# Beyond the drinker: Longitudinal patterns in alcohol's harm to others

## Researchers

1. Anne-Marie Laslett: Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point, Eastern Health; Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne.
2. Sarah Callinan: Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point, Eastern Health; Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University.
3. Janette Mugavin: Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University.
4. Heng (Jason) Jiang: Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point, Eastern Health; Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University.
5. Michael Livingston: Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point, Eastern Health; Drug Policy Modelling Program, University of New South Wales.
6. Robin Room: Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point, Eastern Health; Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne; Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs, Stockholm University

## Summary

In 2008, the first comprehensive study of the harms from alcohol experienced by people other than the drinker was undertaken in Australia. The study, published in 2010, involved a population survey (the 2008 HTO Survey) and analysis of data from a range of government agencies (e.g. police, welfare, justice).

In 2011, participants in the original 2008 HTO Survey were re-contacted to participate in a repeat survey (the 2011 HTO Survey), closely following the format of the questionnaire used in 2008 and focusing on adverse consequences to the respondent (or the respondent’s child) from the drinking of family, friends, co-workers and strangers.

By revisiting a sub-sample of those surveyed in 2008, the 2011 HTO Survey allowed for analysis of patterns of stability and change in harm from others’ drinking over time, and the factors predicting these patterns. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What percentage of respondents in the 2011 follow-up sample were affected by others’ drinking?
2. How did the 2011 HTO Survey findings compare with those of the 2008 HTO Survey?
3. Does a respondent’s status in 2008, or changes in his/her circumstances from 2008 to 2011, predict harm from others’ drinking in 2011?
4. What factors predict harm from others’ drinking in 2011?
5. What predicts who is newly harmed among those who weren’t previously?
6. Among those harmed in 2008, what predicts who will not be harmed again in 2011?
7. What factors predict persistent harm from others’ drinking, in comparison to persistent absence of such harm?
8. How do changes in the number of drinkers in respondents’ lives and changing patterns of alcohol’s harm to others affect respondents’ quality of life and wellbeing?
9. For what proportion of the sample do problems associated with others’ drinking result in use of services?
10. What predicts contact with emergency and health-related services because of others’ drinking in 2011?

## Outcomes

Key findings from *Beyond the drinker* included that:

* In 2008 the first comprehensive study of the harms from alcohol experienced by people other than the drinker was undertaken in Australia.
* In 2011, 1,106 people involved in the original study were re-contacted to participate in a repeat survey to determine the stability and change in harm from others’ drinking over time.
* Sixty-two per cent of respondents had experienced harm from others’ drinking in at least one or both surveys.
* Personal experience of harm (or lack of harm) did not change for the majority (70 per cent) of respondents between 2008 and 2011, with almost a third of respondents harmed by others’ drinking in both years (32 per cent) and 38 per cent not harmed in either year.
* Past experience of harm was a strong predictor of harm, with 65 per cent of respondents experiencing harm in 2008 reporting this again in 2011.
* The number of heavy drinkers in respondents’ households and among other relatives and intimate partners in 2008 was a strong predictor of respondents’ experience of alcohol-related harm in 2011.
* For each additional heavy drinker within their households, respondents were almost six times more likely to experience persistent harm from known problematic drinkers in their lives.
* To reduce the significant social problem of alcohol’s harm to others, policy responses at community, state and national levels are needed to diminish the prevalence of heavy drinking in the population.

## Recommendations

The number of heavy drinkers in respondents’ social circles is a strong predictor of the harm they will experience from others’ drinking. The demographics of the person being harmed, or even how much they themselves drink, were not strong predictors of experiencing harms from others’ drinking in analyses of the 2008 and 2011 HTO Survey data.

This suggests that, in order to reduce the significant social problem of alcohol’s harm to others, policy responses at community, state and national levels are needed to diminish the prevalence of heavy drinking in the population. This could, in turn, reduce the number of people being harmed by the drinking of others.

[view the summary](/wp-content/uploads/02-BEYOND-THE-DRINKER-SUMMARY-web.pdf)

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/02-BEYOND-THE-DRINKER-FULL-REPORT-web.pdf)

The correct citation for this report is: Laslett, AM., Callinan, S., Mugavin, J., Jiang, H., Livingston, M., & Room, R. (2015). *Beyond the drinker: Longitudinal patterns in alcohol's harm to others.* Canberra: Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

## Related content

[The range and magnitude of alcohol's harm to others (2010)](https://fare.org.au/the-range-and-magnitude-of-alcohols-harm-to-others/)

[The hidden harm: Alcohol’s impact on children and families (2015)](https://fare.org.au/the-hidden-harm-alcohols-impact-on-children-and-families/)