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GDS2020 RESPONDENTS REGRETTED GETTING DRUNK 30% OF THE TIME, SO HERE ARE 3 TIPS TO HELP

Alcohol and regret

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Many people will be coming to the end of a dry January, kick started by excessive consumption over a probably somewhat muted festive period. 2020 will have made the need for a month without booze more important than ever. Many studies, including our own GDS Special Edition on COVID-19, have shown 30-50% of drinkers (especially the British) reported drinking more during lockdown, for many with negative effects on their physical and mental health. Excessive alcohol also suppresses your immune system and makes you more vulnerable to respiratory infections.

GDS2020 was conducted in Nov/Dec 2019 just before COVID-19 changed our lives. **Over 90,000 people from across the world told us about their experiences of getting drunk.** In GDS2020, we defined drunk as *'having drunk so much that your physical and mental faculties are impaired to the point where your balance / speech was affected, you were unable to focus clearly on things and that your conversation and behaviours were very obviously different to people who know you'*. People who took part in the survey reported getting drunk a mean of 20 times per year. This is a third less than when we asked the question as part of GDS2019 when we did not define what we meant by drunk. Regardless of definition, the ranking of countries remained largely the same with the Brits, the Aussies and those from Scandinavia still topping the list with a mean of 33 times a year.

Getting drunk should be enjoyable. It is a voluntary activity for most. Yet on average people who took part in GDS2020 regretted getting drunk on a third of occasions (for women nearer 40%). When we asked what behaviours or drinking situations were most responsible for this regret, three very familiar factors came out top:

- 1) Drinking too much too fast (leading to rapid rises in blood alcohol leaving people more intoxicated than they want to be and less in control of their faculties)
- 2) Mixing drinks (beverages with different % ABV can make it hard to track your consumption)
- 3) Hanging out with big drinkers (getting caught up in rounds can leave people 'forced' to drink more quickly than they would like).

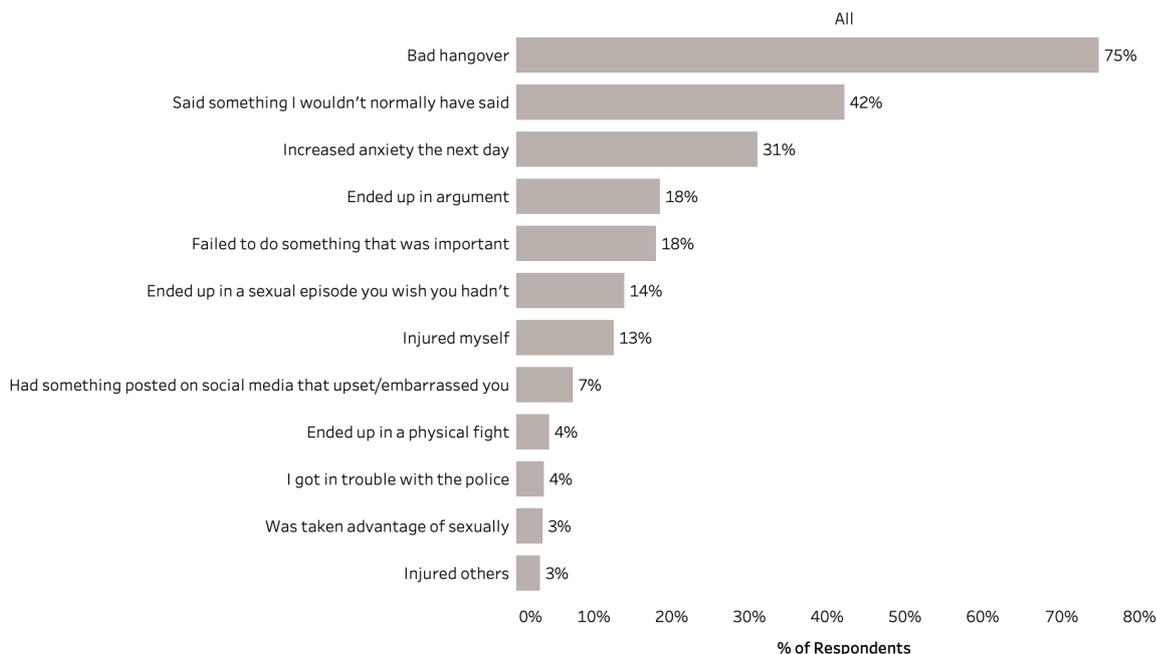
The lessons are easy. You want to avoid regretting getting drunk? Drink more slowly, don't mix your drinks and avoid hanging out with big drinkers. Nothing earth shattering there then. Other top tips include not drinking when you're in a bad mood and avoiding mixing with other drugs (some combinations being worse than others).

Top behaviours and environments associated with regret when getting drunk

So, we've covered how to avoid regret. But what are consequences of a drinking session that lead people to regret getting drunk? Top of the list, unsurprisingly, was getting a hangover. Hangovers are a sign that our body is struggling to cope with processing all the alcohol that we have consumed. The consequence is that you feel really crap. Sorry, but we're not going to give you any magic hangover cures, you've got to wait it out while your liver processes the booze – but drinking less, rehydrating and staying off the booze the next

day are good ideas. Next on the list was people saying something that they would not normally have said when they were drunk. Whether that is telling the truth about what you really think of your mate's new haircut, spilling a secret or declaring your undying love for someone, it can really make you feel embarrassed the next day, worse if you said it on social media. The third consequence that made people regret getting drunk was feeling increased anxiety the next day – or 'hangxiety' as it has become known. This consequence had some marked variations between countries (highest in the UK, Ireland and Scandinavia, lowest in German speaking countries).

Things people regret when getting drunk



The explanation for this increased anxiety is down to the effects of alcohol on the brain.

Most people will be familiar with the idea of alcohol calming your nerves (think about the drinks trolley that appears just after take-off or a few beers before going up to ask someone out for a date). Alcohol reduces anxiety (and makes some people feel more relaxed) because it turns up the activity of your brain's dominant inhibitory neurotransmitter - GABA, while turning down the brain's main excitatory one - glutamate. It is like putting on headphones (increasing GABA) and turning the volume down (decreasing glutamate), which is why too much alcohol can make you feel sleepy. Your brain does not like to be knocked off balance so in the hours following drinking as the muffling of GABA on your brain's activity wears off, it tries to turn up the volume (increasing the activity of glutamate) leading to anxiety and restlessness. This can lead some people to drink the next day as way of coping with 'anxiety', we'd advise against that. While it's true that people with underlying mental health conditions are more likely to notice negative effects on their emotional well-being, alcohol (especially getting drunk) is poor coping strategy for anxiety (and depression) for everyone.

We think that understanding more about alcohol and regret will help us to encourage people to drink a bit less and change how they drink. So in GDS2021 (which runs till mid Feb) we are looking at regrets whilst getting drunk in COVID times, and how people have been seeking help for their drinking and mental health worries. So if you've got 20-25 minutes, help us understand how to ensure people get the right help and the most relevant messaging to keep regret at bay when drinking. **Please take part in the world's largest drug survey (open till Feb 14th) now at <https://www.globaldrugsurvey.com/GDS2020>**

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