

Perceptions of drinking culture in New Zealand

Background

In 2013/14, one in five (20%) New Zealanders aged 15 years or more who drank alcohol in the past year reported a potentially hazardous alcohol consumption pattern (Ministry of Health, 2014). People's perceptions of the acceptability and prevalence of risky alcohol consumption may influence their own intentions and behaviour (Rimal & Real, 2005). This fact sheet examines New Zealand adults' perceptions about the acceptability of risky drinking, and the existence of a risky drinking culture.

Methodology

The 2013 Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS 2013) included questions that assessed attitudes about the acceptability of risky drinking and drinking culture in New Zealand. Responses were collected on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Responses to these questions by adult respondents (age 18 years and over, n=3,821) were compared by gender, ethnicity, age and risky drinking behaviour. Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between groups are reported.

Perception of binge drinking culture

All respondents were asked for their agreement with the statement: "Binge drinking is part of kiwi culture".

Over one-half (53%, 51-54%) of the respondents either agreed (20%, 18-21%) or strongly agreed (33%, 32-35%). One in three either disagreed (7%, 7-8%) or strongly disagreed (25%, 24-26%), while one in eight (12.5%, 11-14%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Those more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement included:

- People in the middle age groups, that is 25 to 44 years (55%) and 45 to 64 years (56%) compared with those aged 18 to 24 years (42%).
- People of European/Other (56%) ethnicities compared with people of Pacific (42%) and Asian (43%) ethnicities.

Acceptability of getting drunk "just not every day"

All respondents were asked for their agreement with the statement: "It's OK to get drunk as long as it's not every day".

Two-thirds (66%, 65-68%) of respondents disagreed (14%, 12-15%) or strongly disagreed (53%, 51-54%) with the statement. One in six either agreed (9%, 8-10%) or strongly agreed (9%, 8-10%), while 16% (15-17%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Those more likely to agree or strongly agree included:

- People who reported some risky drinking (38%) or regular risky drinking (40%) compared with those who had not drunk at a risky level in the previous four weeks (14%).
- Younger adults aged 18 to 24 years (40%) compared with those in all older age groups (Figure 1).
- Males (20%) compared with females (16%).

There were some differences by ethnicity that became insignificant once drinking behaviour was controlled for.

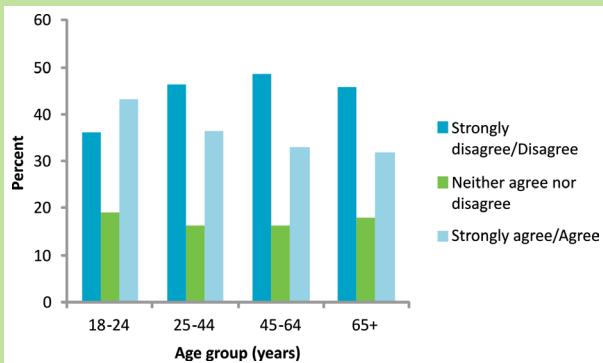


Figure 1: Agreement with “It’s OK to get drunk as long as it’s not every day”, by age group

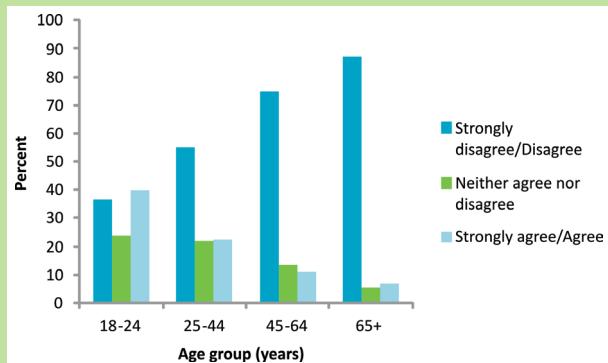


Figure 2: Agreement with “Drunkenness is acceptable in some situations”, by age group

Acceptability of getting drunk “in some situations”

All respondents were asked for their agreement with the statement: “Drunkenness is acceptable in some situations”.

Seven in ten (71%, 69-72%) respondents disagreed (16%, 15-17%) or strongly disagreed (55%, 53-56%) with the statement. One in six (16%, 14-17%) respondents agreed (9%, 8-10%) or strongly agreed (7%, 6-7%), while 14% (13-15%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Those more likely to agree or strongly agree included:

- Males (19%) compared with females (13%).
- Younger adults aged 18 to 24 years (33%) compared with older adults. Nine in ten (91%) people aged 65 and over disagreed with the statement (Figure 2).
- People who reported some risky drinking (32%) or regular risky drinking (37%) compared with those who had not drunk at a risky level in the previous four weeks (13%).

Key points

- Although the majority of New Zealanders do not agree that getting drunk is acceptable, over one-half believe that binge drinking is part of New Zealand’s culture.
- No definition of “binge drinking” was provided to respondents in the survey. Responses may reflect differences in interpretation of what “binge drinking culture” means. However, the responses show that the existence of such a culture in New Zealand is widely perceived.
- Attitudes about the acceptability of drunkenness vary by age, with younger adults the most likely to agree that getting drunk in some circumstances is acceptable.

- Those who drink more heavily themselves are more likely to agree that it is acceptable to get drunk sometimes. However, this attitude is not reported by all heavy drinkers. Large proportions of those who report binge drinking themselves either disagreed with, or expressed no opinion about, the idea that getting drunk is acceptable.
- The wording of the two acceptability questions differed, with one (“it is ok”) implying the opinion of the respondents and the other (“it is acceptable”) implying the respondent’s perception of acceptance by society as a whole. However, responses to these questions were similar, indicating that respondents interpreted and answered them from the same perspective.

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 undertaken 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 with Māori, Pacific, Asian)
 - Age (18 to 24 years compared with 25 to 44, 45 to 64, and 65 or more)
 - 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

- Ministry of Health. (2014). *New Zealand Health Survey — Annual update of key findings 2013/2014: Adult data tables — Health status, health behaviours and risk factors*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- Rimal, R.N., and Real, K. (2005). How behaviors are influenced by perceived norms: A test of the Theory of Normative Social Behaviour. *Communication Research*, 32, 389-414.

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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

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