

# Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey 2013/14 to 2015/16:

Non-drinkers analysis

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# 1. Executive Summary

The Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) is a national survey of people aged 15 years and over about alcohol consumption patterns, alcohol-related behaviour, consequences of consuming alcohol, and attitudes. Results from the 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 surveys were combined to allow analysis of subpopulation groups such as those who are non-drinkers.

This report presents descriptive results from the ABAS focusing on people 18 years and over who are non-drinkers, which includes those who self-identify as non-drinkers and/or did not drink alcohol in the last year. Such results about non-drinkers can inform development of programmes and policies to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

## Key findings from the non-drinkers analysis

- Respondents who reported being non-drinkers or had not consumed alcohol in the past year were more likely to be:
  - females (compared with males)
  - aged 65 years and over (compared with those aged less than 65 years)
  - Māori, Pacific, and Asian respondents (compared with European/Other).
- 47% of non-drinkers reported that they had always been a non-drinker, 38% reported that they had stopped drinking more than two years ago, and 8% reported stopping within the last year.
- Non-drinkers had less positive attitudes towards alcohol compared with drinkers.
- In 2015/16, 87% of non-drinkers reported that they felt supported in their choice not to drink alcohol. However, 30% of non-drinkers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “In some situations it is hard to say I am not drinking” (ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16). Table 1 shows the top three reasons given for not drinking together with who was more likely to report these reasons.

Table 1: Top three reasons for not drinking, ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

Reason for not drinking	%	People who were more likely to report this reason
<b>Health-related (physical and mental well-being, weight, diabetes, on medication)</b>	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those aged 45 years and over</li> <li>• European/Other</li> </ul>
<b>Not interested/it is not part of my life</b>	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 to 24-year-olds</li> <li>• Asian</li> </ul>
<b>Don't like the way it tastes/way it makes me feel</b>	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females</li> <li>• European/Other</li> </ul>
<b>Religious reasons</b>	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 to 44-year-olds</li> <li>• Pacific and Asian</li> </ul>

## 2. Introduction

The Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) is a national survey of people aged 15 years and over about alcohol consumption patterns, alcohol-related behaviour, consequences of consuming alcohol, and attitudes. The survey focuses on behaviour in the previous month and on the last drinking occasion, and includes questions on a range of attitudes and opinions towards alcohol. Results from the survey are used to inform the planning and development of alcohol activities, policies and programmes that aim to reduce alcohol-related harm in New Zealand.

Alcohol consumption is an important risk factor for injury, morbidity, and mortality (Rehm et al., 2009). Furthermore, the average alcohol consumption of an individual can impact the risk of disease and injury (Rehm et al., 2009). A number of countries have adopted a harm reduction approach to alcohol consumption. New Zealand's Health Promotion Agency currently provides low-risk drinking advice, which specifies the importance of having at least two alcohol-free days every week to reduce the long-term health risks posed by alcohol, and also outlines circumstances in which it is advisable not to drink alcohol (eg, if pregnant, or on medication which interacts with alcohol). Understanding the profile of non-drinkers may be helpful in developing programmes and policies to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.

### **This report**

This report presents descriptive results from the 2013/14, 2014/15, and 2015/16 ABAS and focuses on people aged 18 years and over who are non-drinkers. In this report, non-drinkers include those who self-identify as non-drinkers and/or did not drink alcohol in the last year.

The main focus of this report is to describe results for non-drinkers. The report first provides the demographic profile of non-drinkers in New Zealand, followed by information on how long ago they stopped drinking, reasons for not drinking, support received for not drinking, and attitudes around alcohol.

### 3. Method

The ABAS is a national survey of usually resident New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. For each survey year, approximately 4,000 people aged 15 years and over were surveyed over November, December, January, and February. In addition, an extra 200 Pacific respondents were surveyed in February 2016 as part of the 2015/16 ABAS.

The mode of the interview was Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). A random sample of telephone numbers was generated from all number ranges found in the White Pages using a Random Digit Dialling (RDD) approach.

A full description of methodology and other ABAS publications can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

#### Non-drinkers analysis

In 2016, the 2013/14, 2014/15, and 2015/16 ABAS datasets were combined in order to allow analysis of subpopulation groups within the dataset, such as those who were non-drinkers. For this report, the data were restricted to those aged 18 years and over.<sup>1</sup>

A full description of the combined datasets methods can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

In total there were 11,496 respondents aged 18 years and over across the 2013/14, 2014/15, and 2015/16 surveys. Of those, 3,169 responses were from the non-drinkers (see Table 2).

*Table 2: Combined ABAS total sample size and non-drinker sample size for respondents aged 18 years and over*

Year	Survey sample size	Non-drinker sample size
2013/14	3,821	1,016
2014/15	3,812	1,039
2015/16	3,863	1,114
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,496</b>	<b>3,169</b>

The results here are weighted (adjusted) so that the estimated percentages reflect the makeup of the New Zealand population at the last Census (2013). Comparisons by subgroup were conducted for some questions. The confidence level for comparing estimates by subgroup was set at 95%.

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<sup>1</sup> The sample was restricted to non-drinkers aged 18+ years to focus on those who were able to legally purchase alcohol.

Results are presented as weighted estimates with error bars representing the 95% confidence intervals.

Note that the current analyses assessed each variable individually and did not adjust for potentially confounding variables. As a result, some other factor that correlates with the one being assessed may account for the observed effect. For example, given that the different ethnicity groups had different age profiles (eg, Europeans tended to be older), some of the ethnicity effects may in fact be driven by age. Caution should therefore be applied when interpreting the reasons behind the results.

### **Differences across the three survey years**

Comparisons over the three survey years were conducted for non-drinkers. Where there was no significant difference between the survey years, the estimate provided in these results can be interpreted as a representative average estimate for the time period 2013/14 to 2015/16.

Where there were significant differences between survey years, caution needs to be taken in applying the estimate to the whole period 2013/14 to 2015/16.



## 4. Results

### Demographic profile of non-drinkers

A demographic profile of non-drinkers was created to find out which New Zealanders are choosing not to drink alcohol (Table 3). This profile includes all respondents who self-identified as a non-drinker and/or those who had not had an alcoholic drink in the last year.

*Table 3: Demographic characteristics of non-drinker ABAS respondents, 2013/14 to 2015/16*

	Non-drinker respondents	
		Number
<i>Total</i>		3,169
<i>Gender</i>	Female	1,898
	Male	1,271
<i>Prioritised ethnicity<sup>2</sup></i>	Māori	538
	Pacific	358
	Asian	492
	European/ Other	1,781
<i>Age</i>	18-24	286
	25-44	1,112
	45-64	923
	65+	848

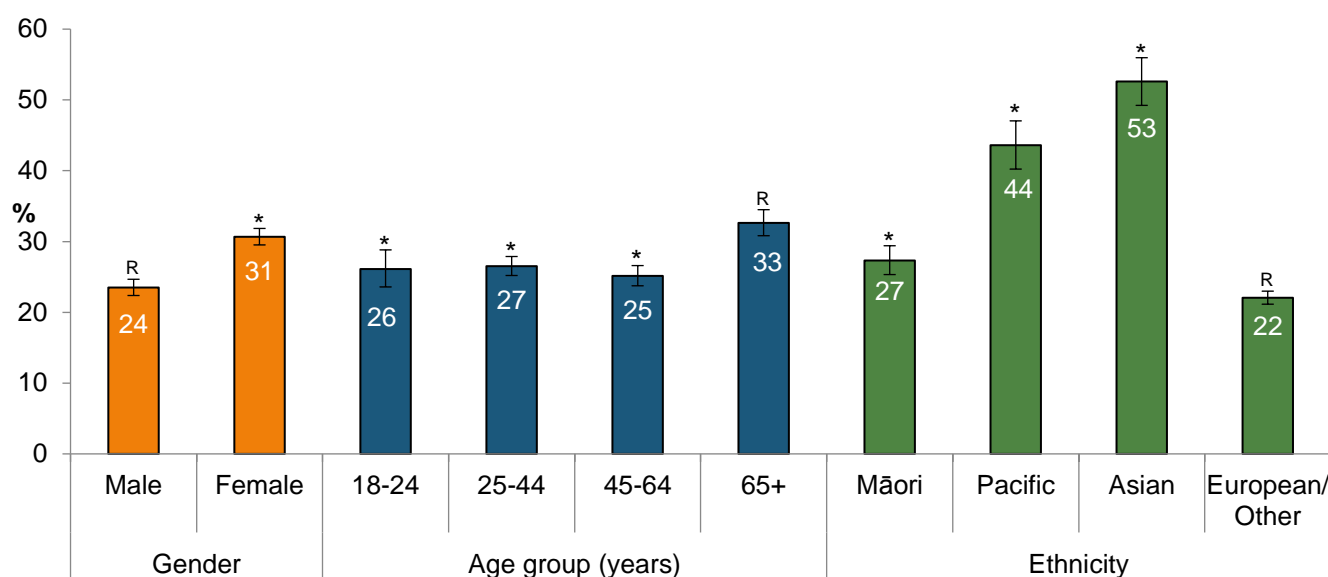
As shown in Figure 1, non-drinkers were more likely to be:

- females (compared with males)
- those aged 65 years and over (compared with 18- to 64-year-olds)
- Māori, Pacific, and Asian respondents (compared with New Zealand European/Other respondents).

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<sup>2</sup> Ethnicity was prioritised in the order of: Māori, Pacific, Asian, then European/Other.

Figure 1: Non-drinkers, by gender, age group and ethnicity



Base: All respondents,  $n = 11,496$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

The demographic differences between non-drinkers shown here are very similar to patterns from the New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS), which asks respondents about drinking alcohol in the last year (Ministry of Health, 2016a). The NZHS 2015/16 estimated that 19% of adults aged 18 years or more did not drink in the last year.<sup>3</sup> In the ABAS, a higher proportion (27%) of adults were found to be non-drinkers. The difference between these surveys may occur for at least two reasons:

- the ABAS counts as ‘non-drinkers’ those who self-identify as non-drinkers (even if they had consumed some alcohol in the last year), whereas the NZHS only asks about drinking alcohol in the last year
- possibly greater non-response bias in the ABAS, as the response rate for the 2015/16 ABAS was just over 30% compared with 80% for the 2015/16 NZHS (Ministry of Health, 2016b).

Between 2013/14 and 2015/16, there was a significant increase in the proportion of non-drinkers, from 26% in 2013/14 to 29% in 2015/16. Because of the change in overall prevalence, it should be kept in mind that the above results are an average of the three survey waves and changes may have occurred within the subgroups over the time period of the pooled data.

<sup>3</sup> Calculation using <https://minhealthnz.shinyapps.io/nz-health-survey-2015-16-annual-update/>

## Time since stopping drinking

Almost all non-drinkers had been so for a long time. Close to half (47%) reported that they had always been a non-drinker and four in ten reported that they had stopped drinking more than two years ago (see Table 4). Very few had stopped drinking recently, only 8% stopping within the last year.

Table 4: Length of time since stopped drinking alcohol

Time since stopping drinking	%	95% confidence interval
<b>I have always been a non-drinker</b>	47	(45, 49)
<b>&gt; 2 years</b>	38	(37, 40)
<b>12 months – 2 years</b>	5	(5, 6)
<b>6 – 12 months</b>	3	(3, 4)
<b>1 – 6 months</b>	4	(4, 5)
<b>&lt; 1 month</b>	1	(1, 2)
<b>Don't know</b>	1	(0, 1)

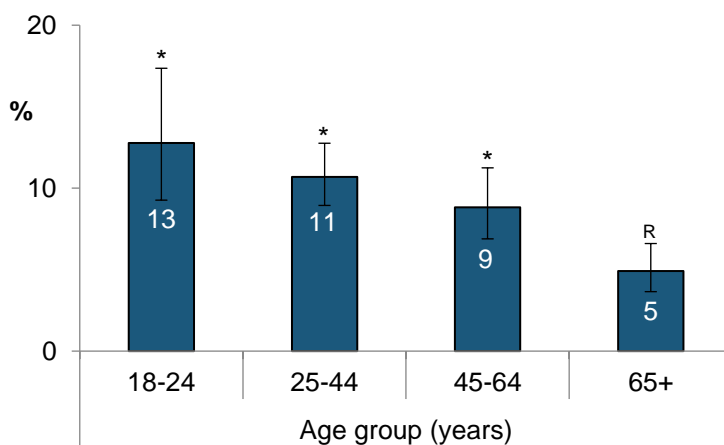
Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

As shown in Figure 2, younger age groups were more likely to have said they stopped drinking within the past year.

There were no differences in response by gender, ethnicity or survey year.

Figure 2: Non-drinkers who said they stopped drinking within the past year, by age group



Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

## Reasons for not drinking

Those who reported that they were non-drinkers, or who had not had any alcohol for the past year, were asked their reasons for not drinking. The top reasons are detailed in this section (see Table 5).

The top three reasons were: “Health-related reasons (that is, physical and mental well-being, weight, diabetes, on medication)”, “Not interested/it is not a part of my life”, and “Don’t like the taste/way it makes me feel”.

*Table 5: Common reasons for not drinking (listed by 5% or more of non-drinkers)*

Reason for not drinking	%	95% confidence interval
<b>Health-related reasons</b>	21	(20, 23)
<b>Not interested/it is not a part of my life</b>	18	(17, 20)
<b>Don’t like the taste/way it makes me feel</b>	15	(13, 16)
<b>Religious reasons</b>	12	(11, 13)
<b>Have seen the negative effects alcohol can have</b>	7	(6, 8)
<b>Family reasons or commitments</b>	7	(6, 8)
<b>Social reasons (eg, believe in moderation; concerns about drinking)</b>	6	(5, 7)
<b>Bad experiences in the past</b>	5	(4, 5)

Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

A sizeable proportion (12%) of non-drinkers did not have or provide a reason for not drinking. Those who did not have or provide a reason were more likely to be:

- 18 to 24-year-olds (compared with those aged 25 years and over)
- Pacific non-drinkers (compared with European/Other non-drinkers)
- non-drinkers interviewed in 2015/16 (compared with those in 2013/14 and 2014/15).

The four most common reasons for not drinking were then examined by subgroups.

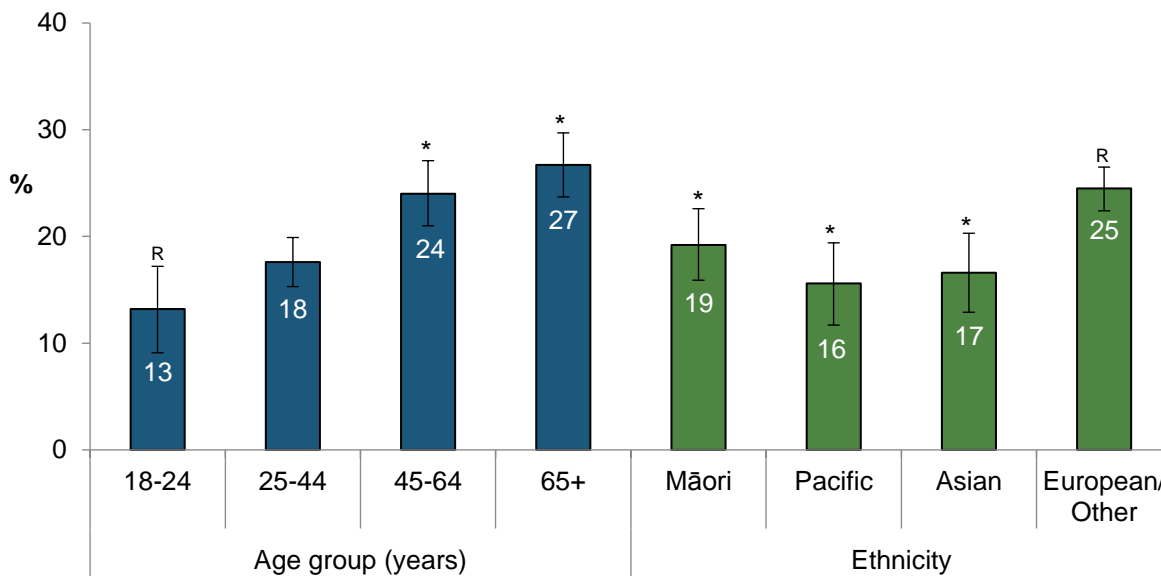
### Health-related reasons

As shown in Figure 3, those who said they did not drink alcohol for health-related reasons were more likely to be:

- aged 45 years and over (compared with 18 to 24-year-olds)
- European/Other non-drinkers (compared with Māori, Pacific, and Asian non-drinkers).

The differences between ethnic groups remained significant after controlling for difference in age. There were no differences in response by gender or survey year.

Figure 3: Non-drinkers who said they did not drink for health-related reasons, by age group and ethnicity



Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

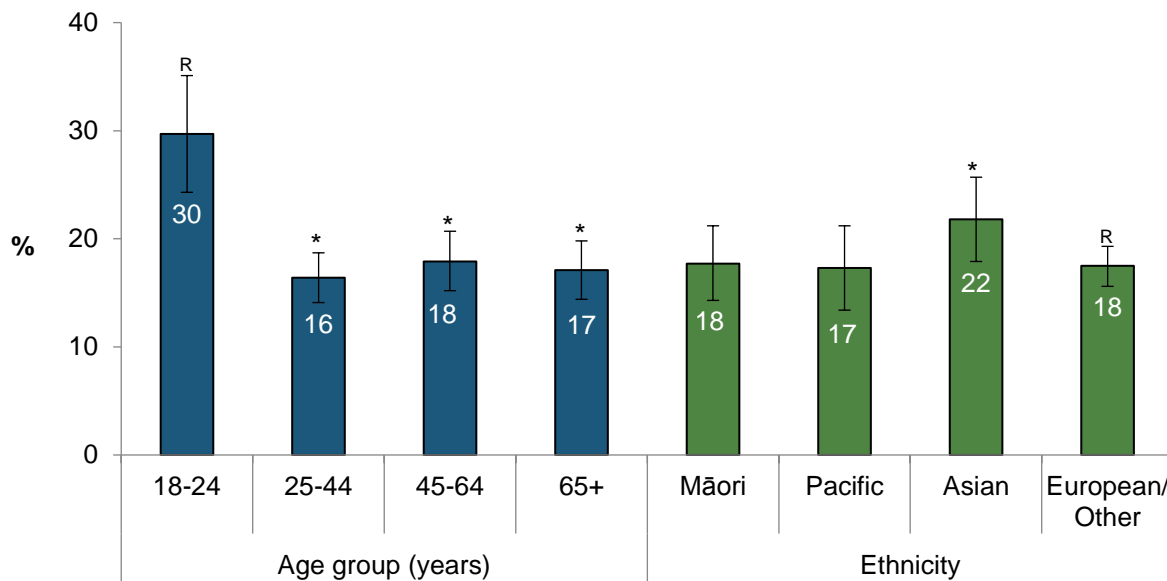
### Not interested

As shown in Figure 4, those who said they did not drink alcohol as they were not interested or it was not part of their life were more likely to be:

- 18 to 24-year-olds (compared with those aged 25 and over)
- Asian non-drinkers (compared with European/Other non-drinkers)
- non-drinkers interviewed in 2013/14 and 2014/15 (compared with those in 2015/16).

There were no differences in response by gender.

Figure 4: Non-drinkers who said they did not drink because they were not interested or it was not part of their life, by age group and ethnicity



Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

### Don't like the taste/way it makes me feel

As shown in Figure 5, those who said they did not drink alcohol because of the taste/way it made them feel were more likely to be:

- females (compared with males)
- European/Other non-drinkers (compared with Māori non-drinkers).

There were no differences in response by age group or survey year.

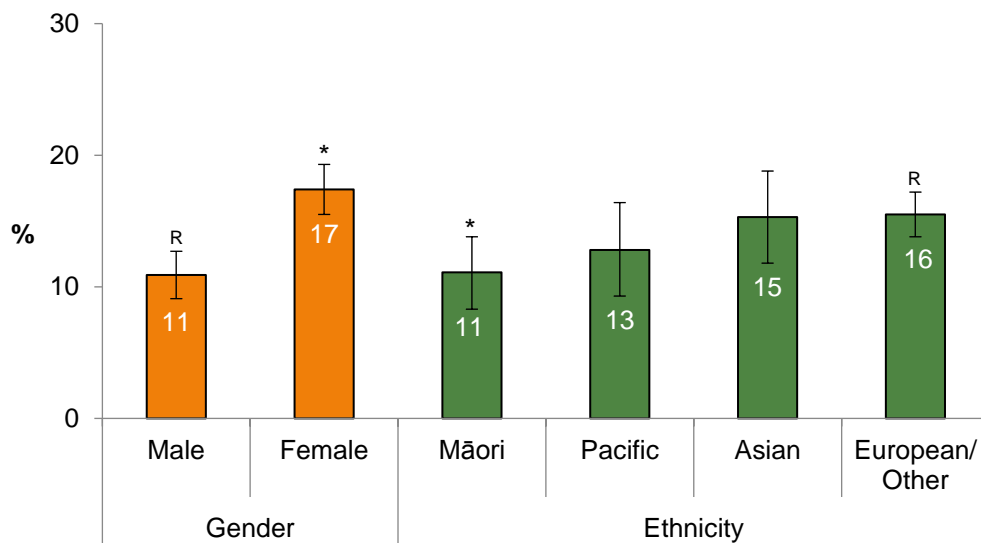
### Religious reasons

As shown in Figure 6, those who said they did not drink alcohol because of religious reasons were more likely to be:

- 25 to 44-year-olds (compared with 18 to 24-year-olds)
- Pacific and Asian non-drinkers (compared with European/Other non-drinkers).

There were no differences in response by gender or survey year.

Figure 5: Non-drinkers who said they did not drink because they did not like the taste or the way it made them feel, by gender and ethnicity

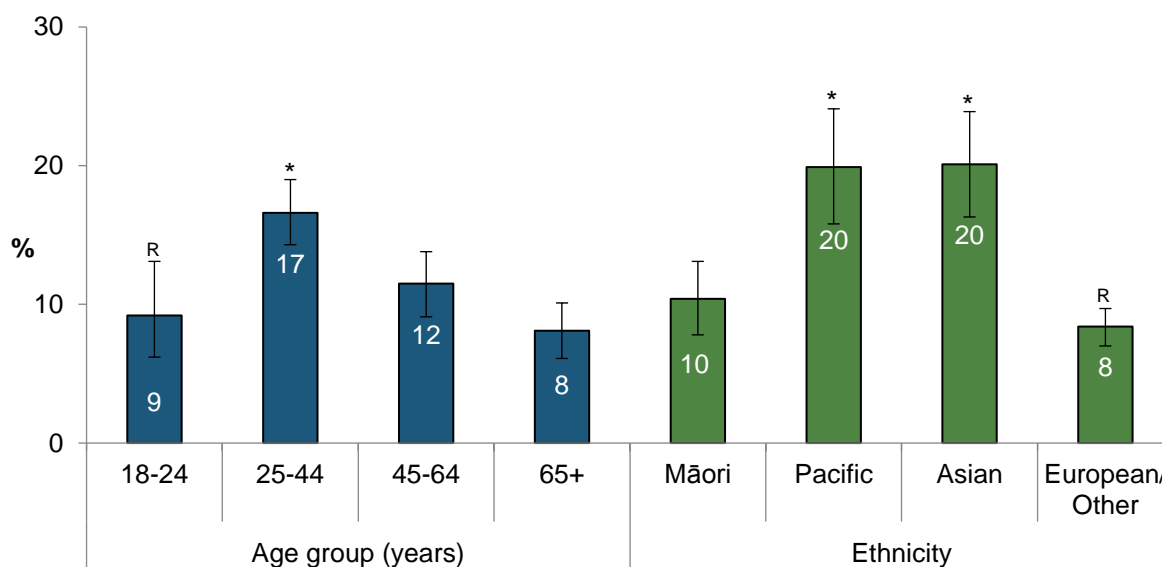


Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

Figure 6: Non-drinkers who said they did not drink for religious reasons, by age group and ethnicity



Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 3,169$

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

## Support for not drinking

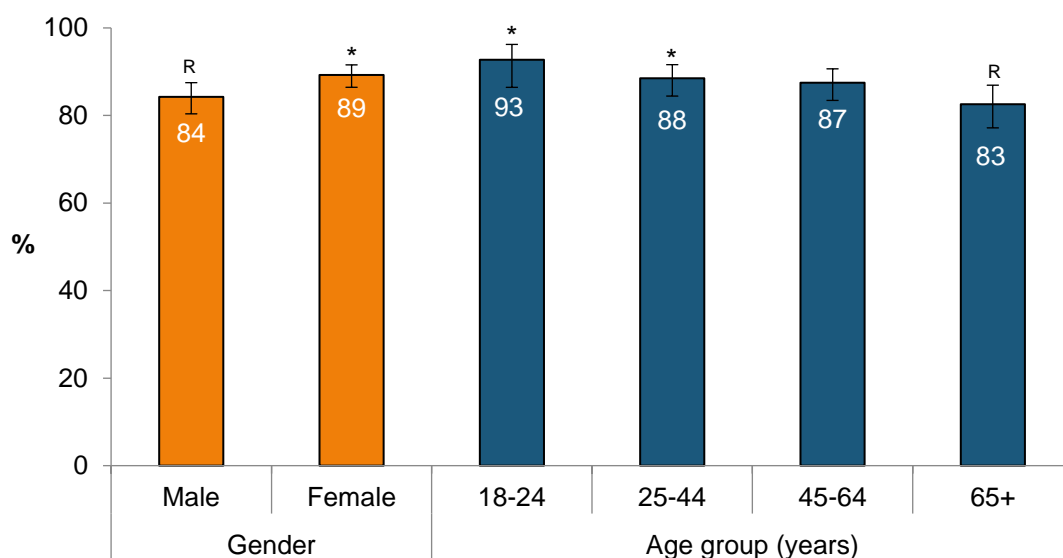
In the 2015/16 ABAS only, non-drinking respondents were asked if they felt supported in their choice not to drink alcohol ( $n = 1,114$ ).

Nearly 9 in 10 non-drinkers (87%) reported that they felt supported in their choice not to drink alcohol. As shown in Figure 7, those who said they felt supported in their choice not to drink alcohol were more likely to be:

- females (compared with males)
- 18 to 44-year-olds (compared with those aged 65 years and over).

There were no differences in response by ethnicity or survey year.

Figure 7: Non-drinkers who said they felt supported in their choice to not drink, by gender and age group



Base: Non-drinkers,  $n = 1,114$

Source: ABAS 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

However, 30% of non-drinkers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “In some situations it is hard to say I am not drinking” (ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16). This result suggests that there are circumstances where greater support could be provided to those who choose not to drink.

## Attitudes around alcohol of non-drinkers

Several attitudes around alcohol were asked about in the ABAS. Responses to these statements used a 5-point scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. In this report, *strongly agree* and *agree* responses have been combined to an overall ‘agree’ category.

There were significant differences in attitudes around alcohol for non-drinkers compared with those who had drunk alcohol in the last year (drinkers) (see Figure 8).

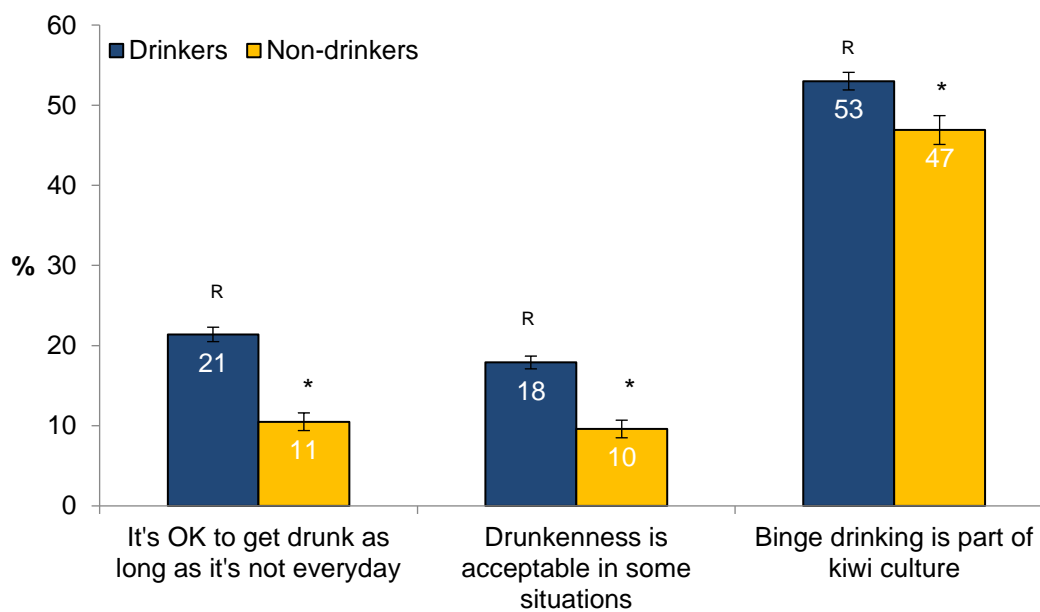


Generally, non-drinkers had less positive attitudes towards alcohol compared with drinkers. For example, 11% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement "It's OK to get drunk as long as it's not everyday", compared with 21% of drinkers.

One in ten (10%) non-drinkers agreed that "Drunkenness is acceptable in some situations", compared with 18% of drinkers.

Almost half (47%) agreed that "Binge drinking is part of kiwi culture", compared with 53% of drinkers.

*Figure 8: Level of agreement ('agree' or 'strongly agree') with specific alcohol-related statements, by drinking status*



Base: Drinkers, n = 8,327; Non-drinkers, n = 3,169

Source: ABAS 2013/14 to 2015/16

\*Significantly different from the reference group (R)

## 5. References

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