

The changing profile of risky alcohol consumption between 2001 and 2019: Women aged 40 and older

PARKER BLAKEY¹, CATHY CLAYDON¹

¹*Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, Australia*

Presenter's email: parker.blakey@aihw.gov.au

Introduction and Aims: At a time when consuming alcohol at risky levels is becoming less prevalent in Australia, some groups—in particular women aged 40 and over—have seen stable or increasing prevalence. The number of alcohol treatment episodes for women aged 40 and over has increased by 134% over a similar timespan.

The aim of this analysis is to explore how attitudes towards alcohol and demographic characteristics have changed as alcohol consumption has increased among women aged 40 and over.

Design and Methods: The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) contains a comprehensive suite of questions about alcohol use, including questions on patterns of use and attitudes towards alcohol. The NDSHS is conducted every three years, most recently in 2019.

Key Findings: Among women aged 40 and over drinking at risky levels, belief in the harmfulness of alcohol decreased and alcohol initiation occurred at an earlier age than cohorts in previous survey waves. Broader population shifts were also reflected among this group: increasing rates of employment, single adult households with dependent children, and diagnoses/treatment of depression and anxiety.

Predictors of risky drinking were similar to the overall population, with the strongest being the number of drinks that a person could have every day without harming their health.

Discussion and Conclusions: The profile of risky drinkers is shifting, both in attitudes towards alcohol and demographics. The results show that one of the best ways to target risky drinking may be to improve awareness of the harms associated with alcohol.

Implications for Practice or Policy: These results support the importance of evidence and education in combating risky alcohol consumption. Knowledge of changing demographics and attitudinal trends can help policy makers and programme developers ensure alcohol messaging is targeted to the people most at risk of alcohol-related harm.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *The collection, collation and reporting of data for the NDSHS is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.*