



Media release

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Risky sex linked to risky drinking

Research published yesterday in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* concludes that unsafe and unwanted sexual experiences attributed to drinking are common among university students. These experiences were associated with heavier drinking, previous high school binge-drinking and the early onset of drinking.

Professor Jennie Connor of the Department of Preventative and Social Medicine, University of Otago and colleagues found that unwanted sexual advances due to someone else's drinking affected 21 percent of female and 12 percent of male students surveyed.

They found nearly 40 percent of the students surveyed reported at least one episode of heavy drinking in the past week. Nearly 70 percent were drinking at hazardous levels.

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says the research helps us better understand the harms associated with drinking and how alcohol is negatively impacting on young people's lives.

"Alcohol use is facilitating exposure to incredibly risky behaviour and situations which can have lasting impacts on all parties. Unplanned or unwanted sex can have significant short and long term consequences, including emotional distress, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies."

She says the research also provides a clear steer for social policy and law makers.

"Preventing early drinking and heavier drinking must be the focus for our policies and interventions. We must stop pointing the finger at young people and start addressing the environment we are exposing them to."

Alcohol marketing, minimum purchase age, price, number of outlets and the hours they operate are all factors of the environment that promotes both early drinking and heavier drinking. The Government's response to the recommendations from the Law Commission's review does not go far enough to address these problems.

Heavy drinking peaks at the ages of 18 -24 years, and this drinking contributes significantly to alcohol industry profits. Williams is concerned that effective measures to address heavy and youthful drinking are being rejected because of their likely impact on the alcohol industry.

"If we want our young people to make healthier choices then we, as adults, must ensure that the messages around them and the modelling we provide support them to do so."

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