

## Alcohol use by 15 to 17-year-olds: 2014/15 ABAS

### Background

The majority of New Zealand secondary school students report having drunk alcohol (Watson et al., 2003). Approximately two-thirds of young people (aged 15 to 19-years-old) who consume alcohol drank until they were intoxicated at least once in the past year (Ministry of Health, 2015). Alcohol misuse among young people is associated with increased risk of injury, death, motor vehicle crashes, mental health problems and sexual risk taking (Fergusson & Boden, 2011). The Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) current advice to parents and caregivers of children and young people under age 18 is that not drinking alcohol is the safest option (Health Promotion Agency, 2014). The HPA's Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) monitors New Zealanders' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol, including alcohol consumption in the past month. This factsheet examines 15 to 17-year-olds' alcohol use.

### Methodology

The 2014/15 Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (2014/15 ABAS) included questions about their consumption of alcohol and their experiences related to drinking alcohol. There were 193 respondents aged 15 to 17 years. Responses were examined by gender. Risky alcohol consumption was defined as five or more drinks of alcohol on one occasion<sup>1</sup>. Frequency of alcohol consumption was defined as alcohol consumed on one day, two days, or three or more days in the last four weeks. Multiple responses were permitted when respondents were asked about their experiences after drinking alcohol. Only those group differences that were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.

### Alcohol consumption in the past four weeks

Respondents were asked "did you drink any alcohol in the last four weeks?" ( $n=193$ ). Almost one in three (29%, 23-35%) said yes, one in eight (13%, 9-18%) said they were drinkers but had not consumed alcohol in the past month and the remaining 59% (52-65%) said they were non-drinkers.

### Frequency of alcohol consumed in the past four weeks

Respondents who had consumed alcohol in the past four weeks ( $n=56$ ) were asked "thinking about the last four weeks, on how many days did you have an alcoholic drink of any kind?". Four in ten (39%, 27-52%) had consumed alcohol on one day, 20% (12-33%) had consumed alcohol on two days and 41% (29-54%) had consumed alcohol on three or more days<sup>2</sup>.

### Experiences after drinking alcohol

Respondents who had consumed alcohol in the past four weeks ( $n=56$ ) were asked "still thinking about the last four weeks have you personally experienced any of the following from drinking alcohol?". The top seven selected responses were felt good, happy or relaxed, was able to de-stress or wind down, met new friends or people, felt more confident, got drunk/intoxicated, did some interesting things and had too much to drink on an occasion (see Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Five or more drinks in one session is the adult male limit for risk of injury recommended in low-risk alcohol drinking advice (Health Promotion Agency, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Because of the low number of respondents asked about their alcohol consumption, these and the following estimates should be treated with caution: the confidence intervals are wide.

## Risky alcohol consumption in the past four weeks

Respondents who had consumed alcohol in the past four weeks were asked “how many times in the last four weeks have you had five or more drinks of alcohol on any one occasion?”. Just under half (49%, 36-61%) had not consumed five or more drinks on any occasion, one in three (31%, 20-44%) had consumed five or more drinks on one occasion and the remaining 20% (12-32%) had consumed five or more drinks on three or more occasions.

## Number of drinks consumed on last drinking occasion

Respondents were asked about the last occasion in the previous three months that they had consumed two or more alcoholic drinks. Of those who reported a drinking occasion (n=60), just over half reported consuming five or more drinks. This included 28% (18-42%) who consumed between five and seven drinks and 27% (17-39%) who consumed eight or more drinks. Just under half (45%, 33-58%) consumed between two and four drinks.

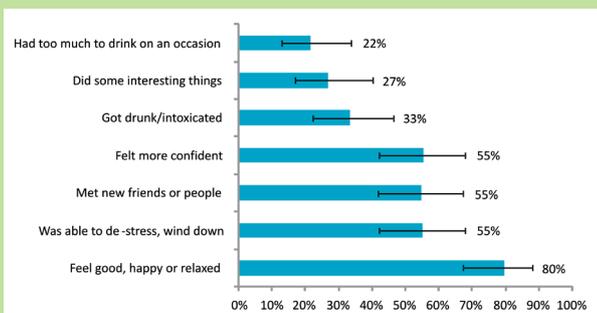
## Type of alcohol consumed

Respondents who reported consuming two or more drinks on an occasion in the past three months (n=60) were asked “And still thinking about this most recent occasion did you drink?”. Multiple responses were permitted. Figure 2 shows the proportions of 15 to 17-year-olds who consumed each type of alcohol on their last drinking occasion.

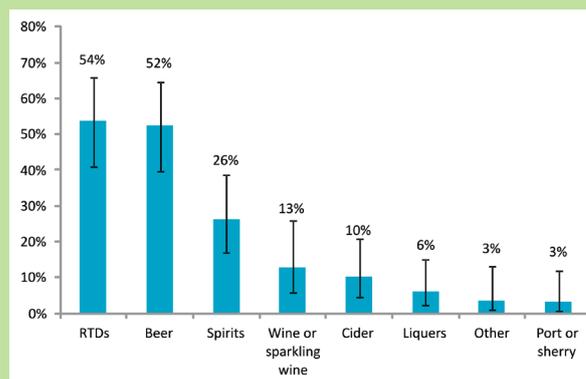
Males (78%) were more likely to have consumed beer on their last drinking occasion, compared with females (21%). Females (70%) were more likely to have consumed RTDs (ready-to-drink mixes) on their last drinking occasion, compared with males (40%).

## Key points

- Almost one in three (29%) 15 to 17-year-olds had consumed alcohol in the past four weeks.
- Among 15 to 17-year-olds who had consumed alcohol in the past four weeks 39% had consumed alcohol on one day, 20% had consumed alcohol on two days and 41% had consumed alcohol on three or more days.
- One in two (51%) 15 to 17-year-olds who consumed alcohol in the past four weeks had 5+ drinks on at least one occasion. Just over one in two (55%) 15 to 17-year olds who reported a drinking occasion in the last three months had consumed five or more drinks on that occasion.
- The top seven selected responses for experiences after consuming alcohol among 15 to 17-year-olds were feel good, happy or relaxed, was able to de-stress or wind down, met new friends or people, felt more confident, got drunk/intoxicated, did some interesting things and had too much to drink on an occasion.
- RTDs, beer and spirits were the three most common types of alcohol consumed on the last drinking occasion. Males were more likely to consume beer, and females more likely to consume RTDs. Other responses did not differ significantly by gender.



**Figure 1: Personal experiences after drinking alcohol in the last four weeks among 15 to 17-year-olds (multiple response) (n=56)**



**Figure 2: Type of alcohol consumed by 15 to 17-year-olds on the last drinking occasion (multiple response) (n=60)**

## 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 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).
- 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>.

## References

- Fergusson, D. & Boden, J. (2011). Alcohol use in adolescence. In: *Improving the Transition: Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity during Adolescence* pp 235-255. Office of the Prime Minister's Science Advisory Committee.
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## About the HPA

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