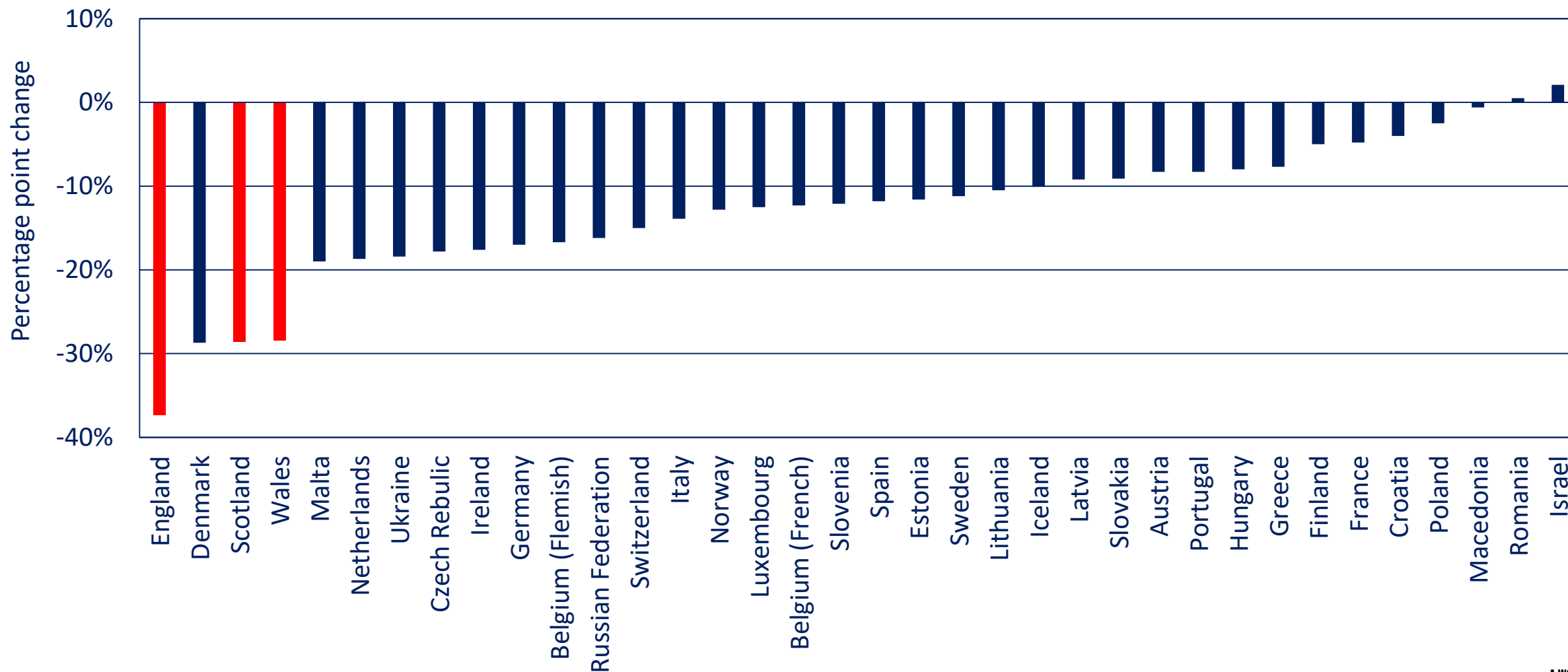


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# Current drinking and ever drinking among young people: England, 2001-2016



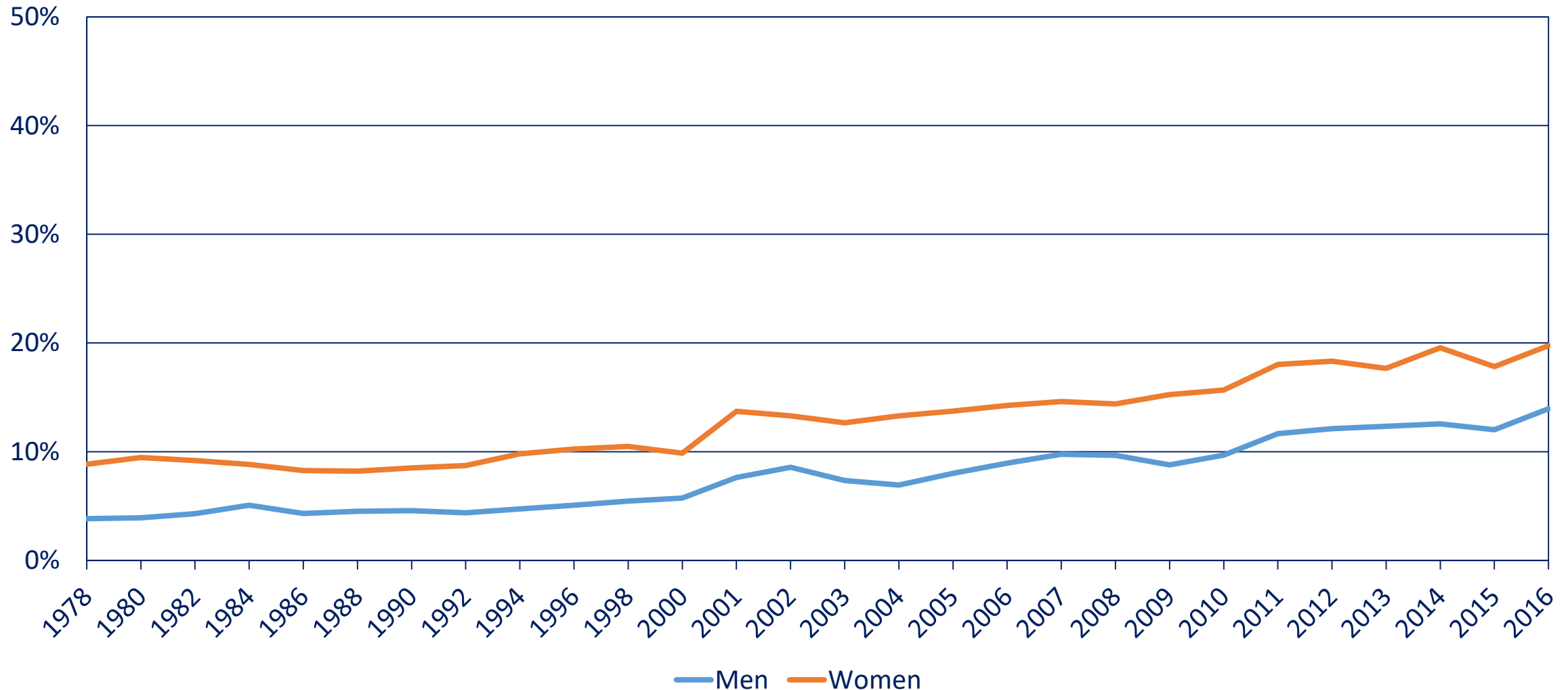
# Change in prevalence of weekly drinking among 11-15 year-olds: 2002-2014





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# Abstention rate among those aged 25+ in England, 1976-2016



Source: General Household/Lifestyle Survey, 1976-2000; Health Survey for England 2001-2016



# Key messages

- Alcohol consumption rose and fell sharply in the decades either side of 2004
- The decline is particularly due to less beer drinking in pubs
- Young people are drinking much less but...
- Those in middle- and older-age are drinking more

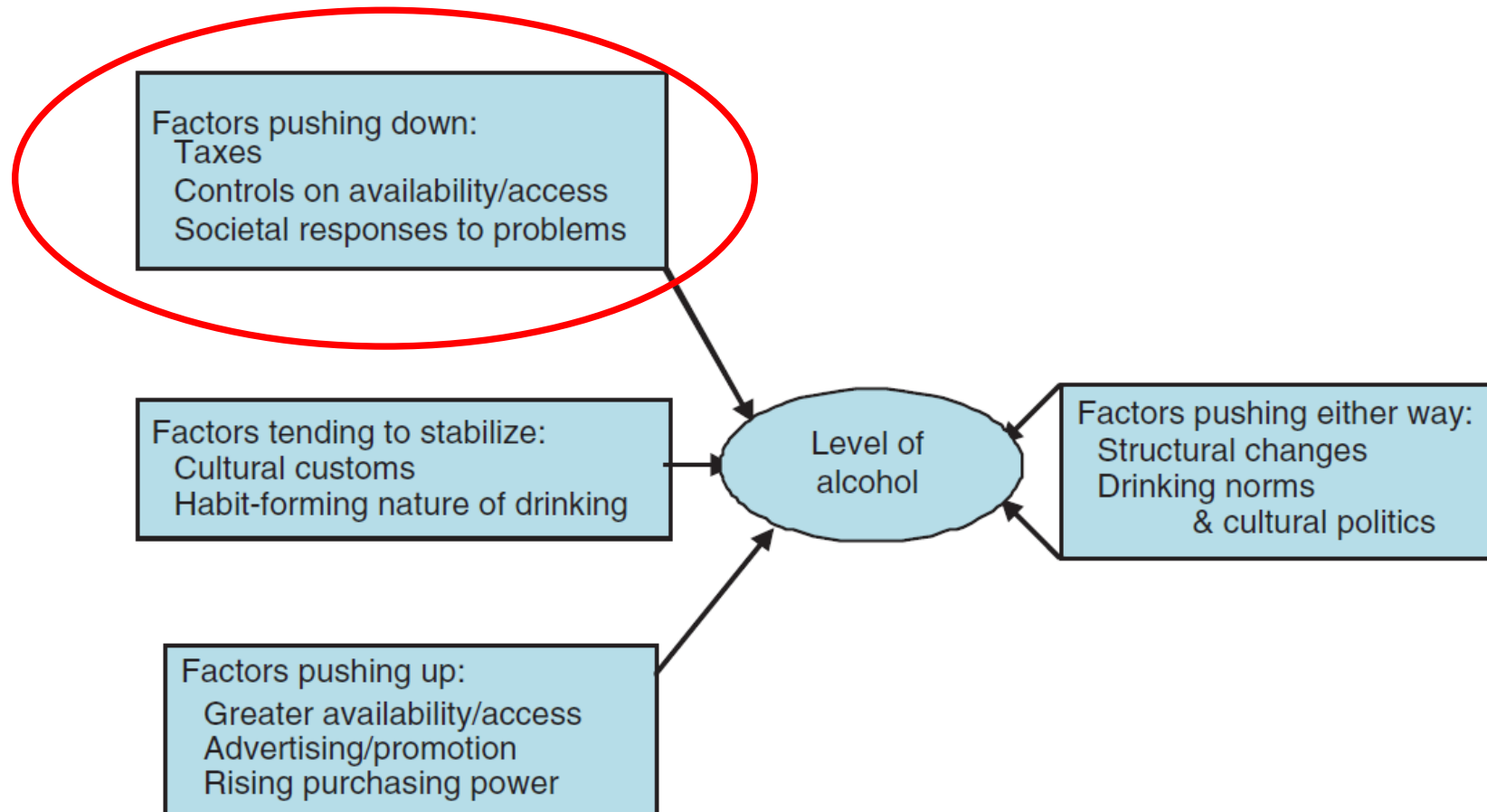


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# WHY IS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION CHANGING?



# What drives alcohol consumption trends?





# Factors which reduce consumption: Alcohol taxes

- ➡ 2005-2008 Inflation
- ↑ 2008 (Mar) Inflation + 6%
- ↑ 2008 (Dec) Up 8% (spirits +4%)
- ↑ 2009 Inflation + 2%
- ↑ 2010-2012 Duty escalator (Inflation + 2%)
- ↑ ↓ 2013 Duty escalator (except beer -2%)
- ↓ 2014 Duty escalator scrapped – Cuts and freezes
- ↓ 2015-2016 Cuts and freezes
- ➡ 2017 Inflation-level increases





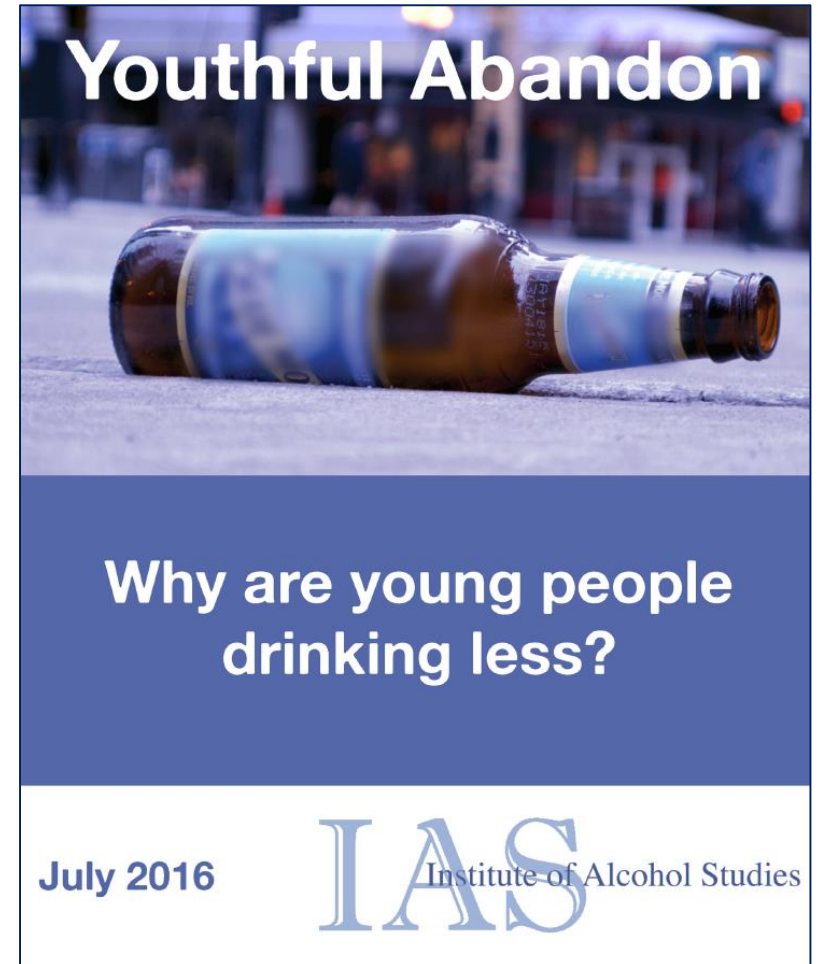


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# Factors that reduced consumption: Reduced availability/access

## Has availability reduced?

- Few regulatory changes to availability
- Is alcohol less available to young people?
  - Challenge 21 and Challenge 25
  - Collaboration between policy and local government
  - Growth of large national retailers
  - **Social supply still commonplace**





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# Factors which reduce consumption: Societal responses

- Formal responses include national alcohol strategies



- Informal responses include public censure





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# Factors which reduce consumption: Societal responses

- ...and community action



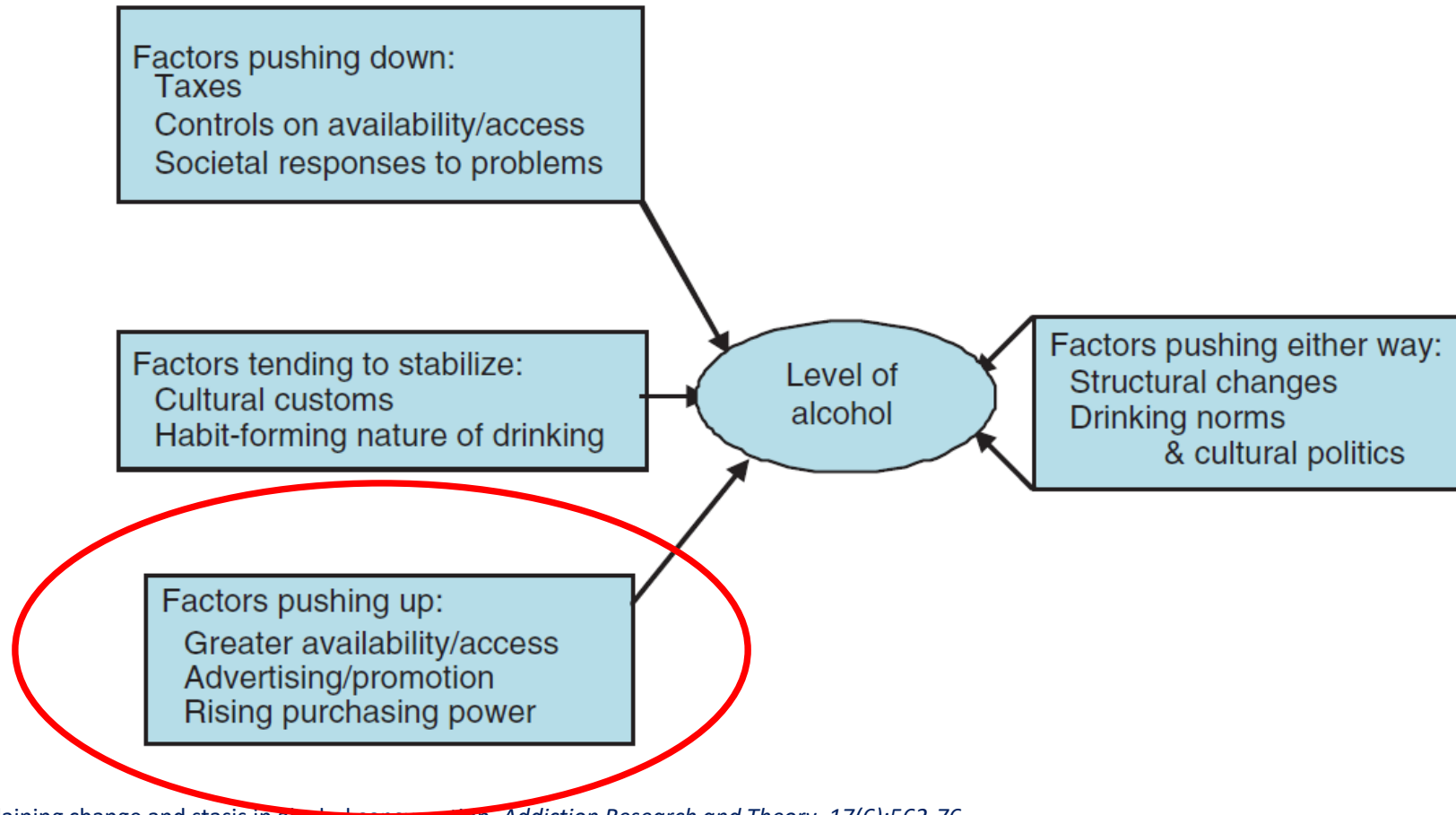
Soberistas  
*love life in control*







# What drives alcohol consumption trends?



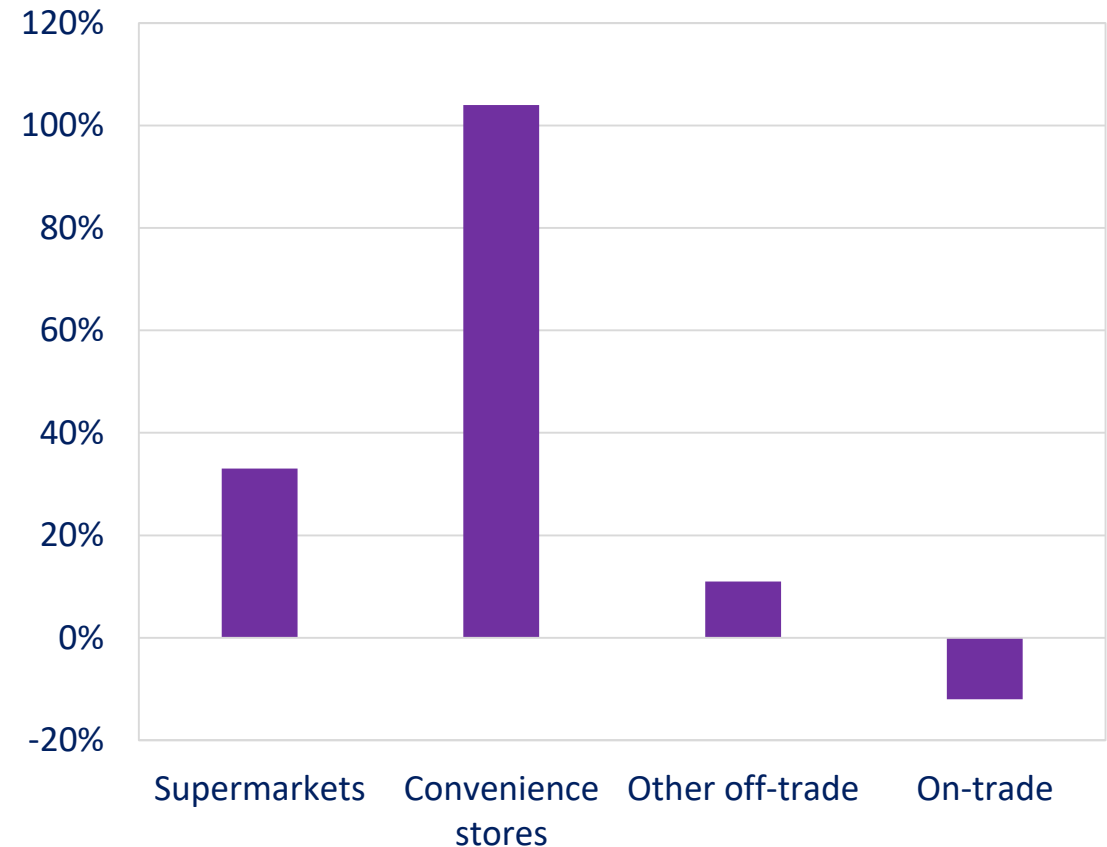


# Factors that increase consumption: Reduced availability/access

## Has availability increased?

- 2003 Licensing Act liberalised licensing hours
  - Little evidence of major changes in response
  - Relevant for younger drinkers?
- Large increase in off-trade availability
  - Relevant for older drinkers?

% change in outlet numbers: 2003-2013



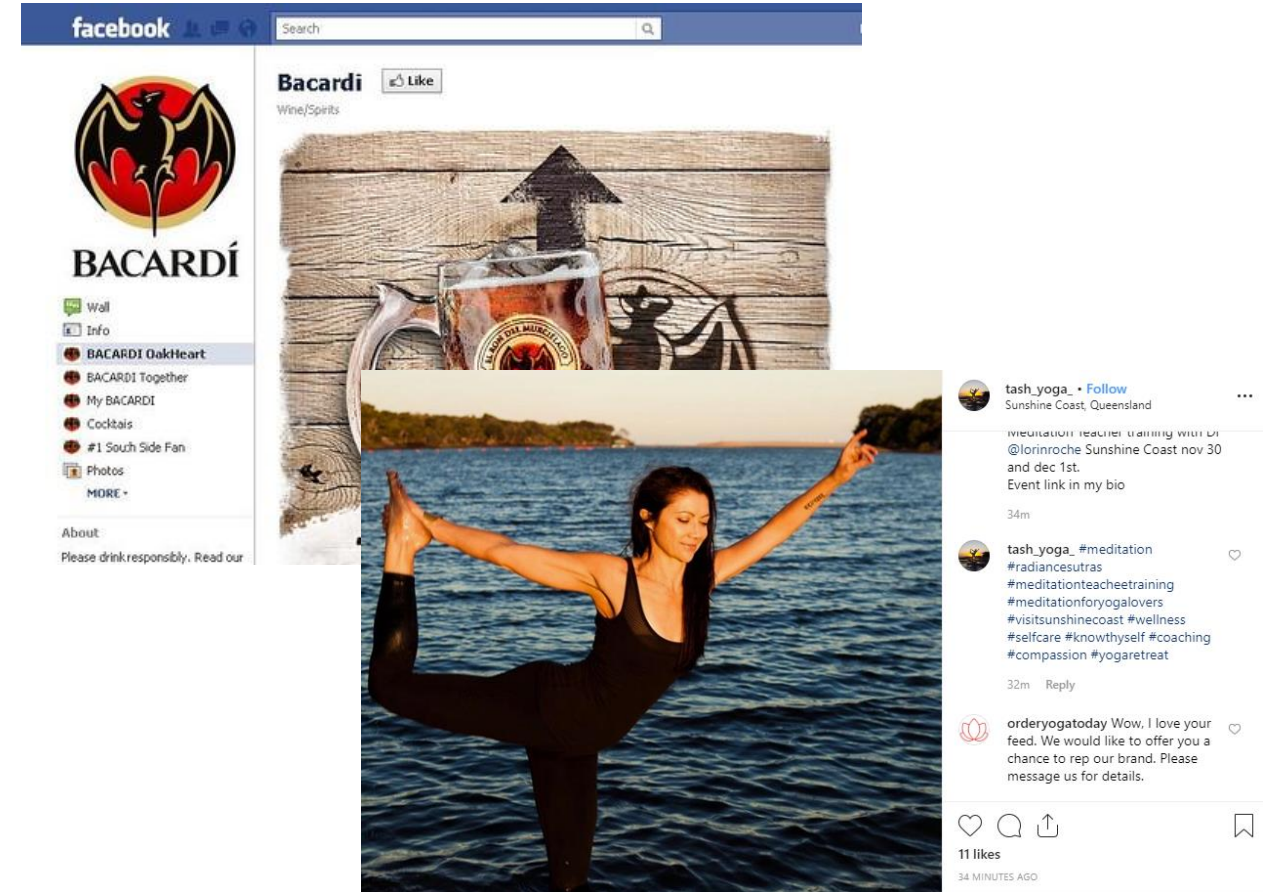


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# Factors that increase consumption: Alcohol marketing

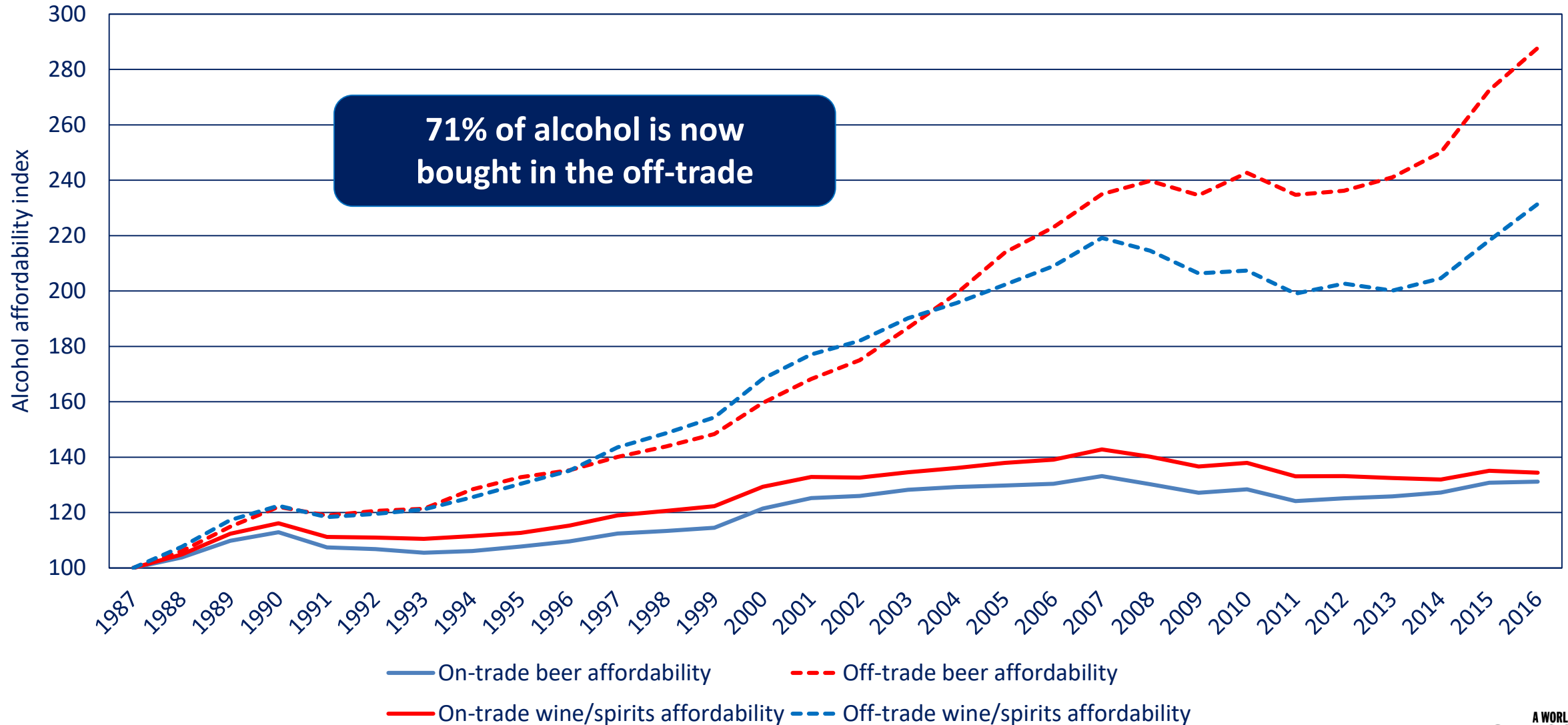
## Changing forms of marketing

- Traditional forms persist:
  - TV and billboard advertising
  - Sponsorship
- New forms include:
  - Websites
  - Social media accounts
  - Influencers
- More competition on social media?
  - Wellness and alternative activities





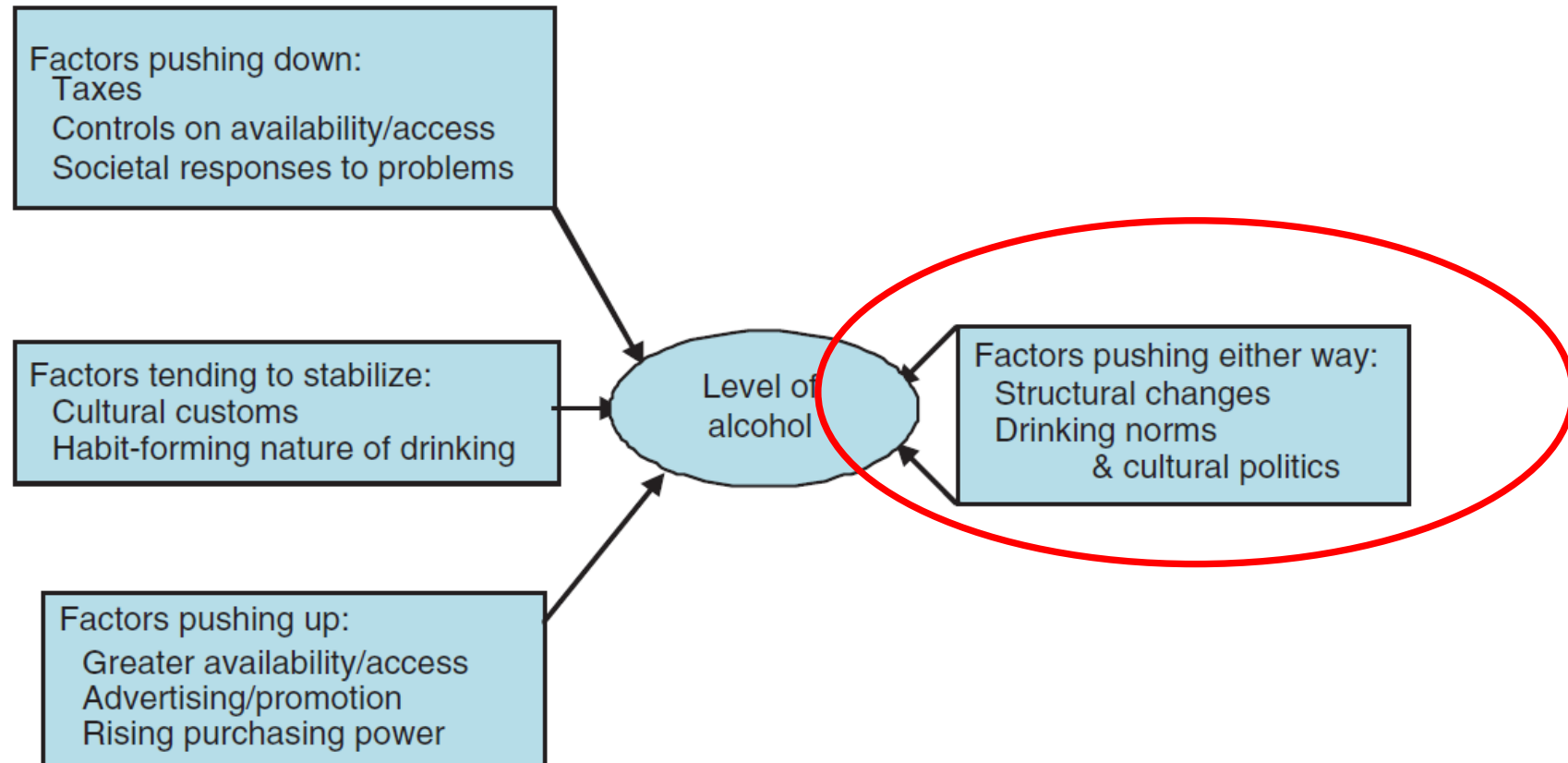
# Factors that increase consumption: Alcohol affordability







# What drives alcohol consumption trends?





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# Factors that push both ways: Structural changes

- New gender roles:
- New working patterns
- Economic insecurity
- Population demographics
- New technologies



## SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

*Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 34 No. 4 2012 ISSN 0141-9889, pp. 481-496  
doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2011.01424.x

**Older and wiser? Men's and women's accounts of drinking in early mid-life**

**Carol Emslie<sup>1</sup>, Kate Hunt<sup>1</sup> and Antonia Lyons<sup>2</sup>**

## SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

*Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 36 No. 2 2014 ISSN 0141-9889, pp. 264-277  
doi: 10.1111/1467-9566.12103

**Staying 'in the zone' but not passing the 'point of no return': embodiment, gender and drinking in mid-life**

**Antonia C. Lyons<sup>1</sup>, Carol Emslie<sup>2</sup> and Kate Hunt<sup>3</sup>**



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# Factors that push both ways: Changing norms

- Examples of recent changes:
  - New approaches to parenting around alcohol
  - Social media limits transgressive behaviour
  - New ideas around the 'authentic self'
- Are norms becoming more moderate or abstemious?



NEWSWIRE

**Are millennials and Gen-Z avoiding alcohol because of social media?**

**Drugs**

<http://informahealthcare.com/dep>  
ISSN: 0968-7637 (print), 1465-3370 (electronic)

**informa**  
healthcare

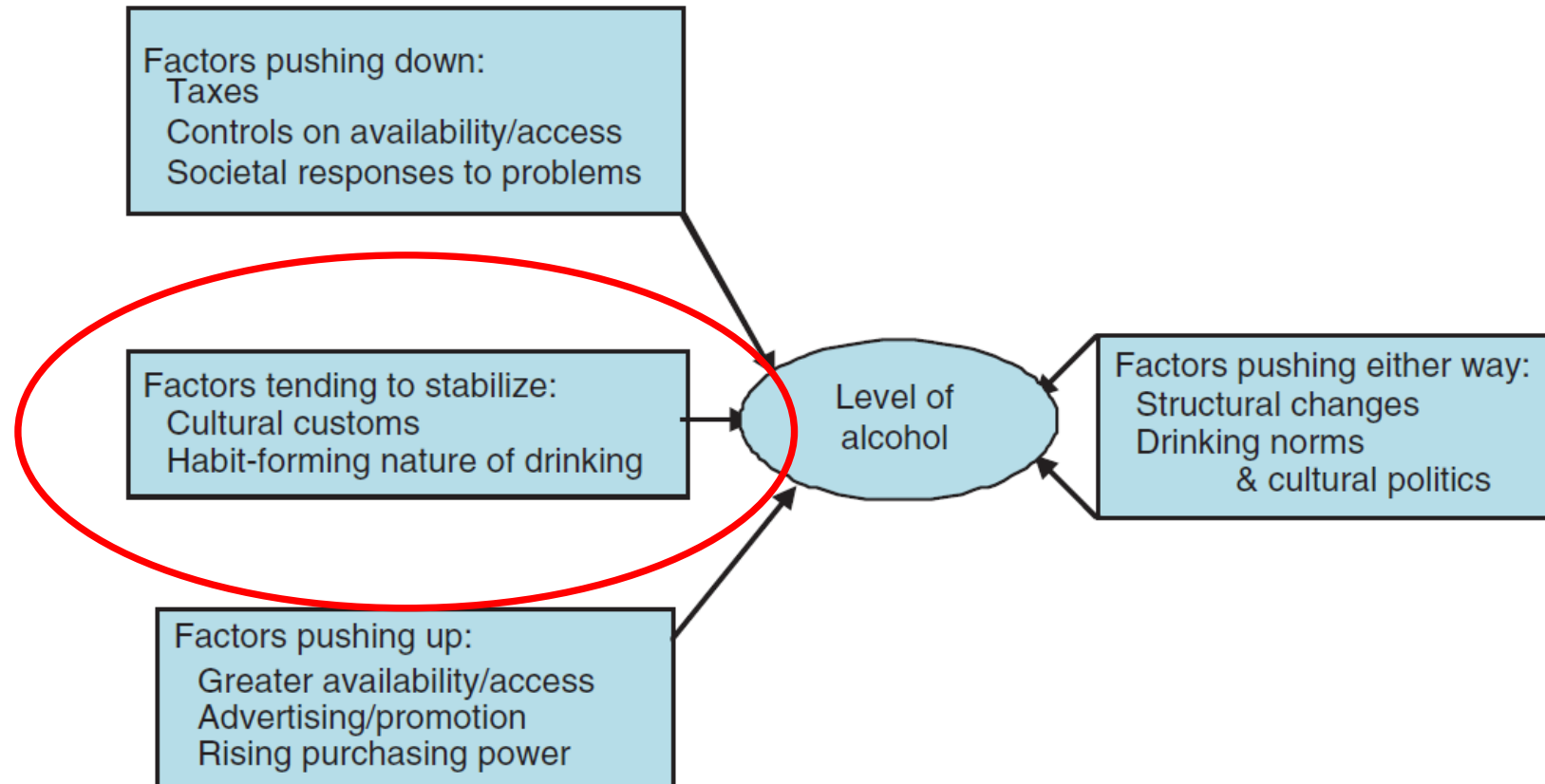
Drugs Educ Prev Pol, 2015; 22(2): 143–149  
education, prevention and policy © 2014 The Author(s). Published by Taylor & Francis. DOI: 10.3109/09687637.2014.969682

**Understanding English alcohol policy as a neoliberal condemnation of the carnivalesque**

William Haydock



# What drives alcohol consumption trends?





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# Factors that stabilise consumption: Drinking cultures and practices

- Drinking culture as a series of drinking practices:
  - Big nights outs
  - Relaxing at home
  - Going out for a meal
  - Etc...
- Comprised of multiple elements
- Systematically reproduced
- Endure over time
  - But can emerge, evolve and decay

ADDICTION

RESEARCH REPORT

SSA | SOCIETY FOR THE  
STUDY OF  
ADDICTION

doi:10.1111/add.13397

## Developing a social practice-based typology of British drinking culture in 2009–2011: implications for alcohol policy analysis

Abdallah K. Ally, Melanie Lovatt, Petra S. Meier, Alan Brennan & John Holmes

School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

ADDICTION

ADDICTION DEBATE

SSA | SOCIETY FOR THE  
STUDY OF  
ADDICTION

doi:10.1111/add.13895

## All drinking is not equal: how a social practice theory lens could enhance public health research on alcohol and other health behaviours

Petra Sylvia Meier<sup>1</sup> , Alan Warde<sup>2</sup>  & John Holmes<sup>1</sup> 

School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK<sup>1</sup> and School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK<sup>2</sup>



# Summary

- Alcohol consumption in the UK has declined since 2004
- Uneven decline across the population
- Multiple competing forces create this uneven decline
- We should not assume the problem has gone away
  - ....or that it will stay away



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# Two questions for discussion

- What does the decline in youth drinking mean for public health, public policy and public debate around alcohol?
- What would an acceptable drinking culture look like?



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# Thank you to our funders







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## Further information

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