

People's estimates of risky drinking behaviour in New Zealand: 2014/15 ABAS

Background

People's perceptions of the acceptability and prevalence of risky alcohol consumption may influence their own intentions and behaviour (Rimal & Real, 2005). Among university and college students, social norms are well demonstrated to influence alcohol misuse (Foxcroft et al., 2015; Kypri & Langley, 2003).

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA)'s Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) monitors New Zealanders' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol, including questions about social norm perceptions of alcohol consumption. This factsheet reports on people's estimates of risky drinking behaviour among adults.

Methodology

Respondents to the 2014/15 Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (2014/15 ABAS) were asked for their opinion on how many heavy drinkers there are: "Over a month, what percentage of adults would have seven or more drinks on at least one occasion?"

The responses of adults aged 18-years-and-over (n=3,812) were analysed. Responses were first compared by gender, ethnicity and age group (while controlling for the other demographic factors). Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between subgroups are reported in cases where the differences remained significant after accounting for other factors. Secondly, responses were compared by all demographic factors and by risky drinking (defined as having consumed seven or more drinks on an occasion in the past month). If differences were no longer significant after risky drinking was included, this is noted in the text.

Actual prevalence of risky drinking behaviour

All adult respondents who had drunk alcohol in the past four weeks were asked how many times they had had seven or more drinks on an occasion. Three in four past-month drinkers (74%, 72-76%) had not consumed seven or more drinks on any occasion in the past four weeks, while one in four (26%, 23-29%) past month drinkers had. Out of all adult respondents (including non-drinkers and those who had not consumed alcohol in the previous four weeks), 16% (15-18%) had consumed seven or more drinks in the past four weeks.

Perceived prevalence of risky drinking behaviour

All respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of New Zealand adults who, over a month, had seven or more drinks on at least one occasion. The mean (or, average) response was 45%, with responses ranging from 0-100% (see Figure 1). As noted, the actual rate reported in this survey was 26% among past-month drinkers and 16% among all adults. The majority of respondents overestimated the prevalence of risky drinking.

Respondents' mean estimates of the proportion of adults who were risky drinkers varied between some groups. Those who gave higher mean estimates included:

- females (48%) compared with males (42%)
- Māori and Pacific people (both 52%) compared with European/Other (44%) and Asian people (40%)
- those aged 18 to 24 years (51%) and 25 to 44 years (47%) compared with those aged 45 to 64 (44%) and 65 years and over (41%)

- those who had consumed seven or more drinks on one occasion or on two or more occasions (both 51%), compared with people who had not drunk to a risky level in the past month (41%).

Demographic differences were still significant after risky drinking behaviour was accounted for. Despite some groups giving lower mean estimates, all the mean estimates listed are still higher than the actual rate of risky drinking.

Key points

- In 2014/15, 71% of adults over-estimated the percentage of New Zealand adults who would have had seven or more alcoholic drinks on a least one occasion over a month.
- Females, younger adults, Māori and Pacific adults and those who had participated in risky drinking behaviour gave higher estimates for the proportion of adults who drink to a risky level.

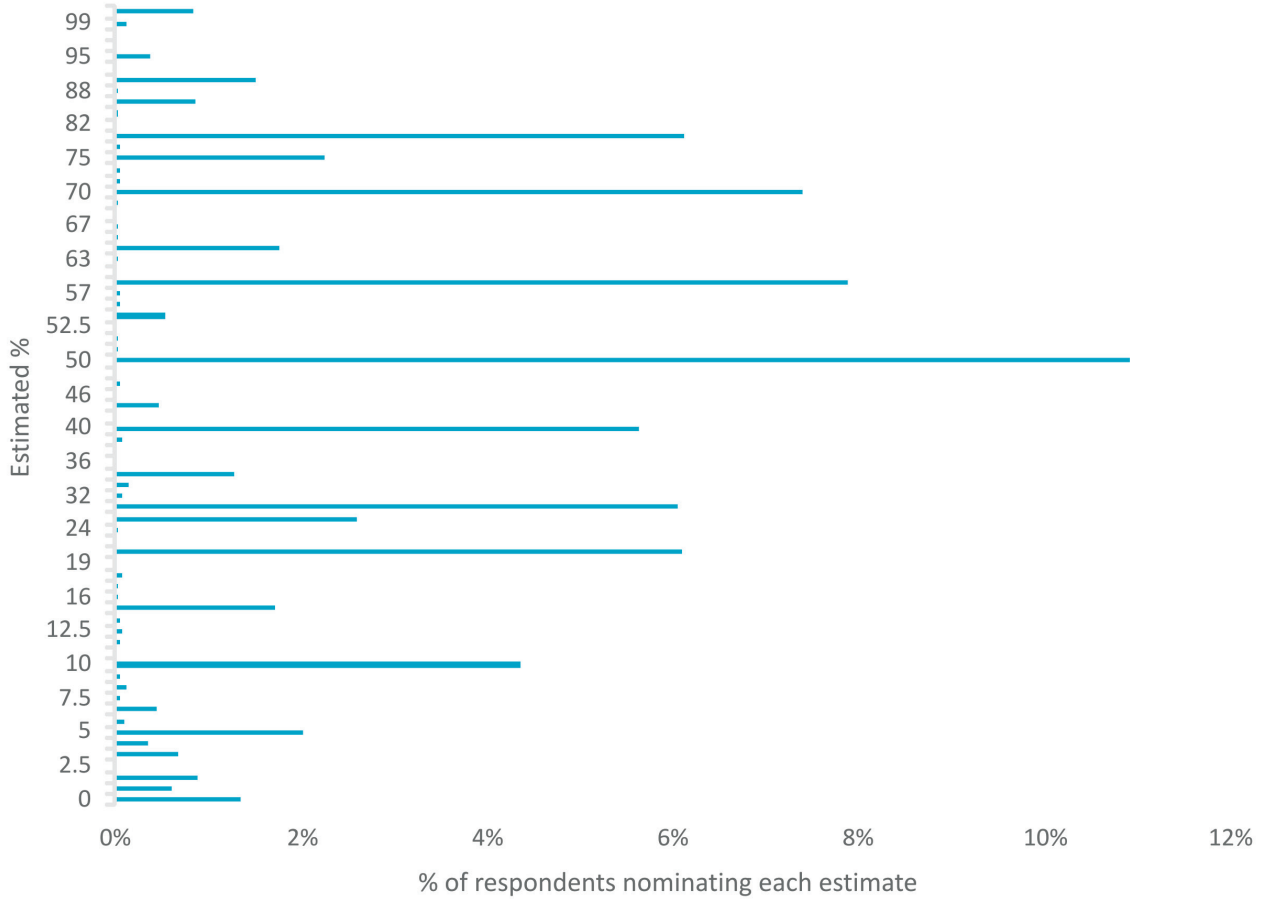


Figure 1. Estimates of the percentage of New Zealand adults who, over a month, had seven or more alcoholic drinks on at least one occasion

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).
 - Ethnicity (comparisons between European/ Other, Māori, Pacific and Asian).
 - Age (comparisons between 18 to 24, 25 to 44, 45 to 64, 65+ years).
 - Risky drinking (non-risky drinkers compared with risky drinkers in past month).
- 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

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