

## People's estimates of risky drinking behaviour in New Zealand adults

### Background

Research shows that some groups of the population, such as university students, overestimate the frequency of alcohol consumption and the amount of heavy alcohol consumption by their peers (Kypri & Langley, 2003; Perkins et al. 1999). This is important as perceived social norms and people's perception of acceptability of risky drinking patterns can influence an individual's behaviour and drinking intentions (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Rimal & Real, 2005). Knowledge about perceived social norms and people's perception of alcohol consumption can be used to inform health promotion programmes.

The Health Promotion Agency's (HPA) Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) is an annual survey that monitors New Zealander's behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol, and includes questions about social norm perceptions of alcohol consumption. This fact sheet reports on people's estimates of risky drinking behaviour among adults who consume alcohol. Risky drinking behaviour is defined as consuming seven or more alcoholic drinks on an occasion at least monthly.

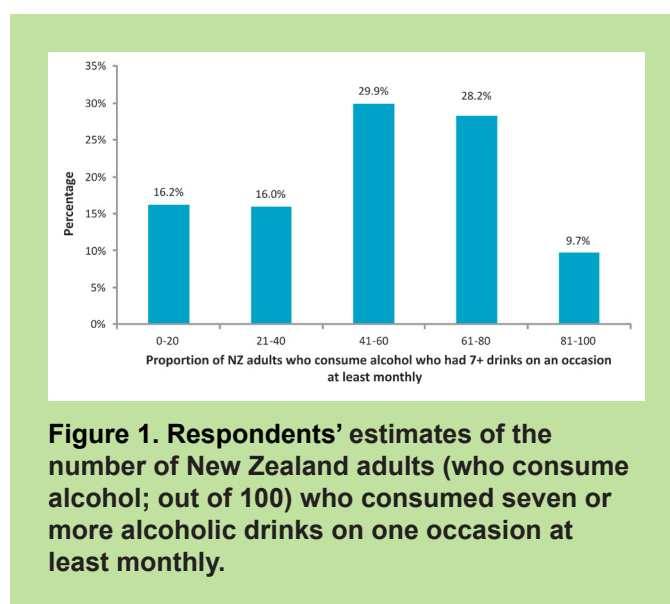
### Methodology

Participants in the 2013 ABAS were asked to estimate the number of New Zealand adults (who consume alcohol; out of 100) who consumed seven or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion at least monthly. There were 3,726 respondents aged 15 years and older. Responses ranged from 0-100 and were examined by gender, ethnicity, age and drinking behaviour.

Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.

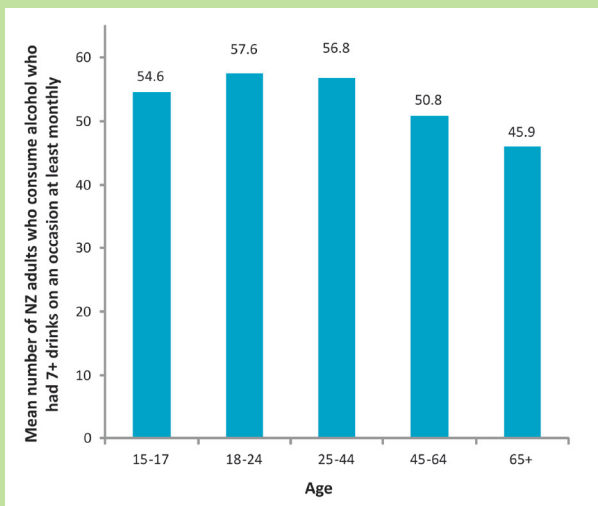
### Perceived prevalence of risky drinking behaviour in adults

All respondents were asked to estimate the number of New Zealand adults (who consume alcohol; out of 100) who consumed seven or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion at least monthly. Responses ranged from 0 to 100 (see Figure 1). When grouped by quintile, the most common responses were between 41 and 60 (29.9%), followed by those between 61 and 80 (28.2%).



**Figure 1. Respondents' estimates of the number of New Zealand adults (who consume alcohol; out of 100) who consumed seven or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion at least monthly.**

Respondents tended to overestimate the prevalence of New Zealand adults who consume alcohol who had seven or more alcoholic drinks on an occasion at least monthly, with 8 in 10 (83%) respondents believing that the prevalence was greater than the actual proportion of 25% (Gordon & Holland, 2014). Two-thirds (66%) of respondents believe that at least half of the adult population who consume alcohol have seven or more alcoholic drinks on an occasion at least monthly. Responses in the estimate prevalence rate varied across different age ranges (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Respondents' estimates, broken down by age, the number of New Zealand adults (who consume alcohol; out of 100) who consumed seven or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion at least monthly.**

Next the responses were averaged and the overall mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) estimate of the number of adult New Zealanders who drink alcohol that had seven or more alcoholic drinks on any occasion in the last month was 52.8.

Respondents who gave higher mean estimates were:

- Females ( $\bar{x}$ =55.1), compared with males ( $\bar{x}$ =50.3)
- Māori ( $\bar{x}$ =59.0) and Pacific people ( $\bar{x}$ =59.5), compared with European/Other ( $\bar{x}$ =51.2)

- People aged between 18 to 24 years ( $\bar{x}$ =57.6), compared with those aged 45 to 64 years ( $\bar{x}$ =50.8) and 65+ years ( $\bar{x}$ =45.9)
- People with some risky drinking behaviour ( $\bar{x}$ =56.5) or regular risky drinking ( $\bar{x}$ =60.0), compared with those who had not consumed alcohol at a risky level in the previous four weeks ( $\bar{x}$ =47.8).

## Key points

- In 2013, 83% of New Zealand adults over-estimated the prevalence of the adult population who consume alcohol and have seven or more alcoholic drinks on an occasion at least monthly.
- In 2013, 66% of New Zealand adults thought at least half of the adult population who consume alcohol have seven or more alcoholic drinks on an occasion at least monthly.
- A number of population sub-groups including females, Māori, Pacific people and 18- to 24- year-olds were likely to over-estimate the prevalence of the adult population who consume alcohol and have seven or more alcoholic drinks on an occasion at least monthly included.

## 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 people, 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 means were produced to compare responses between groups. T-tests were used to compare means 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)
  - Ethnicity (Māori, Pacific people and Asian, compared with European/Other)
  - Age (15 to 17, 25 to 44, 45 to 64, 65+, compared with 18- to 24-years-old)
  - Drinking patterns over the last four weeks: consuming seven or more alcoholic drinks on one or two occasions (“some risky drinking”) and more than two occasions (“regular risky drinking”), compared with not drinking this much on any one occasion).
- 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

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## Citation

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## About the 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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