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The background of the cover is a dynamic, abstract graphic. It features a large, curved, red shape resembling a wave or a splash at the bottom right. Above this, there is a large, white, curved shape that looks like a wave or a splash at the top left. Between these two main shapes, there is a central area where the red and white colors mix and overlap. The overall effect is one of motion and energy. The title and subtitle are positioned over this abstract background.

'Just because it's really, really cheap'

An examination of Victorian young
adults' alcohol product choices

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About the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol.

Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. More than 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised - making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.

FARE is guided by the World Health Organisation's *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol* (2010, Geneva: World Health Organization) for stopping alcohol harms through population-based strategies, problem directed policies, and direct interventions. If you would like to contribute to FARE's important work, call us on (02) 6122 8600 or email info@fare.org.au.

About the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research

The Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR), is an innovative, world-renowned research facility at the forefront of informed alcohol policy development. A joint undertaking of FARE, Turning Point, the Victorian Government, and the University of Melbourne, CAPR is unique in Australia's research landscape in that its sole focus is on building the evidence base on alcohol issues.

Based in Melbourne, CAPR is led by Professor Robin Room, who has over 40 years' experience in investigating alcohol and other drugs issues, is a frequent adviser to the World Health Organization, and a recipient of many research awards, including most recently the Prime Minister's award for Excellence in Drug and Alcohol Endeavours.

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Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	6
Methods	8
Study 1: The Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey (VYADS)	8
Study 2: Interviews with Victorian Young Adult Drinkers	8
Results	10
What are young adults drinking?	10
Why are young adults making these drink choices?	12
Cost	12
Enhancing or reducing intoxication	12
Avoiding feeling sick	13
Suiting the occasion	13
What do young adults drink when they want to get drunk?	14
Discussion	18
Conclusion	19
References	20



Executive summary

This study examined the alcohol drinking preferences of young adults in Victoria who consumed alcohol at risky levels, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, and found that their alcohol product choices were heavily influenced by factors such as cost, alcoholic content, and their intention to become intoxicated.

Previous research has been undertaken into what heavy drinkers usually drink, but little is known about the drink types that heavy drinkers turn to when they are consciously planning on getting drunk. This report will address two aims. The first is to examine what young people drink, particularly those who participate in high-risk drinking. The second is to consider what young people drink when they intend to get drunk, and whether this is different to what high-risk drinkers generally drink across all occasions.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address these aims.

Survey data was used to identify the population level links between drink choices and drinking patterns in Victorian young adults aged 18-24 years. Survey data was taken from 3,528 responses received from 18-24 year olds who completed the 2009 Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey (VYADS).

This is complemented by the insights of qualitative data from 60 interviews conducted in Melbourne during 2012 with young adults of the same age range. This data is used to illustrate and explain the link between drink choice and both high-risk drinking and intention to get drunk.

The study found that on average each participant selected 3.18 drink types that they “usually” consume. High-risk drinkers, defined as those who consume 11 or more standard drinks on one occasion at least once a month, selected an average of 3.51 drink types, compared to the 2.81 types reported by other drinkers ($F(1,3213) = 114.72, p < .001$).

The study found that drink choice among young Victorians is gendered. The largest gender divide can be found in two of the more popular drinks: regular strength beer, which was selected by approximately three quarters of males (76%), and bottled wine, which was selected by over half of the female participants (57%). Spirits (67% & 71%) and RTDs (59% & 69%) were selected by more than half of both males and females respectively.

High risk drinkers were more likely than non-high risk drinkers to consume regular strength beer, cask wine, bottled spirits and RTDs regardless of gender. The qualitative interviews revealed that the main reasons for choosing alcoholic drinks were cost, enhancing or reducing intoxication, avoiding feeling sick and to suit the occasion.

When examining young people who consumed alcohol to get drunk, for all drink types there were more males than females consuming that type of alcohol with the intention of getting drunk. In particular, males who drink cask wine stood out, as 37% of them stated that they intend to get drunk often or always. More than a quarter of male home brew (31%), cider (26%), RTDs (26%) and spirits (25%) drinkers also stated this. Females were less likely to state that they intended to get drunk all the time or often when drinking, but more than 20% of those who drank cask wine (24%), home brew (22%), RTDs (20%) and spirits (20%) did so.



It is clear that while spirits and RTDs are relatively more popular than other drink types among all three of the drinker types, they are also the most popular with drinkers who often intend to get drunk. Furthermore, cask wine and home brew beer, while disproportionately popular among those who intend to get drunk, are still not common choices when compared to more popular drink choices.

The qualitative interviews revealed that young people who consume alcohol with the intention of getting drunk make their drink choices based on the drinks which offer high alcohol content for a relatively low cost; drinks they enjoy consuming at any time; and spirits to achieve rapid intoxication.

Young people explicitly recognise the difference between off- and on-license alcohol prices and consequently choose to drink cheaper alcohol at home before heading out. Research participants also frequently spoke about drinking shots at licensed venues when they wanted to get drunk quickly. Many participants in interviews nominated spirits as the drink they turned to when they wanted to get drunk.



Introduction

Young adults are more likely than other age cohorts to engage in heavy episodic drinking (1) and are experiencing increasing numbers of negative acute consequences from drinking (2). Certain drink types such as beer or spirits are commonly associated with increased harm, but there is little research on what young people drink when intending to get drunk, and less still within a Victorian context.

This report uses quantitative and qualitative data sources to identify drink choices made by young adults aged 18-24 years in Victoria, Australia, and the alcoholic beverages most associated with drinking to intoxication.

Studies on drink choice tend to focus on the demographic profiles, drinking patterns and negative consequences from drinking for those who regularly consume different types of alcohol. Research into drink choice frequently concurs with popular opinion; for instance, the stereotypes that wine is most likely to be consumed by older, well-educated females and beer by males have been confirmed by researchers (3).

Drink choice in Melbourne venues appears to be gendered, with beer being more popular with men, wine with women, and spirits being equally popular with both genders (4). Drink choice also varies by location, with Ready To Drink (RTD) spirits, (also known as premixed drinks and alcopops) being more popular in growth areas, compared to those located in the inner city (5).

People seem to settle into their drink preferences as they get older, with younger people more likely to consume more varieties of drink types. In one study, participants aged under 29 years selected a mean of three drink types (6). A steady decrease in the number of drink types with age was found in participants aged from 30 to 70 years, with septuagenarians consuming a mean of two drink types.

The price of alcohol is particularly important for young people when choosing what they want to drink. A Scottish study on youth drinking found that cheap alcohol was considered to be an important part of a good night out (7). Furthermore, while the same paper found that cheap drink promotions would not affect a young person's choice of venue, at least not that they noticed, it would make a difference to their drink choice once they were there.

A study conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) found that drinkers aged 18-24 years were more likely to be influenced by price and drink promotions than older drinkers (8).

The location of consumption may also impact on the risk of harm. For example, there is a link between beer consumption and adverse consequences from drinking that may in part be due to the affordability of beer on licensed premises.

For instance, in Switzerland it was suggested that beer is less likely to be consumed at home than drinks like wine, possibly resulting in a decreased chance of adverse consequences for wine drinkers (9) as short term harms appear more likely to occur on licensed premises (10).

There has been a large amount of scrutiny of young people and RTD consumption (11). One issue is whether these drinks are designed and marketed to attract young people (12) and, indeed, recent research from the United States (US) has found that such drinks are very popular among underage drinkers (13).



But there have been mixed results when examining the link between RTDs and risky drinking in youth. In a study on drink choice and drinking motives involving an adolescent Italian sample, those who drank to conform with friends were less likely to drink high levels of beer and those who did drink as experimentation or as a means of transgression were more likely to drink high levels of RTDs (14).

A carefully controlled study of German adolescents found no specific “RTDs effect” when predicting negative consequences (15).

This report uses both qualitative and quantitative data to highlight the drink types of choice for high risk drinking Victorian youth and then investigates the reasons for these choices.



Methods

Study 1: The Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey (VYADS)

The Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey (VYADS) was administered to a representative population sample between September and November of 2009. The survey interviewed 5,001 young people aged between 16 and 24 years. Survey participants were all living in the State of Victoria, with 72.8% of them residing in metropolitan Melbourne. Household landlines were called using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and where there was more than one eligible potential respondent in the household, the 16 to 24 year old with the most recent birthday was selected. The cooperation rate for the survey was 71% (16).

When the sample was compared to the information on 16 to 24 year olds in Victoria from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) there were some discrepancies, most notably an under-representation of males and participants aged between 22 and 24 years, and an over-representation of rural participants. Data was weighted in order to take into consideration the ABS estimates on age, sex and rural status. All results presented in this report from the VYADS data are weighted.

To ensure all participants were of age to legally purchase alcohol, only those aged 18-24 years were included in this study. The present analysis is thus based on 3,582 participants, with a mean age of 20.3 years ($SD = 1.90$), of whom 50.6% are female. In this paper we analyse VYADS variables concerning drink choice, the prevalence of pre-drinking and risky drinking.

Please note that many of these questions (e.g., how often when drinking you intend to get drunk) had five response options, but in the current study these were reduced to three for ease of interpretation. The response '*never*' remains as '*never*', '*a few times*' or '*sometimes*' is listed as '*sometimes*' and '*most of the time*' or '*every time*' is listed as '*regularly*'. Descriptive statistics have been used to demonstrate the prevalence of different drink choices among participants who consume alcohol at different levels and with different motives.

Study 2: Interviews with Victorian Young Adult Drinkers

To understand the reasons for the relationships identified in the survey we analysed qualitative interviews with 60 participants conducted in 2012 with 18-24 year olds. The mean age of participants was 20.8 years, with equal numbers of males and females ($SD = 2.1$). The age, gender profiles and drinking patterns of interview participants were similar to those who completed the VYADS. For example, 47.4% of the VYADS sample reported that they drank 11 or more standard drinks in a session more than once a month, compared to 48.3% (29 of 60) of the interview sample.

The majority of interview participants (44) were studying either full or part-time. Two-thirds were employed full or part-time and six participants were neither studying nor working. The sample was ethnically diverse, with just under a third (17) of participants born outside Australia, and 19 speaking another language at home in addition to English. All participants had consumed at least one drink within six months prior to interview.



Participants were recruited through local tertiary institutions and agencies and by word of mouth. Interviews were conducted by three experienced researchers using a detailed theme sheet. Participants were offered the choice of completing interviews on their own, or with one or two friends. At the conclusion of the interviews a brief survey of drinking patterns was administered.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically (17) and, for the purpose of this paper, coded according to reasons given by participants for their alcohol product choice and their drink preference when wanting to become intoxicated.

When analysing both the survey and interview data on these participants, high-risk drinking was defined as consuming 11 or more standard drinks in a single session on at least a monthly basis during the previous year. Drinking eleven or more standard drinks in a session has been identified in other research as denoting high-risk drinking (18). Taylor et al.'s (19) meta-analysis of the dose-response relationship of alcohol to injury shows a smooth risk curve where acute harms increase with each standard drink consumed. They found that consuming 100 grams of alcohol (equivalent to 10 Australian standard drinks) is associated with around ten times the risk of acute non-motor vehicle-related injury (e.g. assault, falls or intoxication-related medical events) in the three hours after drinking concludes. Therefore high-risk drinkers in this paper are defined as those who drink 11 or more standard drinks at least once a month.

Where we use a quote from an interviewee we identify whether this person drank at this high-risk level (HRL) at least monthly over the previous year. Names of participants in this report have been changed.

Results

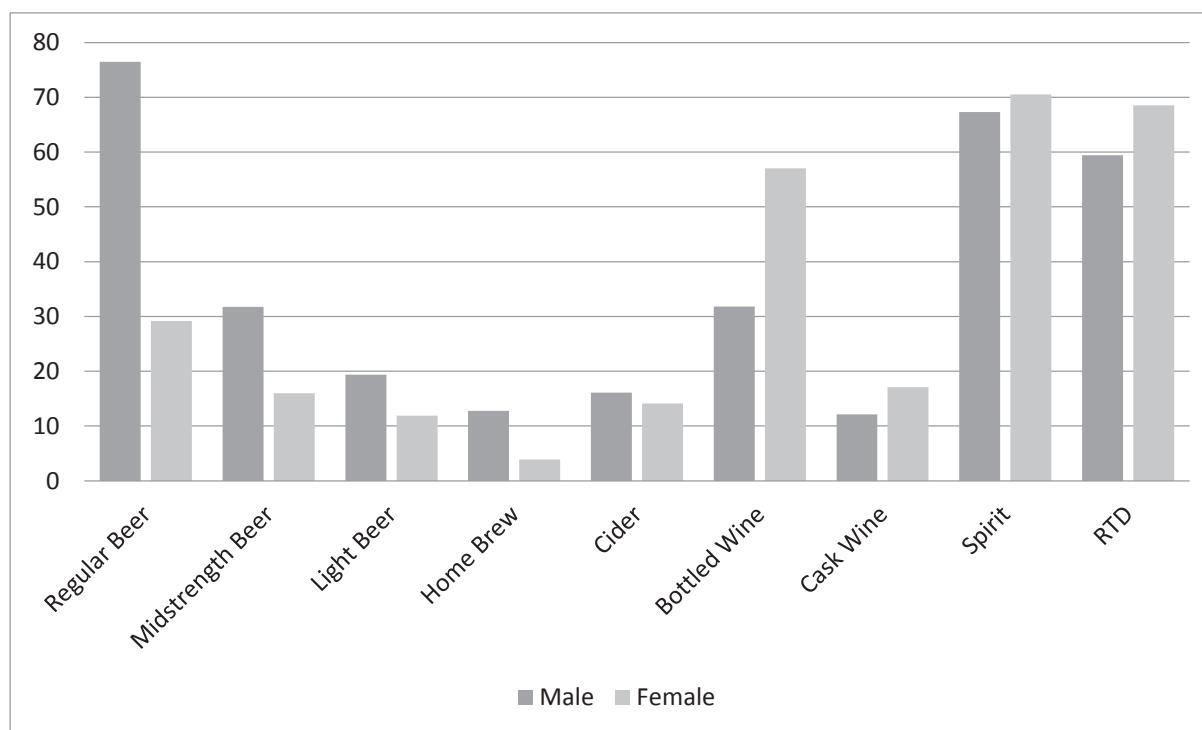
What are young adults drinking?

As noted in the methods section of this paper, participants in the population survey were asked to select all drinks that they “usually” consumed and on average each participant selected 3.18 drink types. Males listed an average of 3.38 drink types, significantly more than women with 2.98 types ($F(1,3213)=36.76, p<.001$). Furthermore, high risk drinkers selected an average of 3.51 drink types, compared to 2.81 types reported by other drinkers ($F(1,3213) = 114.72, p<.001$).

Because the average number of drinks chosen is more than one, the percentage of participants endorsing a particular drink type will total more than 100. Furthermore, because high risk drinkers selected more drink types than non-high risk drinkers, the total percentage of respondents choosing all drink types will be higher for this group than among those who do not drink at high risk levels.

In Figure 1, the drink choices of participants are shown by gender. The largest gender divide can be found in two of the more popular drinks: regular strength beer, which was selected by approximately three quarters of males (76%), and bottled wine, which was selected by over half of the female participants (57%). Spirits (67% & 71%) and RTDs (59% & 69%) were also very popular in this age group; with these types selected by more than half of both males and females respectively.

Figure: 1 - Percentage of male and female participants who state they consume each drink type the most or usually.



The next Figure 2 shows the percentage of high and low risk male and female drinkers who regularly consumed each drink type. High risk drinkers were more likely than non-high risk drinkers to consume regular strength beer, cask wine, bottled spirits and RTDs, regardless of gender. Males who consume alcohol at high risk levels are significantly less likely to drink light beer and significantly more likely to drink home brew than those who do not.

Figure: 2 - Percentage of males and females who state that they consume each drink type regularly, by high risk drinking status

Drink Choice	Male			Female			Total
	High Risk	Not High Risk	Total	High Risk	Not High Risk	Total	
Regular Beer	83.68	63.45 ^a	76.46	37.91	23.14 ^a	29.18	53.52
Midstrength Beer	32.2	30.98	31.77	19.16	13.79 ^a	15.99 ^b	24.11
Light Beer	17.39	22.87 ^a	19.35	12.13	11.69	11.87 ^b	15.72
Home Brew	16.07	6.75 ^a	12.75	5.41	2.88	3.92 ^b	8.47
Cider	16.74	14.92	16.09	15.21	13.37	14.12	15.14
Bottled Wine	32.11	31.32	31.83	57.56	56.64	57.01 ^b	44.05
Cask Wine	14.58	7.77 ^a	12.15	22.04	13.69 ^a	17.11 ^b	14.55
Spirit	73.68	55.9 ^a	67.33	78.52	65.02 ^a	70.54	68.89
RTD	66.03	47.55 ^a	59.44	75.09	63.96 ^a	68.51 ^b	63.84
Unweighted n	1,034	560	1,594	677	955	1,632	3,226

^asignificant difference in the endorsement of that drink type between high risk and not high risk drinkers

^bsignificant difference in the popularity of each drink type by gender



Why are young adults making these drink choices?

While the survey data provides a valuable overview of drink choice, it provides no insight into why young people choose the drinks they do. Qualitative data from interviews with young people gave a range of reasons for their drink choices.

Although participants' drinking choices reflected gendered patterns evident in VYADS data, they did not identify their gender as a reason for alcohol preferences, perhaps because gendered choices are sufficiently naturalised to be unapparent to many people.

The main reasons given by participants for their drink of choice were:

- Cost;
- Enhancing or reducing intoxication;
- Avoiding feeling sick; and
- To suit the occasion.

Cost

Many 18-24 year olds are on restricted budgets and need to be mindful of choosing cheaper products, as Clara explained:

If I had lots of money I would choose my alcohol based on I guess cool standards and fair trade. But I think being a student I think price really is one of the biggest factors. (Clara, HRL)

Because of the price differential between on- and off-premise alcohol, some participants, including Polly (who did not drink at our defined high risk level) 'pre-loaded' the cheapest drinks they could buy at licensed premises, while choosing a wider range of alcohol products for drinking at home:

The price I guess, like with wine just drinking at home, it's a mixture of price and taste and when you're out it's probably price. (Polly)

Enhancing or reducing intoxication

An important reason given for alcohol product selection was either to become drunk or otherwise to avoid consuming too much alcohol. Some participants, and particularly those who drank at a high risk level, selected drinks that offered the greatest alcohol content for the cheapest price. Farook (HRL) laughed when he observed:

I do not drink alcohol for the taste. (Farook, HRL)

In contrast Stephen, also a HRL, tried not to drink too much on occasions when he needed to study the next day:

I've stopped drinking so many sorts of spirits and wine and mixing them altogether, [I] generally try to stick to beer. So in another way I sort of try and control it. (Stephen, HRL)

Drinking sugary and caffeinated energy drinks provided many people with a means to manage their mood and stay out longer.



Well if you got like six pints and you just sort of, your body starts feeling like heavy and stuff. You go and get like a mixed drink which has sugar in it, as soon as you get any hit of sugar you're just gonna be brought back up again. (Kyle, HRL)

See I won't drink [an energy drink] on its own. Like only if I'm having a big night I'll, I'll mix like say vodka or lemonade or whatever but then I'll get like a vodka Red Bull and it keeps me going.... I'll go for hours after that. (Dave, HRL)

Avoiding feeling sick

Interview participants identified that they liked the taste of some alcoholic drinks and not others. For instance, Polly avoided consuming too much sugar, particularly when she was going to drink a lot:

When I'm out at a city club I just really drink vodka and soda, because I hate drinking something that if you're drinking a lot of it ... it's really sugary and you get heaps of it. Whereas if I'm just drinking to you know have with dinner or something it's gonna be wine or cider or something that's sort of nicer to drink. (Polly)

In contrast, Parvani (HRL) found that she could drink beer without feeling sick, whereas vodka made her nauseous:

I started off with vodka in all the kind of mixy drinks that most girls prefer. But then my boyfriend loved beer so that's how I started having a lot of beer and I thought.... In the way that it hits you it's not really bad. So no matter how many beers you have you don't really feel pukey or anything. 'Cause that's what happens to me a lot, if I have vodka so I wanna throw up after a couple of drinks, but that doesn't happen to me after beer and the hangover isn't that bad either. (Parvani, HRL)

Suiting the occasion

Participants argued that some drinks were appropriate at particular occasions, and not at others. For example, Honey (HRL) would drink whisky and wine at home, and cider or vodka and soft drink when she went out, for their different effects:

Well red wine and whiskey will make me very like, I just wanna sit around and talk and like you know just enjoy that kind of time. Whereas if I'm drinking cider or I'm drinking vodka with a mixer I think it's probably with the sugar that's involved it makes me wanna like get up and I wanna dance and like you know, be out. So that would be more for the weekends when I'm getting ready to go out you know dancing and meeting people. (Honey, HRL)

Participants spoke of the drunkenness provided by spirits as being an enlivening experience, comparing this with the more relaxing effects of drinking wine or beer. Anita (HRL) preferred to drink vodka when she went out:

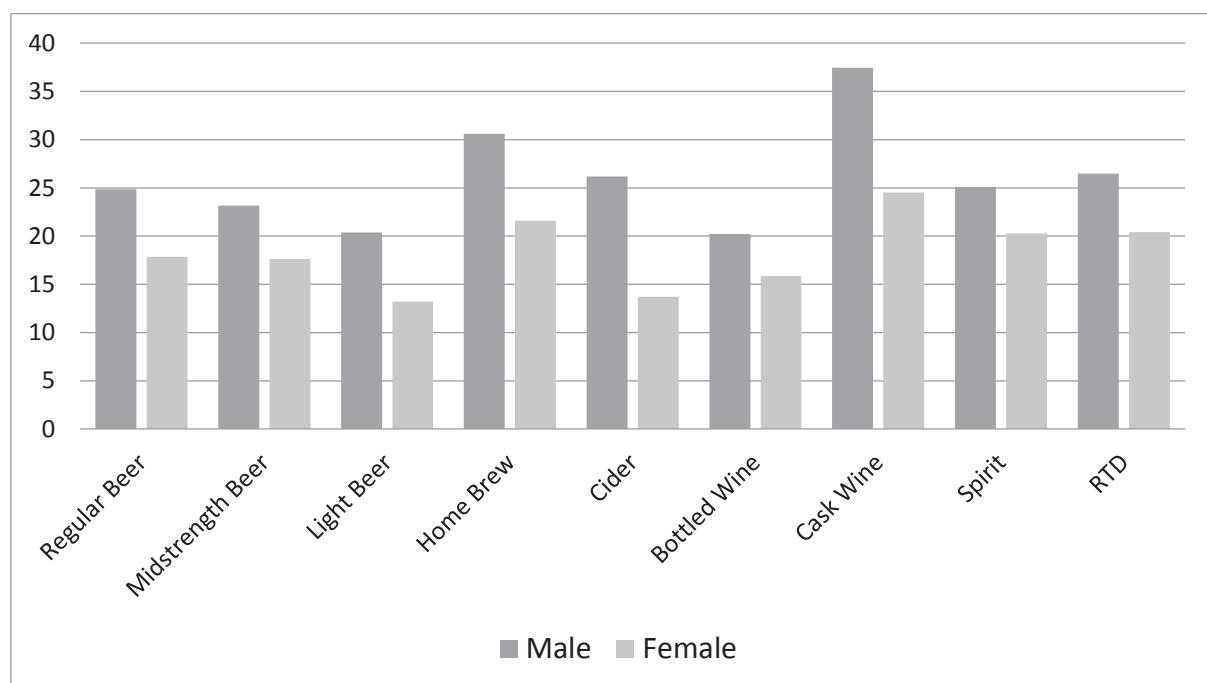
And I suppose it's not making you as sleepy as wine does and it gets you a different drunk, more energetic drunk. (Anita, HRL)

What do young adults drink when they want to get drunk?

One of the confounding factors in the above analysis of high risk drinkers is that there are varying levels of alcohol tolerance. Therefore there could be some participants, for instance younger females, who are getting intoxicated at lower levels than others who consume greater quantities of alcohol. For that reason, it makes sense to also examine how often participants intended to get drunk and compare this motivation with drink choice.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of those who intend to get drunk regularly that selected each drink choice. For all drink types more males than females consume alcohol with the intention of getting drunk. In particular, males who drink cask wine stood out, as 37% of them stated that they intend to get drunk often or always. More than a quarter of male home brew (31%), cider (26%), RTDs (26%) and spirits (25%) drinkers also stated this. Females were less likely to state that they intended to get drunk all the time or often when drinking, but more than 20% of those who drank cask wine (24%), home brew (22%), RTDs (20%) and spirits (20%) did so.

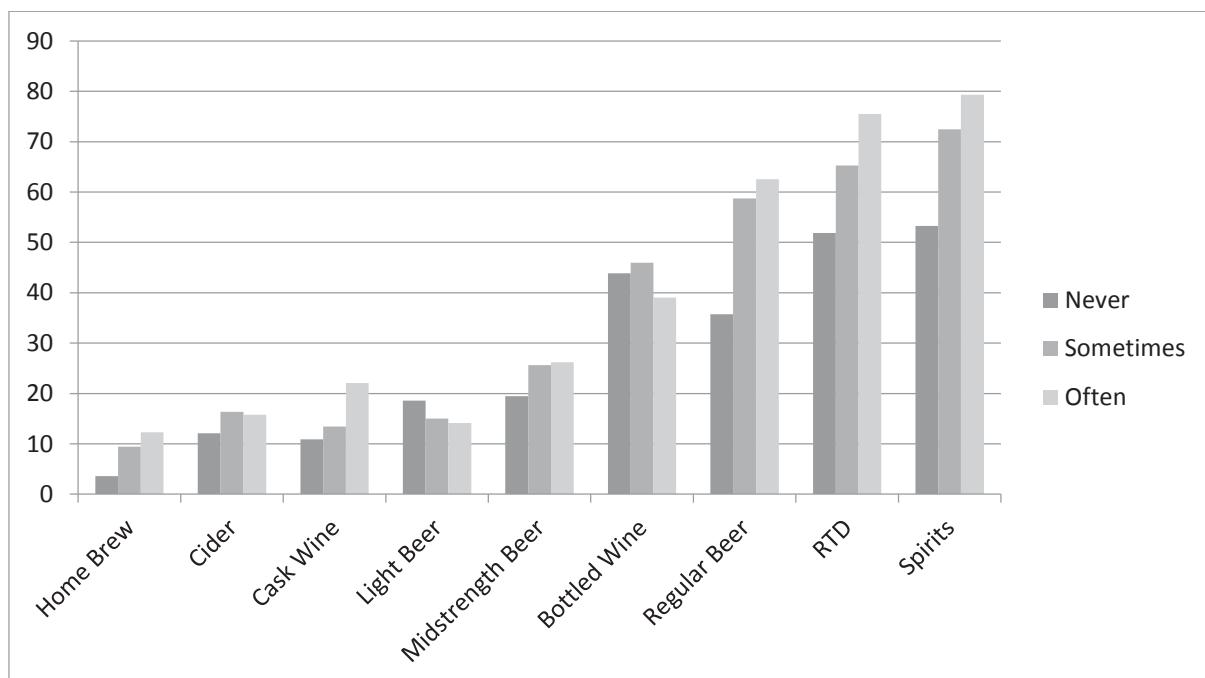
Figure 3 - Percentage of participants that selected each drink type who regularly consume alcohol to get drunk.



The results in Figure 3 for cask wine and home brew should be considered in the context of the relative lack of popularity of these two drink types. This can be seen more clearly in Figure 4, where the proportion of participants who stated that they intend to get drunk regularly, sometimes or never is shown in relation to drink type. There it is clear that while spirits and RTDs are relatively more popular than other drink choices among all three of the drinker types, they are also the most popular among the drinkers who often intend to get drunk. Furthermore, cask wine and home brew beer, while disproportionately popular among those who intend to get drunk, are still not common choices when compared to more popular drink choices. Therefore it could be said that while cask wine and home-brew drinkers are more likely to intend to get drunk when drinking than those who select other drink

types, the small number of people who drink cask wine and home brew beer dictates that they do not make up the majority of those who drink at high risk levels. Instead, those who intend to get drunk when drinking are most likely to consume spirits or RTDs.

Figure: 4 - Percentage of participants who intend to get drunk never, sometimes or often that regularly select each drink type.



Given the manner in which the survey questions were asked, it is possible that participants who regularly intend to get drunk also selected drinks they usually consume when they do not have this intention. Qualitative data offers a more detailed examination of drink choice in conjunction with drinking motives. Participants in the qualitative study offered three main reasons for choosing particular alcoholic drinks when they wished to become very intoxicated. They spoke of selecting: drinks which offer high alcohol content for a relatively low cost; drinks they enjoy consuming at any time; and spirits to achieve rapid intoxication.

Drinks which offer high alcohol content for a relatively low cost

As we have written elsewhere, pre-loading is a common practice among young adults (20). Participants in the qualitative study pre-drank cheap off premise alcohol to reduce their need to purchase expensive alcohol in venues, often selecting products which provided a relatively high alcohol content for their price.

Katie explained that she often drank cask wine before heading out, Clara (HRL) pre-loaded with very cheap wine, and Ryan with spirits:

Often goon [for pre-drinks], which is like wine in a cask, just because it's really, really cheap.
(Katie)



I guess generally we'll probably buy a cheap bottle of wine first [before we go out] so that'll be probably three to five dollars and also I guess we generally go to a lot of places with, with cheap drink deals so going out for like a one dollar night. (Clara, HRL)

If I have pre-drinks before I go out somewhere I'll probably drink a six pack or maybe quarter of a bottle of vodka, maybe like seven or eight standard vodkas. And that, that's because I'm a student and I try not to spend money on alcohol when I go out. So if I drink more at home it's cheaper I reckon. (Ryan, HRL)

Drinks they enjoy consuming at any time

Men discussed drinking beer when they wanted to have a big night more often than women did. In the following quote Thanh explains that he drinks beer when he wants a 'big party':

... [when we are eating] then we might, we will bring wine. So if we have like a big party you know, then we drink beer, we prefer beer.

People often spoke of consuming beer and spirits over a big drinking occasion. Hayden drank beer at home but spirits while at nightclubs because he believed that the spirits offered better value for money as an intoxicant:

I drink beer at home. When I go out after I get a little bit pissed I'll start hitting the Tequila...A bit more bang for the buck.

Marco (HRL) explained that he drank a range of alcoholic drinks, including spirits both mixed and as shots, when he recently wanted to get drunk at a pub:

Oh probably like three shots, two bottles of beer, two bottles of beers and about two or three bourbon and cokes I think, I think that's as much as I can remember. (Marco, HRL)

Spirits to achieve rapid intoxication

As part of the mix of alcoholic products consumed over a night the majority of women, and only slightly fewer men, would select spirits when they wanted to get drunk quickly. This finding was similar for participants who drank at a high risk level and many of those who did not:

Yeah spirits when you're wanting to get drunk, definitely (Polly)

If I wanna get really drunk I would drink vodka (Honey, HRL)

If I wanna get really drunk well I would probably then get some, some kind of spirit, probably my favourite then would be whiskey. You buy a bottle of whiskey and you have your beer or your wine, whatever you're drinking and you're passing it around. (Elke, HRL)

When people wanted to get drunk quickly they would very often consume spirits unmixed as shots. Participants often drank shots when they were out at venues:

We know that the shots can sort of do it fast which is why we have them. (Carolyn, HRL)



I prefer the strong ones so that I can get going faster. It's like tequila shots or ABC or 151 or ABC bomb, that sort of thing..... I don't take shots at home 'cause, well I don't really like shots. The reason why I take shots is just to get drunk and get high and enjoy the music more and yeah to, to meet [men].... So the practical choice [is that] you just go for shots. I would just usually drink two shots at one go. I'll just get high straight away. (May, HRL)

Doing shot and then ... you're getting to the high status very fast. Otherwise if you are drinking beer you have to have like ten or fifteen bottles. (Thanh)

But shot, shots is only probably only, only in the club. (Arif)

Discussion

Alcohol use can be seen as a form of ‘psychoactive consumption’ (21). Sociological studies show how young people’s choice of clothing, music and sub-cultural style enable them to demonstrate particular characteristics and thus affirm a desired social identity (22, 23). Similarly, alcohol and drug use offer opportunities for producing classed, raced and gendered subjectivities, enabling people to demonstrate and affirm their identification with these social categories (24, 25). This is something which alcohol manufacturers are enthusiastically exploiting through marketing alcohol to young people (26, 27). It suggests that drinking choices are guided by a complex combination of social, cultural, personal and price factors.

Gender differences in drink choice appear to be the same for younger samples as in a more general population sample, with the findings that males are more likely to drink beer, females more likely to drink wine, and spirits were popular with both (4) all supported by the survey results in the current study. The previously found popularity of RTDs (also known as premixed drinks or ‘alcopops’) and spirits among young people (6) was supported by the findings in both the survey and qualitative interview research cited in this report. Consistent with previous research, the price of alcohol was considered important by young drinkers (7, 21).

There were some very interesting results surrounding RTD and spirits consumption. The survey data showed that those who drink spirits were not more likely to drink to high risk, but they were quite likely to intend to get drunk. This latter finding was reiterated in the qualitative study, with many of the participants stating that they drank spirits when they intended to get drunk. One possible explanation for the seemingly conflicting results in the two analyses surrounding RTD and spirits consumption and high risk drinking is that RTD and spirits drinkers may intend to get drunk but are doing so on less than 11 drinks. This is particularly possible for young women, who favour RTDs. Given the very strong correlation between RTD consumption and age, it is possible that this drink type is selected by younger drinkers when they intend to get drunk, but these same younger drinkers need less alcohol in order to become intoxicated than those who are even a year or two older.

The interviewees’ thoughts on wine were quite interesting, with some participants taking the conventional view which other research has found: that wine was for consuming on quiet nights or with a meal. Conversely some participants considered wine, particularly cask wine, as a good way to get drunk for a small cost. The focus on price, the relative popularity of cask wine among heavy drinkers and the explicit admission of participants that cask wine is a drink of choice when wanting to get drunk, all provide support for measures such as minimum pricing, or more specifically volumetric taxation of wine, to reduce the availability of cheap alcohol.

Participants were very clear that spirits, particularly as shots, were the drink of choice when people intended to get drunk on licensed premises. A driving force behind this was the perceived ‘bang for your buck’ that shots provided, suggesting a need for further investigation into the relative price of shots in licensed premises.

Conclusion

The findings from both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews conducted in this study reveal that young people aged 18-24 years in Victoria who consume alcohol with the intention of getting drunk are selecting drink types that offer high alcohol content for low cost.

Young people aged between 18 and 24 also explicitly recognise the difference between off- and on-license alcohol prices.

Many are therefore pre-loading before heading out, and drinking shots at licensed venues in order to achieve their desired level of intoxication.

The availability of cheap, high-alcohol content alcoholic beverages is fuelling heavy drinking occasions in young Victorians, who are consciously turning to these drink choices when intending to get drunk.

Measures based on reducing the availability of cheap or discounted alcohol, including licensing controls, pricing or taxation could help reduce the high rates of high-risk drinking among Victorian youth.

Current regulations relating to the Responsible Service of Alcohol and discounting in licensed premises also need to be adequately enforced. Enforcement of these measures will reduce the likelihood of young people consuming alcohol to intoxication in licensed premises.

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