

Similar drinking patterns in underage boys and girls is not evidence of women “catching up” to men.

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Introduction and Aims: There has been a recurring research and media focus on the higher consumption rates of girls under 18, compared to boys, and how this could potentially signify a convergence between men's and women's consumption in the future. This paper will use representative data to assess how meaningful this finding has been in the past.

Design and Methods: Data is taken from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), from cross sectional waves every three years from 2001 to 2019 (total N = 173,356). Weighted prevalence rates of risky drinking (monthly occasions of 5 or more standard drinks, 10g ethanol), stratified by age and gender are used.

Results: Cross sectionally, consumption rates under 18 are similar between boys and girls, with men consuming significantly more than women once over 18. However, when examined by cohort, it becomes clear that this is a repeating pattern, with risky drinking rates similar under 18 and then more men drinking riskily after 18. Any decrease in the gap between men and women aged 18-30 can be attributed to a decrease in men's, rather than an increase in women's, risky consumption.

Discussions and Conclusions: Girls under 18 have been consuming alcohol in a similar manner to boys consistently for years. While this does not rule out the possibility of women “catching up to men” at some point, the failure of this demographic quirk to predict convergence over time indicates that this is not enough warrant concern about the possibility without other indicators.

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