

# Study shows how excessive drinking affects others

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A new study published in *Addiction* shows that around a fifth of adult Australians, from across regional and metropolitan Australia, reported harm from the excessive drinking of people they know.

The [study](#) investigates its impacts on family, friends, and colleagues and showed that women experienced more harm than men when they lived with—or were related to—someone who drinks in excess.

Lead researcher Dr. Anne-Marie Laslett said urgent changes to policies and services were essential to care for especially regional women and children who were harmed by a family member's drinking behaviors.

Almost two-thirds of the survey participants reported having heavy drinkers in their lives and more than 22% reported being negatively affected by the drinking of people they knew well.

Of respondents, 6% reported that they had experienced alcohol-related harm from a household member; 15% from a family member they did not live with; 7% reported such harm from a friend; and 3% from a co-worker in the past year.

"Participants felt the burden of driving such friends and relatives around and caring for them; they reported feeling let down due to them not living up to their roles; and feeling emotionally hurt or neglected," Dr. Laslett said.

Almost 15% of women, compared to almost 8% of men reported being emotionally hurt or neglected; 11.5% of women said they experiencing serious arguments compared to 7.2% of men.

"We also uncovered a range of more serious harm such as verbal abuse and family problems. Some of our participants revealed that they suffered physical or sexual harm; property damage; [financial stress](#); and threats from others' drinking," Dr. Laslett said.

"It was quite concerning to see the number of participants who reported family problems, were called names or insulted, and fell into financial

trouble from others' drinking behaviors.

Other problems that were reported were that the person did not do their share of housework; that they had been put at risk in the car when the person was driving; or that they could not bring friends to their homes.

Dr. Laslett said public health-oriented advocacy organizations such as the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) have been advocating for harm prevention and [policy change](#) for some time, immediate action needs to be taken to provide the services and policy changes we need to tackle this problem appropriately.

"We have seen governments provide funding for [awareness campaigns](#) and programs to reduce [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder](#) (FASD) and in relation to alcohol and driving but other areas also need [government funding](#) if we are to see a reduction in the harm people face from other's drinking habits.

"As well as improved regional services for those impacted by [excessive alcohol consumption](#), we need more gendered services that consider the needs of women; and also more focus on protecting young people affected by others' drinking.

Researchers in the U.K. found that if people cannot change their own drinking, family members affected by other's drinking reported some reduction of stress and strain by implementing psychosocial practices, including guided imagery, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, and anger management. Interventions need to focus on those drinking and the people around them.

Programs tailored for women affected by [intimate partner violence](#) where drinking is involved, have shown some success overseas when

both the drinking and gendered violence is addressed.

**More information:** Anne-Marie Laslett et al, Harm from the drinking of people you know: A range of effects from different relationships, *Addiction* (2024). DOI: [10.1111/add.16509](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.16509)

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