

Perceptions of drinking culture in New Zealand: 2014/15 ABAS

Background

When people perceive that heavy drinking is highly prevalent or permissible in their community, they may be more likely to develop risky drinking patterns themselves (Kypri & Langley, 2003; Perkins, 2002). In 2013/14, around 20% of New Zealand adults who drank alcohol reported drinking at a level that might be hazardous to their physical or mental health (Ministry of Health, 2014).

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) promotes social environments that protect New Zealanders from alcohol-related harm, and aims to contribute to development of a culture that supports people to drink moderately or not at all. This fact sheet reports on attitudes and perceptions about drinking culture among New Zealand adults (aged 18-years-and-over).

Methodology

The 2014/15 Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (2014/15 ABAS) asked three questions that assessed people's perceptions of the drinking culture in New Zealand and their attitudes towards drunkenness. Responses to each of the three perception questions asked were collected on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

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.

Perception of binge drinking culture

All respondents were asked for their level of agreement with the statement: *Binge drinking is part of kiwi culture*. No definition was provided for "binge drinking"; respondents defined this for themselves.

Half of all adults agreed that binge drinking is part of kiwi culture: 21% (19-22%) agreed and 30% (29-32%) strongly agreed. Around one in three disagreed, including 25% (23-26%) who strongly disagreed and 8% (7-9%) who disagreed with the statement. Fourteen percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Those more likely to agree or strongly agree that binge drinking is part of kiwi culture included:

- people aged 45 to 64 years (56%), compared with 18 to 24-year olds (44%), 25 to 44-year-olds (50%) and those aged 65 years and over (47%)
- European/Other (53%) and Māori (50%), compared with Pacific (36%), and European/Other compared with Asian (43%) people.

Acceptability of getting drunk "just not every day"

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

Two-thirds of respondents disagreed with this statement, including 52% (50-53%) who strongly disagreed and 15% (13-16%) who disagreed. Nearly one in five agreed, including 8% (7-9%) who strongly agreed and 10% (9-11%) who agreed, while 16% (15-17%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

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

- males (20%), compared with females (15%)
- those aged 18 to 24 years (41%), compared with 25 to 44-year-olds (23%), 45 to 64-year-olds (11%) and those aged 65 years and over (5%)
- Māori (24%), compared with Asian (11%) and European/Other people (17%)
- past-month risky drinkers (35%) compared with non-risky drinkers (16%) and non-drinkers (10%).

After controlling for risky drinking behaviour, the difference between Māori and European/Other was no longer significant.

Acceptability of getting drunk “in some situations”

All respondents were asked for their level of agreement with the statement: *Drunkenness is acceptable in some situations*.

More than two-thirds of respondents disagreed with this statement, including 54% (52-55%) who strongly disagreed and 17% (15-18%) who disagreed. Fifteen percent either agreed (9%, 8-10%) or strongly agreed (5%, 5-6%) that it is acceptable to get drunk in some situations, while 14% (13-16%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

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

- males (17%) compared with females (12%)
- those aged 18 to 24 years (31%), compared with 25 to 44-year-olds (20%), 45 to 64-year-olds (11%) and those aged 65 years and over (4%).

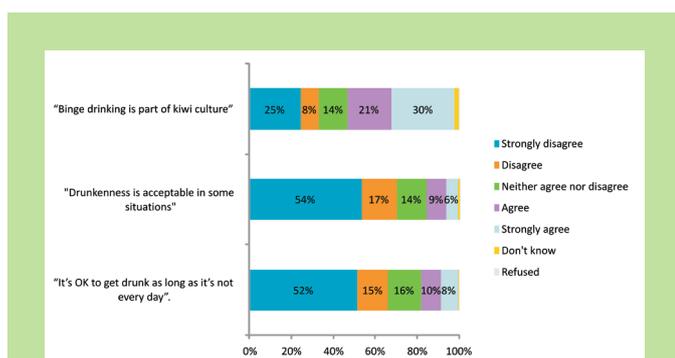


Figure 1: Overall agreement or disagreement with statements about drinking culture

- Māori (18%) compared with Asian people (12%)
- risky drinkers (29%) compared with non-risky drinkers (13%) and non-drinkers (10%).

After controlling for risky drinking behaviour, the ethnic group differences were no longer significant.

Key points

- Although more than two thirds of New Zealand adults did not agree that getting drunk is acceptable, half agreed that binge drinking is part of kiwi culture. Figure 1 shows the overall agreement or disagreement with each statement.
- 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, particularly among adults in the middle age groups.
- Those who reported risky drinking behaviour were more likely to agree with the statements “It’s OK to get drunk as long as it’s not every day” and “Drunkenness is acceptable in some situations”, compared to those who did not report risky drinking behaviour.
- Attitudes about the acceptability of drunkenness vary by age and gender. Males and those aged 18 to 24 years were the most likely to agree that getting drunk is acceptable. Figure 2 shows the agreement with each statement by age group.

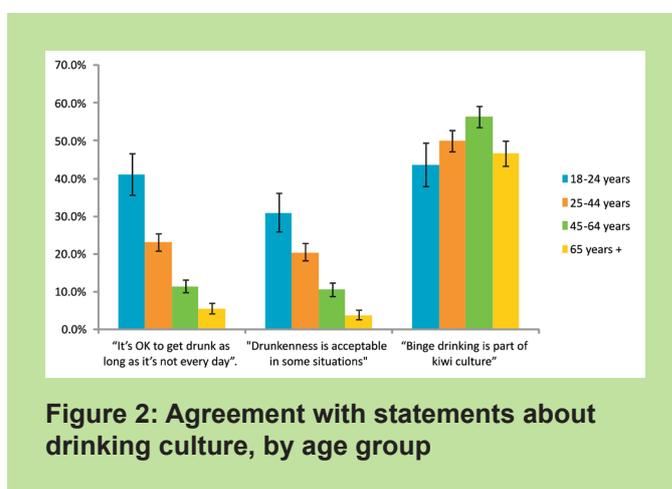


Figure 2: Agreement with statements about drinking culture, by age group

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 (as 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-drinkers compared with those who had drunk to a risky level in past month and those drinkers who had not drunk to a risky level)
- 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

- Kypri, K., & Langley, J. D. (2003). Perceived social norms and their relation to university student drinking. *Journal of studies on alcohol*, 64(6), 829-834.
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Citation

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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, and 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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