

AlcoholNZ article

Title

**Women's alcohol use and harms compared with men's –
What new national alcohol data shows**

At a glance

- This article was published in print form in HPA's June 2015 *AlcoholNZ* magazine (available on alcohol.org.nz/alcoholnz).
- It provides information on women's self-reported alcohol use, patterns of drinking and harms from drinking alcohol, with comparisons made with men's alcohol use.
- Most New Zealand adults aged 15+ years (80%) drank alcohol in the last year. Women were less likely than men to drink alcohol. They are also less likely than men to drink frequently or drink to intoxication.
- Hazardous drinking patterns are more common among men than women.
- Men and women typically drink different types of alcoholic beverages. Women were more likely to drink wine, ready-to-drinks (RTDs) and spirits, and less likely to drink beer.
- These results are from the Ministry of Health's *New Zealand Health Survey* and HPA's *Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey*.

Citation

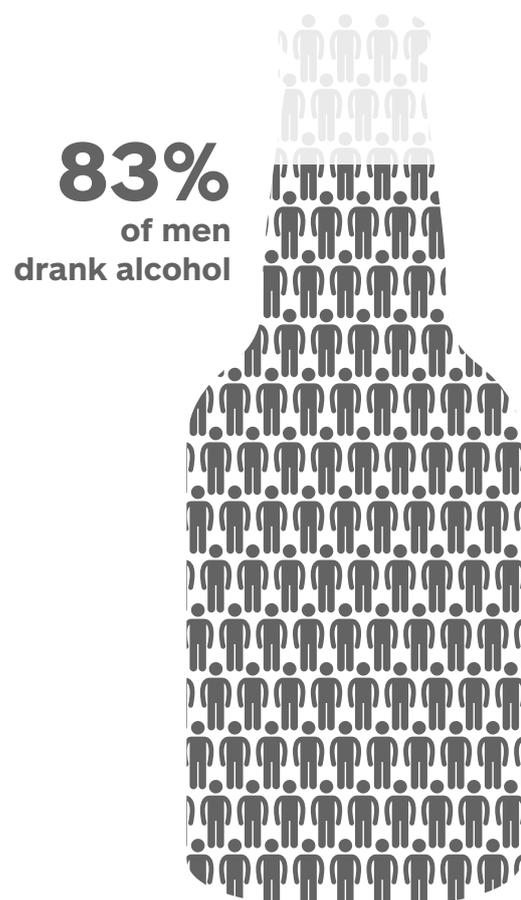
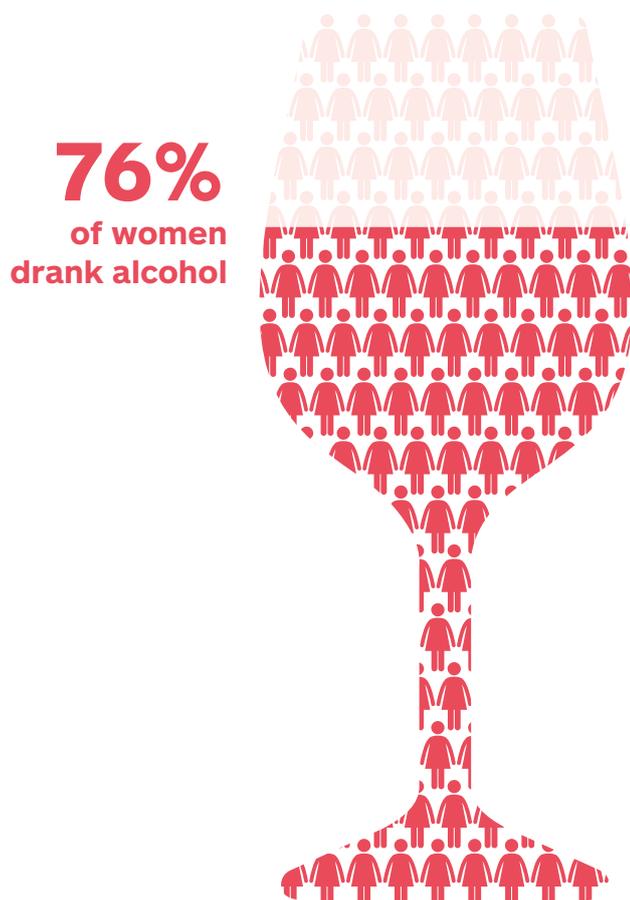
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Women's alcohol use and harms compared with men's

What new national alcohol data shows

This article provides an overview of findings from recently released data from the Ministry of Health's New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS) and the Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) about women's self-reported alcohol use, patterns of drinking and harms from drinking alcohol, in particular in comparison with men.

In the last 12 months...



Data from large national surveys such as the NZHS and the ABAS can provide a very useful picture about New Zealanders' alcohol use, attitudes and behaviours. The analysis of the data from these surveys is also used to inform policy and practice and to identify and examine trends and differences, including between men and women and for different age groups.

Alcohol consumption and drinking patterns

The findings from the 2013/14 NZHS show that most adults aged 15+ years (80%) had consumed alcohol in the last 12 months. Women (76%) were less likely than men (83%) to have drunk alcohol in the last year (Ministry of Health, 2014b).

Women are less likely than men to drink frequently. In the 2012/13 NZHS, after adjusting for age differences, men were 1.2 times more likely than women to drink with medium frequency (once or twice a week) and 1.4 times more likely to drink with high frequency (at least three to four times a week). The prevalence of drinkers who drink to high frequency increased with age for both sexes (Ministry of Health, 2015).

Women are less likely than men to drink to intoxication (defined as drinking enough to feel drunk). Men were 1.2 times more likely to drink to intoxication at least once in the past year and 2.0 times more likely to drink to intoxication with high frequency (defined as at least once a week). Overall, 5.5% of women reported drinking to intoxication with high frequency. After 24 years of age, drinking with high frequency decreased with increasing age for all adults (Ministry of Health, 2015).

The 2013 ABAS examined drinking patterns and self-reported experiences after drinking alcohol over the last month. The findings about frequency of drinking and drinking to intoxication were similar to those from the 2012/13 NZHS. Women (18%) were less likely than men (27%) to report drinking alcohol within the last month or to drink at a high frequency (defined as consuming alcohol on 13 or more days within the last month). Women (15%) were also less likely to report having been drunk or intoxicated over the last month than men (20%) (Gordon & Holland, 2015).

Age of initiation

Of the adults who had ever drunk alcohol, women (23%) were less likely than men (32%) to report drinking before the age of 15 years (Ministry of Health, 2015).

Types of alcohol consumed

On a typical occasion

Men and women typically drink different types of alcohol. Women were more likely to drink wine, ready-to-drinks (RTDs) and spirits, and less likely to drink beer. Only 30% of women typically consumed beer or cider compared with 80% of men. However, 71% of women reported typically consuming wine or sherry compared with 38% of men. The types of alcohol women typically consume vary with age and also by ethnic group (Ministry of Health, 2015).

On last drinking occasion

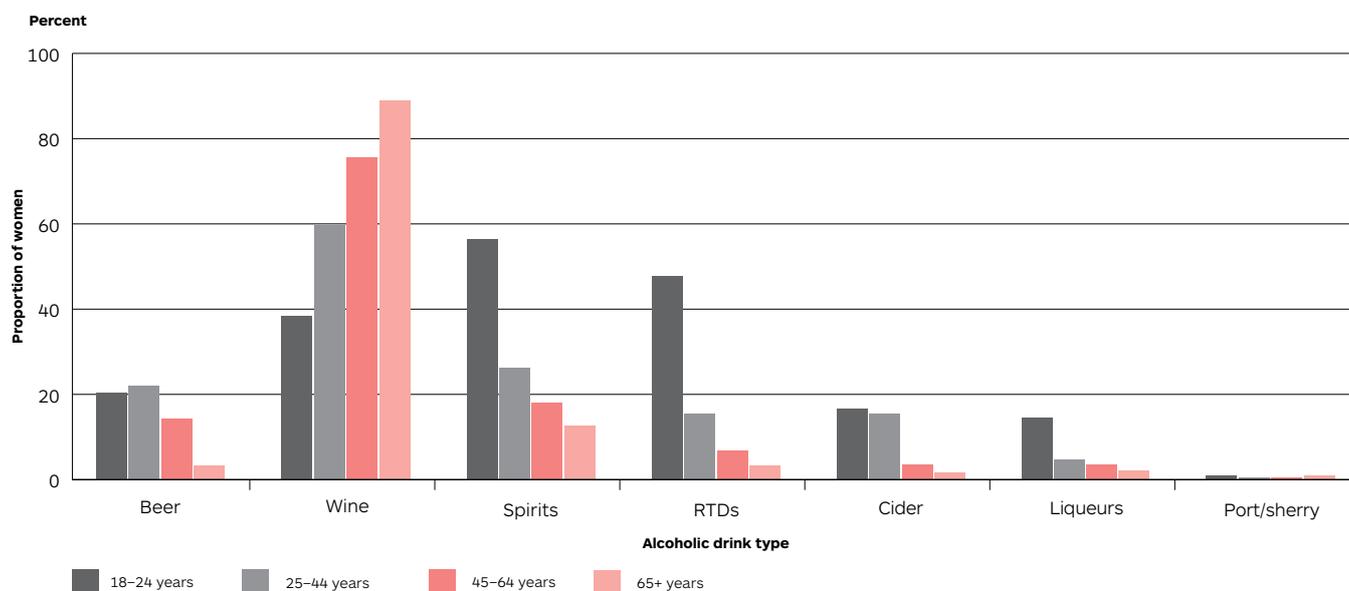
Findings from the 2013 ABAS showed that on the last drinking occasion, the three most common types of alcohol that females aged 15 to 17 years had consumed were RTDs (73%), spirits (57%) and beer (34%) (Holland, 2015). Patterns of the types of alcohol consumed changed with age, in particular a marked increase in wine consumption with age as illustrated in Figure 1 (note multiple responses of drink types can be reported for the last drinking occasion).

Hazardous drinking of alcohol

Hazardous drinking refers to an established drinking pattern that carries a risk of harming the drinker's physical or mental health, or having harmful social effects on the drinker or others. It is defined in the NZHS as behaviour that results in a score of eight points or more on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) (Ministry of Health, 2015).

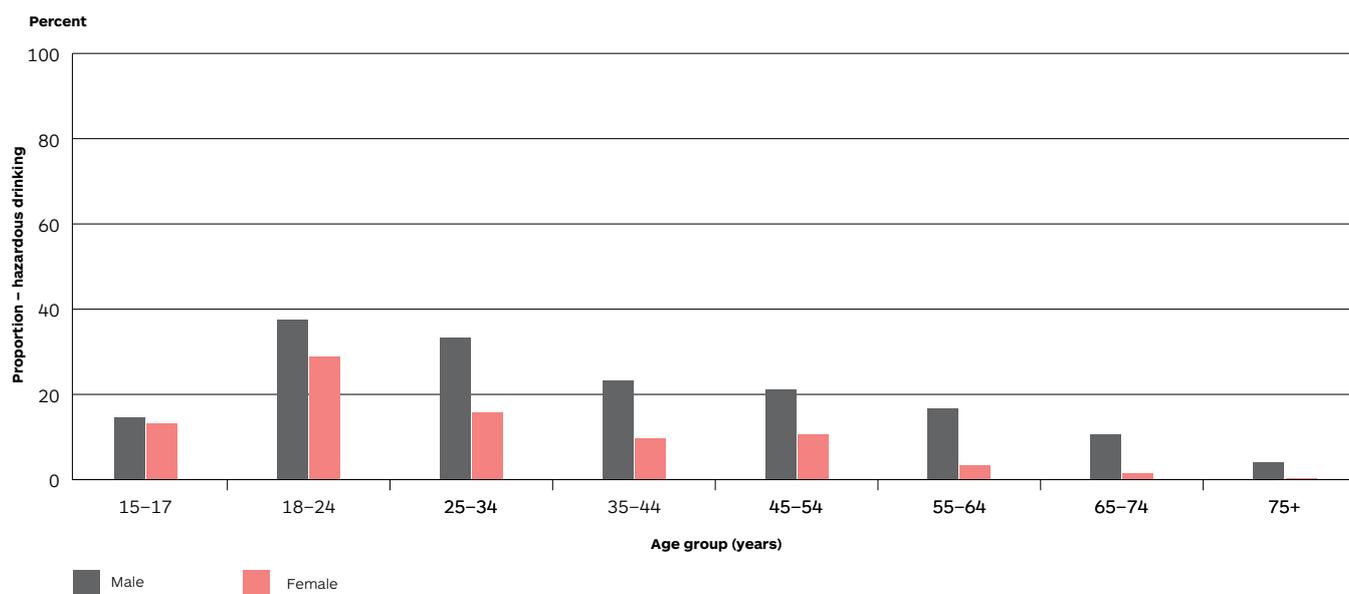
The Ministry of Health reported in its 2013/14 NZHS annual update that one in six adults (16%) had a hazardous drinking pattern, down from 18% in 2006/07. The age group with the highest proportion of hazardous drinkers were 18- to 24-year-olds (37% for men and 29% for women). Overall hazardous drinking patterns were more common among men (22%) than women (11%). The rate of hazardous drinking declined for men from 26% in 2006/07 to 22% in 2013/14. In comparison, although women were less likely to have hazardous drinking patterns, there has been no change in their hazardous drinking rates since 2006/07 (Ministry of Health, 2014a). Differences in hazardous drinking prevalence in the adult population for women and men by age are graphically shown in Figure 2 (Ministry of Health, 2014b).

Figure 1: Types of alcoholic drink consumed by women on last drinking occasion, by age group



Source: 2013 ABAS data.

Figure 2: Unadjusted prevalence of hazardous drinking in the adult population, by age and sex, 2013/14



Source: Chart created from data in Ministry of Health (2014b).

Harms from drinking alcohol

The 2012/13 NZHS found that women reported being less likely than men to engage in risky behaviours while under the influence of alcohol, such as driving or operating machinery. Women were also less likely than men to report a range of harmful effects from their drinking in the past 12 months. These harms included:

- harmful affects to their physical health (6.9% for women compared with 9.1% for men)
- injuries (2.7% compared with 4.2%)
- harms to friendships and social lives (4.3% compared with 6.1%)
- harms to home lives (3.5% compared with 5.9%)
- financial position affected (4.7% compared with 6.9%).

However, a greater percentage of women than men reported harmful effects from other people's drinking on friendships and social life (10% compared with 6.8%), on home life (6.7% compared with 3.9%), and on financial positions (3.0% compared with 1.6%) (Ministry of Health, 2015).

Similar findings about women experiencing less harm than men from their own drinking were reported in the 2013 ABAS. Women (11%) were less likely than men (16%) to report experiencing potential harm or negative experiences within the last four weeks associated with drinking alcohol. These experiences included: failure to meet family or work or study commitments; 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 under the influence of alcohol; and getting into a regrettable sexual encounter (Gordon & Holland, 2015).

Where to find further analysis and data

HPA regularly publishes findings from the ABAS, as well as analyses of alcohol-related data from its other surveys, through its factsheet series *In Fact: Research facts from the HPA*. These factsheets can be found on HPA's website – hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications.

From 2011 the Ministry of Health's NZHS became a continuous survey, enabling annual updates on data about alcohol use and hazardous drinking. The most recent annual update contains 2013/14 data from people selected for the survey from July 2013 to June 2014. Additional questions about alcohol were asked in the 2012/13 NZHS. The analysis of the findings from these additional questions has recently been reported on in the Ministry of Health's 2015 publication *Alcohol use 2012/13: New Zealand Health Survey*. Reports and data tables about alcohol from the NZHS can be found on the Ministry of Health's website – health.govt.nz.

References

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