

Untreated heavy drinkers followed up for a decade: why do some continue to drink so heavily?

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The Research Team

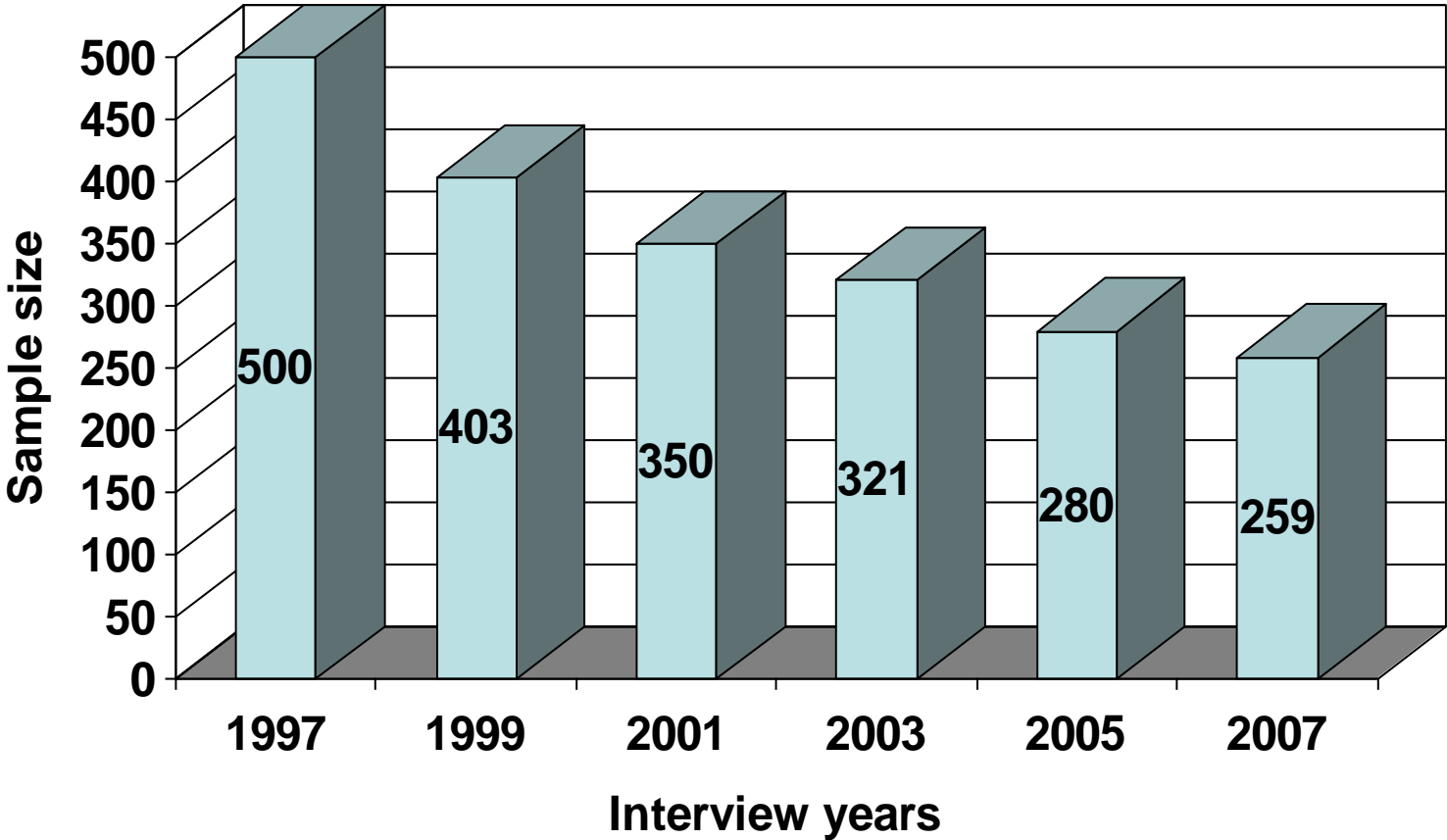
- Principal investigators: Jim Orford, Alison Rolfe, Susan Dalton, Elizabeth Hartney.
- Project secretary: Julie O'Connell.
- 18 research interviewers.
- Funded by the Department of Health.
- Steering committee: Alex Copello, Christine Godfrey, Duncan Raistrick, John Kemm, DoH team

Birmingham Untreated Heavy Drinkers: recruitment

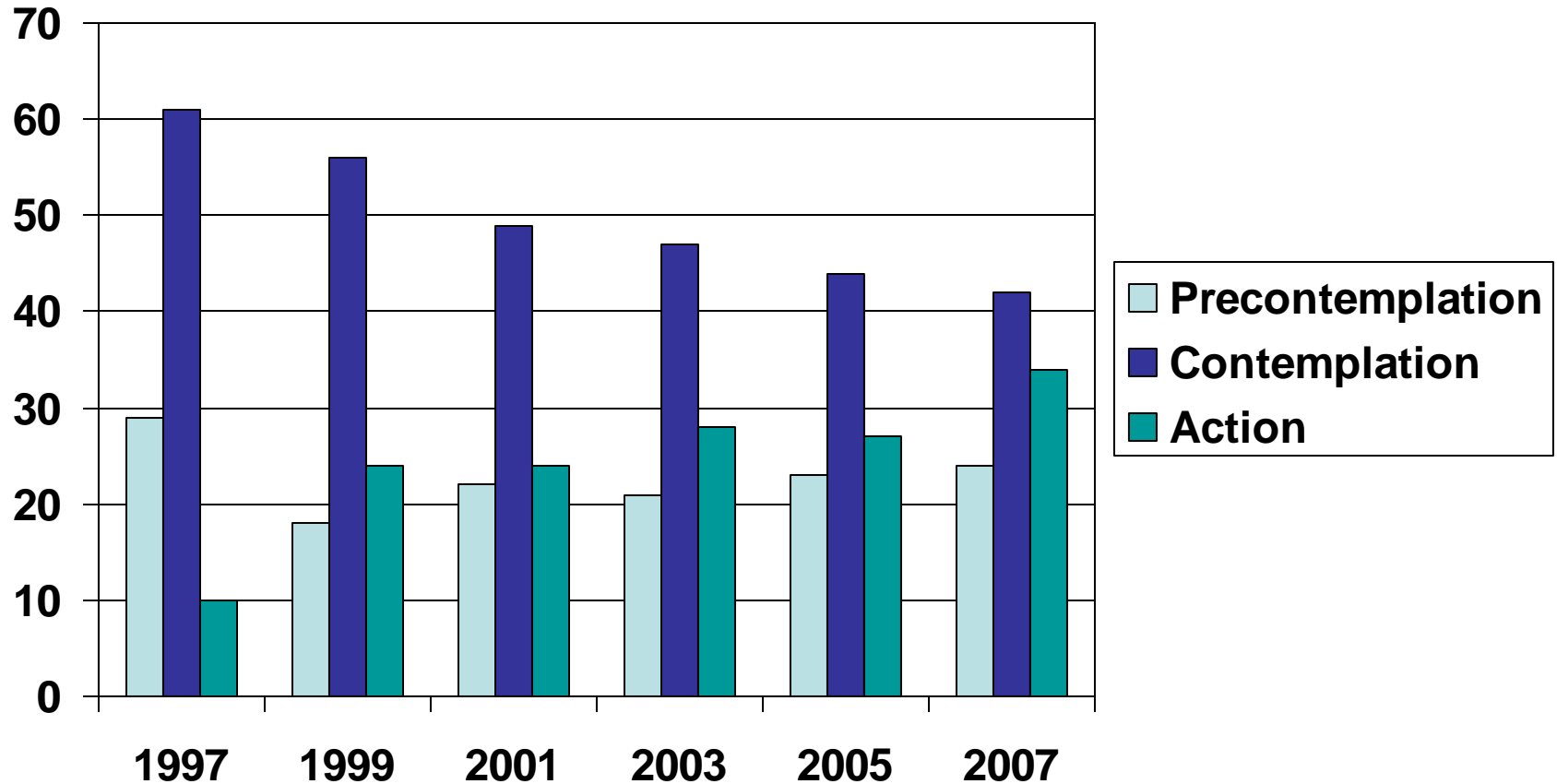
- 500 participants recruited in 1997 from West Midlands community
- Untreated for alcohol problems in last 10 years
- At least 50 (men) 35 (women) units per week, for at least half weeks in past year
- Aged 25 - 55



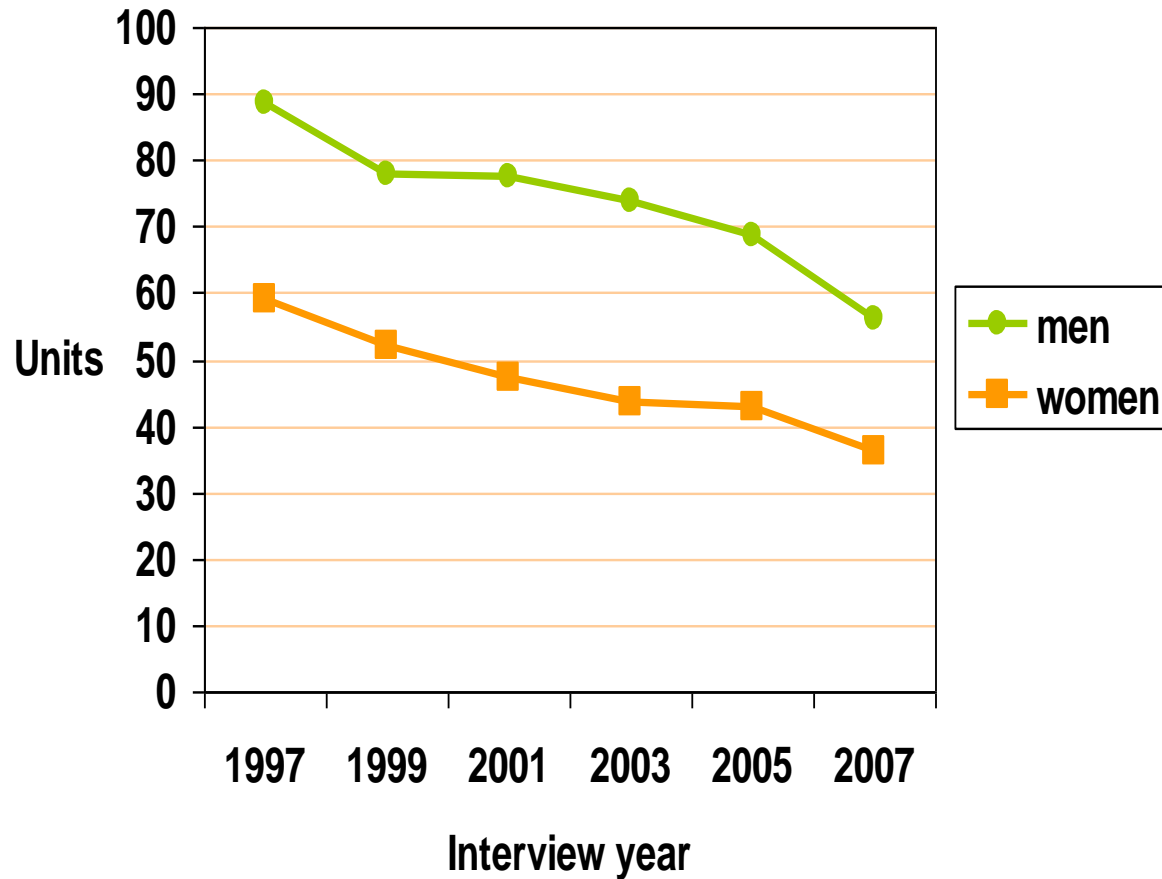
Sample attrition, 1997-2007



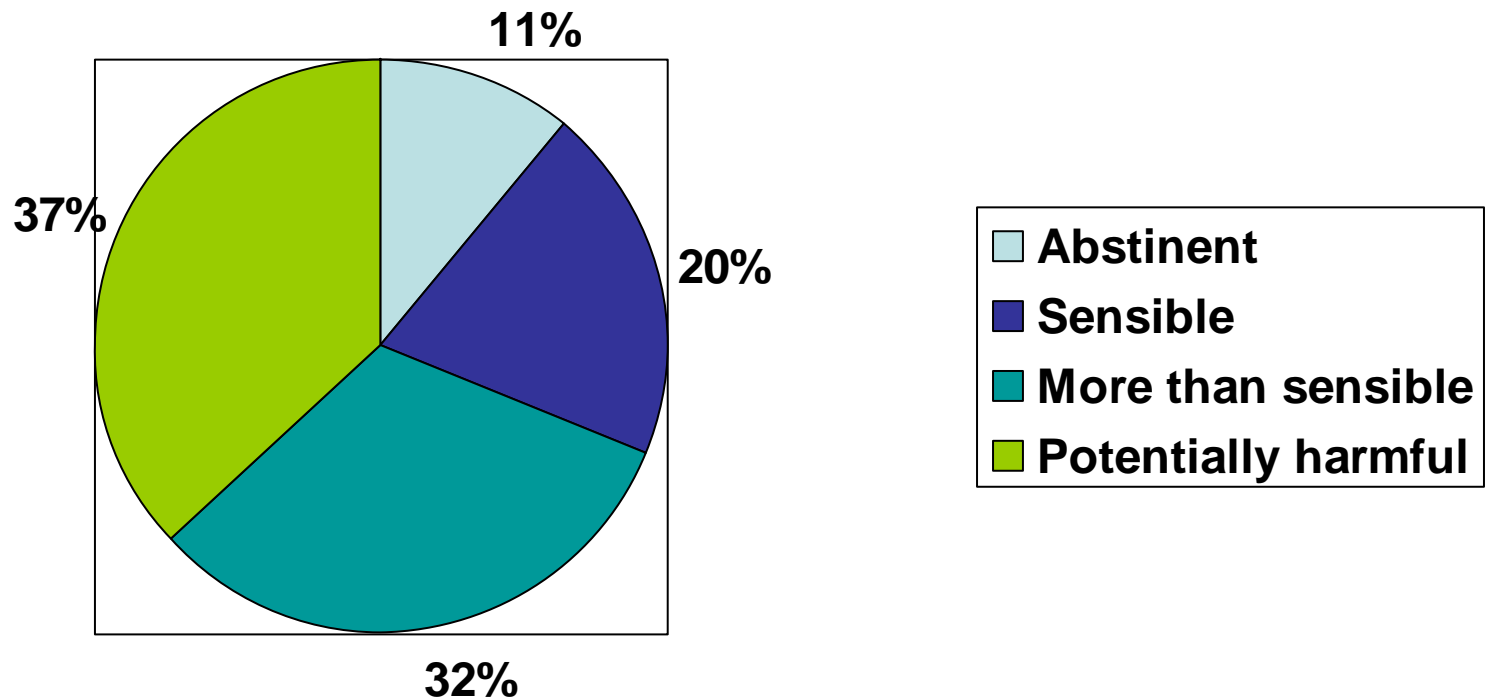
Readiness to Change (N=259)



Mean weekly alcohol consumption over time (N=184 men; 75 women)



Drinking in 2007 (N=259)



Are they still untreated?

- 62 participants (24%) have sought help or advice for their drinking over the last 10 years
- 34 (13%) have had contact with alcohol treatment services
- Most of the sample are still untreated
- Most of those who decrease do so without professional help



Why do some continue to drink heavily? Three ideas

- Drinkers' own definitions are important
- Heavy drinking is deeply socially embedded
- Heavy drinkers can live with some harms and dependence

Three estimates of moderate/normal/sensible weekly drinking

Median units (20th-80th percentiles)

	Men (N=365/227)	Women (N=125/94)
'Moderate' for self (W1)	57 (40-95)	35 (25-54)
'Normal' for own sex (W1)	32 (20-56)	15 (10-28)
DoH 'sensible' for own sex (W4)	18 (0-24)	14 (0-14)

Participant 12: Illustrates the importance of a drinker's own definitions

Drinks last week:

104 122 119 107 92 92

Days last year drinking 10 or more units:

NA 360 364 358 310 313

Own drinking definitions:

V high 140; high 120; mod 100; low 80

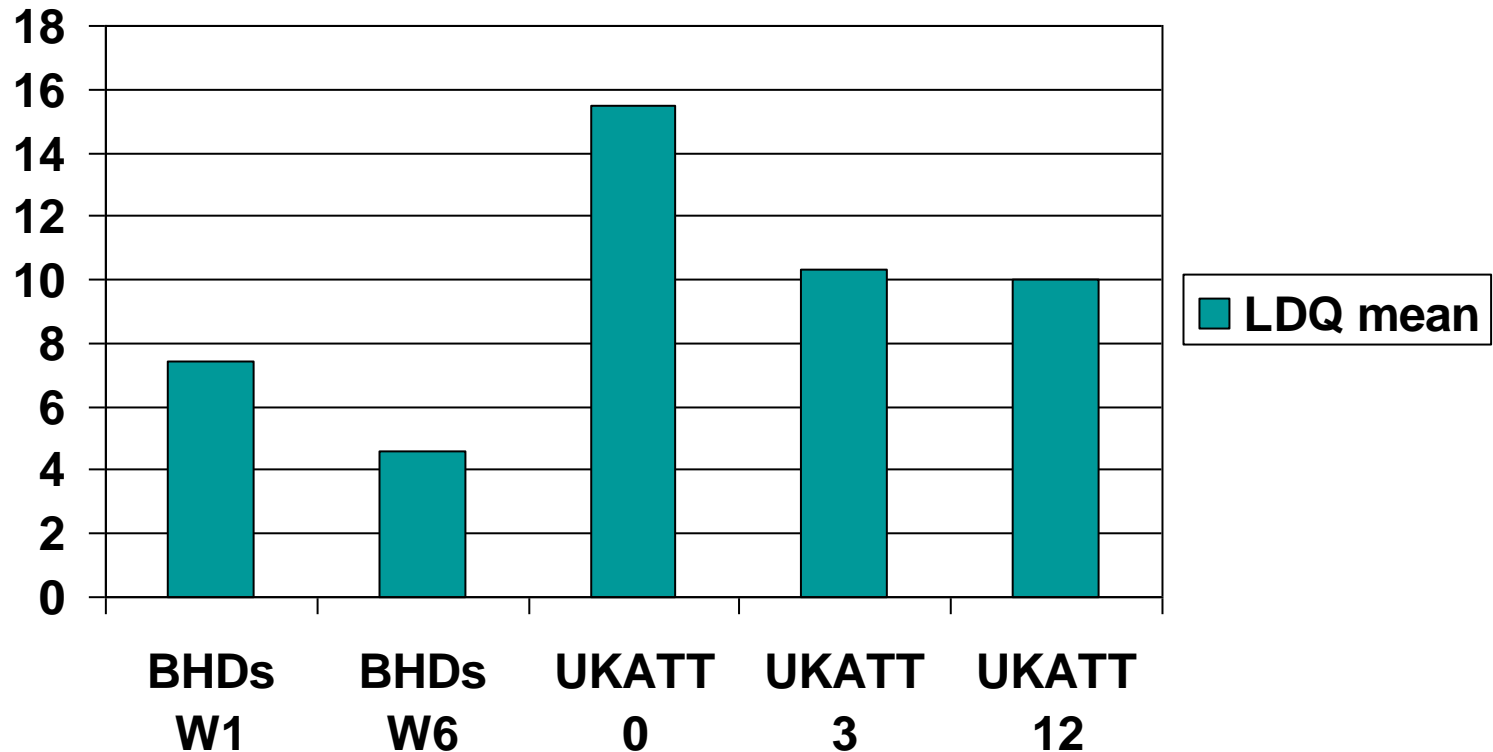
Six most important people (Wave 5)

	Men (N=191)	Women (N=86)
At least one 'heavy drinker'	56%	62%
At least one drinks same or more	71%	83%
At least one disapproves	34%	38%
At least one would approve if stopped	57%	54%

Participant 318: Illustrates how deeply embedded drinking is in family and friendship groups and in drinking places

- “Most of the people I hang around with are of a similar ilk in terms of drink”
- “I love pubs, end of story, love pubs”
- His friends clubbed together and bought him 300 bottles of wine for his fortieth birthday

Leeds Dependence Questionnaire (LDQ) Birmingham Heavy Drinkers & UKATT



Participant 318: Illustrates how it is possible to live with evident harms from drinking and some dependence

- Three drink related accidents
- Memory “shot to pieces”
- Leeds Dependence Questionnaire scores:
7 4 8 7 8 6
- “I know I exceed what those levels are but it doesn’t worry me sufficiently to do anything about it”