

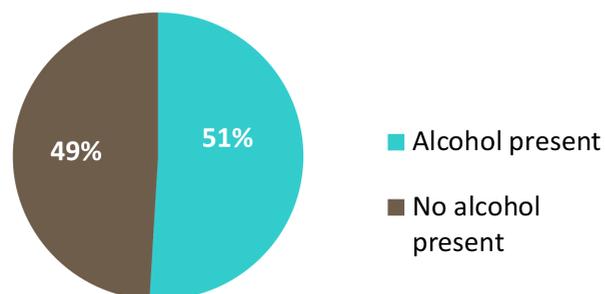
The role of alcohol in fatal fires in Ireland

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Fire fatalities 2014-2016 (n=106)

Toxicology results: 51% alcohol present (n=54)



Background

Research on fire fatalities indicates that older people (65 years and older) are at an increased risk of death due to fires, males are often over represented and health and/or mobility issues are known to play a role¹. Other factors reported to increase the risk of fire-related fatalities include living alone, smoking and alcohol consumption².

Aim

The aim of this research is to describe fire-related fatalities in the Republic of Ireland for the period 2014-2016 inclusive that involved alcohol. The use of coronial data allows for a more comprehensive, national insight into the circumstances of these fatalities.

Methods

A retrospective review of closed coronial inquest files pertaining to all fire-related fatalities involving alcohol for the years of death 2014 to 2016 inclusive, involved extraction of data on socio-demographic details, history of drug and/or alcohol dependency or misuse, history of mental ill-health, toxicology results, history of smoking, mobility status and information pertaining to the fire incident including the cause of fire.

Results

106 people died in fires in Ireland during 2014-2016 inclusive; **over half** of those (54, 51%) had consumed alcohol around the time of their death. The statistics below are based on those **54** people.



More **men** than women had consumed alcohol prior to their death (36, 67%).

62 years

The median age of all alcohol-related fire fatalities was **62 years** of age.



Most were **alone** at the time of fire (39, 72%). Majority were **single/separated/divorced/widowed** (42, 78%).



Thursdays (12, 22%) and **Sundays** (10, 19%) were the most common day of the week for fires to occur.



All fires took place in private dwellings. More occurred in **rural** settings (29, 54%) than urban (25, 46%). The most common location of the fire was the **living room** (11, 20%) and **bedroom** (7, 13%).



Most fires occurred during the **night**; from 00:00hrs – 05:59hrs (13, 24%).



21 people (39%) were known to be smokers. Where known, cigarettes/smoking were the most frequently reported cause of the fire.

Alcohol

Toxicology

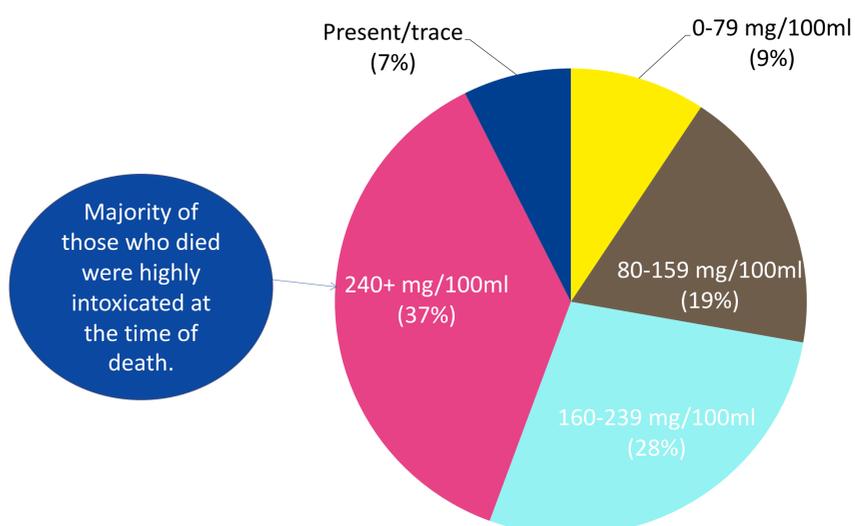
Toxicology reports from coronial files involving alcohol found that:

- 28 (52%) had alcohol only
- 26 (48%) had alcohol and drugs.

The most frequently found drugs listed on the toxicology reports **in addition to alcohol** include:

- Antidepressants
- Other specified hypnotics (excluding benzodiazepines)
- Non-opioid analgesics
- Benzodiazepines.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)



Conclusion

The analysis of toxicology reports contained in Coroner's data has highlighted the high percentage of people who had consumed alcohol prior to their death due to fires. Alcohol appears to be a key factor in these deaths, especially if mixed with drugs. Fire safety policies and practices need to ensure that at-risk groups are specifically targeted. Emphasis needs to be placed on smoking cessation, the importance of having an escape plan in place (particularly for older people and/or those who live alone) and to identify particular risk factors including alcohol misuse, combining alcohol with prescribed medication, cooking under the influence of alcohol and the lack of fire safety equipment.