

# FACT SHEET TWENTY ONE

## ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

The importance of the link between smoking and drinking is shown by recent studies which suggest that smoking is more likely to kill heavy drinkers than alcohol. The study found that more alcohol-dependent individuals die of tobacco-related diseases than of diseases related to alcohol use. 51% of deceased former in-patients at a Minnesota alcohol treatment programme died of tobacco-related illnesses, compared with 34% who died of alcohol-related liver disease.

There is anecdotal evidence in the UK to support these findings.

Reports indicate that the prevalence of smoking amongst substance misusers is between two and three times that of the general population. Further, it is indicated that alcohol-dependent individuals may constitute one quarter of all smokers.

It is suggested that alcohol treatment agencies could usefully address nicotine dependence at the same time.

In the UK in 1994, 27% of adults were cigarette smokers compared with 28% in 1992 and over 40% in 1976 (OPCS). Men and women in unskilled manual households are more than twice as likely to smoke as people in professional households. In terms of age, smoking is most prevalent among those aged 60 and over.

There is a significant association between smoking and drinking in the UK. Amongst men, 37% of smokers exceed the current 'sensible limit', compared with 20% of those who have never smoked, and men who drink more than 50 units a week are twice as likely to smoke as more moderate or non-drinkers.

Women smokers are twice as likely to exceed the sensible limit as those who have never smoked, and women who drink more than 35 units a week are three times as likely to smoke as non-drinkers, and twice as likely to smoke as more moderate drinkers.

Smoking during pregnancy reduces birth weight. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is more common in the babies of smokers.

The weight of evidence supports the position that women who are pregnant and who drink any alcohol at all may expose their babies to foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) or foetal alcohol effect (FAE), a lesser degree of FAS.

The combination of both alcohol and smoking during pregnancy is implicated in cases of FAS