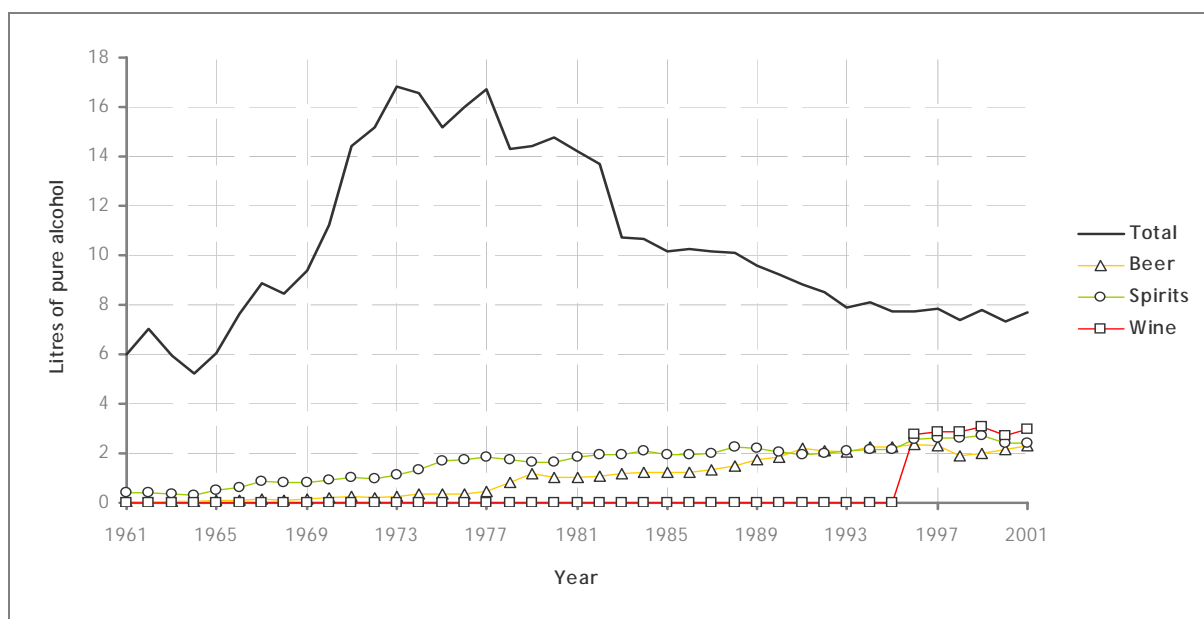


REPUBLIC OF KOREA (THE)

Recorded adult per capita consumption (age 15+)

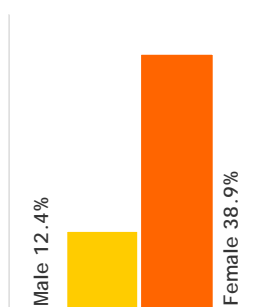
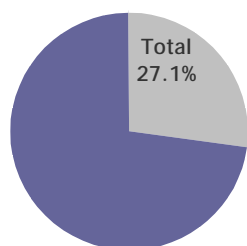


Note: From 1996 the wine category includes rice and wheat fermented beverages, which before 1996 were included in the total consumption figure.

Sources: FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), World Drink Trends 2003

Recent changes in the socioeconomic status of the Republic of Korea have caused big differences in alcohol-related social and health problems. The traditional trait of drinking mild fermented beverages with nutritional side dishes and meals has shifted to drinking strongly distilled liquors without any side dishes. Moreover, the alcohol consumption per adult capita of Korea is now 8.1 litres, which parallels the level of other developed countries; it used to be 1.0 litre in 1960 and 7.0 litres in 1980. The alcohol consumption per capita of adult males is now 18.4 litres. Consequently, the national incidence of alcohol-related diseases and accidents has rapidly increased.¹

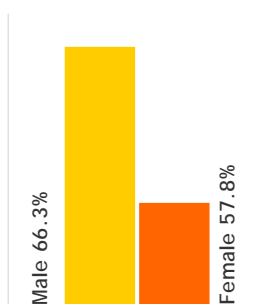
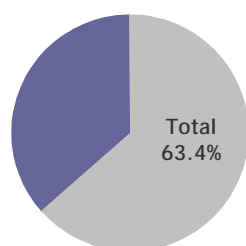
Abstainers



Data from the 2001 Korean version of the Household Health Interview Survey (nationally representative sample of subjects aged 20 years old and above).²

Estimates from key alcohol experts show that the proportion of adult males and females who had been abstaining (last year before the survey) was 12% (males) and 37% (females). Data is for after year 1995.³

Heavy drinkers (among drinkers)

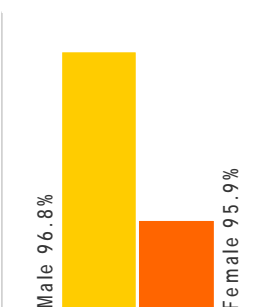
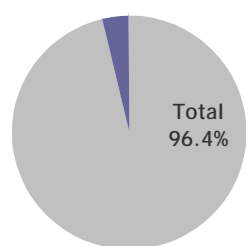


Data from the 2001 Korean version of the Household Health Interview Survey (nationally representative sample of subjects aged 20 years old and above). Heavy drinking was defined as consumption of five or more drinks on one drinking occasion for males and consumption of three or more drinks on one drinking occasion for females.²

WHO focal point data estimates that the rate of frequent drinking is 13.4% among males and 2.4% among females. Frequent drinking was defined as drinking on five or more days each week.⁴

The rate of heavy drinkers increases with age. Drinkers who live in the countryside are more prone to be heavy drinkers than city drinkers. According to professional difference analysis, workers in agriculture or the fishery consume more alcohol than any other profession, next to the self-employed business owner, service member person, salesperson, and the unemployed. These results indicate that free-living people without a regular strict schedule have more chances for drinking.¹

Youth drinking among students



Most of the students who drink are aged between 19 to 22 years old.⁵

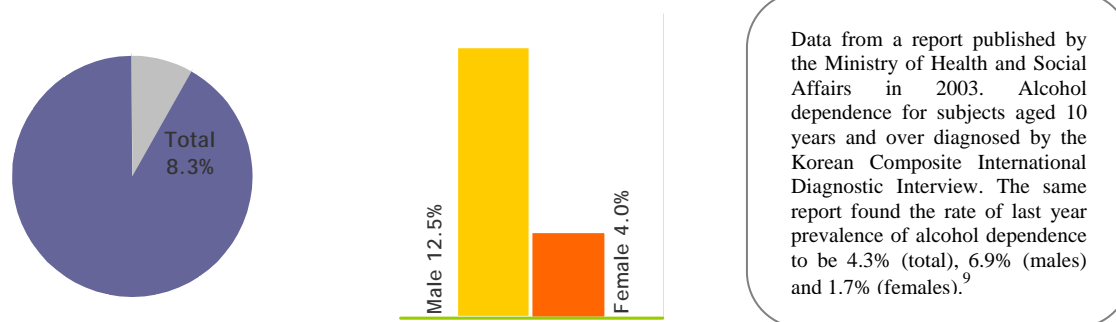
Data from the 2001 National Health and Nutrition Survey (age group 20 to 29 years old) found that 86% of the total population sampled were regular drinkers.⁶

Data from the 1999 Social Statistics Survey (age group 20 to 29 years old) show that about 75% are drinkers.⁵

Data from the 2002 Social Statistics Survey (age group 20 to 29 years old) found that the rate of heavy drinkers was 9% among males and 0.9% among females. Heavy drinking was defined as drinking almost everyday.⁷

In a study of 2124 students (1092 boys and 1032 girls) who attended junior high and high schools in Seoul (age range 14 to 18 years old), the rate of lifetime prevalence of alcohol use was found to be 62%. An estimated 68% of students aged 12 to 16 years reported that they were monthly drinkers and 28% of them used alcohol weekly.⁸

Alcohol dependence (lifetime prevalence)



According to the 2001 National Health and Nutrition Survey, the rate of alcohol dependence was found to be 12.8% among males and 3.7% among females. Alcohol dependence was defined by three or more positive responses on the four-item CAGE questionnaire.⁶

A household urban survey conducted in Seoul of subjects aged 18–65 years (total sample size $n = 3134$; males $n = 1490$ and females $n = 1644$) found that the rate of lifetime prevalence of alcohol dependence in the population sampled was 8.8% (total), 17.2% (males) and 1% (females), using DSM-III criteria.¹⁰

A corresponding survey conducted among a rural Korean population ($n = 1966$) found that the lifetime prevalence rate of alcohol dependence was 11.7% (total), 22.4% (males) and 0.7% (females).¹¹

A recent epidemiological study illustrated that the lifetime prevalence rate of alcoholism in the Republic of Korea showed a remarkable sex difference: there was a 20- to 30-fold higher incidence in the male population than the female population. Generally, violent activities after heavy drinking were somewhat tolerated. Public attitude toward drinking is common, but drinking by women and the younger generation is increasing these days and causes other social problems.¹

The percentage of alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence among psychiatric inpatients is gradually increasing: 1.74% in 1980 to 6.62% in 1989. Among the alcoholics, 28.4% are primary alcoholics, whereas 71.6% are complicated alcoholics, mainly with affective disorders (52.8%).¹

In a study looking at 472 homeless men housed in shelters in the two largest cities in the Republic of Korea, lifetime prevalence of alcohol dependence was found to be 37.4% - twice as high as the general population rate. The current prevalence of alcohol dependence was 28.6%. Diagnostic criteria were those of the DSM-IV.¹²

Traditional alcoholic beverages

Two types of alcoholic beverages are traditionally popular in the Republic of Korea: *soju* and *makkolli*. *Soju*, the most widely used traditional beverage, is a distilled liquor made from fermented potatoes and has an alcohol content of 25%. *Makkolli* is the oldest alcoholic beverage in the Republic of Korea, made by fermenting non-glutinous and glutinous rice together. It has an alcohol content of about 7%.¹³

Makkolli is a thick milky liquid with a pungent, bittersweet taste and odour. It is a fermented liquor that can be strained before drinking according to taste. Its high carbon dioxide gas content, due to its ongoing fermentation gives it a strong thirst-quenching quality. Because its alcoholic content is relatively low, it can go off quickly. It is enjoyed for relaxation after work and taken on special occasions such as weddings and funerals.¹⁴

Makkolli is the oldest of Korean beverages and one of the most popular in the Republic of Korea. Its name has changed with the passage of time. During the *Koryo* Dynasty it was known as *Ihwaju*, meaning "pear blossom wine" because the yeast fermentation process used in its making usually occurred during the pear blossom season. It was also known as *T'sckchu* or "unclear liquor" because it was not filtered before bottling or consumption, giving it an opaque appearance. Nowadays it also goes by the name *Nong-ju* or "farmers drink," because of its rice grain origins. Since ancient times, farmers have enjoyed their *makkolli* brew while working in the fields. It is also revered for its pure white colour, that of the traditional garb of the Korean people who were known as the "white-clad" people in ancient times. *Makkolli* was the beverage of choice among Koreans until the 1950s when food shortages forced the government to impose a ban on the use of rice for its making. Consumption of the coarsely brewed wine plummeted, while popular attention switched to *soju*.¹⁴

Soju had its origins 5000 years ago among the Sumerians, an ancient non-Semitic people of southern Mesopotamia who were the first to distill any kind of liquor. It was among them that beer, wine, whiskey and vodka originated. The distillation method they developed spread worldwide.¹⁴

Soju was introduced to Koreans by the Mongolian invaders of the 13th century. At this time it was regarded as a high quality and luxurious product, the reason being the amount of grain that was required in the distillation process. Due to its cost and its alcohol content it was normally used only for medical purposes. The popularity of *soju* rose during the *Choson* Dynasty and was often prohibited due to its excessive consumption. It was so beloved among the people of *Choson* that, no matter how devoted they were to Confucian principles, they even changed the ritual of drinking a cup of tea to honour their ancestors' spirits and substituted instead a bowl of *soju* or *makkolli*.¹⁴

Soju is presently the most widely consumed alcoholic drink in the Republic of Korea. The name *soju* means "made of something burning", an indication of the fiery taste of this distilled liquor made by collecting the vapour of heated fermented wine. Because its alcohol content is relatively high, *soju* does not go off quickly. Its ingredients are steamed rice, barley, corn, potatoes, sweet potatoes and water.¹⁴

In a recent study conducted, it was found that beer is not the highest risk alcoholic beverage for alcohol-related harm, unlike the situation in many Western countries. *Soju*, the most widely consumed alcoholic beverage in the country, is associated with the greatest risk. The study also found that *soju* emerged as the beverage for which more than half Korean drinkers had consumed the highest level of pure alcohol in the last month.¹³

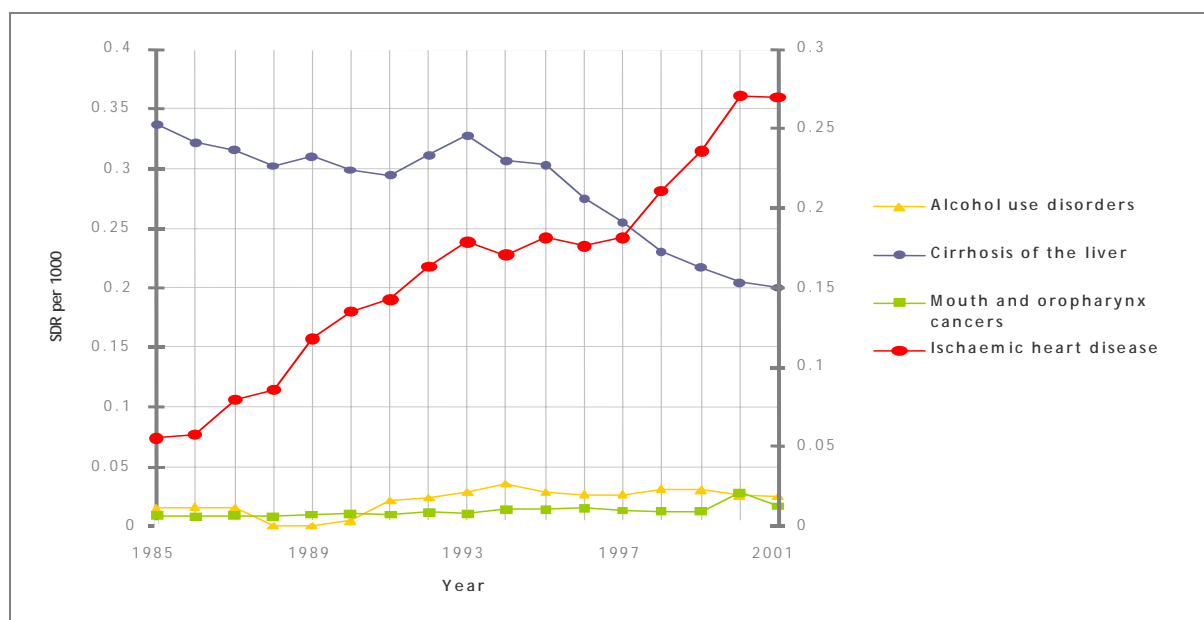
Unrecorded alcohol consumption

The unrecorded alcohol consumption in the Republic of Korea is estimated to be 7.0 litres pure alcohol per capita for population older than 15 for the years after 1995 (estimated by a group of key alcohol experts).³

Mortality rates from selected death causes where alcohol is one of the underlying risk factors

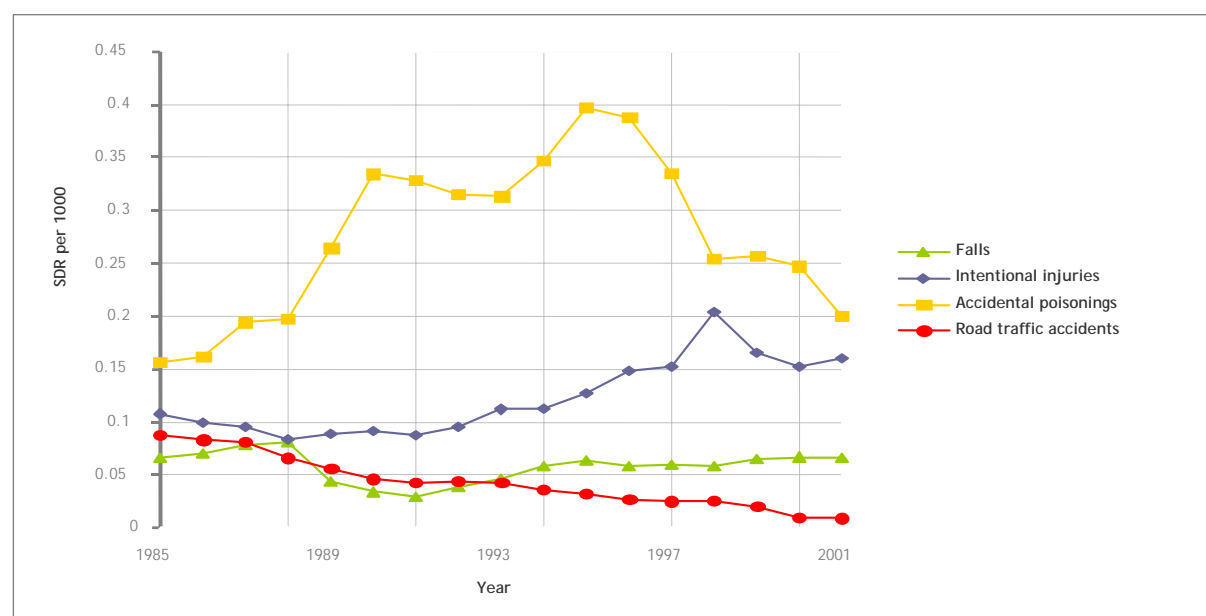
The data represent all the deaths occurring in a country irrespective of whether alcohol was a direct or indirect contributor.

Chronic mortality



Note: Chronic mortality time-series measured on two axes, ischaemic heart disease on right axis and the other causes on the left.

Acute mortality



Source: WHO Mortality Database

Note: Caution should be exercised when interpreting the results as death registration level is incomplete.

Morbidity, health and social problems from alcohol use

The annual incidence of acute pancreatitis per 100 000 people has increased from 15.6 in 1995 to 19.4 in 2000. Alcohol consumption is a main contributing factor to this disease.¹⁵

The yearly change in the proportion of cases with alcoholic liver diseases of chronic liver disease patients shows the dramatic increase among the Korean population from 1.5% in 1980 to 24% in 1993. The analysis of hepatocellular carcinoma patients in the Republic of Korea indicates that 84% of male patients are heavy drinkers, whereas most of the female patients are not habitual alcohol drinkers.¹

The number of alcohol-related traffic deaths has increased by an average of 12.7% annually. The ratio of alcohol-related to total deaths has also increased from 3.1% in 1990 to 6.7% in 1995. Analysed in terms of age groups, 75.6% of the alcohol-related accidents involved drivers between the ages of 21 and 40 years old.¹⁶ The rate of car accidents caused by drunken driving is about 10-fold higher than in any other developed country.¹

Country background information

Total population 2003	47 700 000	Life expectancy at birth (2002)	Male	71.8
Adult (15+)	38 160 000		Female	79.4
% under 15	20	Probability of dying under age 5 per 1000 (2002)	Male	8
Population distribution 2001 (%)			Female	7
Urban	83	Gross National Income per capita 2002	US\$	9930
Rural	17			

Sources: Population and Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat, World Bank World Development Indicators database, The World Health Report 2004

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