

YOUTH AND ALCOHOL SURVEY OVERVIEW

*Based on a survey conducted by the Business Research Centre for
the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand*

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WHY A SURVEY ON YOUTH AND ALCOHOL?

The Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand (ALAC) commissioned this April 1997 survey from the Business Research Centre. The results give ALAC a benchmark against which to measure the effectiveness of its three-year campaign to reduce teenage binge drinking. The survey also provides revealing insights into the alcohol-related attitudes and behaviour of young New Zealanders.

A nationally representative sample of more than 500 14 to 18 year olds - boys and girls, Maaori and pakeha - were asked over the telephone about their drinking behaviour and attitudes. They answered questions about how often they drank, what they drank, how they got hold of alcohol, and what bad effects they had suffered from drinking too much.

This report presents an overview of the benchmark survey results.

TEENAGE DRINKING PATTERNS

Do All Teenagers Drink?

- One in five young people say they never drink.
- Half say they drink at least once a fortnight.
- One in seven say they drink about once a week.
- One in 50 say they drink almost every day.

When Do Teenagers Start Drinking?

Nearly all teenagers have at least tried alcohol, even the non drinkers. Most have drunk a full glass.

- Over half say they had their first full glass of alcohol by the age of 14.
- One in 20 say they had their first full glass of alcohol before the age of 10.
- Heavier drinkers tend to start drinking earlier than lighter drinkers. Nearly three-quarters of heavier drinkers say they had their first full glass of alcohol by the age of 14.

How Much Do Teenagers Drink?

Young people don't all behave and think the same in relation to alcohol. The survey identified three distinct groups - heavier drinkers, lighter drinkers and non drinkers.

- About a third of young people are classified as heavier drinkers - they say they consumed five or more glasses of alcohol last time they drank. This group consumes four-fifths of all the alcohol young people drink.
- Nearly half of young people are classified as lighter drinkers - they say they drank one to four glasses last time they drank alcohol.
- Non drinkers say they drink no alcohol at all, and are a fifth of young people between 14 and 18.

What Kinds of Alcohol Do Teenagers Drink?

Beer is the alcoholic drink most popular with teenagers, followed by wine. Three-quarters of young people have drunk beer. More than two-thirds have drunk wine. Half of young people have drunk spirits, liqueurs, low alcohol beer and alcoholic soda.

- Nearly three-quarters of heavier drinkers and just over half of lighter drinkers say they drank beer last time they drank.
- One in seven heavier drinkers and one in five lighter drinkers say they consumed wine last time they drank.
- More than a third of heavier drinkers and less than one in seven lighter drinkers say they consumed spirits last time they drank.
- Heavier drinkers are more likely to have tried a wider range of alcoholic drinks.
- Nearly a quarter of young drinkers have drunk ‘rocket fuel’ - a concoction of several different kinds of alcohol - but heavier drinkers are more likely to have drunk it.

What Other Risky Activities Do Young Drinkers Engage In?

Drinking alcohol is only one element in a range of teenage risk-taking. This makes it more difficult to shift the behaviour and attitudes of young drinkers.

- More than a third of heavier drinkers smoke cigarettes, compared to one in 17 non drinkers.
- More than a quarter of heavier drinkers use cannabis, compared to one in 50 non drinkers.
- More than half of heavier drinkers regularly drive a car or motorbike, compared to less than a quarter of non drinkers. Although driving is not usually considered a risky activity, it is when cannabis and alcohol are involved.

BINGE DRINKING

What Is Binge Drinking and How Often Do Teenagers Do It?

Binge drinking is consuming a lot of alcohol in a short time - five or more glasses in one sitting. In this study, a glass of alcohol was defined as a whole can or bottle of beer, or a whole glass of wine etc.

- A third of young people say they drank five or more glasses last time they drank.
- More than a quarter say they've had a binge drinking session in the last two weeks.
- Nearly half of heavier drinkers - that's nearly a fifth of all young drinkers - say they drank nine or more glasses last time they drank.

How Does Binge Drinking Affect Teenagers?

Binge drinking has unpleasant effects like throwing up, being unable to remember periods of time, falling over or hurting yourself, being muddled and confused, and feeling guilty or embarrassed. Nearly all heavier drinkers and three-quarters of lighter drinkers have suffered at least one of these ill-effects.

- Nearly half of teenage drinkers have vomited after drinking.
- More than a third haven't been able to remember a period of time.
- More than a third have fallen over or hurt themselves.
- Nearly a quarter have got into an argument or a fight.
- One in six has got into trouble at home because of drinking.
- One in eight has got into a sexual situation they weren't happy with.
- One in 11 has got into trouble with the law because of drinking.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ABOUT ALCOHOL

What Do Teenagers Think About Drinking in General?

Most young people believe drinking makes people feel more comfortable at parties and in other social situations. On the other hand, few say they feel left out if they drink less than everyone else.

- More than two-thirds of heavier drinkers agree that getting drunk is fun, compared to less than half lighter drinkers, and one in 20 non drinkers.
- More than three-quarters of heavier drinkers, two-thirds of lighter drinkers and a quarter of non drinkers agree that it's OK to get drunk as long as it's not too often.
- Four out of five young people believe drinking can damage your image or what people think of you. Heavier drinkers are less likely to believe this.
- Just over two-thirds believe people who get drunk embarrass themselves. Heavier drinkers are less likely to believe this.
- Three-quarters believe drinking makes people more comfortable in social situations. Heavier drinkers are more likely to believe this.

What Do Teenagers Believe Are the Ill-effects of Drinking?

The ill-effects of drinking young people mention most are becoming violent, making a fool of themselves, and driving under the influence of alcohol. Others are said to be committing crime and damaging their health.

- One in four believe drinking and driving is the worst effect of drinking.
- One in six believe violence is the worst effect of drinking.
- One in 11 believe getting into a bad sexual situation is the worst effect of drinking.
- One in 14 believe making an idiot of yourself is the worst effect of drinking.
- One in 17 believe bad health, such as loss of brain cells and injury, is the worst effect of drinking.
- One in 50 believe becoming addicted to alcohol is the worst effect.

What Do Teenagers Think About How Much They Drink?

Those who think they are drinking more than they used to say it's because they are getting older, because they are going out and socialising more, because alcohol and money is easier to get hold of, and because of boredom and peer pressure.

Those who think they are drinking less than they used to say it's because drinking is boring, because they don't like the taste, hangovers or bad experiences like car accidents, because they have responsibilities like school certificate or work, because they can't afford it, or because their friends don't drink.

- Nearly half of young drinkers think they are drinking more than they used to. Heavier drinkers are more likely to think so.
- One in five young drinkers and one in three heavier drinkers think they are drinking too much.
- About a quarter of young drinkers think they are drinking less than they used to.
- Nearly three-quarters of young drinkers think they drink about the right amount.

What Do Teenagers Think About Their Own Drinking?

Nearly all young drinkers believe they can say no to alcohol.

- Three-quarters of heavier drinkers and nine out of 10 lighter drinkers believe they can stop drinking when they feel they've had enough.
- One in five young people say they usually drink to get drunk. More than a third of heavier drinkers say they drink to get drunk, but only one in 10 lighter drinkers.
- Four out of five heavier drinkers say their friends enjoy getting drunk, compared with less than two-thirds of lighter drinkers, and just over a third of non drinkers.

LAST TIME THEY DRANK

How Much Did They Drink?

- One in seven of those who drink at all drank more than 10 glasses.
- Four out of 10 drinkers drank five or more glasses.
- Nearly half the drinkers drank three glasses or less.
- One in five drinkers drank just one glass.

Where Did They Drink?

A friend's home is the most popular place for teenage drinking, with well over a third of drinkers saying that's where they were last time they drank.

- Heavier drinkers were more likely to have drunk at a friend's home last time they drank.
- One in five drank at a party. Heavier drinkers were more likely to have done so.
- Less than a quarter drank in their own home (which in nine out of 10 cases was also their parents' home). Lighter drinkers were more likely to have done so.
- Very few drank in a public place like a beach, park or river bank, or in a car.

Did They Suffer Any Ill-effects?

One in three young drinkers suffered at least one ill-effect from alcohol last time they drank.

- Nearly two in three heavier drinkers and one in seven lighter drinkers suffered at least one ill-effect.
- Almost one in six drinkers saw or heard things in a confused way.
- One in eight drinkers were unable to remember periods of time.
- One in eleven drinkers fell over or hurt themselves.
- One in eleven drinkers felt guilty or embarrassed because of their drinking.
- One in 12 drinkers threw up.

Who Gave Them Their Alcohol?

Most were given alcohol by somebody else, with less than a quarter getting hold of their own drink. Heavier drinkers were more likely than lighter drinkers to have got the drink themselves.

- Nearly half were given alcohol by friends.
- More than a quarter were given alcohol by parents or guardians. Lighter drinkers were twice as likely as heavier drinkers to have got their alcohol this way.

For Those Who Bought Their Own Alcohol, Where Did They Buy It?

Only one in six teenagers said they bought their own alcohol last time they drank.

- A quarter of heavier drinkers bought their alcohol themselves, even though they were under the legal drinking age.
- Bottle stores were the most popular places to buy alcohol - one in nine did so.
- One in 25 bought their alcohol from a pub or hotel.
- Virtually no young people bought alcohol from a supermarket, cafe or restaurant.

Who Did They Drink With?

- Four out of five drank with a group of three or more.
- Lighter drinkers were more likely to have drunk with one or two others.
- Very few reported drinking on their own.
- One in three lighter drinkers drank with a parent or guardian, compared with one in 16 heavier drinkers.

TYPES OF TEENAGE DRINKERS

Who Are the Heavier Drinkers?

Heavier drinkers are a third of all 14 to 18 year olds, just over half are boys, and Maaori are also slightly over-represented. Heavier drinkers tend to be older, and to start drinking earlier in life.

Heavier drinkers tend not to apply their beliefs about what constitutes heavy drinking to themselves - many don't see themselves as heavier drinkers. Yet this group is consuming 80 percent of the alcohol drunk by 14 to 18 year olds.

As well as drinking more than lighter drinkers, heavier drinkers also tend to drink more often, and from a wider repertoire of alcoholic drinks. About half of them drink at least once a week, and a third say they drink to get drunk. Nearly all of them have suffered at least one ill-effect from binge drinking.

Two-thirds of heavier drinkers surveyed had drunk five or more glasses in one sitting in the previous two weeks, and two-thirds of these had done so more than once.

Heavier drinkers are more likely than lighter drinkers to buy their own alcohol, even though they are under the legal age limit, and to drink it in groups of three or more at friends' houses or at parties. They are less likely to drink at home with their parents or guardian.

The heavier drinker is more likely to believe in the positive effects of drinking and less likely to believe drinking alcohol can damage their image. The heavier drinker is also more likely to engage in other risky activities - smoking cigarettes, using cannabis and driving. Heavier drinkers tend to be slightly less confident than lighter drinkers that they can control their own drinking.

- Heavier drinkers are more likely to say their fathers are heavy drinkers.

- Only one in 25 heavier drinkers see themselves as heavier drinkers. Nearly half think they are light drinkers, even though nearly half of those drank more than nine glasses at their last drinking session.
- Heavier drinkers also drink more frequently. More than half drink at least once a week.
- Three-quarters of heavier drinkers agree that it's OK to get drunk so long as it's not too often.
- Nearly a quarter of heavier drinkers believe they are drinking less than they used to.
- A third of heavier drinkers believe they drink more than is right for them.

Who Are the Lighter Drinkers?

Nearly half of young people are lighter drinkers, consuming between one and four glasses of alcohol last time they drank. Lighter drinkers consume only a fifth of all the alcohol drunk by 14 to 18 year olds.

Lighter drinkers are less likely to binge, more likely than heavier drinkers to stick to two glasses of one type of alcohol per sitting. Only one in 10 lighter drinkers say they drink to get drunk, and about a third claim they drink about once a week.

Because lighter drinkers are less likely to binge drink, they are also less likely to suffer ill-effects like vomiting and confusion. A third of them say they have never suffered any ill-effects at all from drinking.

Lighter drinkers have a more accurate perception of their own drinking than heavier drinkers, and are less likely to smoke cigarettes, use cannabis or drive than heavier drinkers. They are also less likely to believe in the positive effects of drinking than heavier drinkers.

Lighter drinkers are more likely than heavier drinkers to obtain alcohol from parents or guardians, and more likely to drink it with them.

- A third of lighter drinkers say they drink once a week, and no more than two glasses of one type of alcohol.
- More than a third of lighter drinkers say they are drinking more than they used to.
- Lighter drinkers are less likely than heavier drinkers to believe in the positive effects of drinking.

Who Are the Non Drinkers?

A fifth of young people say they are non drinkers. They tend to be younger than heavier and lighter drinkers, and to engage less in other risky behaviour like smoking cigarettes, using cannabis and driving.

There are three types of young non drinker - those who have never touched a drop, those who have had a sip but not a full glass, and those who have drunk alcohol in the past but don't now. The majority of non drinkers have tried at least a sip, but less than a fifth have tried a full glass.

The non drinker has very strong views on drinking to excess - only a quarter agree that it's OK to get drunk so long as it's not too often, and only one in 20 agree that getting drunk is fun. They are less sure of knowing they could stop if they'd had enough.

- Non drinkers are more likely to say their parents don't drink. A quarter of them say so.
- Non drinkers tend to hold strong views on drinking, with only a quarter agreeing that it's OK to get drunk so long as it's not too often.

CHANGING TEENAGERS ATTITUDES

The Heavier Teenage Drinker

Since this group's drinking is part of a wider pattern of risk-taking, attitudes and behaviour in regard to alcohol might be difficult to shift.

On the other hand, nearly a quarter of heavier drinkers claim they are drinking less now than in the past, and a third believe they are drinking more than is right for them, both of which provide an opportunity for modifying attitudes and behaviour.

The Lighter Teenage Drinker

On the whole, this group seems to be on the right track in regard to alcohol. However, 40 percent of lighter drinkers say they are drinking more now than in the past, and one in six has binged in the last two weeks.

Some of this group may be experimenting with alcohol and may be at risk of heavier drinking in the future.

The Non Drinking Teenager

Non drinkers may well become drinkers in the future. They tend to be slightly younger, and as they grow up may be increasingly exposed to alcohol and associated risky behaviour.