

Alcohol use among 15 to 17-year-olds

Background

Four in nine New Zealanders report the first time they consumed a large amount of alcohol on one drinking occasion was when they were 15 to 17-years-old (Ministry of Health, 2009). The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) advises that for young people aged 15-17 years, the safest option is to delay drinking for as long as possible (Health Promotion Agency, 2014). HPA's Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) monitors New Zealanders' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol, including those related to last month alcohol consumption. This fact sheet reports on alcohol use among those aged 15-17 years.

Methodology

Participants in the 2013 ABAS were asked about their consumption of alcohol in the last four weeks and their experiences related to drinking alcohol. There were 180 respondents aged 15-17 years in the ABAS. Responses were examined only by gender, as the sample of 15 to 17-year-olds was not large enough to enable breakdown by further subgroups. Risky alcohol consumption (five or more drinks of alcohol on one occasion) was examined by frequency of alcohol consumption, defined as alcohol consumed on one day, two days, or three or more days in the last four weeks. Multiple responses were permitted when respondents were asked about their experiences after drinking alcohol.

Only those group differences that were statistically significant ($p < .05$) are reported.

Alcohol consumption in the past four weeks

Respondents were asked, 'Did you drink any alcohol in the last four weeks?' Almost one-half (48%, 41-55%) of 15 to 17-year-olds said they had not consumed alcohol in the past four weeks because they were non-drinkers, 14% (10-20%) had not consumed alcohol in the past four weeks but said they do drink, while 38% (31-45%) had consumed alcohol in the last four weeks.

Frequency of alcohol consumption in the past four weeks

Respondents who reported they had consumed alcohol in the last four weeks were asked, 'Thinking about the last four weeks, on how many days did you have an alcoholic drink of any kind?' Thirty-seven percent (26-49%) reported they had consumed an alcoholic drink on one day in the last four weeks, 24% (15-38%) reported two days, and 39% (28-52%) reported consuming an alcoholic drink on three or more days in the last four weeks.

Risky alcohol consumption

To measure risky alcohol consumption respondents were asked, 'How many times in the last four weeks have you had five or more drinks of alcohol on any one occasion?' The overall population rate among 15 to 17-year-olds who had never engaged in risky alcohol consumption was 78% (71-83%). Of those respondents who had consumed any alcohol in the last four weeks, 57% (45-68%) reported they had five or more drinks on at least one occasion in the last four weeks; 29% (20-41%) of respondents had done it once, and 28% (19-40%) two or more times.

Respondents (who had consumed alcohol in the last four weeks) who had ever engaged in risky alcohol consumption were also likely to have consumed alcohol on three or more days in the last four weeks (84%, 65-94%), compared with two days (44%, 23-69%)¹ and one day (38%, 22-58%)², in the last four weeks.

¹ Caution should be exercised when interpreting this estimate as the relative standard error (RSE) of the estimate is 28.70%.

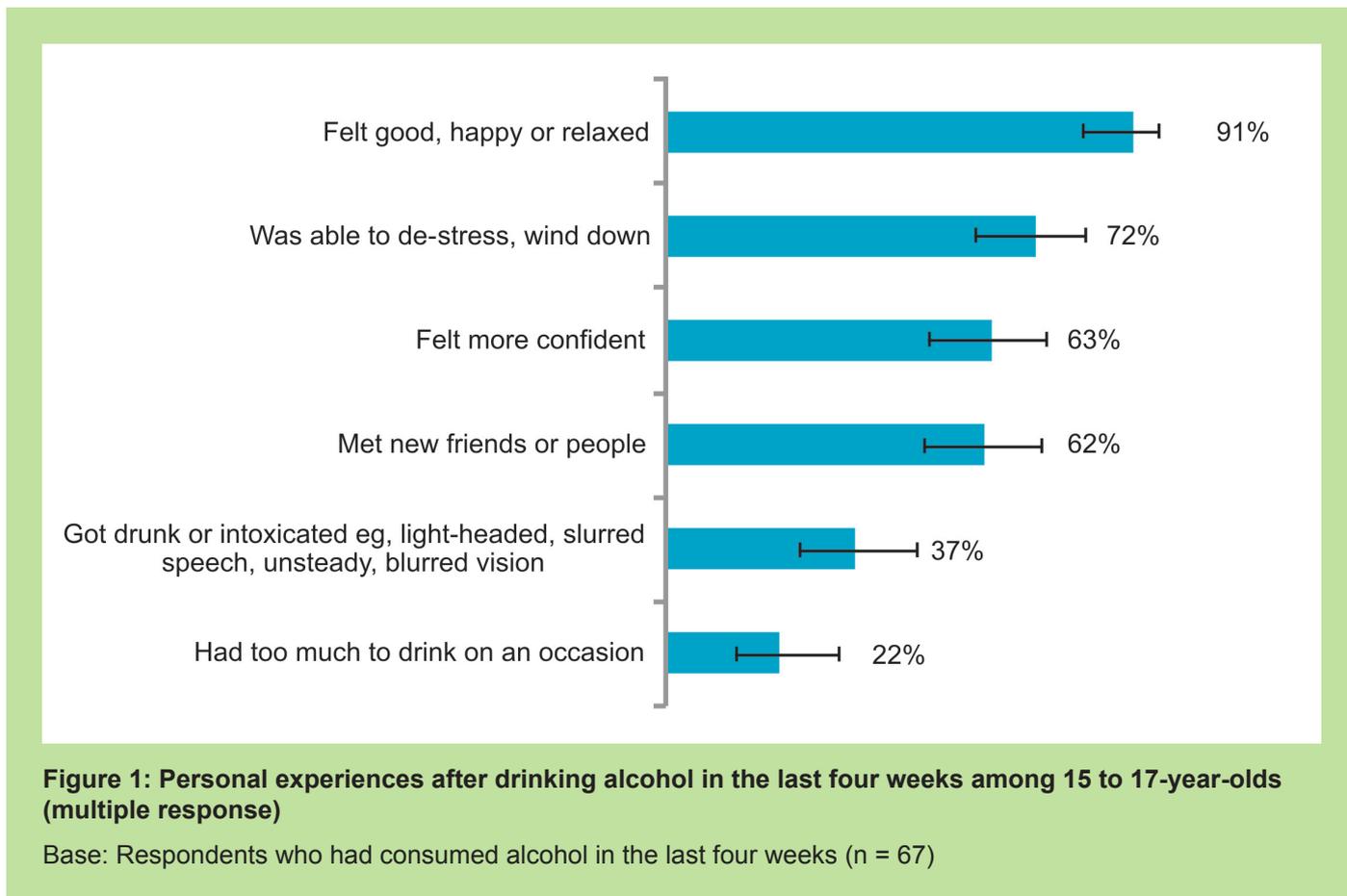
² Caution should be exercised when interpreting this estimate as the RSE of the estimate is 25.06%.

Experiences after drinking alcohol

Respondents (who had consumed alcohol in the last four weeks) were asked, 'Still thinking about the last four weeks, have you personally experienced any of the following from drinking alcohol?' Respondents were presented with a list of 14 possible experiences, both positive and negative, including alcohol-related injury and harm. Figure 1 shows the experiences that had greater than 20% response. Nine out of ten (91%, 81-96%) respondents felt good, happy or relaxed after

drinking alcohol in the last four weeks. Almost three-quarters (72%, 60-82%) reported being able to de-stress and wind down, while 63% (51-74%) felt more confident, 62% (50-72%) met new friends or people, 37% (26-49%) got drunk or intoxicated, and 22% (14-33%) had too much to drink on an occasion.

A gender difference was found only among those reporting they got drunk or intoxicated. Males (29%, 18-44%) were less likely than females (51%, 31-70%) to have had reported getting drunk or intoxicated in the last four weeks.



Key points

- Thirty-eight percent of 15 to 17-year-olds had consumed alcohol at least once in the past month.
- Seventy-eight percent of 15 to 17-year-olds (of the total population, non-drinkers included) had never consumed alcohol at a risky level (five or more drinks) in the last month.
- Those (who consumed alcohol in the past month) who had ever engaged in risky alcohol consumption in the last month were likely to drink alcohol more frequently compared with those who had not engaged in risky alcohol consumption.
- The most common experiences after consuming alcohol in the last four weeks were: feeling good, happy or relaxed; ability to de-stress and wind down; feeling more confident; meeting new friends or people; getting drunk or intoxicated; and having too much to drink on an occasion.
- Females were more likely than males to have reported getting drunk or intoxicated after drinking in the last four weeks.

About the Attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol survey

- The ABAS is a nationwide telephone survey conducted annually. The survey focuses on behaviour related to the previous month and last drinking occasion, and a range of attitudes/opinions towards alcohol. The 2013 ABAS consisted of a sample of 4,001 New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. The survey was conducted between November 2013 and February 2014.
- The main sample, with a response rate of 22%, included 662 Māori, 245 Pacific peoples, 314 Asian people and 2,780 people of European or other ethnicities (prioritised ethnicity).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the New Zealand population.
- For this analysis, proportions and 95% confidence intervals were produced. Odds ratios were used to compare responses between groups. The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to $\alpha=0.05$.
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
 - Gender (males, compared with females)
 - Frequency of alcohol consumption (one day, two days, compared with three or more days in the last four weeks)
- A full description of the 2013 ABAS survey methodology and further ABAS publications can be found online at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

References

- Health Promotion Agency. (2014). *Alcohol – the body and health effects*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.
- Ministry of Health. (2009). *Alcohol use in New Zealand: Key results of the 2007/2008 New Zealand Alcohol and Drug Use Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Citation

- Holland, K. (2014). *Alcohol use among 15 to 17-year-olds. [In Fact]*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency Research and Evaluation Unit.

About HPA

The HPA is a Crown entity that leads and delivers innovative, high quality and cost-effective programmes and activities that promote health, wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, prevent disease, illness and injury. HPA enables environments that support health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and reduce personal, social and economic harm. HPA also undertakes functions specific to providing advice and research on alcohol issues.

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