

Alcohol use among adults in the previous month: ABAS 2014/15

Background

The amount of alcohol consumed and frequency of alcohol use are important factors in reducing long-term health risk and the risk of injury or harm on a single drinking occasion (Health Promotion Agency, 2014; NHMRC, 2009). In New Zealand these factors differ by age, gender and ethnicity (Ministry of Health, 2015). The Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) monitors behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol, focusing on use within the last month and the last drinking occasion. This fact sheet reports on adults' (age 18 and over) alcohol consumption and experiences within the last month.

Methodology

Respondents to the 2014/15 ABAS were asked about their consumption of alcohol in the last four weeks and their experiences related to drinking alcohol. There were 3,808 adults (people aged 18 and over). Alcohol consumption was assessed by examining two variables; frequency of alcohol use and risky drinking in the last four weeks. Frequency of alcohol use was defined as the number of days where alcohol was consumed within the last four weeks; 1 to 3 days, 4 to 8 days and 9 or more days. Risky drinking was defined as the number of occasions in the last four weeks where seven or more alcoholic drinks¹ were consumed: none, 1 to 2 times, and 3 or more times. Multiple responses were permitted when respondents were asked about their experiences after drinking alcohol over the last month.

Responses to these questions were compared by gender, age and ethnicity. Only statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between groups are reported.

Alcohol consumption in the last four weeks

Respondents were asked 'Did you drink any alcohol in the last four weeks?' Nearly two-thirds (64%, 62-66%²) of adults reported consuming alcohol in the last four weeks. A further 10% (8-11%) reported that they drank alcohol but had not done so in the last four weeks, and 26% (24-28%) said that they were non-drinkers.

Those more likely to report drinking alcohol in the last four weeks were:

- Males (70%) compared with females (59%), after controlling for age and ethnicity.
- People aged 18 to 24 (62%), 25 to 44 (64%) and 45 to 64 (69%) compared with 65+ year-olds (58%), after controlling for gender and ethnicity.
- European/Other (70%) compared with Māori (60%), Pacific people (43%) and Asian people (39%), after controlling for gender and age.

Frequency of alcohol consumption in the last 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?' Out of these adult drinkers, 37% (35-39%) reported consuming alcohol between 1 to 3 days within the last four weeks, 30% (28-32%) between 4 to 8 days and 33% (31-35%) on 9 or more days (see Figure 1).

¹ What is being examined 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 64% and the confidence interval is 62-66%.

Those more likely to report drinking alcohol on 9 or more days in the last four weeks were:

- Males (39%) compared with females (29%), after controlling for age and ethnicity.
- All age groups, 25 to 44 (28%), 45 to 64 (36%), and 65+ year-olds (47%), compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (16%), after controlling for gender and ethnicity.
- European/Other (38%) compared with Māori (27%), Pacific people (18%³) and Asian people (16%), after controlling for gender and age.

Risky alcohol consumption in the last four weeks

Those respondents who had consumed alcohol in the last four weeks were asked *'How many times in the last four weeks have you had seven or more drinks of alcohol on any one occasion?'* Out of these adult drinkers, nearly three-quarters 74% (72-76%) reported never having engaged in risky alcohol consumption in that period. Just over one-quarter (26%, 24-28) reported at least one risky drinking occasion in the last four weeks; with 16% (14-18%) having done so once or twice, and 10% (9-12%) three or more times (see Figure 2).

Those drinkers more likely to report any risky alcohol consumption within the last four weeks were:

- Males (35%) compared with females (18%), after controlling for age and ethnicity.
- People aged 18 to 24 (47%) compared with all other age groups: 25 to 44 (35%), 45 to 64 (17%) and 65+ year-olds (8%), after controlling for gender and ethnicity.
- Māori (50%) or Pacific people (44%) compared with European/Other (22%) or Asian people (18%), after controlling for gender and age.

Experiences after drinking alcohol in the last four weeks

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 15 possible experiences, both positive and negative, including alcohol-related injury and harm. Figure 3 shows experiences reported by adult drinkers that had greater than a 10% response.

For positive experiences, eight out of ten respondents (83%, 81-84%) reported that they felt good, happy or relaxed after drinking alcohol and seven out of ten (70%, 68-72%) reported being able to de-stress, wind down after drinking alcohol. Nearly one-quarter (24%, 22-26%) reported meeting new friends or people, and

a similar proportion (24%, 22-25%) reported feeling more confident. Those more likely to report positive experiences were:

- For feeling good, happy or relaxed, 18 to 24-year-olds (93%) compared with 45 to 65 (82%) and 65+ year-olds (68%), after controlling for gender.
- For able to de-stress or wind down, 18 to 24-year-olds (83%) compared with 45 to 64 (70%) and 65+ year-olds (51%), after controlling for gender.
- For meeting new friends or people, males (27%) compared with females (21%), after controlling for age, and 18 to 24-year-olds (56%) compared with 25 to 44 (26%), 45 to 64 (19%) and 65+ year-olds (15%), after controlling for gender.
- For feeling more confident, 18 to 24-year-olds (61%) compared with 25 to 44 (27%), 45-64 (18%) and 65+ year-olds (9%), after controlling for gender.

Around one in seven adult drinkers (15%, 13-17%) reported getting drunk or intoxicated, and 13% (12-15%) reported they had too much to drink on at least one occasion in the last four weeks (see Figure 3). Those more likely to report these experiences were:

- For getting drunk or intoxicated, males (18%) compared with females (12%), after controlling for age, and 18 to 24-year-olds (41%) compared with 25 to 44 (21%), 45 to 64 (9%) and 65+ year-olds (3%), after controlling for gender.
- For having too much to drink on an occasion, males (15%) compared with females (12%), after controlling for age, and 18 to 24-year-olds (25%) compared with 25 to 44 (17%), 45 to 64 (11%) and 65+ year-olds (5%), after controlling for gender.

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

Overall, 19% (17-20%) of adult drinkers reported at least one potential harm or negative experience within the last four weeks associated with drinking alcohol. These experiences included spending too much money on alcohol, failure to meet work or family or study commitments or responsibilities, doing something embarrassing that they regretted, injuring themselves, getting into a fight, placing themselves into a situation where they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, driving while being unsure how much they were under the influence of alcohol, and getting into a regrettable sexual encounter.

Those more likely to report one or more potential harm or negative experiences in the last four weeks included:

- Males (24%) compared with females (13%), after controlling for age, ethnicity and risky drinking.
- People aged 18 to 24 (34%) compared with 45 to 64 (13%) and 65+ year-olds (13%), after controlling for gender, ethnicity and risky drinking.

³ Caution should be exercised when interpreting this estimate as the relative standard error (RSE) of the estimate is 25.6%.

- Pacific people (37%) compared with Māori (27%), Asian people (17%) and European/Other (16%), after controlling for gender, age and risky drinking.
- Risky drinkers (39%) compared with non-risky drinkers (12%), after controlling for gender, age and ethnicity. A risky drinker is defined as someone who consumes seven or more alcoholic drinks on at least one occasion during the previous month.

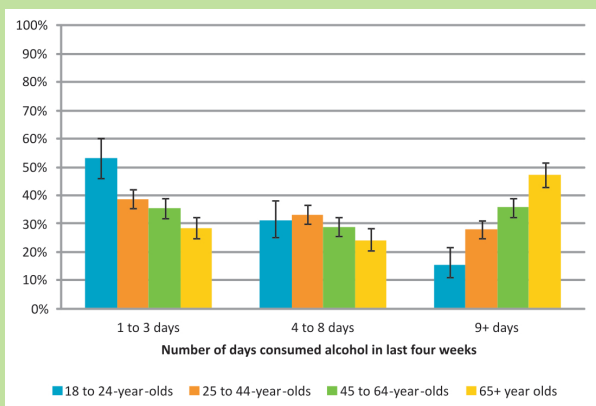


Figure 1. Number of days consumed alcohol within the last four weeks

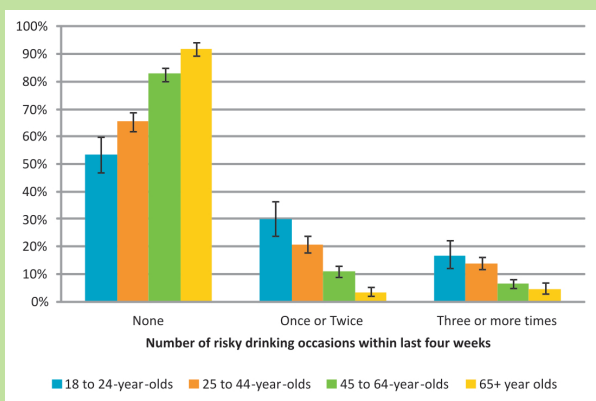


Figure 2. Number of risky drinking occasions (seven or more alcoholic drinks) within last four weeks

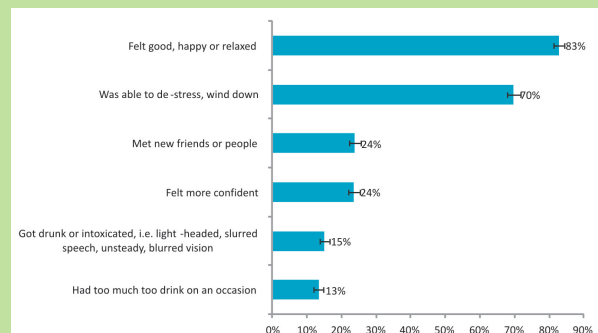


Figure 3. Personal experiences after drinking alcohol in the first four weeks (multiple response possible)

Key points

- Around two-thirds of adults reported consuming alcohol in the last four weeks, with males more likely to do so than females.
- Overall, of those who drank alcohol in the last four weeks, over one-third consumed alcohol on up to three days, under one-third between four to eight days, and one-third on nine or more days during the last four weeks.
- Of those who drank alcohol in the last four weeks, one-quarter reported consuming at risky levels (seven or more drinks) on at least one occasion over the last four weeks. Males were more likely to do so than females, as were 18 to 24-year-olds compared with all other age groups.
- The most common experiences reported after consuming alcohol in the last four weeks were: feeling good or happy or relaxed, able to de-stress or unwind, meeting new friends or people, feeling more confident, getting drunk or intoxicated and having too much to drink on an occasion.
- Overall, 19% of adults who consumed alcohol during the last four weeks reported at least one potentially harmful or negative experience (other than being drunk or having too much to drink). Males, 18 to 24-year-olds, Pacific people and risky drinkers were more likely to report experiencing one or more harms/negative experiences.

References

- Health Promotion Agency. (2014). *Alcohol – the body and health effects: A brief overview*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.
- Ministry of Health. (2015). *Alcohol use 2012-2013: New Zealand Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- 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 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 (males compared with females).
 - Ethnicity (comparisons between European/ Other, Māori, Pacific and Asian).
 - Age (18 to 24-year olds compared with 25 to 44, 45 to 64, 65+ year-olds).
 - Risky drinking (non-risky drinkers compared with risky drinkers in past month)
- A full description of the 2014 ABAS survey methodology and further ABAS publications can be found online at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

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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