

Alcohol use among adults in the previous month

Background

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) provides low risk drinking advice for adults (people aged 18 years or older) to reduce their long term health risk and their risk of injury on a single drinking occasion (Health Promotion Agency, 2014). HPA's Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) monitors New Zealanders' use, behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol. This factsheet reports on adults' alcohol consumption and experiences of drinking alcohol within the last month.

Methodology

Participants in the 2013 ABAS were asked about their consumption of alcohol in the last four weeks and their experiences related to drinking alcohol. There were 3,817 respondents aged 18 years and over. Responses were examined by gender, age, and ethnicity. Alcohol consumption was defined by frequency of use in the last four weeks (number of days where alcohol was consumed; 1 to 4 days, 5 to 12 days and 13 or more days) and by frequency of risky drinking in the last four weeks (number of times consumed seven or more drinks on an occasion; none, 1 to 2 times and three or more times). Multiple responses were permitted when respondents were asked about their experiences after drinking alcohol.

Only group differences that were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) are reported.

Alcohol consumption in the past four weeks

Respondents were asked 'Did you drink any alcohol in the last four weeks?' Nearly two-thirds (64%, 62-65%) of adults reported consuming alcohol in the last four weeks. A further 12% (11-14%) reported that they drank alcohol but had not done so in the last four weeks, and 24% (23-25%) said they were non-drinkers.

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

- Males (68%) compared to females (60%).
- European/Other (70%) compared with Māori (61%), Pacific people (45%) or Asian people (35%) (after controlling for age and gender).

Frequency of alcohol consumption in the past 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?' Overall, nearly one-half (48%, 46-50%) of these adults reported consuming alcohol between 1 to 4 days within the last four weeks, with a further 29% (27-31%) reporting drinking between 5 to 12 days and 22% (21-24%) on 13 or more days.

Those more likely to report drinking alcohol on 13 or more days in the last four weeks included:

- Males (27%) compared to females (18%).
- All age groups, 25 to 44 (19%), 45 to 64 (25%) and 65 year and older (32%), compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (10%) (see Figure 1).

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

Risky alcohol consumption

To measure risky alcohol consumption respondents were asked 'How many times in the last four weeks have you had seven or more drinks of alcohol on any one occasion?' Of those respondents who had consumed any alcohol in the last four weeks, three-quarters (74-77%) reported never having engaged in risky alcohol consumption in the last four weeks. One-quarter (23-26%) reported at least one risky drinking occasion

in the last four weeks: 15% (13-16%) of respondents having done so once or twice, and 10% (9-11%) three or more times.

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

- Males (32%) compared to females (18%).
- 18 to 24-year-olds (58%) compared with all other age groups: 25 to 44 (33%), 45 to 64 (17%) and 65+ year olds (6%) (see Figure 2).

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

Experiences after drinking alcohol

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 the experiences that had greater than a 15% response. Eight out of ten respondents (82%, 80-84%) reported that they felt good, happy or relaxed after drinking alcohol.

Two-thirds (69%, 67-71%) reported being able to de-stress, wind down during the last four weeks. Nearly one-fifth (22%, 21-24%) reported meeting new friends or people and feeling more confident (22%, 21-23%). Around one in six (17%, 16-19%) reported getting drunk or intoxicated and a similar proportion

(15%, 13-16%) had too much to drink on at least one occasion, in the last four weeks.

Males were more likely than females to report meeting new friends or people (males 27%, females 18%), feeling more confident (males 26%, females 19%), and getting drunk or intoxicated (males 20%, females 15%).

Age differences were found for all six personal experiences when compared to 18 to 24 year olds. Specifically, within the last four weeks, in relation to drinking alcohol:

- Felt good, happy or relaxed: 45 to 64 (80%) and 65+ year olds (71%) were less likely to report this when compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (91%).
- Able to de-stress, wind down: 25 to 44 (78%), 45 to 64 (66%) and 65+ year olds (47%) were less likely to report this when compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (85%).
- Meet new friends or people: 25 to 44 (25%), 45 to 64 (16%) and 65+ year olds (16%) were less likely to report this when compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (52%).
- Felt more confident: 25 to 44 (27%), 45 to 64 (15%) and 65+ year olds (11%) were less likely to report this when compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (55%).
- Got drunk or intoxicated: 25 to 44 (23%), 45 to 64 (11%) and 65+ year olds (1%) were less likely to report this when compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (50%).
- Had too much to drink: 25 to 44 (19%), 45 to 64 (12%) and 65+ year olds (3%) were less likely to report this when compared with 18 to 24-year-olds (35%).

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, nearly one-half reported consuming alcohol between 1 to 4 days within the last four weeks. Approximately one-fifth reported consuming alcohol on 13 or more days.
- Of those who drank alcohol, one-quarter reported consuming alcohol at risky levels (seven or more drinks) on at least one or more occasions. 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, happy or relaxed; able to de-stress, unwind; meeting new friends or people; feeling more confident; getting drunk or intoxicated; and having too much to drink on an occasion.
- Overall, 13% 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).

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

Overall, 13% (12-15%) of adults reported at least one potential harm or negative experience within the last four weeks associated with drinking alcohol. These experiences included failure to meet family or work 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 negative harm or experiences in the last four weeks included:

- Males (16%) compared to females (11%).
- 18 to 24-year-olds (37%) compared with 24 to 44 (14%), 45 to 64 (10%) and 65+ year olds (6%).

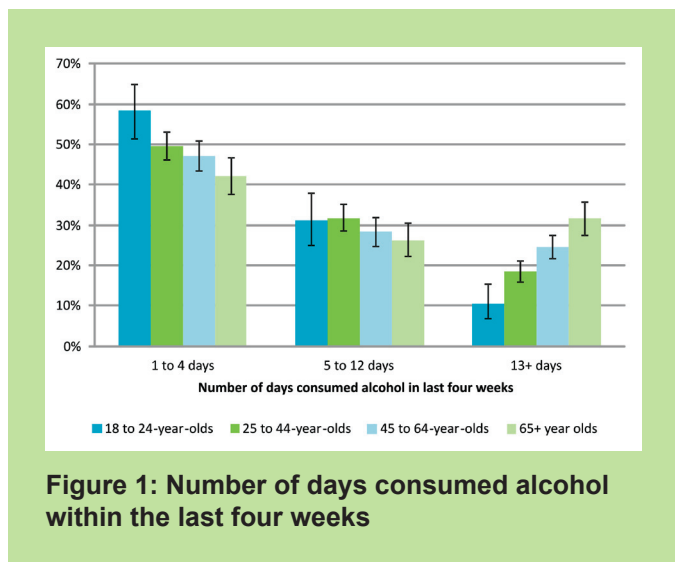


Figure 1: Number of days consumed alcohol within the last four weeks

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

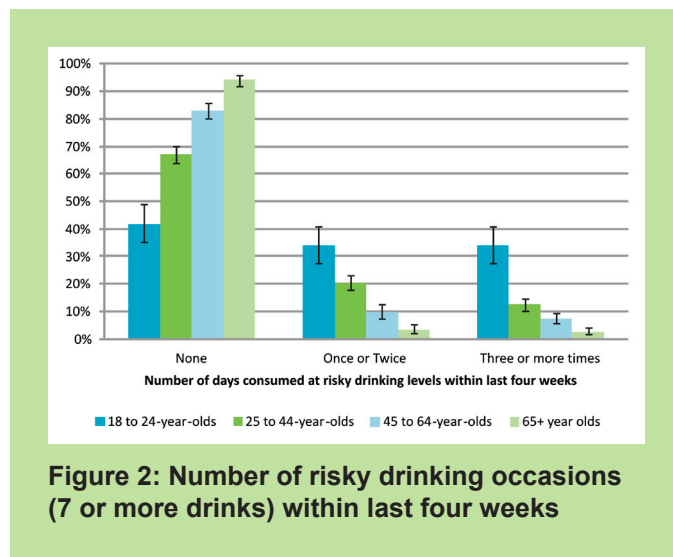


Figure 2: Number of risky drinking occasions (7 or more drinks) within last four weeks

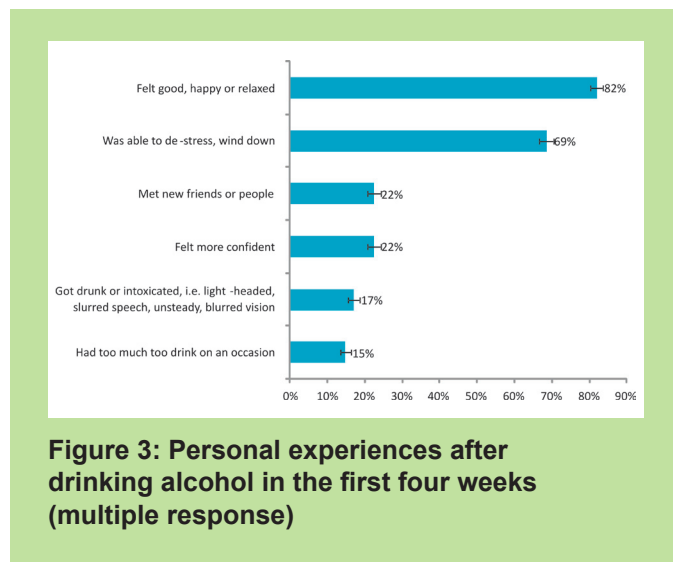


Figure 3: Personal experiences after drinking alcohol in the first four weeks (multiple response)

References

Health Promotion Agency. (2014). *Alcohol – the body and health effects*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

Citation

Gordon, C., & Holland, K. (2015). *Alcohol use among adults in the previous month. [In Fact]*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency Research and Evaluation Unit.

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 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)
 - Age (18 to 24, compared with 25 to 44, 45 to 65 and 65 and over)
 - Frequency of alcohol consumption (1 to 4 days, 5 to 12 days, compared with 13 or more days in the last four weeks)
 - Frequency of risky alcohol consumption (no risky drinking (seven or more drinks on an occasion) compared with 1-2 times, and 3 or more times within the last four weeks)
- 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>.

About HPA

The 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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