

Patterns of drinking in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as self-reported on the Grog Survey App: a representative urban and remote sample

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Background: Measuring self-reported alcohol use is challenging in any population, particularly when episodic drinking may be common, such as in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) Australian populations. Drinking among Indigenous Australians has been shown to vary greatly within and between communities (1). However, most survey methods assume a 'regular' pattern of drinking. National estimates have also been shown to underestimate alcohol use among Indigenous Australians (2). Local survey data are therefore needed to inform policy and community-led initiatives.

Aims: To report on drinking patterns from two representative community samples.

Methods: Indigenous Australians (aged 16+ years) in two South Australian communities were recruited to complete the Grog Survey App. The App is a validated, interactive tablet-based survey tool, designed to help Indigenous Australians describe their drinking. Using a modified Finnish method combined with Timeline Followback, participants describe their last two drinking occasions and date of their last four, including beverage and container type, and non-drinking periods. Drinking patterns were described using medians and interquartile ranges; gender and remoteness were compared using Wilcoxon rank-sum tests. Spearman correlations explored the relationship between drinking patterns and age. Logistic regressions tested if beverage or container preference differed by remoteness or gender.

Results: Three-quarters of participants (n=597/775) were current drinkers. Median standard drinks per occasion was 7.8, and median drinking occasions per month was 1.3. Nearly three-quarters of current drinkers (73.7%) reported a period of no drinking (median: 60 days). Remote drinkers were more likely to drink beer, but less likely to drink wine, spirits, port and sherry. Improvised containers were used by 40.5% of drinkers. Mugs and kitchen glasses were more popular in the urban site, compared to 'slabs' and cans in the remote site.

Conclusions: Episodic drinking with extended 'dry' periods and from non-standard drinking containers was common in this representative sample of Indigenous Australians. This study improves upon previous national and community surveys by providing detailed alcohol consumption data, including dry periods and non-standard drinking containers. Future surveys should use survey instruments that can capture diverse drinking patterns, rather than assuming regular drinking patterns. The diversity of container use and beverage preference, by gender and remoteness, illustrates nuances within and between communities. It highlights the importance of community data to inform local strategies addressing alcohol use.

References

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