

## Last drinking occasion: number of drinks and time spent drinking

### Background

In 2013/14, four in five (80%) New Zealanders aged 15-years or more reported drinking alcohol, with one in five (20%) reporting a potentially hazardous alcohol consumption pattern (Ministry of Health, 2014).

The Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) monitors New Zealanders' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol, including those related to the last drinking occasion.

This fact sheet reports on the number of alcoholic drinks consumed and the length of time spent drinking alcohol on the last drinking occasion involving two or more alcoholic drinks among adults aged 18-years and older.

### Methodology

Participants in the 2013 ABAS were asked about the last occasion they had two or more alcoholic drinks. Respondents were asked to describe how many alcoholic drinks they had consumed, and how long the drinking occasion was (in hours). Multiple responses were permitted when respondents were asked about the type of alcohol they consumed on their last drinking occasion. The analysis for the number of alcoholic drinks consumed during, and the length of the drinking occasion was restricted to adult respondents (18-years and older) whose last drinking occasion was within three months (n=2,109).

Current HPA advice for adults to minimise the risk of harm for drinking alcohol is that women should drink no more than four standard drinks and men no more than five standard drinks on any one drinking occasion (Health Promotion Agency, 2015). The number of drinks consumed on the last occasion was split into three categories based on HPA's low-risk drinking advice with different categories for men and women. The categories used for analysis were men: up to 5, 6 to 10, over 10 drinks; women: up to 4, 5 to 8, over 8 drinks. The number of alcohol drinks consumed and time spent drinking were examined by gender, age group and ethnicity. Only those group differences that were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.

### Last drinking occasion (two or more alcoholic drinks)

Of the adult respondents who reported having two or more alcoholic drinks on their last drinking occasion within the last three months (n=2,109), 55% (53-58%) reported doing so within the last week, 28% (26-30%) within one week to one month, and 17% (15-19%) within one month to three months.

### Number of alcoholic drinks consumed on the last drinking occasion

Respondents whose last drinking occasion involved two or more alcoholic drinks within the last three months were asked to describe what types of alcoholic drinks they had consumed and how many drinks<sup>1</sup> of each type they had consumed. The number of drinks consumed from all drink types was combined to determine the total number of drinks consumed on the last drinking occasion. For this analysis, the number of drinks consumed was divided into three categories, for men and for women, to reflect HPA low-risk drinking advice for a single occasion (see Methodology section).

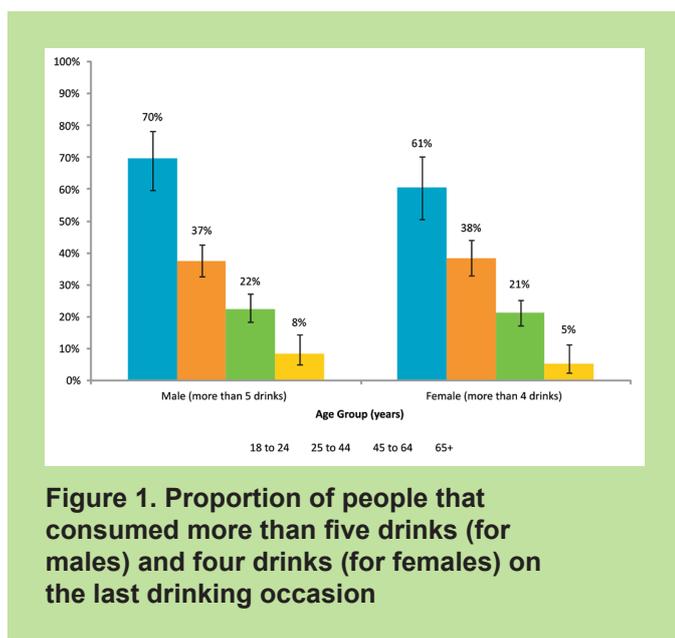
For adult men (n=979) on the last drinking occasion, 71% (68-74%) reported consuming up to five drinks, 18% (16-21%) between 6 to 10 drinks, and 11% (9-13%) more than 10 drinks. For adult women (n=1,024) on the last drinking occasion, 72% (69-74%) reported consuming up to four drinks, 19% (17-22%) between 5 to 8 drinks, and 9% (8-11%) more than 8 drinks.

<sup>1</sup> The ABAS uses a standardised approach for how much of each drink type is consumed but the drink sizes are not adjusted to reflect standard drinks. In terms of HPA low-risk advice, what is being examined is the number of drinks reported by the respondent rather than the number of standard drinks.

The proportion of respondents who consumed more alcoholic drinks than the HPA advice (in terms of number of drinks) on their last occasion varied significantly by age (see Figure 1):

- For males, 18 to 24-year-olds were more likely to report consuming more than five drinks (70%) than all other age groups; 25 to 44 (37%), 45 to 64 (22%) and 65+ (8%).
- For females, 18 to 24-year-olds were more likely to report consuming more than four drinks (61%) than all other age groups; 25 to 44 (38%), 45 to 64 (21%) and 65+ (5%).

Analysis by ethnicity was not conducted due to small numbers in some sub-groups.



**Figure 1. Proportion of people that consumed more than five drinks (for males) and four drinks (for females) on the last drinking occasion**

## Time spent drinking on last occasion

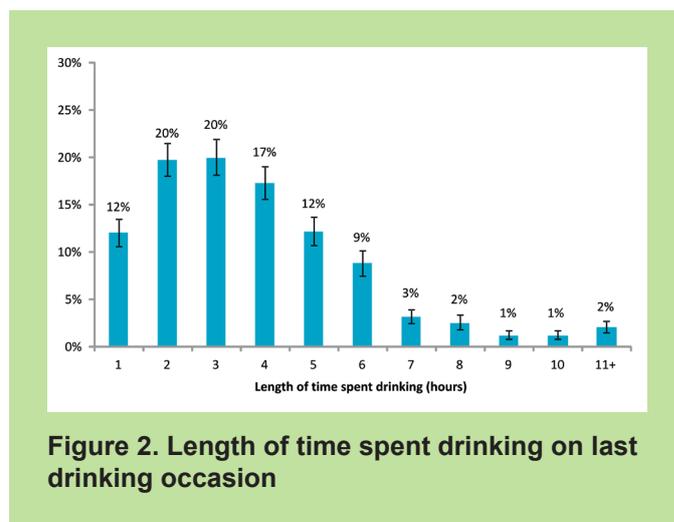
Respondents whose last drinking occasion involved two or more alcoholic drinks within the last three months were also asked “About how long in hours did the occasion last? That is, roughly how long was it from the time you started drinking to the time you stopped drinking?”

For adults (n=2,104), the mean length of time for the last drinking occasion was 3.9 hours (3.8-4.0). The 25<sup>th</sup> percentile was two hours, the median three hours and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile was five hours. The times reported ranged from 1 hour to 48 hours. Figure 2 shows the proportion of respondents reporting each amount of time that their last drinking occasion lasted, to the nearest hour. Responses of 11 hours or more were combined. Respondents most commonly reported that the last drinking occasion lasted for one to two hours (32%) or

three to four hours (37%). One in five (21%) said the last occasion had lasted five to six hours, while fewer respondents reported their last occasion lasting 7 to 10 hours (8%) or 11 hours or more (2%).

The majority (69%) of respondents’ last drinking occasions were up to four hours long. Those more likely to report drinking for five or more hours on the last drinking occasion included:

- Females (33%) compared to males (29%).
- 18 to 24-year-olds (58%) compared to all other age groups; 25 to 44 (40%), 45 to 64 (24%) and 65+ (13%).
- Māori (42%) and Pacific people (42%) compared to European/Other (29%).



**Figure 2. Length of time spent drinking on last drinking occasion**

## Key points

- Nearly two-thirds of adult drinkers (64%) reported that the last drinking occasion where they consumed two or more drinks was within the last month.
- Over two-thirds of adult men (71%) and adult women (72%) reported drinking up to five drinks (males) or up to four drinks (females) on their last drinking occasion (drinks here are not necessarily standard drinks).
- Young adults (18 to 24-years-old) were significantly more likely to drink more than five drinks for men or four drinks for women than all other age groups.
- The average drinking occasion lasted 3.9 hours, with 69% of drinking occasions lasting up to four hours in length.
- Those more likely to have a drinking occasion lasting five or more hours were females, 18 to 24-year-olds, and Māori and Pacific people.

## 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 (male compared with female).
  - Ethnicity (European/other compared to Māori, Pacific and Asian).
  - Age (18 to 24-year-olds compared to 25 to 44, 45, 64, 65+).
- 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. (2015). *Low risk alcohol drinking advice*. Retrieved from <http://www.alcohol.org.nz/alcohol-you/your-drinking-okay/low-risk-alcohol-drinking-advice>
- Ministry of Health. (2014). *2013/2014 New Zealand Health Survey: Results* [Adult data tables: Health status, health behaviours and risk factors]. Retrieved from <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2013-14-new-zealand-health-survey>

## Citation

- Gray, R., and Gordon, C. (2015). *Last drinking occasion: Number of drinks and time spent drinking*. [In Fact, Volume 4, Issue 22]. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency Research and Evaluation Unit.

## About the HPA

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.

## Research and Evaluation Unit

Health Promotion Agency, PO Box 2142, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

<http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>

[research@hpa.org.nz](mailto:research@hpa.org.nz)

June 2015

ISSN 2350-2991

