

Study quantifies direct effect of alcohol misuse on 20-somethings

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University of Otago, Christchurch researchers have for the first time quantified exactly what damage alcohol abuse is inflicting on 20-somethings, and in turn society.

The Christchurch Health and Development Study research shows up to a quarter of New Zealanders aged 21 to 30 have a problem with [alcohol](#) (classified as a subclinical alcohol problem) which affects their daily life to some extent.

More than 5 per cent of this age group met the clinical criteria for [alcohol addiction](#).

Researchers were able to account for factors such as [family background](#)

or previous substance abuse issues to shine the spotlight on the exact role alcohol plays in creating multiple serious social and personal issues. The study shows those with clinical alcohol addictions are:

- Almost nine times more likely than those with no [alcohol problems](#) to inflict [physical violence](#) on others.
- Three times more likely to commit property crimes such as burglary, car theft or vandalism.
- Almost 11 times more likely to have ten or more sexual partners and twice as likely to have a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Almost seven times more likely to contemplate suicide.
- Almost three times more likely to be the [victims of violence](#).

Those who have some problem with alcohol, or a subclinical condition (typically those whose drinking has some negative effect on their job, family, friends or [criminal behaviour](#) but who have not been diagnosed as an addict) are:

- Three times more likely to commit a violent crime and twice as likely to commit property crime.
- Twice as likely to commit [family violence](#).
- Almost twice as likely as those with no problem to have an STI.
- Most three times more likely to contemplate suicide.
- Almost twice as likely to have been the victim of a violent crime.

Researcher Dr Joe Boden says much attention has been paid to the effects of the effects of problematic youth drinking but little on those aged in their 20s.

This study shows this group is still very much at risk, despite perceptions their drinking may be tapering off.

Dr Boden says the study showed the wide-ranging effect of alcohol

misuse in 20-somethings on themselves and society.

"It seems that young people don't need to misuse alcohol for a long time before they experience some serious negative outcomes, and often multiple serious outcomes."

"There could be great benefits to society in addressing alcohol misuse in those aged in their 20s."

For example, the study showed that people aged in their 20s did not abuse alcohol violent crime committed by that age group would drop by almost half.

Dr Boden says becoming a parent has the biggest effect on minimising drinking. Many adults today however were having children later and experiencing an 'extended adolescence'. This may have some impact on the reasonably high number of people in their 20s with drinking problems.

The research was recently published in the prestigious *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* journal.

Provided by University of Otago

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