# Young women’s drinking experiences in public drinking venues

## Researchers

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## Summary

Research on women’s drinking behaviour is limited. Evidence shows women are at higher risk than men for detrimental physical, medical, social and psychological effects of at-risk alcohol consumption. However, there is comparatively little research examining drinking by young women. There is a need to utilise female perspectives in examining alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems in order to reflect a more balanced and competent version of drinking in today’s culture.

This research collected data using observations and qualitative interviews. Observations were carried out across of variety of settings and contexts to examine the influence of different social environments on target behaviours. Sampled locations included three inner Brisbane city licensed venues, various locations around the Fortitude Valley area (Brisbane), Eagle Farm Racecourse and Surfers Paradise during Schoolies celebrations.

Observations were chosen as part of the methodology because they facilitate not only the examination of young female drinking behaviours, but also the more subtle interactions between social norms and controls, drinking context and friendship group dynamics and behaviour.

In addition to the observations, 40 female university students were interviewed either in focus groups (n=17) or by telephone (n=23).

## Outcomes

Qualitative analysis of the data from both the observations and interviews revealed three  areas that influenced  young women’s drinking behaviours, being:

1. The reasons influencing whether and how much to drink – including inexperience with alcohol, associating alcohol with fun and relaxation, practical barriers such as work or study or being the designated driver, and social and cultural influences.
2. Women’s understanding and management of risks – primarily short-terms risks of alcohol use (e.g. social embarrassment, injury or assault) and risk management strategies such as limiting intoxication levels, protection of a friendship group, and managing environmental threats.
3. Prevention and management of excessive intoxication – through information campaigns, intervention by trusted others (including friends, police and volunteers) and acceptance when help was offered.

Young women’s drinking behaviour was most strongly influenced by their immediate social group. When the friendship group employed a ‘culture of care’, it could mitigate intoxication-related vulnerability in three ways:

* through advice from members to slow alcohol consumption;
* by one member taking a maternal, caring role and overseeing the safety of others; and
* maintaining contact to ensure no one was separated from the group.

## Recommendations

The researchers recommended that:

* the safety behaviours used by young women are incorporated into safety information regarding alcohol consumption;
* campaigns are developed and disseminated to raise awareness among young women regarding safe transportation;
* the alcohol-related risk and protective behaviours uncovered in this study that are unique to young women are utilised in school and community based programs;
* any campaigns designed to influence young women’s drinking take a holistic approach and incorporate both risk and protective strategies;
* best practice initiatives to manage intoxication that have been identified in this research are endorsed;
* further investigations into the perception and awareness of current services is conducted; and
* further research is conducted, focusing on the impact of social influences on young women’s drinking.

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-Young-Womens-Drinking-Experiences-in-Public-Drinking-Venues.pdf)