

GENDER CONVERGENCE IN AUSTRALIAN DRINKING: RECENT EVIDENCE

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Introduction and Aims:

Researchers in many countries have identified a gender convergence in alcohol consumption, especially since the mid 20th Century. Various studies have identified ongoing convergence over recent decades, with women's drinking becoming more similar to men's. In Australia, there have been some indications of convergence from measures of alcohol-related harm, but there have been no systematic analyses of consumption data. This study will explore whether alcohol consumption patterns have converged between men and women between 2001 and 2013 and whether these trends vary by age groups.

Design and Methods:

Data from five waves of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, a series of repeated cross-sectional surveys conducted between 2001 and 2013, were used to assess convergence in five measures of alcohol consumption (any drinking, total volume and three measures of risky drinking). Convergence was examined for eight different age groups.

Results:

There was little evidence of gender convergence in Australian drinking since 2001. Men had significantly higher rates on all measures at nearly all age groups and there were few sub-groups which had seen significant narrowing of these differences. Gender differences were small for teenagers, but these differences were stable across the study period. There was a significant narrowing of gender differences for 50-59 year olds, but gender differences in this age group remained stark.

Discussions and Conclusions:

Gender differences in Australian drinking remain significant, and there is little evidence that they are narrowing over time. On average men drink twice as much as women and are much more likely to report risky drinking patterns. Risky drinking among women should not be ignored, but male drinking remains the main driver of alcohol problems in Australia.

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