

Media Release

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● Alcohol consumption in the UK: Geographical views offer new perspective on the future of alcohol policy

***Consumption controversies: alcohol policies in the UK* is the latest in a series of research reviews from the Society launched today that seeks to sort the fact from the fiction on important issues affecting society in the UK: Does the UK have a drinking problem? Is it safer to drink at home? Can the role of the local British pub be balanced alongside concerns for public health? These questions and more will be explored at the document's formal launch taking place in the House of Commons on Wednesday 8th December from 4pm.**

Dr Nicola Shelton from the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London (UCL) is an expert in the geographical variations of alcohol trends and believes the misconceptions of binge drinking are shielding some groups not traditionally seen as 'at risk'. "With all the images in the media of intoxicated young people pouring out of clubs and onto the streets late at night it would be easy to assume that the problem was limited to this group, but it's not. In some regions, it is the middle-aged population that are responsible for as much binge drinking as younger people, and they are probably quite unaware that the term 'binge drinker' refers to them," she said. In surveys of drinking behaviour, very few people recognise their own habits as 'harmful'. "We need to address attitudes as much as policy."

Professor Marion Roberts from the School of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Westminster is concerned spending cuts in local authorities, and particularly in policing, will exacerbate the problems already faced by towns and cities as they try to expand their night-time economies and support public health and law and order. "There is a contradiction at the heart of government policy. They want economic expansion and high-yield properties on the 'high street' but they want local controls and low-cost policing too", she said. "While many of the proposed amendments published last week to the Licensing Act 2003 are to be welcomed, Government should now return to one of the original objectives of licensing reform, which was to create a more positive and inclusive night-time city."

One of the biggest changes in drinking culture has taken place in the home with more than 1.8 million people now drinking there today compared to 2004. A team of Joseph Rowntree Foundation-funded researchers, who contributed expertise to the publication, found that while most parents agree with official guidance that children should not try alcohol until they are at least 15 years old, the everyday drinking behaviour of adults at home is confusing the health and behavioural messages and actually encouraging children to try alcohol. Professor Gill Valentine from the University of Leeds and Dr Mark Jayne from the University of Manchester will be speaking at the event today:



Speaker biographies are available online at www.rgs.org/alcohol, but those quoted in this release include:

Professor Gill Valentine, *School of Geography, University of Leeds*

Professor of Human Geography, and Director of the Leeds Social Science Institute (LSSI), Professor Valentine has an international reputation for theoretically-informed empirical work that is methodologically innovative and has popular and policy impacts. Her research interests include: social identities and belonging, children and parenting, consumption cultures (especially in relation to food, drink and gambling) and research methods. She has been awarded grants and contracts from UK Research Councils, charities, government departments, and non-governmental organisations to the value of more than £2 million. Professor Valentine also acts as a Trustee of the Drinkaware Trust. She has led, with Dr Sarah Holloway, and working alongside Dr Mark Jayne, a Joseph Rowntree funded project entitled '*Drinking Places: Social Geographies of Consumption*.'

Dr Mark Jayne, *Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Manchester*

Dr Jayne's research interests include consumption, the urban order, city cultures and cultural economy. He has published over 50 journal articles, book chapters and official reports. He is author of *Cities and Consumption*, co-author of *Alcohol, Drinking, Drunkenness: (Dis)Orderly Spaces* and co-editor of *City of Quarters: Urban Villages in the Contemporary City*, *Small Cities: Urban Experience beyond the Metropolis* and *Urban Theory beyond 'the West': A world of cities*.

Dr Nicola Shelton, *Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London (UCL)*

Head of the Health and Social Surveys Research Group, Dr Shelton's interests lie in population health and well-being taken from a geographical perspective. She is currently working on a secondary analysis of the Scottish Health Survey and Health Survey for England.

Professor Marion Roberts, *School of Architecture and the Built Environment (SABE), University of Westminster*

Professor Marion Roberts started her career as an architect and moved into urban design whilst researching her PhD. Her research interests are focused on socio-spatial relations in urban design. She has been awarded a number of research grants, consultancy and advisory roles from leading charities and government departments on the topic of the night-time economy. Professor Roberts has recently completed a book entitled *Planning the Night-time City* with Dr Adam Eldridge. She is currently leading a Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded project with Tim Townshend of Newcastle University and Dr Adam Eldridge, Dr Ilaria Pappalepore and Budhi Mulwayan of the University of Westminster entitled '*From Park to Club: Youth, Alcohol and Place*'.