In 2009, the Rape and Justice in Ireland Report (RAJI) revealed very high levels of alcohol involvement in rape in Ireland. Although alcohol does not cause sexual violence it may be used to excuse violent behaviour, to blame victims, and to incapacitate victims. Alcohol may also contribute to situations in which sexual violence is more likely to occur.

**Alcohol Involvement in incidences of rape:**
- 76% of all rape defendants in the RAJI study had been drinking at the time of the alleged rape.
- 70% of women in the RAJI study reported drinking at the time they were raped.
- Alcohol was involved in over 45% of adult women’s unwanted sexual experiences.

**Irish Drinking Habits:**
- 26% of those who had consumed alcohol in a 30 day period had consumed five or more drinks compared to EU average of 10%.
- The frequency of binge drinking in Ireland is the highest in Europe: 44% of Irish respondents who had consumed alcohol in the past 12 months indicating that they had been binge drinking at least once a week.
- Patterns for youth alcohol consumption in Ireland echo adult patterns: 42% of boys and 44% of girls aged 15-16 reporting binge-drinking during the previous month.
Irish Drinking Habits and Sexual Violence in Ireland:

Although little research has been done to assess the impact of the level of alcohol consumption on the likelihood of sexual violence, it stands to reason that binge drinking will multiply many of the effects associated with alcohol that impair recognition, response and sense of responsibility by perpetrators in sexually violent incidents.

In Ireland, the levels of binge drinking on the occasion of a rape are extraordinarily high:

- 88% of defendants on trial for rape whose alcohol consumption was known had been binge drinking at the time of the rape.  
- 45% of complainants and 40% of suspects of reported rape between 2000 and 2005 in Ireland had been binge drinking on the occasion of the rape.  
- As many as 10% of victims who reported rape to Gardaí were so intoxicated from alcohol as to be unable to offer physical or verbal resistance during the assault.

Targeting alcohol use as a means of reducing sexual violence: the possibilities

No direct causal link exists between alcohol consumption, at any level, and the perpetration of sexual violence. Nevertheless, harmful alcohol use can and should be targeted as part of the response in reducing rates of sexual violence in Ireland. Possibilities include:

- Educational programmes that address cultural expectations towards alcohol-related behaviour.
- Messaging and actions that address supply of and access to alcohol such as outlined in the Steering Group Report On a National Substance Misuse Strategy February 2012.
- Further research on the impact of alcohol reduction programmes on sexual violence reduction.

References: