

the drinking & teens project

THE UNIVERSITIES OF NEW SOUTH WALES, QUEENSLAND, NEWCASTLE, & TASMANIA AND CURTIN UNIVERSITY

The Drinking and Teens Project has been running for 6 years, making it one of the longest running studies of youth alcohol behaviours in the world. Even though you are all busy with work, school, life...you have still managed to fit in our surveys, for which we are so thankful.

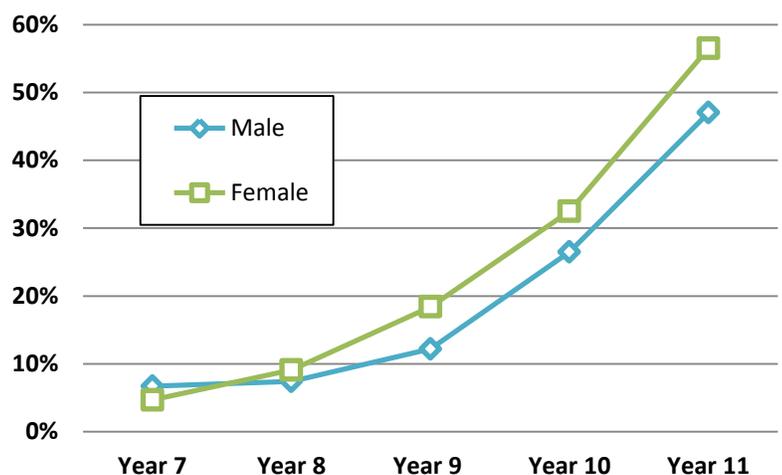
We have been fortunate to receive some additional funding to continue running the study for the next few years. We hope that you will continue with us in this landmark study. Your experiences as you finish school, turn 18 and enter adulthood are vital for us to understand the factors which influence the way that you and your friends use alcohol and how your early experiences with alcohol influence you as adults.

This year we will not be sending your parents a survey. The amount of funding we received was not enough to survey both parents and young people this year, and of course, you are the most important! Please thank them for us for participating in the study to date. They may be interested in the summaries of the papers we have published on the next page.



Rates of alcohol use in high school

The graph below shows the percentage of males and females who reported drinking (at least a standard drink) each year. More females than males have reported drinking alcohol in Years 9, 10 and 11. In Year 11, around 30% of you reported not drinking alcohol at all and most drinkers in the study report drinking monthly or less than monthly. The majority of drinkers reported drinking between 1 and 4 standard drinks on a drinking occasion.



ARE YOU MOVING?

Have you moved recently or changed any of your contact details? If any of your details have changed, please let us know so that future surveys and reimbursements arrive at the right place!

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What have we learned so far?

You have now been involved with the Drinking and Teens Project for 6 years, completing surveys in Years 7 to 12. We have begun analyzing the data and publishing the results in scientific journals and presenting them at conferences. Summaries of some of the papers that we have published so far are below. The papers described here are based on the first 3 surveys that you completed in Years 7-9. We are currently analyzing the data from the later surveys and will be publishing further results in the coming year. If you would like a copy of any of the papers mentioned, please let us know and we will be happy to email you a copy.

Sipping and Early Adolescent Alcohol Consumption

In many other research studies, the consumption of sips of alcohol is not separated from the consumption of whole drinks. In this study when sipping and consuming whole drinks were combined in one category, the results showed that 67.3% of children had drunk alcohol in Year 7. When the two groups were separated, the results showed that 59.6% of children had sipped alcohol before, while only 7.8% had consumed a whole drink. When sipping and drinking are both taken into account, the percentage of children 'drinking' is far lower than first thought. Failing to distinguish between sipping and drinking of full servings of alcoholic beverages has substantial impacts on apparent rates of adolescent alcohol involvement. Much existing research is likely to be overestimating the extent of alcohol use by adolescents by not recognizing that much of this use is limited to sipping.

Adolescent Alcohol Use: Are Sipping and Drinking Distinct?

This study examined a range of factors including demographics, parenting practices and peer influence to determine the difference between adolescents who have only sipped alcohol compared to those who are drinking alcohol in Years 7 or 8. It was found that 'sippers' were more likely to come from families where parents have stricter alcohol-specific rules and more consistent parenting practices, that they have fewer substance-using friends and whose friends disapprove of substance use. This study showed that sipping and drinking (full servings) of alcohol are quite different behaviours which occur in different environments. Grouping 'sippers' and 'drinkers' together in research may have significant effects on the results of epidemiological studies, potentially hiding the true outcomes for drinkers.

Cohort Profile: The Australian Parental Supply of Alcohol Longitudinal Study (APSALS)

This paper describes the design of the study, the reasons the study was conducted and the characteristics of the families involved in the study. The study aims to understand the link between the age that children start drinking and the development of risky drinking behaviours. It is also looking at other factors which might influence drinking behaviours, particularly the influence of parents, family and peers. While rates of alcohol use appeared high in early adolescence (Year 7 = 19.8%, Year 8 = 32.7% and Year 9 = 39.8%), the majority of this consumption was sipping, not consuming whole standard drinks. Significant numbers of adolescents were supplied alcohol by their parents, though again this was mostly just sips of alcohol (Year 7 = 15.3%, Year 8 = 26.0% and Year 9 = 34.6%). The study also showed that the families in this study are largely similar to, or representative of, the general Australian population.

Parents who Supply Sips of Alcohol in Early Adolescence: A Prospective Study of Risk Factors

Parents are one of the main sources of alcohol for adolescents. This paper investigated which factors influence whether parents choose to give alcohol to their adolescents. Parents who perceived that their child's friends were using alcohol were more likely to subsequently supply sips of alcohol to their child – this may be due to a belief that a small supervised quantity of alcohol will protect their child from unsupervised alcohol use with peers. It is also possible that those parents felt that this was a normal behavior for the child's age and in turn, that supply of alcohol is also normal.