

5 Harm and psychological distress associated with drug use

This chapter presents analysis of alcohol- and illicit drug-related harm along with an examination of Kessler-10 status and selected drug-consumption patterns.

Perpetrators of drug-related harm

Survey participants were asked how many times in the past 12 months they undertook specific potentially harmful activities while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Activities undertaken while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs in the past 12 months: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Influence and activity	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
Alcohol	(per cent)					
Drove a motor vehicle	18.6	16.2	8.3	8.0	13.4	12.1
Operated a boat	2.1	1.7	0.2	0.2	1.1	0.9
Operated hazardous machinery	1.3	1.4	—	0.1	0.7	0.8
Verbally abused someone	7.8	7.4	4.3	4.1	6.0	5.7
Physically abused someone	1.5	1.7	0.6	0.5	1.1	1.1
Caused damage to property	2.5	2.7	0.7	0.7	1.6	1.7
Stole money, goods or property	0.7	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4
Created a public disturbance or nuisance	4.0	4.2	1.7	1.6	2.8	2.9
Went swimming	7.3	7.1	3.2	3.3	5.2	5.2
Went to work	6.7	6.0	2.1	2.1	4.4	4.0
Other drugs						
Drove a motor vehicle	4.8	4.2	2.0	1.7	3.3	2.9
Operated a boat	0.7	0.4	—	—	0.3	0.2
Operated hazardous machinery	0.8	0.7	0.1	—	0.4	0.4
Verbally abused someone	1.1	1.2	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.9
Physically abused someone	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3
Caused damage to property	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4
Stole money, goods or property	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
Created a public disturbance or nuisance	0.8	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.6
Went swimming	2.8	2.2	0.8	0.8	1.8	1.5
Went to work	2.8	2.5	1.0	0.8	1.9	1.6

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

Perpetrators of drug-related harm—alcohol

Overall, the proportion of respondents who reported that they were likely to undertake a potentially harmful activity while under the influence of alcohol remained relatively stable between 2004 and 2007.

- Males were more likely than females to undertake potentially harmful activities while under the influence of alcohol.

- Between 2004 and 2007, the proportion of the population aged 14 years or older who drove a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol decreased from 13.4% to 12.1%.
- Males (16.2%) were more than twice as likely as females (8.0%) to drive while under the influence of alcohol.
- The proportion of persons who verbally abused someone while under the influence of alcohol also declined slightly between 2004 (6.0%) and 2007 (5.7%). Males (7.4%) were almost twice as likely as females (4.1%) to verbally abuse someone while under the influence of alcohol.

Perpetrators of drug-related harm—drugs other than alcohol

The prevalence of activities undertaken while under the influence of drugs other than alcohol was much lower than for alcohol.

- As seen above for alcohol-related harm, males were more likely than females to undertake the specified activities while under the influence of other drugs.
- The activity most likely to be undertaken while under the influence of other drugs in 2007 was driving a motor vehicle, which decreased from 3.3% in 2004 to 2.9% in 2007.
- Males (4.2%) were more than twice as likely as females (1.7%) to drive while under the influence of drugs other than alcohol.
- Approximately 1.5% of persons reported swimming or going to work while under the influence of other drugs in 2007. These findings also represent declines when compared with proportions in 2004 at 1.8% and 1.9% respectively.
- Less than 1% of persons undertook any of the remaining activities while under the influence of other drugs.

Victims of drug-related harm

Australians aged 14 years or older were more than twice as likely to be victims of alcohol-related incidents as victims of incidents related to other drugs (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Proportion of the population aged 14 years or older who have been victims of alcohol or other drug-related incidents, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Influence and activity	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
Alcohol	(per cent)					
Verbal abuse	27.5	29.3	22.5	21.5	24.9	25.4
Physical abuse	5.4	5.9	3.5	3.1	4.4	4.5
Put in fear	10.6	12.0	15.3	14.1	13.0	13.1
Other drugs						
Verbal abuse	10.8	13.0	8.8	9.1	9.8	11.0
Physical abuse	1.8	2.6	1.4	1.4	1.6	2.0
Put in fear	6.0	7.9	8.5	9.0	7.3	8.4

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

Victims of drug-related harm—alcohol

- The proportion of victims of alcohol-related incidents increased between 2004 and 2007 for males but decreased for females.
- Males (29.3%) were more likely than females (21.5%) to be victims of alcohol-related verbal abuse in 2007.
- The proportion of persons subjected to alcohol-related physical abuse remained relatively stable between 2004 and 2007 at approximately 4.5%. Males (5.9%) were more likely than females (3.1%) to be victims of alcohol-related physical abuse.
- The likelihood of being ‘put in fear’ by a person under the influence of alcohol also remained stable between 2004 and 2007, around 13.0%. Females (14.1%) were more likely than males (12.0%) to be ‘put in fear’ by a person under the influence of alcohol.

Victims of drug-related harm—drugs other than alcohol

- In 2007, 11.0% of Australians aged 14 years or over were victims of verbal abuse from a person under the influence of other drugs. This was an increase from the proportion verbally abused in 2004 (9.8%).
- The proportion ‘put in fear’ by a person under the influence of other drugs in 2007 (8.4%) increased compared with the proportion in 2004 (7.3%).
- The proportion physically abused by a person under the influence of other drugs also increased between 2004 (1.6%) and 2007 (2.0%).

Estimates of the number of victims of alcohol-related incidents

There were an estimated 4.4 million victims of alcohol-related verbal abuse and a further 2.3 million Australians aged 14 years or older who were ‘put in fear’ by persons under the influence of alcohol in the 12 months preceding the 2007 survey (Table 5.3). More than three-quarters of a million Australians were physically abused by persons under the influence of alcohol.

Table 5.3: Number of victims of alcohol-related incidents: population aged 14 years or older, by age and sex, Australia, 2007

Incident	Age group						14+
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
	(number)						
	Males						
Verbal abuse	257,600	702,000	519,200	455,900	334,700	227,600	2,491,400
Physical abuse	81,600	203,500	82,100	65,300	49,200	14,800	503,500
Put in fear	121,500	263,300	214,900	199,500	148,100	72,700	1,024,900
	Females						
Verbal abuse	223,200	471,000	357,200	347,600	288,400	186,800	1,878,000
Physical abuse	38,200	101,700	40,700	42,600	27,600	18,300	272,200
Put in fear	176,900	323,300	228,900	245,600	151,900	99,300	1,233,500
	Persons						
Verbal abuse	480,700	1,171,400	875,400	803,300	623,100	414,900	4,368,700
Physical abuse	119,600	305,300	122,400	107,700	76,800	33,100	775,000
Put in fear	298,800	586,900	443,800	445,600	300,100	172,100	2,259,400

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- With the exception of those aged 60 years or older, there were more male than female victims of alcohol-related verbal or physical abuse.
- Conversely, for all ages, more females were ‘put in fear’ by persons under the influence of alcohol than males.

Injuries resulting from drug-related physical abuse

Approximately 5% of all Australians aged 14 years or older suffered an injury (non-self-inflicted) as a result of an alcohol or other drug-related incident in the 12 months preceding the survey (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Most serious injury sustained as a result of alcohol or other drug-related incidents: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Injury	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Total physically abused	6.0	6.6	4.0	3.5	5.0	5.0
Most serious injury						
Bruising, abrasions	35.1	39.1	47.2	39.1	40.0	39.1
Burns, not involving hospital admission	0.5	0.6	0.2	1.4	0.4	0.8
Minor lacerations	12.7	9.5	12.0	11.8	12.4	10.3
Lacerations requiring suturing, but not hospital admission	4.3	4.4	2.1	2.1	3.4	3.6
Fractures not requiring hospital admission	4.9	4.2	5.7	3.8	5.2	4.0
Sufficiently serious to require hospital admission	3.1	4.8	1.9	3.7	2.6	4.4
No physical injury sustained	39.3	37.4	31.0	38.1	35.9	37.7

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- The most frequent serious injury sustained as a result of alcohol or other drug-related physical abuse was bruising or minor abrasions (39.1%). Males and females were equally likely to sustain bruising or abrasions.
- Approximately two in five (37.7%) of those physically abused in the past 12 months sustained no physical injury.
- In 2007, minor lacerations accounted for 10.3% of injuries among victims of physical abuse as a result of alcohol or other drug-related incidents, a decrease from 12.4% in 2004.

Risk of serious injury

In 2007, risk of serious injury varied by age group and type of injury (Table 5.5). Victims of physical abuse aged 60 years or older were most likely to report no physical injury sustained.

Table 5.5: Most serious injury sustained as a result of alcohol or other drug-related physical abuse, by age, Australia, 2007

Injury	Age group						
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	14+
	(per cent)						
Bruising, abrasions	39.5	46.9	34.0	29.8	34.2	29.3	39.1
Burns, not involving hospital admission	1.6	0.5	—	2.7	—	—	0.8
Minor lacerations	10.6	10.8	10.9	8.9	10.0	9.2	10.3
Lacerations requiring suturing, but not hospital admission	0.7	5.9	4.2	3.0	0.9	1.3	3.6
Fractures not requiring hospital admission	4.4	4.1	5.2	5.9	0.6	—	4.0
Sufficiently serious to require hospital admission	3.6	4.0	3.9	6.4	6.3	2.2	4.4
No physical injury sustained	39.6	27.9	41.8	43.3	48.1	58.1	37.7
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Notes

1. Denominator in each age group is the number physically abused.
 2. Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.
- ‘Bruising or abrasions’ was most frequently mentioned as the most serious type of injury resulting from alcohol or other drug-related incidents for all age groups.
 - For the older age groups, ‘no physical injury sustained’ as a result of these incidents was the most common outcome of physical abuse.
 - Approximately one in ten victims of alcohol or other drug-related physical abuse received minor lacerations. This finding was broadly consistent across all age groups.

Psychological distress and patterns of drug use

The Kessler 10 scale of psychological distress (K10) was developed for screening populations on psychological distress. The scale consists of ten questions on non-specific psychological distress and relates to the level of anxiety and depressive symptoms a person may have experienced in the preceding 4-week period.

Table 5.6: Psychological distress^(a) by selected drug-use: proportion of persons aged 18 years or older, Australia, 2007

Drug/use	Level of psychological distress ^(b)			
	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
	(per cent)			
All persons (aged 18+)	69.0	21.1	7.7	2.2
Tobacco smoking status				
Daily	59.4	24.0	11.6	5.1
Other recent smokers ^(c)	58.4	31.5	8.1	2.1
Non-smokers ^(d)	71.5	20.1	6.8	1.5
Risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term				
High risk	56.3	28.5	12.2	3.1
Risky	65.4	23.6	8.3	2.7
Low risk	71.8	19.7	6.7	1.8
Abstainer	68.6	20.5	8.1	2.9
Any illicit ^(e)				
Used in the last month	51.2	28.6	14.6	5.6
Not used in the last month	70.8	20.5	6.9	1.8
Marijuana/cannabis				
Used in the last month ^(f)	51.2	27.2	15.7	5.8
Not used in the last month	70.1	20.8	7.2	1.9
Inhalants				
Used in the last month ^(f)	44.3	32.5	17.5	5.7
Not used in the last month	69.2	21.1	7.6	2.1
Heroin				
Used in the last month ^(f)	20.9	14.2	53.7	11.1
Not used in the last month	69.2	21.1	7.5	2.1
Meth-amphetamine				
Used in the last month ^(f)	43.5	35.3	15.8	5.4
Not used in the last month	69.6	21.0	7.4	2.1
Cocaine				
Used in the last month ^(f)	47.1	30.9	15.3	6.7
Not used in the last month	69.3	21.1	7.5	2.1
Ecstasy				
Used in the last month ^(f)	45.4	34.4	16.3	3.9
Not used in the last month	69.5	20.9	7.5	2.1

(a) Using the Kessler 10 scale of psychological distress.

(b) Low: K10 score 10–15; Moderate: 16–21; High: 22–29; Very high: 30–50.

(c) 'Other recent smokers' are persons who smoke 'Weekly' or 'Less than weekly'.

(d) 'Non-smokers' are 'Ex-smokers' or persons who have 'Never smoked'.

(e) 'Any illicit' includes pain-killers, tranquillisers, steroids, barbiturates, meth/amphetamine, marijuana/cannabis, heroin, methadone or buprenorphine, cocaine, hallucinogens, ecstasy, ketamine, GHB and inhalants.

(f) 'Use in the last month' refers to use of the substance at least once in the previous month.

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- In 2007, approximately seven in ten people aged 18 years or older reported low levels of psychological distress (69.0%). Almost one in ten (9.9%) reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- Daily smokers (16.7%) were more likely than other recent smokers (10.1%) or non-smokers (8.3%) to report high or very high levels of psychological distress.

- High-risk drinkers (15.3%) were twice as likely as low-risk drinkers (8.5%) to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- Risky drinkers and abstainers were equally likely (and more likely than low-risk drinkers) to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- One in five persons who used an illicit drug in the past month reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- Approximately two-thirds of people (64.9%) who used heroin in the past month reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.