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Background

General population data suggests that drinking alcohol among Australians is decreasing. Specifically, data from the 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found an increase in Australians reporting to have taken action to reduce their drinking in 2019 compared to 2016 and earlier, and an increase in the proportion of ex-drinkers, from 7.6% in 2016 to 8.9% in 2019. Furthermore, risky drinking has decreased among younger (14-17 years) Australians from 30% in 2011 to 9% in 2019, whereas this behaviour has remained stable among older Australians.

Aims

Given the decrease in alcohol consumption among the general population, particularly amongst younger groups, we wanted to look at:

1. Past six-month ('recent') alcohol use, including trends in drinking at risky levels, among two samples of people who use illicit drugs, from 2010-2021.
2. What factors were associated with risky alcohol consumption in 2021 among a younger population that consumes illicit stimulant drugs (EDRS) and an older sample that injects illicit drugs (IDRS).

Methods

- Data were obtained from the **Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS)** and the **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)** between 2010-2021, recruited from capital cities in Australia.
- **EDRS**: is an annual survey of people who regularly consume illicit stimulants (primarily ecstasy). The median age of EDRS participants was 24 (IQR=21-29) in 2021.
- **IDRS**: consists of an annual survey of people who regularly inject illicit drugs. The median age of IDRS participants was 45 (IQR=38-51) in 2021.
- To assess risky levels of drinking the AUDIT-C scale was used, with a cut off point of 5 or more indicating that further assessment is required (hereafter referred to as 'risky drinking'). Binary logistic regression models were performed to assess whether age, gender, sexuality, employment status, education, mental health, past year experience of an overdose (OD), drug treatment engagement, psychological distress and past month criminal activity were associated with engaging in risky drinking. The *p*-value was set at 0.05.

Results

Figure 1. Past 6-month alcohol consumption and AUDIT-C scores of ≥5 among IDRS and EDRS participants, nationally

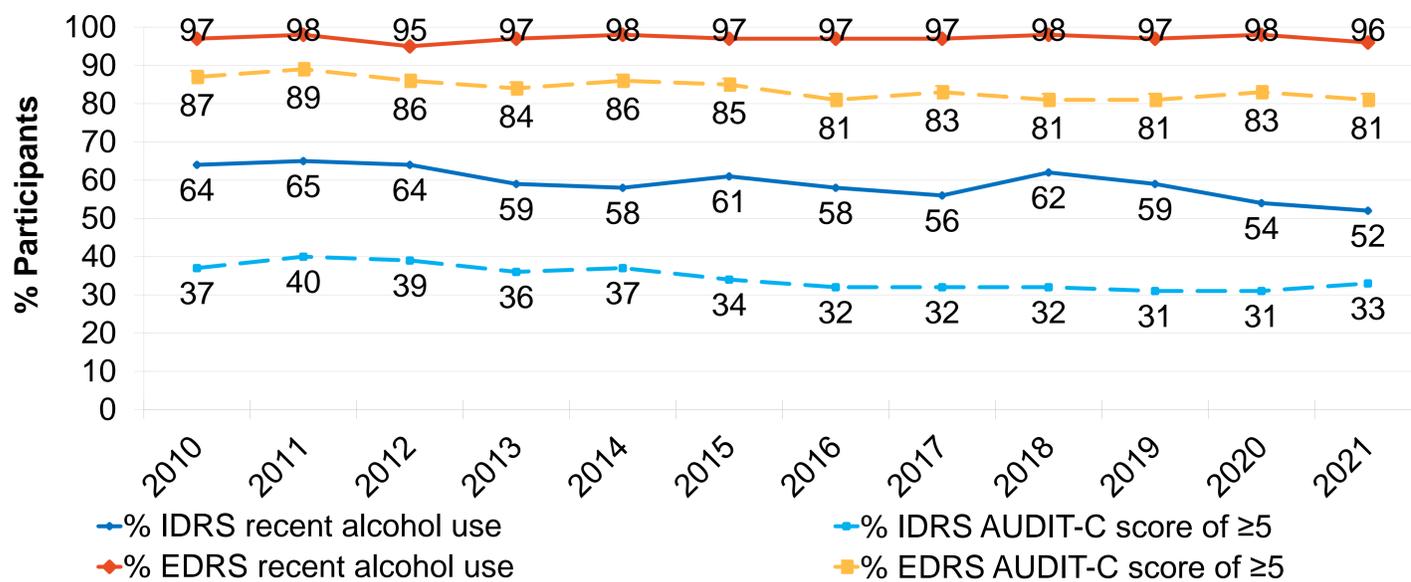
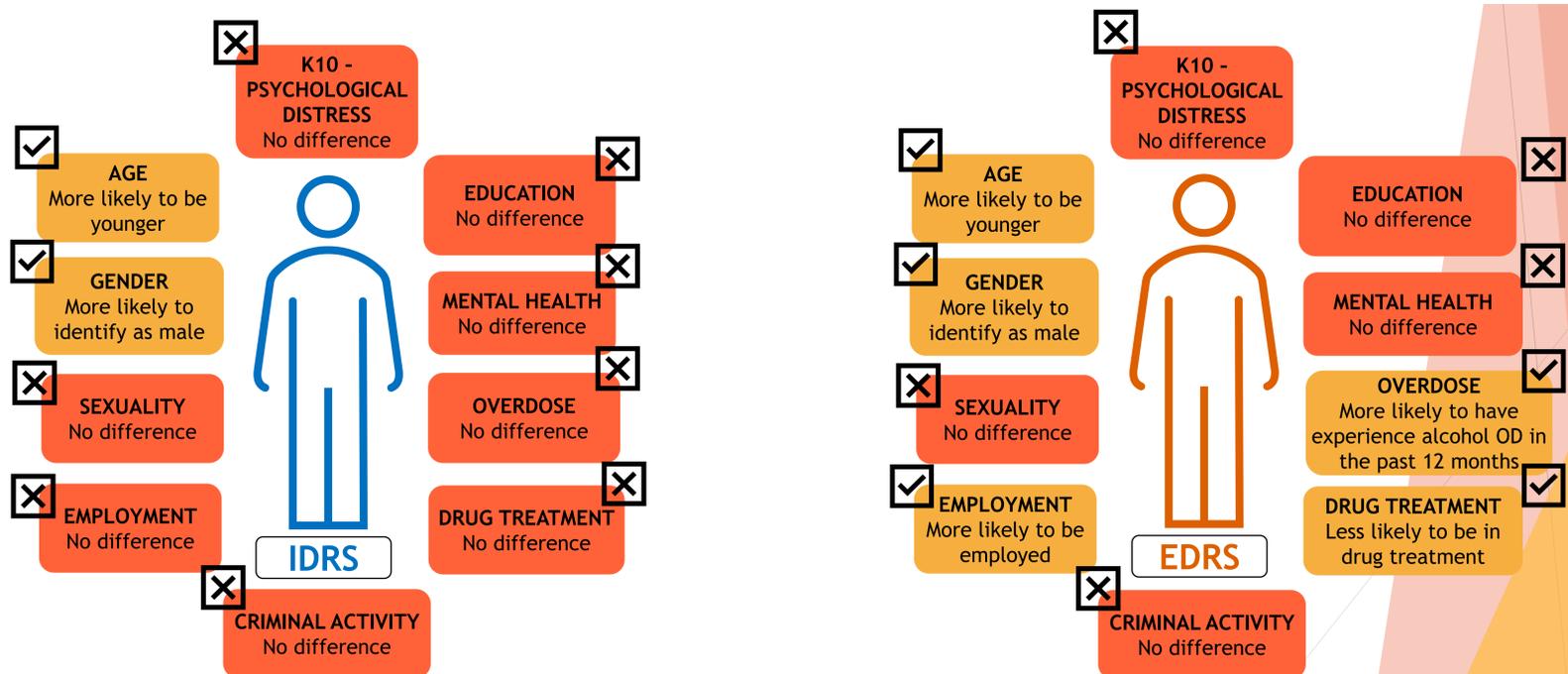


Figure 2. Factors associated with risky drinking among IDRS and EDRS participants, nationally, 2021



Conclusion

- Past 6-month alcohol use has historically been high and stable among EDRS participants whereas a decrease over time was observed among the IDRS sample, from 64% in 2010 to 52% in 2021.
- The majority of EDRS participants reported potential risky drinking across the monitoring period of 2010-2021.
- Slight declines in potential risky drinking were observed in both the EDRS and IDRS samples but has remained stable from 2016 onwards.
- There were more EDRS participants (younger cohort) than IDRS participants (older cohort) that reported risky drinking and drinking generally across our monitoring period.
- Those reporting risky drinking were more likely to be younger and identify as male in both the IDRS and EDRS samples, however risky drinking amongst the EDRS sample was also positively associated with being in employment and having experienced an OD on alcohol, and negatively associated with being in drug treatment.
- To sum, our samples of people who regularly consume illicit drugs have not followed the general population trend of decreases in risky drinking, with risky drinking remaining particularly high among our younger cohort of people who use ecstasy and/or other stimulants.

References

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019: Key Findings.

Acknowledgement

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