



Alcohol Use

Alcohol use in Australia has been steadily increasing over the past 10 years.¹ It has been estimated that in 2008, 10.3 litres of pure alcohol was consumed in Australia, per person aged 15 and over. This compares to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 9.6 litres.²

Alcohol is consumed on a weekly basis by 41.2% of Australians aged 14 years and over, and daily by 8.9%.¹ It has been estimated that roughly 13% of Australian children live in a home with at least one adult who misuses alcohol.³ Data from 2006 showed that in Australia approximately one in five people aged 14 years and over consumed alcohol at short term risky or high-risk levels on at least one occasion in the preceding 12 months. One in ten Australians consumed alcohol at risky or high levels in the long term.⁴

Overall, women are less likely to consume alcohol on a daily (6%) or weekly (35%) basis when compared with males (12% and 48% respectively).⁴

In a recent study, Australian women were shown to score amongst the highest with respect to the negative consequences experienced from consumption.⁵ The regular use of alcohol is associated with many medical problems, such as liver cirrhosis, pancreatitis, heart disease and brain damage. Women are harmed more quickly and with lower levels of alcohol consumption than men.⁶

Of Australians seeking treatment for alcohol and / or other drugs in 2005/06 (of whom one third were women), alcohol was the principal drug of concern (39%), followed by cannabis (25%), opioids (17%) and amphetamines (11%).⁷

Substance Use & Incarceration

A survey of female adult prisoners in Western Australia found that:

- 67% of the women reported a connection between their drug and alcohol use and offending behaviour;
- 41% reported that they were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of the offence;
- 21% stated that they committed the offence to get money to buy drugs; and
- 16% were selling or trafficking drugs at the time of the offence.⁸

Regular and dependent alcohol use increased the likelihood of women being involved in violent offending, although not to the same extent as men.⁸

The Australian Institute of Criminology's quarterly Drug Use Monitoring in Australia Program (DUMA) of police detainees found that almost 40% of Indigenous women were dependent on alcohol (either alone or in combination with illicit drugs).⁸

"The use of licit substances is an accepted part of Australian and most other western societies. The vast majority of Australians use caffeine, through the consumption of tea, coffee, cola drinks and chocolate. The regular use of alcohol and tobacco by adults is acceptable to three out of four and two out of five Australians respectively".¹

"Substance use is fundamentally a social act—we obtain, consume, and construct the experience of using alcohol or other drugs in relation to others. The rituals associated with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs are an important part of creating meaning in relation to this behaviour".¹

Adolescents

Alcohol remains the most common substance used by young people with about 80% of secondary students reporting having used it at some time. This figure dropped to 14% for cannabis use and 19% for inhalant usage.⁹ One-third (29.3%) of teenagers had at some time used an illicit drug. Female teenagers were slightly more likely than male teenagers to have ever used an illicit drug.¹⁰

The 2010 Adolescent Community Profile for the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) found that:

- Of those aged 15 to 17 years, 72.7% had consumed alcohol at some point, and 50.6% said they had drunk alcohol in the past 30 days; and
- Of those aged 12 to 14 years, 43.8% said they had at some time used alcohol and 21.8% reported use in the past 30 days.¹¹

Violence Against Women and Substance Misuse

A number of studies have found that women, as a response to trauma, are more likely to self-medicate than men.¹² Women experiencing family violence may begin or increase substance use as a way to cope with the violence that is being inflicted on them.¹² Of women undergoing drug treatment, approximately half are victims of childhood sexual abuse.¹³

Consuming high levels of alcohol can put women at risk of experiencing sexual aggression including sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, attempted rape and rape.¹⁴ Younger women are particularly vulnerable to unwanted sex.¹⁵ A recent survey of Australian Secondary Students found that of year 10-12 female students who were sexually active, 32% had experienced unwanted sex, with one of the main reasons being that they were too drunk or too high.¹⁶

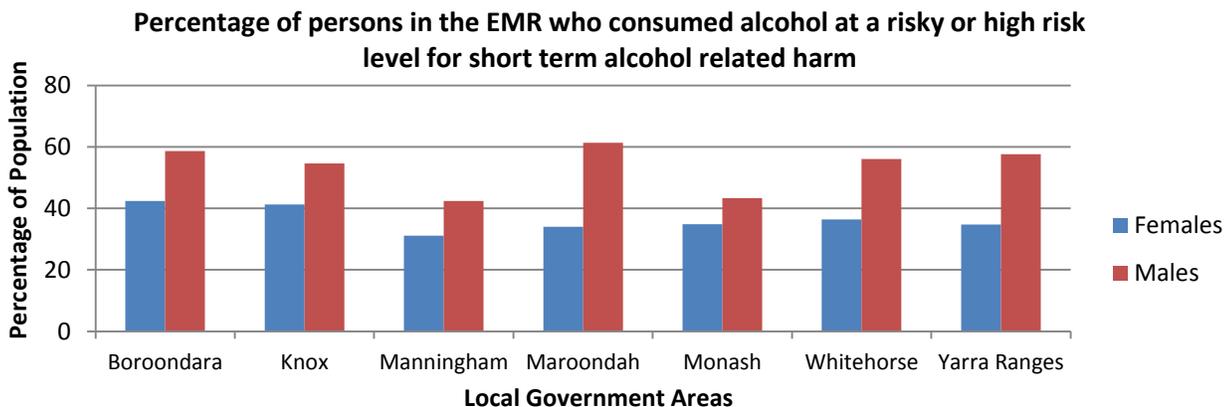
“Strong links between parental alcohol abuse and child maltreatment have been found across Australia, with child protection agencies reporting alcohol abuse as one of the top contributors in child protection cases”.¹

Pregnancy, Motherhood and Substance Use

The use of drugs and alcohol in pregnancy, or violence perpetrated against a woman whilst she is pregnant, can have an adverse affect on unborn babies. Negative birth outcomes, such as low birth weight, have been associated with substance use, and the use of alcohol during pregnancy increases the risk of harm to a foetus with a range of disorders possibly occurring including: facial anomalies, congenital abnormalities, and neurological developmental and social-emotional problems.¹ Research shows that mothers experiencing illicit drug related diagnosis are more likely to be younger, unmarried, Australian-born and Indigenous.¹⁷

Alcohol Use in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR)

Across the EMR, males were more likely than females to consume alcohol at a risky or high risk level for short term harm.¹⁸ Females in Boroondara were the most likely to consume alcohol at a risky or high risk level (42%), while females in Manningham were the least likely to (31%).¹⁸



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