



Alcohol trends in Western Australia: Australian school students alcohol and drug survey

Youth drinking lowest in three decades

Students were asked if they had consumed alcohol and how recent their use was (Figure 1).

Rates of use have declined over the past three decades - the proportion of students reporting drinking in the past year has approximately halved (79.7% to 44.3%), in the past month (50.1% to 23.9%) and past week (33.5% to 13.9%).

In the same time period, the proportion of students reporting they have never drunk alcohol has more than tripled, increasing from 9.0% to 31.5%.

How are the data collected?

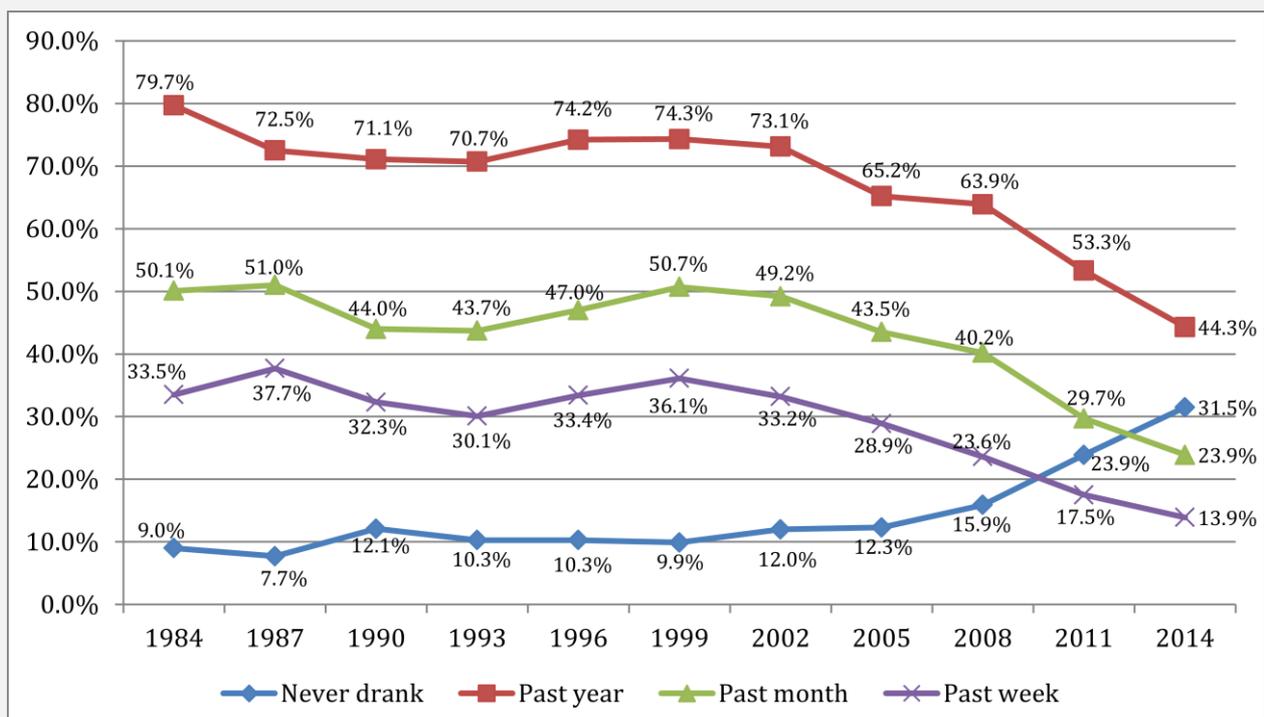
Every three years, school students in Western Australia are surveyed to find out about their drug use in the Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug Survey.

They are asked about alcohol, tobacco, other illicit and licit drug use, how much they use, how they use and their attitudes to alcohol and other drug use.

This survey has been collected since 1984, with additional drug related questions added since 1996.

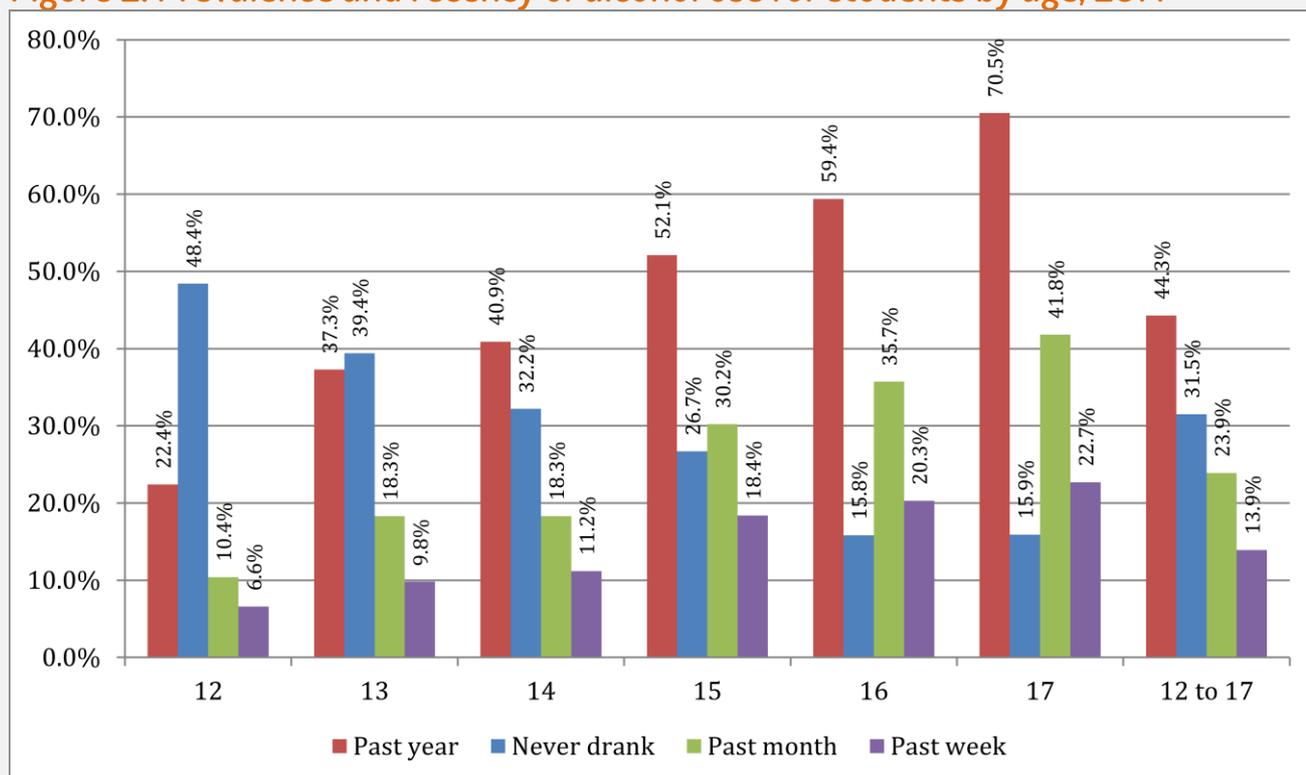
The most recent survey included 3,305 young people aged from 12 to 17 years from 46 randomly selected government, Catholic and independent schools across the State.

Figure 1: Prevalence and recency of alcohol use for students aged 12 to 17 years, 1984 to 2014



More information on these surveys is available at: www.mhc.wa.gov.au.

Figure 2: Prevalence and recency of alcohol use for students by age, 2014



Alcohol use in 2014 is generally higher for males and older students

As Figure 2 shows, the proportion of students who report never drinking steadily decreases with increasing age (48.4% of 12 year old students vs. 15.9% of 17 year old students); with the prevalence of drinking increasing with age across each recency period. For example, the proportion of 17 year old students who report drinking in the past week (22.7%) is triple that of 12 year olds (6.6%).

For all male students (aged 12 to 17 years), 33.4% report never drinking, 45.1% drinking in the past year, 23.6% in the past month and 13.8% in the past week. For all female students, 29.5% report never drinking, 43.5% in the past year, 24.2% in the past month and 13.9% in past last week.

Of those students who drank in the past week, boys drank more standard drinks on average (7.5) than girls.

Risky drinking guidelines

According to the 2009 National Health and Medical Research Council alcohol consumption guidelines not drinking alcohol is the safest option for children and young people under 18 years of age.

This is particularly so for those under 15 years of age.

For adults, drinking at risk of single occasion harm (e.g. injury) is defined as having more than four standard drinks on any one day.

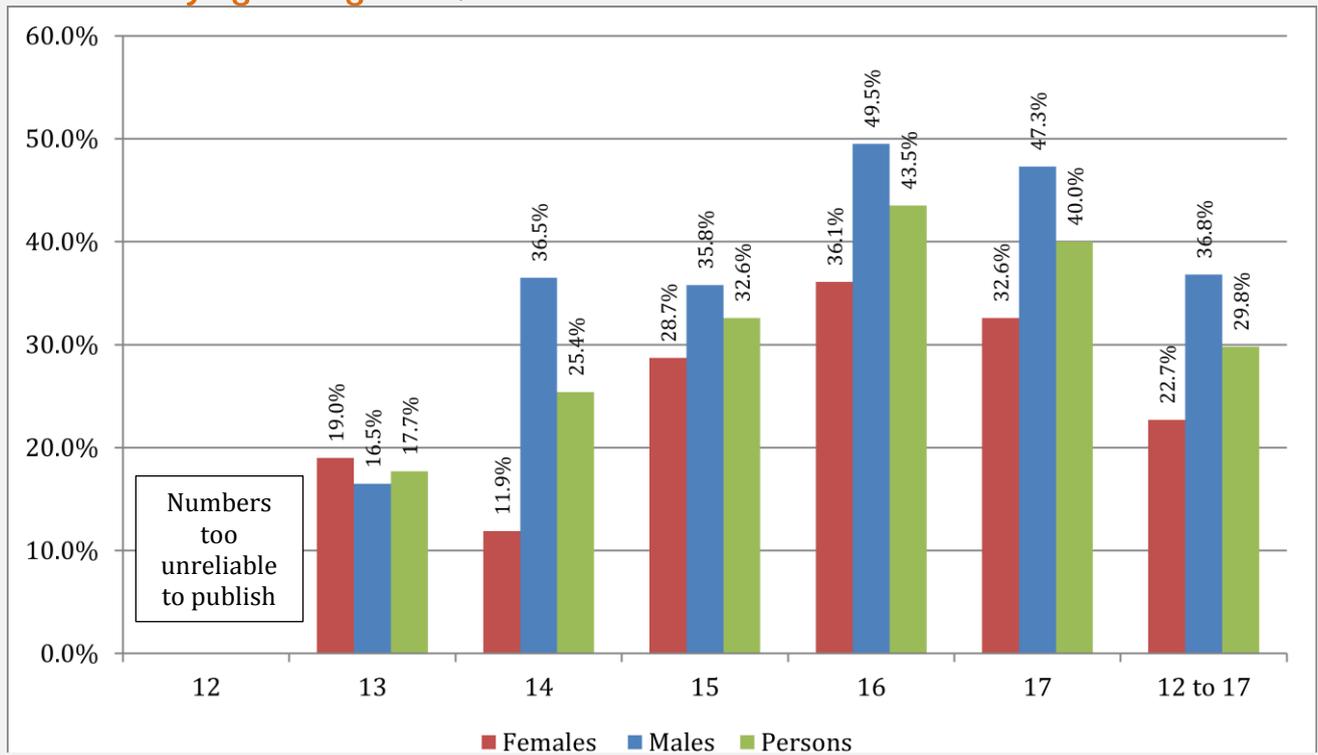
Defining risky drinking for students

Single occasion is the most common type of risky drinking for young people, as most students do not drink regularly. Only those who had used alcohol in the last week were asked about quantity consumed. Therefore, risky drinking for other recency periods such as past month or year cannot be calculated. Note, single occasion risk in the following analysis is defined using adult guidelines, though not drinking is the safest option for young people.

Risky drinking in 2014

Of those students who drank in the past week (13.9%), one in three (29.8%) drank at risk of single occasion harm (see Figure 3) although this was substantially reduced compared to 2011 (36.2%). For boys who drank in the past week (13.8%) more than one-third (36.8%) drank at a risky level. Of girls who drank in the past week (13.9%) almost one-quarter (22.7%) drank at risky levels.

Figure 3: Prevalence of single occasion risky drinking for students who drank in the last week by age and gender, 2014

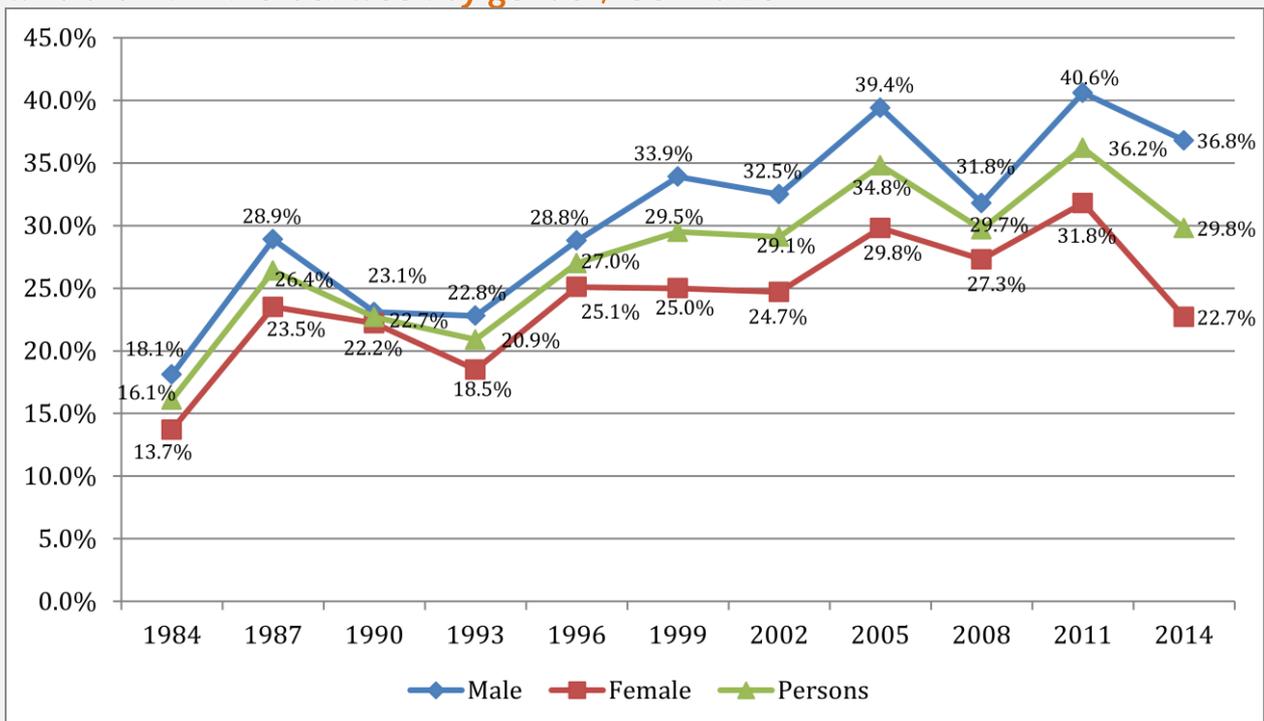


An upward trend in risky drinking but substantial reductions from 2011

As Figure 4 shows, there has been an increase in the proportion of students drinking at risky levels for single occasion harm from 1984 (16.1%) to 2014 (29.8%).

However, the proportion of students drinking at single occasion risk in 2014 (29.8%) was substantially lower than that reported in 2011 (36.2%).

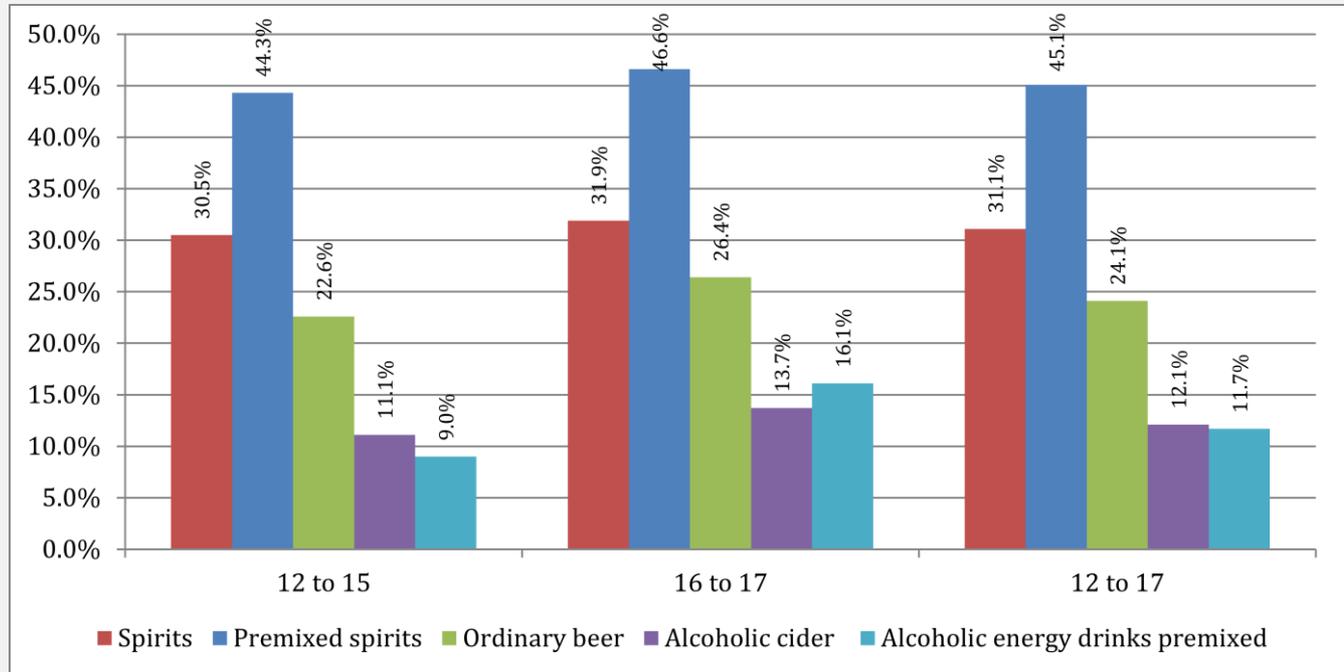
Figure 4: Trends in single occasion risky drinking for students aged 12 to 17 years who drank in the last week by gender, 1984 to 2014



Spirits and premixed spirits are preferred

Students who drank in the past week were asked what drink they usually have (but could select more than one). Figure 5 shows the top five responses based on 12 to 17 year old preferences. Most students usually drink premixed spirits (45.1%) and spirits (31.1%). Premixed alcoholic energy drinks was a new response option in 2014, with 11.7% of students indicating they usually drink these.

Figure 5: Top 5 usual alcoholic drinks (based on responses for 12 to 17 years olds) for students who drank in the last week, 2014



Friends and parents are the most common sources of alcohol

Students who drank in the past week were asked the source of their last alcoholic drink (but could select more than one). Figure 6 shows the top five responses based on 12 to 17 year old sources. One in three sourced alcohol from their friends (30.5%) and parents (30.4%) and almost one in ten from a sibling (8.7%).

Figure 6: Top 5 sources of last alcoholic drink (based on responses for 12 to 17 year olds) for students who drank in the last week, 2014

