

New data reveals many Australians drinking to relieve stress and anxiety despite mental health risk

October 2023:

A national poll commissioned by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) found that 34.9% of adults who drank alcohol in the past 12 months did so to “relieve stress” and 18.5% to “deal with anxiety”, even though alcohol use is contributes to mental ill health.

One in seven people who had an alcoholic drink in the last 12 months (14.1%) said they are concerned with the amount of alcohol they are drinking, while one in five (19.8%) reported concern about the drinking of a family member.

One in seven (13.8%) said another person had expressed concern about their alcohol use. Women and young people are more likely to be concerned about the drinking of a family member.

Clinical addiction psychiatrist Associate Professor Shalini Arunogiri said it was important to understand that drinking alcohol can exacerbate anxiety and other mental health conditions, while also increasing the risk of suicide or self-harm.

“When people experiencing anxiety, stress or distress use alcohol as a way to cope, they are much more likely to develop a dependency,” Associate Professor Arunogiri said.

“In the mental health sector, it is very common to see people seeking help for both alcohol and mental health.

“As a community, we need to recognise the risk alcohol poses to both physical and emotional wellbeing. The role of alcohol also needs to be acknowledged in suicide prevention strategies.”

The national poll asked 1,004 adults about their reasons for drinking alcohol (if at all), whether they were concerned about their own alcohol use or that of someone else, and whether they think Australian Governments are doing enough to address the harms from alcohol.

It found that the top reason given for drinking alcohol was “to socialise” (74.7%), while one in five respondents (20%) said they did so because other people were drinking.

Only one in five (21.9%) said they think Australian Governments are doing enough to address harms from alcohol.

FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi said that greater awareness is needed of the link between alcohol use and mental ill health.

“Many people are unaware of the link between alcohol, anxiety and mental health. Greater awareness is needed to ensure that people have accurate information about alcohol and mental ill health.

“We also need to ensure that Governments introduce common sense measures to ensure that alcohol companies are not promoting their products in a way that contributes to misconceptions about alcohol and mental health. Right now alcohol companies spend millions of dollars to convince people their

harmful and addictive products are essential to social occasions, a way to connect and unwind,” Ms Giorgi said.

“We saw during the pandemic how these companies promoted alcohol as a way to cope with the pressures of lockdowns, and this predatory marketing continues. This is not okay and shows what can happen when alcohol companies and their lobby groups are left to set their own rules about alcohol marketing.”

Associate Professor Shalini Arunogiri is Clinical Director of the Hamilton Centre, the Victorian statewide specialist centre for addiction and mental health, and a FARE board director.

She is Chair of the RANZCP Faculty of Addiction Psychiatry, board member for the International Society of Addiction Medicine, and NHMRC Emerging Leader Fellow at Monash University.

Associate Professor Shalini Arunogiri and FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi are available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We do this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy and delivering health promotion campaigns.

FARE has been working with communities across the country to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians for 20 years. To learn more about us and our work visit www.fare.org.au.