Department for Communities and Local Government

The effect of alcohol or drugs on casualty rates in accidental dwelling fires, England, 2011-12

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Department for Communities and Local Government

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Key Points

- In 2011-12, there were 30,709 accidental dwelling fires in England. In 8% (2,483) of these fires where impairment due to suspected drug or alcohol use was recorded as a contributory factor.

- Impairment due to alcohol or drug use resulted in 41 deaths and 1,208 injuries from 2,483 dwelling fires.

Fatalities and non-fatal casualties

- Average fatality rate where alcohol or drug impairment suspected to be an influencing factor is three times more compared to where alcohol or drug impairment was not an influencing factor.

- The rate of serious injuries is four times higher where drug or alcohol impairment was a contributory factor than where alcohol or drug impairment was not a factor.

- Male casualties outnumbered females by two to one in dwelling fires where impairment due to suspected alcohol or drug use was an influencing factor.

Circumstances of the victims

- More than half (56%) of casualties in accidental dwelling fires where impairment due to alcohol or drugs was a contributory factor were themselves not suspected to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

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Introduction

This analysis examines the effect of impairment due to alcohol and/or drugs on casualty rates per fire in accidental fires in dwellings in England in 2011-12.

Findings

- Impairment due to alcohol or drugs was recorded as having been a contributory factor in 8% (2,483) of the total of 30,709 accidental dwelling fires attended by Fire and Rescue Services in England in 2011-12.

- The average rate of fatalities per accidental dwelling fire where alcohol or drug usage was a contributory factor was over three (3.2) times higher compared to where alcohol or drugs usage was not a contributory factor. (tables 1 and 2)

- The rate of non-fatal casualties taken to hospital per accidental dwelling fire was almost three (2.8) times as great where alcohol or drug usage was a contributory factor, compared to where alcohol or drug was not a contributory factor. (tables 1 and 2)

As well as whether alcohol and/or drugs were a contributory factor to the fire, details are also recorded about each casualty including whether each victim was suspected to have been under the influence of either alcohol or drugs. These show that:

- More than half (56%) of casualties in accidental dwelling fires where impairment due to alcohol or drugs was a contributory factor were themselves not suspected to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. (table 3)

- More than one third (37%) of casualties in dwelling fires where alcohol or drug was suspected to be a contributory factor were under the influence of alcohol compared to 6% of casualties who were suspected to be under the influence of drugs. (table 3)

- Rates of casualties in accidental dwelling fires where either alcohol or drug was an influencing factor (table 4) were:

    - higher for men than women for all adult age groups under age 80. Overall, male casualties outnumbered females by two to one in accidental dwelling fires where either alcohol or drug was an influencing factor.
    - notably higher for both males and females aged between 20 and 59, compared to other age groups.

Table 1 - Casualty rates in accidental dwelling fires according to whether impairment due to suspected alcohol or drugs was a contributory factor, England, 2011-12

Victim type description	impairment due to alcohol or drugs was a contributory factor	impairment due to alcohol or drugs was not a contributory factor[1]	Ratio[2]
Fatal	0.017	0.005	3.2
Hospital non-fatal casualties[3]	0.219	0.078	2.8

Note:
[1] see below
[2] ratio of i) average casualty rates per accidental dwelling fire where impairment due to alcohol or drug was a contributory factor to ii) the rate where impairment was not due to either of the substances
[3] Non-fatal casualties whose injuries required them to be taken to hospital. Excludes casualties whose injury severity was 'first aid' or 'precautionary checks recommended'

Table 2 - Fatal and non-fatal casualties in accidental dwelling fires where impairment due to alcohol or drugs was a contributory factor, England, 2011-12

Casualty type	Alcohol or drug was a contributory factor		Alcohol or drug was a contributory factor (rate per fire)		Ratio[1]
	No/don't know[1]	yes	No/don't know[1]	yes	
Fatalities	146	41	0.005	0.017	3.2
All non-fatal casualties (A+B+C+D)	5,127	1,208	0.182	0.487	2.7
Hospital non-fatal casualties (A+B)	2,193	544	0.219	0.078	2.8
Hospital - serious injuries (A)	275	104	0.010	0.042	4.3
Hospital - slight injuries (B)	1,918	440	0.068	0.177	2.6
First aid given at scene (C)	1,834	368	0.065	0.148	2.3
Precautionary check recommended (D)	1,100	296	0.039	0.119	3.1

[1] Records of fire incidents include the opinion of the senior officer at the scene as to whether alcohol or drugs appeared to have been a contributory factor. On occasions this will be unclear either way. 'Not known' was recorded for 2,999 of the 30,709 accidental dwelling fires in England. Had the ratios calculated compared 'yes' to 'no', rather than 'yes' to both 'not known' and 'no' combined, as is the case in this analysis, then the ratios of rates of casualties would have been higher.

Table 3: Numbers of casualties in accidental dwelling fires in England, 2011-12 according to i) whether casualties were suspected to have been under the influence of alcohol or drugs by ii) whether either alcohol or drugs were suspected to have been a contributory factor to the fire

Circumstances of victims	Alcohol or drugs were a contributory factor		Alcohol or drugs were not a contributory factor		Total	
Suspected under the influence of alcohol	474	38%	41	1%	515	8%
Suspected under the influence of drugs	70	5.6%	15	0.3%	85	1.3%
Not suspected to be under the influence of either alcohol or drugs	705	56%	5,217	99%	5,922	91%
Total	1,249	100%	5,273	100%	6,522	100%

Table 4: Numbers of casualties in accidental dwelling fires in which either alcohol or drugs were suspected to have been a contributory factor, England, 2011-12

Age	Female	Rate[1]	Male	Rate[1]	Not recorded	All	Rate[1]
0-9	36	1.17	31	0.96		67	1.06
10-19	35	1.12	39	1.19		74	1.16
20-29	81	2.24	142	3.90		223	3.07
30-39	82	2.32	155	4.40	1	238	3.38
40-49	73	1.86	160	4.16		233	3.00
50-59	50	1.54	150	4.71	1	201	3.13
60-69	35	1.20	90	3.22		125	2.19
70-79	18	0.91	43	2.49		61	1.64
80-89	14	1.13	9	1.12		23	1.12
90-99	1	0.33	2	1.79		3	0.72
All	425	1.58	821	3.14	2	1,248	2.35
	34%		66%				

1. Rate per 100,000 population

Total casualties in this table equals 1,248 as opposed to 1,249 in other tables due to one casualty where age was not specified