

Young people in affluent areas drink more alcohol, study finds

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A La Trobe University study examining Australia's heavy drinkers has found that young people 14- to 24-years-old living in higher socio-economic areas are more likely to drink higher quantities of alcohol than

those from lower socio-economic areas.

Co-lead authors Dr. Amy Pennay and Dr. Sarah Callinan, both from the Center for Alcohol Policy Research at La Trobe University, analyzed national population data from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey captured in 2019. Their results were published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Dr. Pennay said the study revealed fascinating insights into the correlation between [young people](#)'s backgrounds and higher levels of [drinking](#).

"Not only did we find affluence to be a contributing factor, we also found that young people whose [first language](#) is English are likely to drink in greater amounts than people for whom English is their second language," Dr. Pennay said.

"Although drinking has declined significantly for young people over the past 20 years, particularly for underage people, there are still some segments of the youth population drinking at risky levels."

The study divided participants into five groups based on socio-economic characteristics. The group of 14- to 17-year-olds in the highest socio-economic group was seven times more likely to consume more [alcohol](#) over the course of a year than those in the lowest socio-economic group.

Dr. Pennay said it is important that we continue to investigate why some heavy drinking sub-groups are drinking more than others to prevent alcohol-related problems.

"Our findings could have important implications for how we target messaging about safe levels of drinking to particular audiences," Dr. Pennay said.

Researchers also found other important differences among young heavy drinkers related to gender, [cultural background](#), socio-economic status, education, regionality and work industry.

Key findings of the study

- In 2019, young people aged 14–17 consumed an average of 91 drinks per year
- Young people aged 18–24 consumed an average of 452 drinks per year
- Young people aged 14–17 who speak English as first language were 43 times more likely to drink greater quantities of alcohol than those for whom English is [second language](#), but only twice more likely for 18- to 24-year-olds
- For underage young people (14–17 years) those not in school are 14 times more likely to drink greater quantities of alcohol than those in school
- 18- to 24-year-olds living in regional or [remote areas](#) are 1.5 times more likely to drink greater quantities of alcohol than those in [metropolitan areas](#)

The study used data from 1,547 people aged between 14 and 24 years old who took part in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's National Drug Strategy household survey 2019.

More information: Sarah Callinan et al, Who are Australia's young heavy drinkers? a cross-sectional population study, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100020](#)

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