

**Prevalence, Determinants and Consequences of Risky Alcohol Consumption of  
Australian University Students**

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### **Statement of Originality**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library\*, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the copyright Act 1968.

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### **Acknowledgement of Collaboration**

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers. I have included as part of this thesis a statement clearly outlining the extent of collaboration, with whom and under what auspices.

I contributed to the development of the research question, the database search, the statistical analysis, the interpretation of results and editing of the manuscript. Professor John Germov, Tara Renae McGee, Toni Schofield, Jo Lindsay, Julie Hepworth and Rose Leontini contributed to the formulation of the methodology and data collection. Professor Billie Bonevski and Dr Ross Wilkinson contributed to the development of the research question, the interpretation of results, and editing of the manuscript.

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## **Structured Abstract**

### **Scope**

The high prevalence of risky alcohol use among university students is well documented, typically yielding prevalence rates of 40% to 80%. Among university students aged between 18 to 25 years risky alcohol use is clinically problematic as it increases the likelihood of alcohol dependence and abuse occurring. Research reports males pose a greater risk as they are typically found to consume alcohol at riskier levels than their female counterparts. Although research is emerging suggesting the gender gap may be diminishing, there is currently no consensus across the literature. Alcohol-related adverse consequences that follow risky alcohol use have been reported as academic difficulties, interpersonal problems, sexual, verbal and physical assault at both the first-hand and second-hand level. Lines of enquiry in determining alcohol-use motives of university students' risky alcohol consumption have identified personal motivations and social motivations as the reasons for excessive use; although there is no consensus concerning which is the most salient.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to measure the prevalence, determinants, consequences and gender differentials of risky alcohol consumption among Australian university students. In addition to measuring prevalence of risky alcohol consumption, we also investigated alcohol dependence among students. We investigated consequences in terms of first-hand and second-hand effects and examined whether students risky alcohol consumption was better predicted by personal or social motives.

### **Methodology**

This research analysed data from the cross-sectional Alcohol and University Life Survey which consists of questions from several key measures that enable collection of



data pertaining to alcohol consumption patterns, alcohol-related harm, and harm minimisation practices. Participants were 3725 Australian university students from five public universities across Australia. Females accounted for roughly 74% ( $n = 2466$ ) of the population sample and males 26% ( $n = 853$ ). Mean age was 22 years ( $SD = 6.8$ ). The three main measures of interest for this research were students' answers pertaining to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), the College Alcohol Survey and the Three-Dimensional Measure of Drinking Motives.

## **Results**

Results revealed 39% of students drink at risky levels and 41% showed incipience of alcohol dependence within a 12 month period; with 4.6% showing daily alcohol dependence. Male students had a mean AUDIT score of 9.4 ( $SD = 6.32$ , 95% CI = 8.98-9.87) indicative of risky alcohol use. Female students had a mean AUDIT score of 7.3 ( $SD = 5.73$ , 95% CI = 7.15-7.62) indicating the absence of, or low, alcohol problems. Males were 1.8 times more likely to engage in risky alcohol consumption compared to females, and an increase of each year in age is associated with a decrease in the odds of consuming alcohol at risky levels by a factor of .975. We identified males were between two to four times as likely to experience first-hand and second-hand adverse alcohol-related consequences. However, females were 1.7 times more likely to experience sexual assault. Moreover, males were twice as likely to consume alcohol at risky levels for personal reasons and up to four times as likely for social reasons in contrast to females.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

The risky alcohol consumption among university students is an issue for health and social concern. The results of this study reinforce the importance for the development of an intervention program for university students in order to reduce harm associated with

risky alcohol consumption. Our results could be used as a starting point for the development of such an intervention. Brief interventions should be tailored according to gender and developed to address ways of coping with psychological distress and or social pressures. Additionally, policy makers could use the results of this study to re-evaluate the alcohol environment on campuses by addressing special promotions regarding pricing, as well as time and quantity of alcohol availability, for example.