

IT'S NOT COOL WHEN YOU DO IT, MUM: A GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE TRENDS IN THE NDSHS

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Introduction / Issues:

Observed patterns of substance use have previously indicated that risky alcohol and drug use “peaks” in the 20s then declines with age. However, the results of the past two iterations of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) show a decline among young people but little decline for those aged 40 and older.

Design and Methods:

The NDSHS is Australia’s largest and most comprehensive survey on drug and alcohol use. 10-year birth cohorts were constructed and tracked them over successive surveys to examine alcohol and illicit drug use patterns over time.

Key Findings:

Those born between 1986 and 1995 appear to have “peaked” in their drug and alcohol use and these “peak” rates were lower than the “peaks” of the previous birth cohort (1976 to 1985). Generations born between 1946 and 1975 showed a much slower decline than the next youngest age group, particularly for lifetime alcohol risk. Those born before 1946 showed steady or increasing illicit drug use.

Discussions and Conclusions:

These findings suggest that risky drinking and drug use may be lower in the current generation of young people than previous generations at the same age. Those born before 1976 may be continuing to drink and use illicit drugs as they age.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

While use among young people has declined, given Australia’s aging population, policy makers and practitioners should consider increased need for intervention as older people continue to use.

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