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### ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AND COGNITIVE DECLINE IN EARLY OLD AGE

**Peter Kabai, Kaposvar, Hungary:** Sabia et al.<sup>1</sup> correctly stated that “some participants may have underestimated their consumption.” In 1999, total alcohol consumption for the United Kingdom per capita for those aged 15 years and older was estimated at 10.3 L reported plus about 1.7 L unreported absolute alcohol.<sup>2</sup> Drinking 12 L a year equals about 26 g of alcohol per day per person. Using data in table 1,<sup>1</sup> the median self-reported consumption is 10.6 g per day per person, which is less than half of the estimated consumption for the United Kingdom in 1999. However, the true average consumption of the study population may be different when taking the maximal consumed value for each category, as the calculated maximal consumption is still lower (22.5 g/day/person) than the average consumption in the United Kingdom. It is likely that the data are biased because heavy drinking was substantially underestimated.<sup>3</sup> The association between drinking habits and cognitive abilities at older age is a novel study and it is important to rigorously estimate the possible bias of the data.

**Author Response: Severine Sabia, London; Archana Singh-Manoux, Paris:** The authors thank Dr. Kabai for his comments on our article.<sup>1</sup> The Whitehall II study is not representative of the general

population. Dr. Kabai estimated alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom at “26 g of alcohol/day per person”; in our study it was 16 g/day in men and 7 g/day in women. The difference is that our study comprised older adults with stable civil service jobs who were healthier than the general population.<sup>4</sup> We made no claims about calculating mean average consumption in the UK population. In addition, the lower prevalence of heavy drinkers in our study is unlikely to have biased associations with cognitive decline. To assess these associations, we modeled the continuum of alcohol consumption using refined categories in the supplementary analyses to show harm to cognitive health in those who drank 36 grams or more of alcohol every day. We could not examine the effects on cognitive decline among those drinking even higher quantities as few participants in our cohort drank more. However, this does not imply that the results for participants in the 36 g/day category are biased.

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## Alcohol consumption and cognitive decline in early old age

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