

Number of alcoholic drinks and time spent drinking on last occasion: 2014/15 ABAS

Background

The pattern of drinking alcohol on an occasion (how much a person drinks and how fast) is related to the level of intoxication, and the risk of injury (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009). Low-risk alcohol drinking advice for adults on a single occasion is no more than four standard drinks for women and no more than five standard drinks for men (Health Promotion Agency, 2015). The Health Promotion Agency's (HPA) Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) provides information on New Zealanders' use of, behaviour, and attitudes towards, alcohol, focusing on use within the last month, and the last drinking occasion. This fact sheet reports on the number of alcoholic drinks consumed and the length of time spent drinking on the last drinking occasion involving two or more alcoholic drinks by adults aged 18 years and older.

Methodology

Respondents to the 2014/15 ABAS were asked to describe what type of alcohol and how much of each type of alcohol they consumed on the last occasion they had two or more alcoholic drinks. The number of drinks from all drink types consumed was combined to determine the total number of drinks consumed¹. The total number of drinks consumed was then split into three categories, differentiated for men and women, based on HPA low-risk alcohol drinking advice (Health

Promotion Agency, 2015). The categories for men were: 2 to 5 drinks, 6 to 10 drinks, and over 10 drinks. The categories for women were: 2 to 4 drinks, 5 to 8 drinks, and over 8 drinks. Respondents were also asked how long the drinking occasion was (in hours).

The analysis was restricted to adult respondents (18 years and over) whose last drinking occasion was within the last three months (n=2,117). The number of alcohol drinks consumed was examined by age group for each gender. Time spent drinking was examined by gender, age group and ethnicity. Only statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between groups 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, 56% (54-58%)² reported doing so within the last week, 30% (27-32%) within one week to one month, and 15% (13-16%) within one to three months.

Number of alcoholic drinks consumed on the last drinking occasion

On the last drinking occasion, among men (n=1,092), 67% (64-69%) reported consuming 2 to 5 drinks, 22%

¹ 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 drinking advice, what is being examined in this In Fact is the number of drinks reported by the respondent rather than the number of standard drinks.

² A range when provided refers to the 95% confidence interval around the proportion estimate. In this example, the proportion estimate is 56% and the confidence interval is 54-58%.

(19-25%) between 6 to 10 drinks, and 12% (10-14%) more than 10 drinks. Among women (n=920), 71% (68-74%) reported consuming 2 to 4 drinks, 21% (19-24%) between 5 to 8 drinks, and 8% (6-9%) more than 8 drinks.

For both men and women, 18 to 24-year-olds were more likely to consume more than the HPA low-risk alcohol drinking advice (in terms of number of drinks) for a single drinking occasion than all other age groups; 25 to 44, 45 to 64 and 65+ year-olds (see Figure 1).

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

Time spent drinking on last occasion

Respondents who reported having two or more alcoholic drinks on a drinking occasion 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, the mean length of time of the last drinking occasion was 3.7 hours (3.6-3.8). Figure 2 shows the

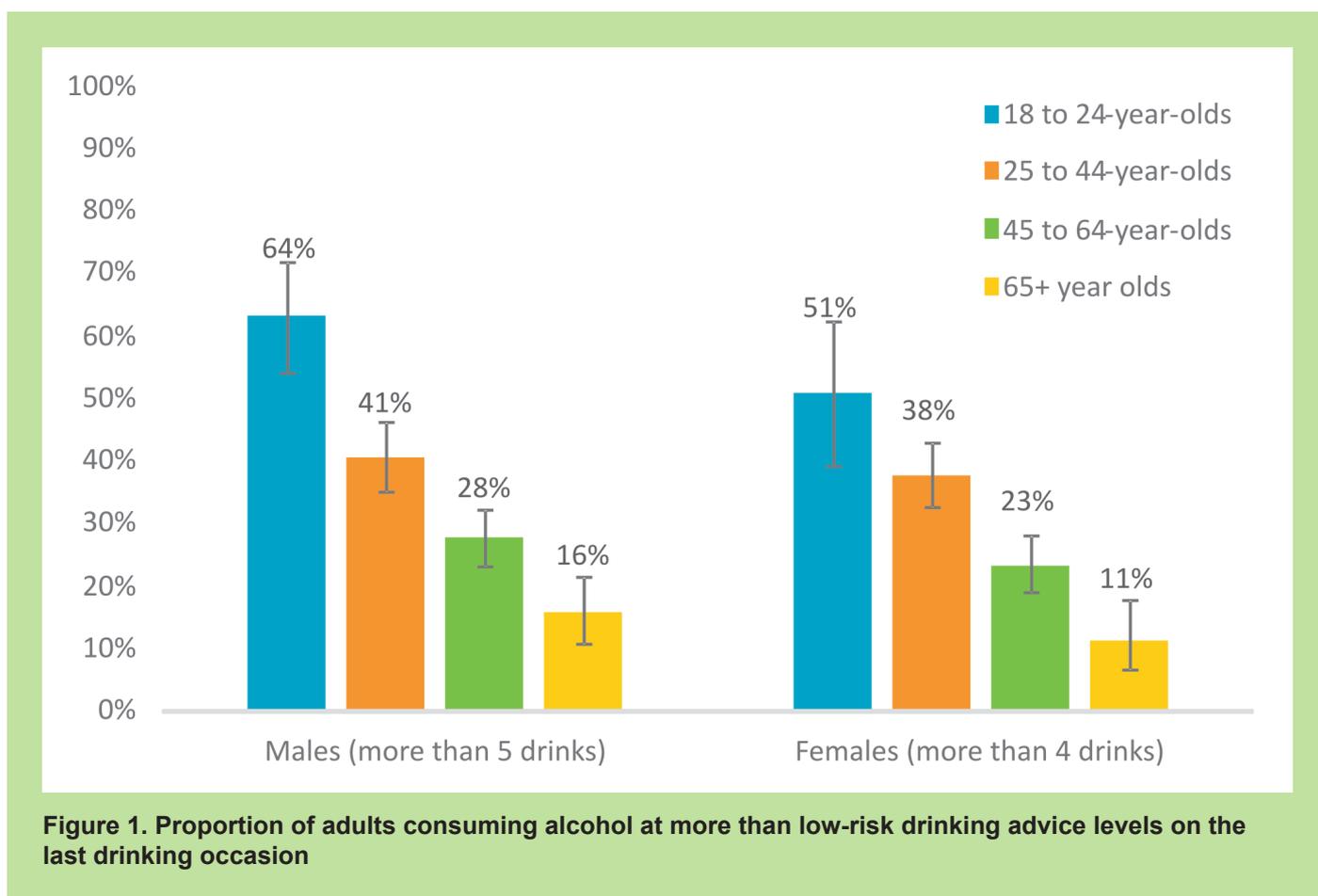
proportion of respondents reporting the amount of time that their last drinking occasion lasted, to the nearest hour by gender. Responses of eight hours or more were combined into a single category.

The 75th percentile (five hours) was used to define the length of a long drinking occasion. Those more likely to report drinking for five or more hours on the last drinking occasion included:

- Females (30%) compared with males (25%), after controlling for age and ethnicity.
- 18 to 24-year-olds (49%) compared with all other age groups; 25 to 44 (32%), 45 to 64 (23%) and 65+ year-olds (14%), after controlling for gender and ethnicity.
- Māori (47%) and Pacific (40%) compared with European/Other (24%) and Asian³ (20%), after controlling for gender and age.

Drinking rate on last occasion

Across the range of different drinking venues and occasion types, the overall drinking rate (number of drinks on last occasion divided by number of hours spent



³ Caution should be exercised when interpreting this estimate as the relative standard error (RSE) of the estimate is 25.9%.

drinking) was determined. For adults, the mean drinking rate was 1.55 drinks per hour (1.5-1.6).

The 75th percentile (two drinks per hour) was used to define a high rate of drinking. Those more likely to report drinking at a rate of two or more drinks per hour included:

- Males (41%) compared with females (20%), after controlling for age and ethnicity
- Pacific (51%) compared with Māori (34%), Asian (29%) or European/Other (28%) ethnicities, after controlling for gender and age.

Key points

- Of the adult respondents who reported having two or more alcoholic drinks on their last drinking occasion within the last three months, 56% reported doing so within the last week.

- Over two-thirds of men (67%) and women (71%) reported drinking below 'risky drinking' levels on their last drinking occasion involving alcohol. Risky drinking is defined as more than five drinks for men and more than four drinks for women (drinks are not necessarily standard drinks).
- Young adults (18 to 24-year-olds) were more likely than other age groups to drink at 'risky drinking' levels.
- The mean drinking occasion lasted 3.7 hours. 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.
- The mean drinking rate was 1.6 alcoholic drinks per hour. Those more likely to drink at two or more drinks per hour were males and Pacific people.

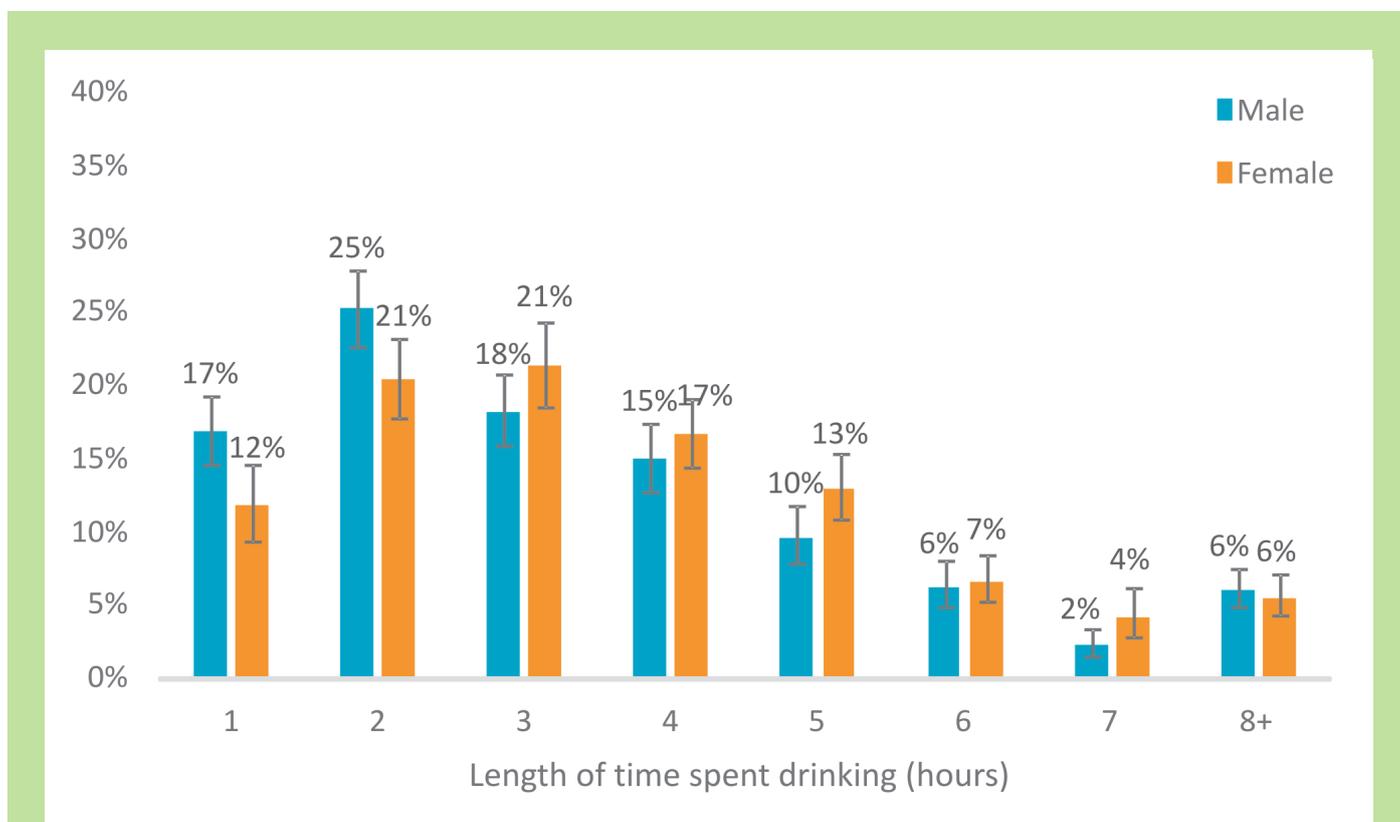


Figure 2. Proportion of adults by length of time (hours) spent drinking on the last drinking occasion

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 2014/15 ABAS consisted of a sample of 4,005 New Zealanders aged 15-years and over. The survey was conducted between November 2014 and February 2015.
- The main sample, with a response rate of 21%, included 610 Māori, 215 Pacific people, 316 Asian people and 2,864 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).
 - Age (comparisons between 18 to 24, 25 to 44, 45 to 64, 65+ years).
 - Ethnicity (comparisons between European/ Other, Māori, Pacific and Asian).
- A full description of the 2014/15 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). *Alcohol: The body and health effects*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.
- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2009). *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.

Citation

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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.

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