

Unrecorded Alcohol in Vietnam

Results of a Population Survey

February 2018

Over the past decade, there has been a growing effort to measure and describe alcohol consumption and prevailing drinking patterns in Vietnam, as well as correlations with rapidly changing social and economic conditions [1]. Traditional homemade beverages, largely made from rice, are widely used in Vietnam [2], but only a few studies to date have examined their prevalence, associated drinking patterns, and the relationship to harmful drinking [3, 4]. According to the World Health Organization's 2014 Global Status Report on Alcohol, unrecorded alcohol makes up 70% of total consumption in Vietnam [5]. Direct estimates of unrecorded consumption at the national level have not been previously published, and very little published research exists, even at the local level [3]

In an effort to help describe the unrecorded alcohol market in Vietnam, as well as drinking patterns and preferences among its consumers, the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD)¹ supported a national population-based survey of alcohol consumption following a multi-stage, stratified, and semi-purposive sampling design. The work was undertaken in collaboration with the Institute for Population and Social Studies (IPSS) at the National Economics University in Hanoi, Vietnam.²

Methodology

Between November 2014 and January 2015, 5,175 in-person interviews were completed in Vietnam's six regions. Two provinces within each region, three districts within each province, and two wards within each district were randomly selected in order to achieve national representation. Efforts were made to ensure that the selection was representative of both upper and lower socioeconomic strata in Vietnam. The survey relied on a questionnaire of items sourced by IARD from existing international and national surveys that were adapted to the local context and understanding among the survey population in close collaboration with IPSS.

Respondents reported usual frequency, quantity, and drink size for each type of recorded and unrecorded alcohol beverage. Alcohol volume in liters and in grams of pure alcohol was calculated for each beverage type and summed across types to determine total alcohol from all sources. Recorded alcohol beverages included imported and domestically produced beer, wine, and distilled spirits. Unrecorded alcohol included traditional homemade beverages (notably rice wines), counterfeit, contraband, and surrogate alcohol.

Classification of types of alcohol as recorded and unrecorded was made in accordance with IARD's [Alcohol Taxonomy](#) and informed by IARD's [Toolkit for Assessing the Unrecorded Alcohol Market](#).

¹ The International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to addressing the global public health issue of reducing harmful drinking. IARD is supported by the world's leading beer, wine, and spirits producers. IARD works together with all relevant stakeholders to promote policy dialogue, assess the evidence, and seek local solutions to harmful drinking globally.

² Funding for the survey and research project was provided by IARD in accordance with the [Dublin Principles](#) and IARD's [General Principles for Research](#).

Key results

The following provides a short overview of key findings from the survey about drinking patterns, demographic characteristics of consumers, and outcomes associated with unrecorded alcohol consumption in Vietnam.

Alcohol consumption

According to the results of the survey, 51% of the population of Vietnam are current drinkers.

- The majority (78%) were male, and only 22% of women respondents identified themselves as current drinkers.
- In general, current drinkers were as prevalent in urban as in rural areas, but urban women were more likely than rural women to drink alcohol (25% versus 20%).
- Among current drinkers, younger individuals (25 years old and younger) reported consuming the lowest levels of alcohol of all age groups, while those between 46 and 54 years old reported consuming the most alcohol.
- Consumption varied across the 12 provinces studied, with the highest prevalence of current drinkers reported in Gia Lai province (68%), followed closely by Dac Lac (64%), and the lowest prevalence in Binh Duong province (42%).

Based on the survey, current drinkers consumed alcohol at per capita levels of 6.7 liters of pure alcohol over the past 12 months.

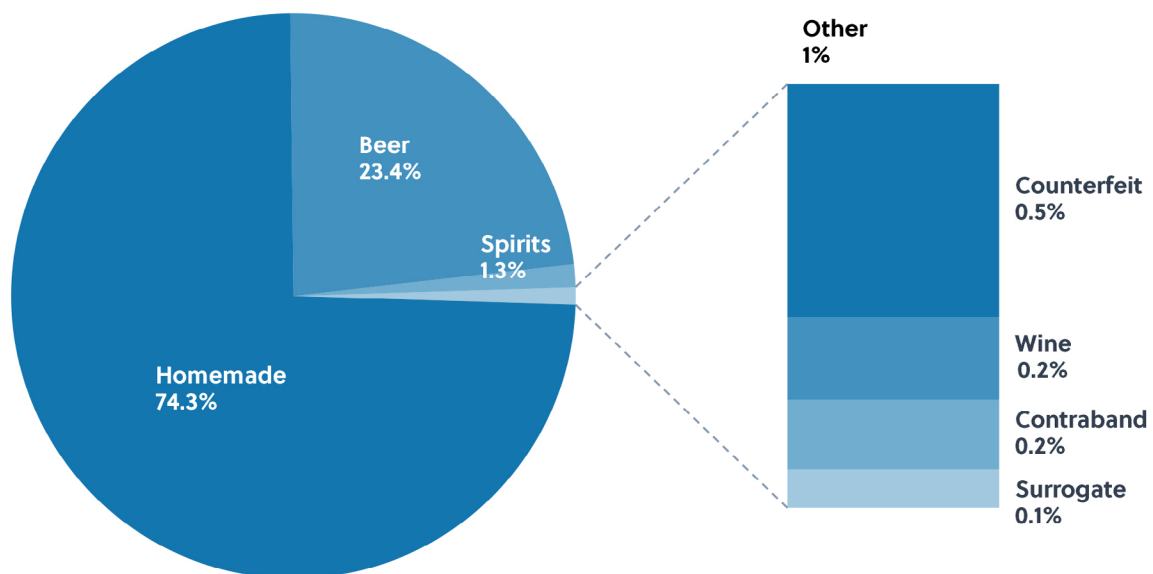
- Men reported consuming significantly higher levels of alcohol than women, at 8.2 liters of pure alcohol per capita per year. Women reported consuming 1.3 liters of pure alcohol per capita per year.
- Urban respondents drank significantly more alcohol in total, but less unrecorded alcohol than rural respondents.

Unrecorded and recorded alcohol consumption

Unrecorded alcohol made up 75% of the total alcohol consumed in Vietnam (Figure 1).

- Across Vietnam, 78% of respondents who identified themselves as current drinkers reported consuming homemade alcohol³ in the past 12 months, and homemade alcohol³ accounted for 5.0 liters, or 74%, of all alcohol consumed.
- The second most preferred beverage type was beer, which was consumed by 69% of all current drinkers and accounted for 1.6 liters, or 23%, of all alcohol consumed.
- Smaller numbers of drinkers reported consuming spirits or wine. Combined, these two types accounted for 0.1 liters, or 1.5%, of all alcohol consumed.
- When asked about their consumption of unrecorded alcohol, 2.4% of current drinkers reported consuming counterfeit alcohol, 1.5% reported consuming contraband alcohol, and fewer than 1% reported consuming surrogate alcohol.
- These three unrecorded alcohol types combined accounted for 0.8% of the total volume of alcohol consumed in the previous 12 months.

FIGURE 1. Proportion of total alcohol consumption by beverage category; All current drinkers.



³ Homemade alcohol in Vietnam is predominantly rice wine.

The survey found that consumption varied among provinces (Figure 2).

- Drinkers in Ben Tre province consumed the most alcohol in the past 12 months at 11.6 liters, 93% of which was unrecorded.
- In Khanh Hoa province, drinkers consumed 4.1 liters of alcohol. At 42% of the total alcohol volume consumed, this was the lowest proportion of unrecorded alcohol in any province.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Respondents were classified according to the type of alcohol they were most likely to consume. Survey data showed that the characteristics of consumers of recorded and unrecorded alcohol beverages varied (Table 1).

- Most current drinkers (50%) drink more than one type of alcohol, with beer and homemade alcohol comprising the most common combination.
- Among current drinkers, 30% reported drinking only homemade alcohol.

FIGURE 2. Contributions of recorded and unrecorded alcohol to total alcohol volume, by province.

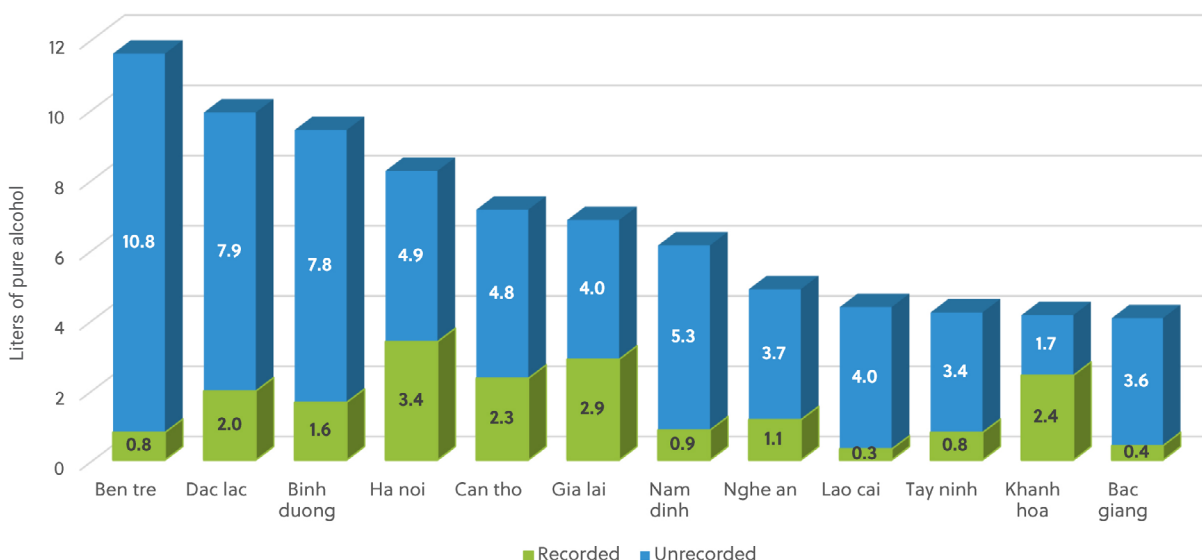


TABLE 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

	Full sample	All current drinkers	Recorded only*	Unrecorded only**	Both types***
N	5,175	2,618	542	774	1,303
Male	51%	78%	51%	83%	87%
Urban	41%	40%	56%	29%	40%
Less than high school education	63%	60%	48%	70%	59%
Unemployed	29%	22%	26%	22%	20%
Married	83%	86%	75%	91%	87%
Monthly household income <5million VND	41%	36%	25%	51%	31%
Average age	45	45	42	48	44
* Recorded only: consumers who reported drinking only beer, wine, or spirits, and no unrecorded alcohol.					
** Unrecorded only: consumers who reported drinking only homemade alcohol, or other unrecorded alcohol, and no legally produced beer, wine, or spirits.					
*** Both types: consumers who reported drinking both recorded alcohol (beer, wine, or spirits) and unrecorded alcohol (homemade, surrogate, counterfeit, or contraband).					

- Those who reported consuming only recorded alcohol were generally younger and had a higher household income and higher level of education than those consuming other beverage types.
- Drinkers of recorded alcohol only were also more likely to live in urban areas and be unmarried.
- This group also included more women than other groups that consumed different types of beverages.
- On the other hand, those who consumed only unrecorded alcohol were more likely to live in rural areas, have less than a high school education, and have lower income levels.
- Those who drank unrecorded alcohol included a larger proportion of males, were older, and the vast majority were married.
- The consumption of unrecorded alcohol was more prevalent in rural areas.

Drinking patterns

Average alcohol consumption in the past 12 months differed among select groups of drinkers (Table 2).

- On average, individuals who reported drinking only recorded alcohol consumed the least amount (2.0 liters) of alcohol over the past 12 months.
- Compared with consumers of only recorded alcohol, those who drank only unrecorded alcohol or a combination of recorded and unrecorded alcohol beverages reported consuming nearly four times more alcohol in the past 12 months (7.7 liters and 8.1 liters respectively).
- Among consumers of both recorded and unrecorded alcohol beverage types, about two-thirds of total alcohol consumed came from unrecorded alcohol beverages and one-third from recorded alcohol beverages.

TABLE 2. Proportion of total alcohol consumption by recorded/unrecorded alcohol preference.

	Drinker Category		
	Recorded Only	Unrecorded Only	Both Types
Homemade		99.5%	67.5%
Other Unrecorded		0.5%	1.1%
Beer	92.7%		29.7%
Spirits	5.8%		1.6%
Wine	1.6%		0.2%
Total in Liters	2.0L	7.7L	8.1L

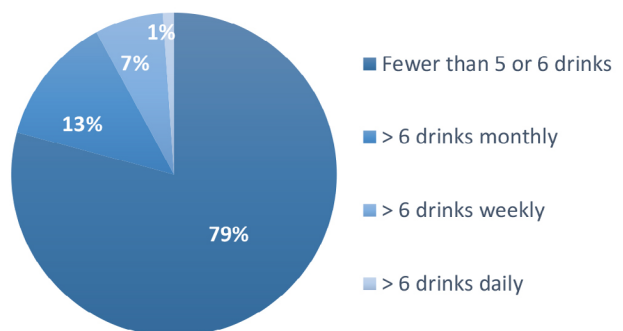
Respondents were also asked about the frequency with which they consumed alcohol.

- While a majority of respondents consumed alcohol infrequently, a small but sizable group (15%) consumed alcohol on a daily basis, and 26% reported drinking at least once a week.
- Women were more likely to be occasional drinkers than men, and less likely to be daily drinkers.
- The frequency of drinking was lowest among the youngest age groups and highest among those 56 years old or older.

Respondents were asked about the largest number of drinks they had consumed during a single 24-hour period in the past year and how often they had consumed this amount, providing an indication of occasional heavy drinking and chronic heavy drinking (Figure 3).

- Occasional heavy drinkers, those who consumed more than six drinks a day on a monthly basis, made up 13% of all drinkers.
- The frequency of heavy drinking differed significantly by sex; 25.6% of men drank heavily on at least a monthly basis, compared with 3.5% of women.
- Chronic heavy drinkers, those who consumed more than six drinks a day on a daily basis, made up 1% of all current drinkers, and regular weekly heavy drinkers made up another 7% of all current drinkers.
- The youngest and oldest age groups had the lowest prevalence of drinking heavily on at least a monthly basis, and the 36-45 age group had the highest prevalence of weekly and monthly heavy drinking.
- Daily heavy drinkers were more prevalent in the two oldest age groups (46 to 55 years old and 55+ years old).

FIGURE 3. Frequency of drinking more than six drinks in a 24-hour period during the past 12 months, among current drinkers (N=2619)



Patterns of drinking were examined to determine the prevalence of light, moderate, and heavy drinking.⁴

- While the majority of current drinkers (86%) in Vietnam were light or moderate drinkers, 6% reported drinking heavily (more than 48g of alcohol per day).
- Heavy drinking was more frequent among men than among women.
- Heavy drinking was more prevalent among older respondents, 46 years old and older, than among younger age groups.
- There were no significant differences between rural and urban populations in the prevalence of heavy drinking.

Drinking levels according to recorded/unrecorded alcohol preference (Figure 4).

- Among drinkers who reported consuming only recorded alcohol, light drinkers made up the largest group (80%).
- Drinkers who consumed a combination of different types of beverages, both recorded and unrecorded, had the largest proportions of heavy and moderate-heavy drinkers.
- Heavy drinking was least prevalent among those who consumed only recorded beverages, regardless of whether it was beer, wine, or spirits.

Alcohol-related harm

Respondents were asked about their perceived mental and physical health status, as a potential indicator of alcohol related harm.

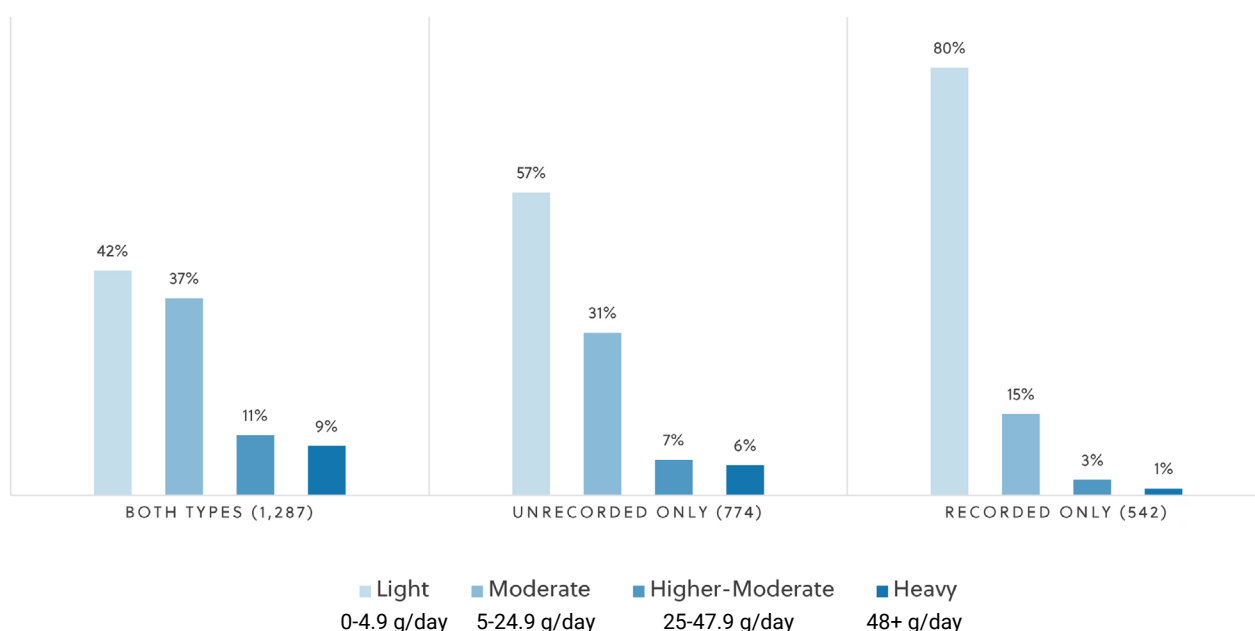
- Consumers of unrecorded alcohol were only likely to report being under stress and experiencing poor health than drinkers of recorded alcohol.
- Those drinking both recorded and unrecorded alcohol were more likely to report harm across all outcomes (home life, friendships, health, work/studies, and finances).

Drivers of unrecorded alcohol consumption

In order to assess the drivers of consumption among those who reported drinking homemade alcohol, consumers were asked about their reasons for drinking this type of beverage.

- Two main reasons were given for drinking homemade alcohol: it is easier to obtain due to fewer restrictions on where or when it may be purchased; and it is a traditional beverage in Vietnam.
- The third most important reason was price, with nearly 50% of drinkers reporting the much lower price of homemade alcohol as an important reason for its consumption.

FIGURE 4. Drinking levels by recorded/unrecorded preference.



⁴ Drinking levels were defined according to the average number of grams of alcohol consumed per day during the past 12 months from all sources. While some researchers and WHO use an average of 60 grams per day as the cutoff to indicate heavy drinking, there were few individuals in the current survey population with an average between 48g and 60g, and we chose to combine all drinkers with an average above 48g into the heavy drinking category.

Homemade alcohol production

All survey participants were asked about the production of homemade alcohol in their communities.

- A third (32%) of respondents reported that they had a friend, neighbor, or relative engaged in making homemade alcohol.
- The majority (74%) reported that they had purchased homemade alcohol from their friend, neighbor, or relative at least once in the past 12 months.
- Among all respondents, 5.5% reported that they had made their own homemade alcohol in the past 12 months, with 27% of this group reporting selling some of what they had produced.
- These results indicate that around 37.5% of the survey population either produced their own homemade alcohol or knew someone who did. This is nearly equivalent to the prevalence of homemade alcohol drinkers in the full sample population of drinkers and non-drinkers (40%).

Final Remarks

This study offers important insights into the unrecorded alcohol market in Vietnam and is the first direct effort to measure its size and patterns of consumption at the national level. The findings confirm that the prevalence of unrecorded alcohol in Vietnam is very high, making up approximately 75% of all alcohol consumed.

The results also indicate that the consumption of unrecorded alcohol is closely associated with harmful drinking patterns and a number of social, economic, and demographic factors that likely contribute to harmful outcomes. Consumers of unrecorded alcohol are more likely to drink heavily than those who consume legally produced and recorded alcohol beverages, and tend to be of lower socioeconomic status. They are more likely to be older and to live in rural areas, which is consistent with the traditional aspects of these beverages. Consumers of unrecorded beverages are also more likely to report poor health and greater negative outcomes than those who drink legal, commercially produced beer, spirits, and wine.

Taken together, these findings suggest a need for further research into these relationships in order to develop appropriate and sustainable solutions. However, the results strongly point to the need for special efforts around policy measures to specifically address unrecorded alcohol. As this segment of the alcohol market is largely unregulated, control measures like pricing, taxation, and restrictions on the availability of recorded alcohol beverages are of little use because they do not affect the production, sale, or consumption of unrecorded alcohol. The impact of these measures is restricted to the recorded market, which accounts for only 25% of all alcohol consumed in Vietnam.

As the findings show, two of the main drivers of consumption of unrecorded alcohol are that it is easier to obtain than legal, branded beverages and that it is less expensive than recorded alcohol beverages. In light of this relationship, increased regulation of the recorded alcohol market may have the unintended consequence of driving consumption even further into the unrecorded sphere. At the same time, simply banning the production of unrecorded alcohol is also not an effective solution, since much of it is already illegal and part of the grey or black market.

The strong role played by the traditional aspects of unrecorded alcohol in Vietnam highlight a need for approaches other than simply strengthening or adding regulatory policies. A comprehensive strategy aimed at unrecorded alcohol includes educating consumers of unrecorded beverages and changing attitudes and perceptions. Successful interventions are those that include bringing the production and sale of traditional beverages into the regulatory environment, involving communities where unrecorded consumption is most prevalent, and changing social norms around its role in society.

Finally, this study also indicates a close relationship between the consumption of unrecorded alcohol, social determinants of health, and self-reported harm. Specific efforts to address the unrecorded alcohol market and interventions aimed at harmful drinking patterns can generally be expected to have significant implications for reducing the alcohol-related disease burden in Vietnam.

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