

Binge drinking and risk of depression in young Australian women

Excessive alcohol consumption and mental health problems are major public health issues and have wide reaching effects on families and society.

Both are prevalent among young people in Australia and the relationship between them is extremely complex.

Our research

Five distinct patterns of binge drinking (five or more drinks on one occasion) were identified in young women aged 16 to 21:

- 24 per cent very infrequent – mostly never (Class 1)
- 17 per cent fluctuating infrequent - usually rare (Class 2)
- 17 per cent frequent - mostly once a month (Class 3)
- 26 per cent very frequent—usually once a week (Class 4)
- 16 per cent extremely frequent - usually more than once a week (Class 5).



Extremely frequent binge drinking and depression

Women in the extremely frequent category were at elevated risk of depressive symptoms in both the short-term (one to six years), and the long-term (ten to fifteen years).

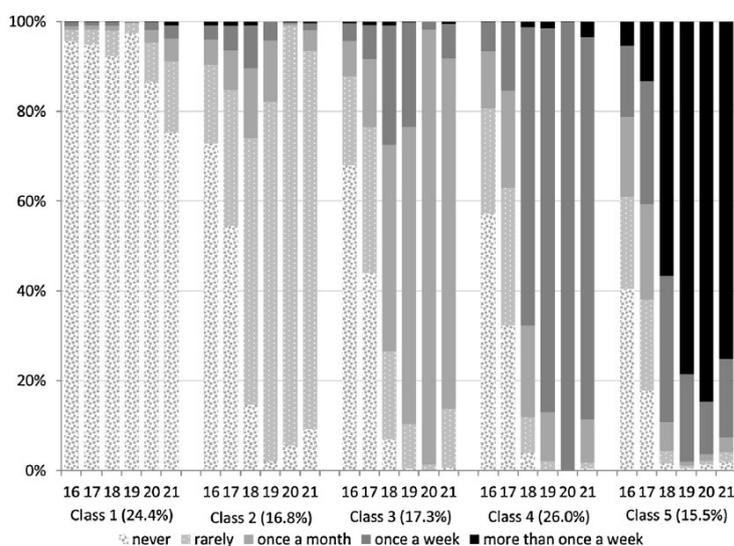
These findings suggest that there is a lasting impact of heavy drinking on mental health and that there is a threshold where the risk of depression not only increases but is sustained over time.

Further research is needed to investigate whether poor mental health leads to binge drinking, or whether there could be a two-way relationship.

Given the high rates of depression among young women, more consideration should be given to prevention strategies to decrease the frequency of binge drinking in adolescence.

Publication

Jennifer Powers, Luke Duffy, Lucy Burns, Deborah Loxton. Binge drinking and subsequent depressive symptoms in young women in Australia. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*: doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2016.01.019



The research was based on data reported by more than 8000 women from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH).