

Who We Are Helping:

Describing demographic, health, and social factors associated with principal drug of concern (PDOC), alcohol use, and alcohol-related harms, in the Australian alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment-seeking population

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Introduction and Aims: The health and sociodemographic factors associated with alcohol use have been researched on a population level, but there is limited literature addressing the Australian AOD treatment-seeking population. This study aimed to explore this area in order to identify risk factors and impacts of alcohol consumption, which may ultimately inform treatment.

Design and Methods: Australian treatment outcomes profile data on substance use patterns, self-reported health ratings, and sociodemographic factors, was acquired from public AOD services in 6 NSW local health districts (n=14,287). Descriptive tables and graphs were created to present the data. T-tests, linear regressions, and multinomial logistic regressions were conducted to compare demographics, social factors, health ratings, and harms, by PDOC and alcohol consumption.

Results: Clients with alcohol as their PDOC were generally older and had lower health ratings than most other PDOCs. Within the alcohol PDOC, health ratings were not different between abstainers and those drinking $0 < X \leq 40$ standard drinks/28 days, nor those drinking $0 < X \leq 4$ standard drinks/occasion. When consumption exceeded these thresholds however, health ratings declined. Harms such as violence, injecting, and housing stress, increased with alcohol consumption.

Several demographic differences were noted when comparing risk factors for heavy alcohol consumption. For example, caring for <5-year-old children was associated with lower consumption in females but not males. Injecting behaviour and violence were more associated with heavy per-occasion than overall consumption, vice versa for age.

Discussions and Conclusions: The study evidences ≤ 10 drinks/week and ≤ 4 drinks/day drinking guidelines in treatment-seeking groups. Results can also inform tailored screening and treatment by sociodemographic characteristics and alcohol consumption pattern.