

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# **The Culture and Context of Alcohol Use in Community Sporting Clubs in Australia:**

## **Research into ‘Attitudes’ and ‘Behaviour’**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This study is fundamentally interested in the relationship between alcohol and sport in Australian society. It is the first of its kind anywhere in the world. It is the first attempt at a systematic audit of alcohol use in community level sporting clubs, as well as the various attitudes club members hold in relation to that use. The study seeks to make sense of the cultures and contexts of alcohol use in sporting clubs in ways that might inform the future development of targeted education, health promotion and prevention programs and strategies within clubs. More immediately, this study should prove invaluable in the broader implementation of the Good Sports Accreditation Program (GSAP) within community level clubs around the country.

The relationship between alcohol consumption and sport is well established in Australian society. Many professional and amateur sporting clubs are sponsored by alcohol companies or local hotels, whilst a number of high profile national and international sporting events such as the Melbourne Cup horse race, the Formula One Grand Prix and the Australian Open are sponsored by large alcohol breweries. Such prominent associations between elite level sport and the consumption of alcohol undoubtedly affect the ways alcohol is consumed in more ‘grass-roots’ settings in this country, with many studies now suggesting that alcohol misuse is all too common within community level sporting clubs around Australia. The present study contributes to this emerging evidence base.

### **Research Aims**

The present study addresses the problem of alcohol misuse within community level sporting clubs through the broader study of the *cultures and contexts* of alcohol use within such settings. This research also features the study of the attitudes and behaviours of club members, officials and supporters regarding the sale, consumption and management of alcohol at their sporting club. The exploration of these factors is expected to provide insights into the nature of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems with the club environment.

More explicitly, the following research aims have informed this study:

- To explore the incidence and prevalence of alcohol consumption within community sporting clubs nation wide;
- To examine alcohol related problems in community sporting clubs nation wide;
- To understand the attitudes and concerns of club members with respect to the consumption of alcohol; and
- To gain insights to assist into the implementation and promotion of the GSAP in each of the relevant community sports in Australia.

### **Research Design/Methodology**

This study utilised a quantitative research design in keeping with the key research aims. The use of a broad based survey instrument was deemed to be the most efficient and cost effective means of collecting data among club members, players and officials. Such a method has been successfully employed in similar studies in sporting clubs (see Duff et al 2002, AIPC 2003), with the added advantage of ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants.

### **Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument was developed and tested at the Australian Drug Foundation. The survey instrument comprises four major sections, the first of which concerns demographic items including participants' gender, age, education and so on. The second section of the survey explores participant's habits in their sporting club, and their drinking behaviour, for example, *How often do you drink at your sporting club?; Where do you prefer to drink?.* The third section comprises items concerning participants' attitudes toward the importance, or otherwise, of alcohol in various aspects of sporting club life. The final section includes items concerning the alcohol policies (if any) of the participants' sporting club, and asks about aspects such as under-age drinking and drink-driving.

### Research Setting

The most popular sporting codes in the country (measured in terms of broad-based adult participation) were selected for study: viz. Australian Rules football, Rugby Union and Rugby League, Cricket, Tennis and Surf Life Saving. The inclusion of these codes covers both summer and winter codes, thus allowing for some consideration of seasonal variations in alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems within sporting clubs. The inclusion of these codes also enabled the research team to explore differences in consumption patterns across the various states and territories, with many codes popular only in certain states and territories (i.e. rugby league, surf life-saving), whilst others have a more national reach (i.e. tennis and cricket).

### The Sample

Given the enormous number of community level sporting clubs in each of the codes selected for research, it was decided to survey only a sample of clubs in each code. That said, the final sampling frame was tailored to suit the characteristics of each code given the wide divergence in club numbers and geographic spread. For this reason, a 10% sample of clubs was selected in the case of those more popular codes in the more populous states (e.g. cricket and tennis in each state) whilst a larger sample was taken in the case of the less popular codes in the smaller states. Indeed, a 100% sample was selected in some instances (e.g. Australian rules and rugby union in Tasmania). In each instance the peak administrative authority for each code in each state and territory was contacted in order to procure up-to-date databases detailing the precise number of clubs in each code in each state, including all club contacts and mailing details. With the exception of the National Rugby League, in each instance the peak sporting authorities were happy to forward their databases to the ADF once the confidentiality and security of each database had been guaranteed.

### Procedures

Given the seasonal nature of the sports identified for participation in this research it was decided to stagger the data collection across three major phases; the first in winter 2003 (August-September); the second in early summer 2003 (December) and the final phase in

Winter 2004 (April, May). This staggering of the data collection also allowed research staff sufficient time to organise support for the research among the various sporting codes and authorities. The first phase conducted in the Winter of 2003 took in the codes of Australian Rules football in Queensland and Tasmania and rugby league in Queensland and New South Wales, however the problems associated with securing the support of the Australian Rugby League significantly hampered data collection efforts in this code. This first phase comprised approximately 10% of the total survey mail-out. The second, and largest phase was conducted in summer 2003/04 taking in cricket and tennis in many states and surf life saving clubs in the eastern states of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. This phase comprised nearly 60% of the total survey mail-out. The third and final phase included rugby union clubs in all states and Australian Rules clubs in South Australia and Western Australia and comprised 30% of the total mail-out. Once all surveys had been returned to the ADF, all collected data was recorded, collated and analysed using the software package SPSS 12.

## **National Research Findings**

### Response Rates

Two hundred and thirteen sporting clubs (N=213) across seven states and territories were included in the national sample of community level sporting clubs, with a total of **1,742** surveys collected from among this sample. The club response rate was 23%, whilst the total survey response rate was 8%. The survey response rate is lower than the broader club response rate for the principal reason that many clubs returned less than the full 30 surveys sent to them.

Just over a quarter (25.2%) of all returned surveys was received from sporting clubs in South Australia, and just under a quarter (22.8%) was returned from New South Wales. Smaller numbers of surveys were returned from Queensland (14.1%), Tasmania (12.6%), Western Australia (12.2%), Victoria (9.9%) the ACT (1.5%) and the Northern Territory (1.7%). Meanwhile, over a quarter of returned surveys were received from rugby union clubs (26.7%). Slightly smaller numbers were returned from Australian Rules football clubs (25.7%); tennis clubs (17.9% of all returned surveys), cricket clubs (16.8%) and

surf lifesaving clubs (9.9%). The lowest level of participation was recorded among rugby league clubs with only 3% of all returned surveys sourced from such settings.

### State in Australia

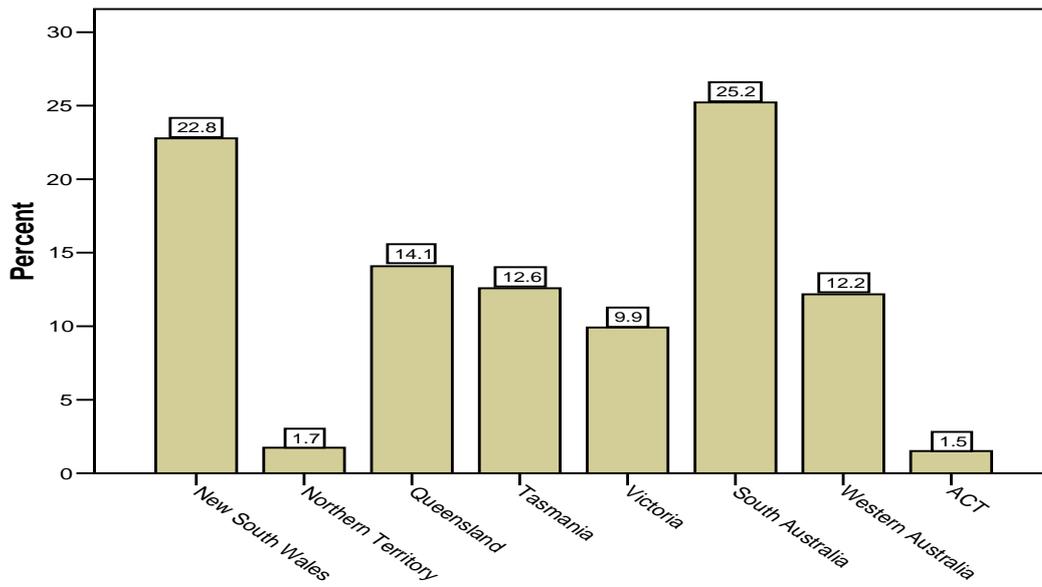


Figure 1: Survey Breakdown from the States and Territories across Australia

### Type of Sport

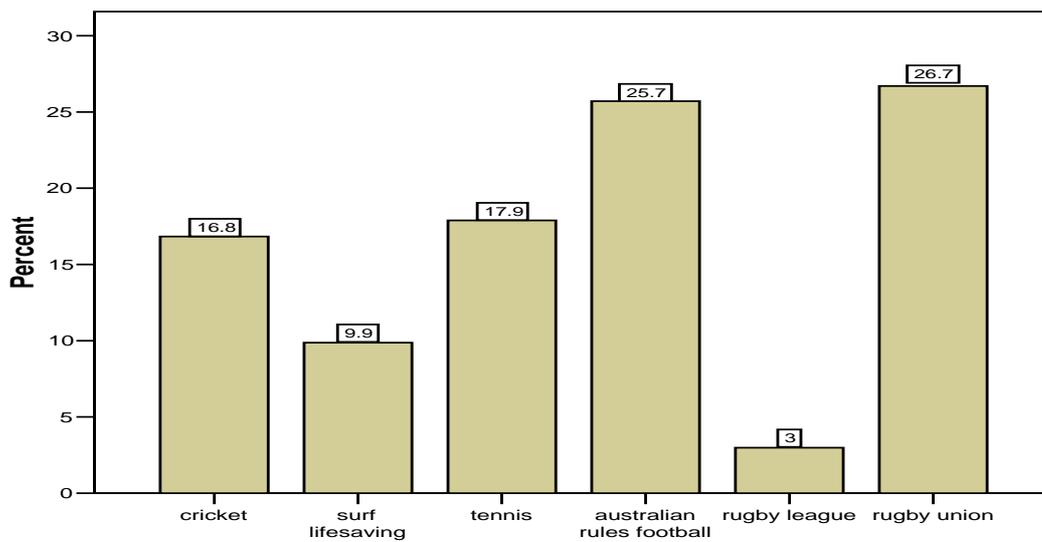


Figure 2: Percentage of Surveys Returned Among Participating Codes

### Demographics

Of the 1742 returned surveys, approximately three quarters (72.2%) were completed by men and a quarter by women (27.8%). With respect to the age of survey participants, one third (33.1%) was aged between 21 and 30 years, and 21.1% were aged between 31 and 40 years of age. Just over 20% were aged between 41 and 50 years of age with smaller number reporting older ages (15.6%, 50+ years). Participants were also asked to characterize their involvement at their sporting club. Almost two thirds of participants reported that they were players at their sporting club (62.4%), followed by officials (17%); supporters (9.8%); parents of players (4.1%), or partners of players (3.9%). A small proportion reported that their involvement was 'other' (2.7%) (for example, coach, trainer etc.).

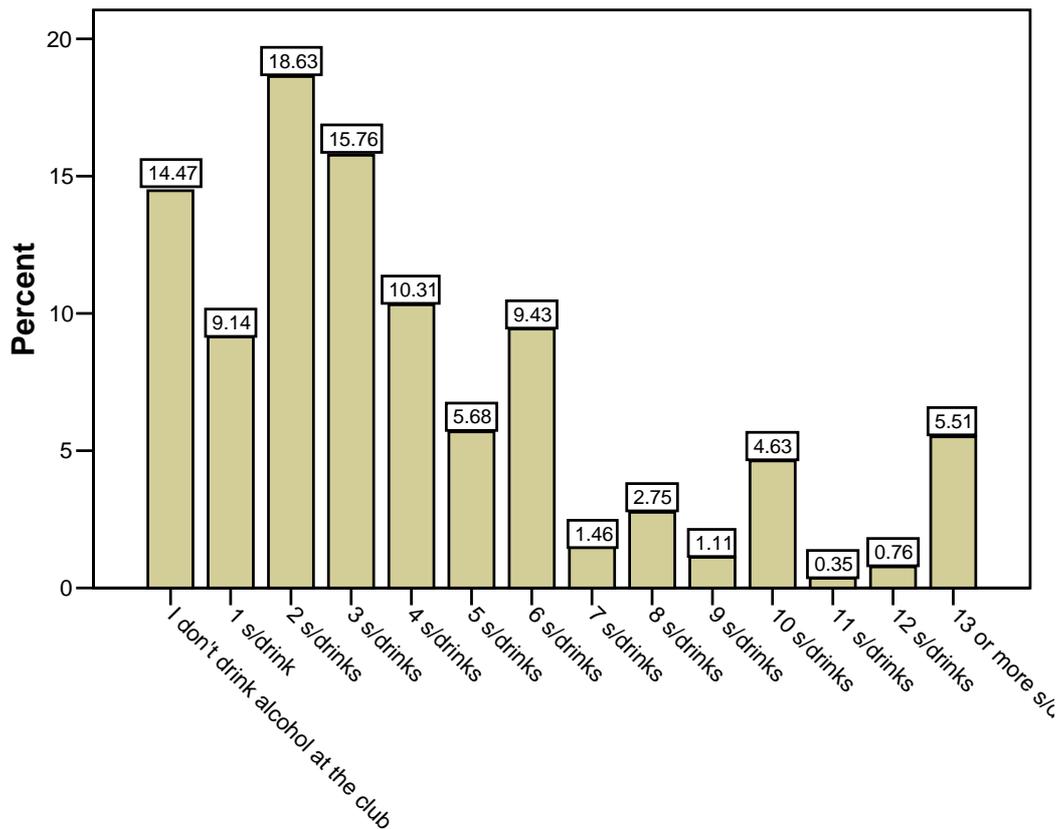
Over a quarter of those surveyed reported that they had completed university studies (29.2%), with a further 21.9% reporting Year 12 completion. Fourteen percent reported completing Year 10. Smaller numbers reported TAFE college studies (11.7%), Year 11 completion (10.3%), and undertaking an apprenticeship (7.2%). The lowest numbers reported were for Year 9 completion (2.8%), less than Year 9 (1.5%).

### Alcohol Consumption at the Sporting Club

The vast majority of survey participants reported that they drink alcohol at their sporting club on a regular basis with only 12.2% of survey respondents indicating that they never drink at their club. Among 'drinkers', the majority of respondents reported that they drink at their clubhouse (68.9%); at the sporting clubs' sponsored licensed premises (12.2%) or at the playing ground (canteen) (6.7%). A very small proportion said they drink at 'other' venues (0.1%) such as club canteens or at team mates' private homes. Almost half of those surveyed (47.1%) reported that they drink alcohol at their sporting club on one day per week, and just under a quarter (23.4%) reported that they drink at their club on two occasions per week. Smaller numbers reported drinking three (8.3%), four (1.2%), or five or more (1.1%) days per week at their sporting club.

Participants were also asked to report the number of standard drinks they typically consume on each occasion of drinking at their club. A small number of club members reported that they do not drink alcohol at their club (12%). Most respondents reported that they drink between one and four standard drinks per visit (53.8% 1-4 SD) with smaller numbers reporting higher consumption patterns. Just over fifteen percent of respondents reported drinking 5 or 6 standard drinks per club visit, with a further 12% reporting the consumption of between 7 and 10 standard drinks per visit. Around 7% of participants reported that they drink 11 or more standard drinks per club visit. Thus whilst the majority of those surveyed reported drinking alcohol at low to moderate levels, a substantial number are drinking at much more risky if not dangerous levels.

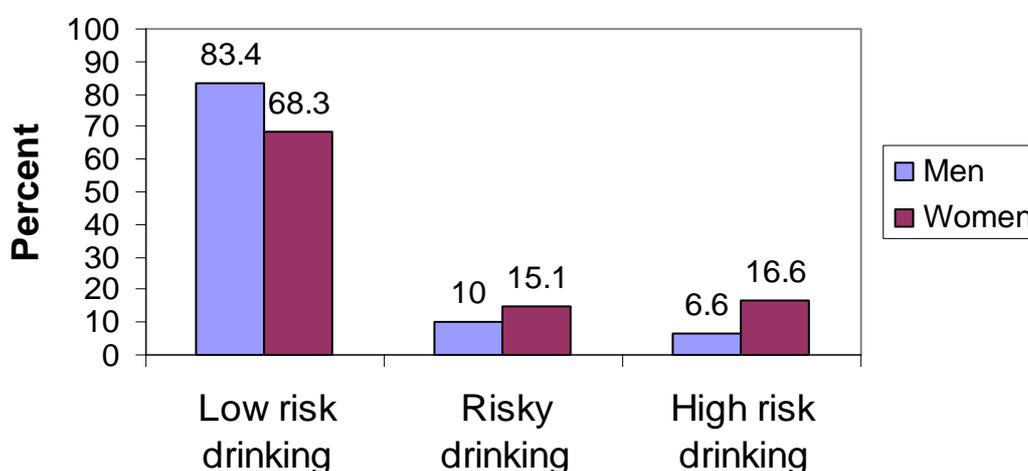
### How much do you generally drink on each occasion?



**Figure 3: Number of Standard Drinks Consumed Per Visit**

Measured according to the Australian Alcohol Guidelines, it was found that some 16% of men and 31% of women in the sample are regularly drinking at levels that place them at significant risk of harm in the short term. Meanwhile, almost one third of the males in this study (31.7%) are drinking at risky or high risk levels measured in terms of long term harms, while over half of all women (57.8%) are drinking at levels that are associated with some level of risk in the long-term.

## Australian Alcohol Guidelines - Risk of harm in the short-term

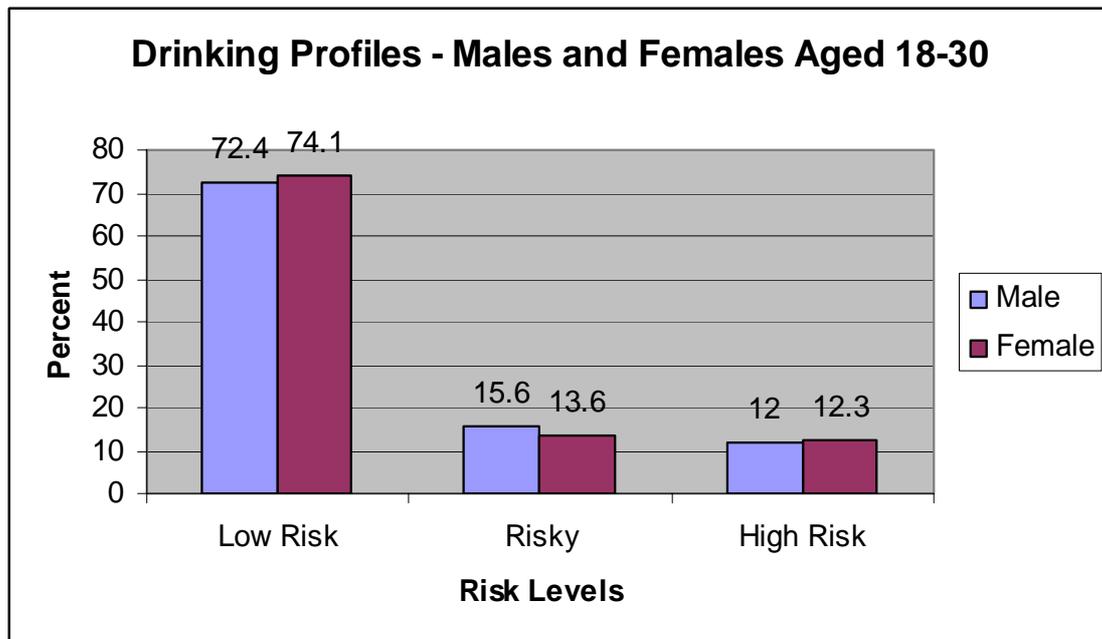


**Figure 4: Short Term Risk Profiles**

### Alcohol Consumption at the Sporting Club amongst 18-30 Year Olds

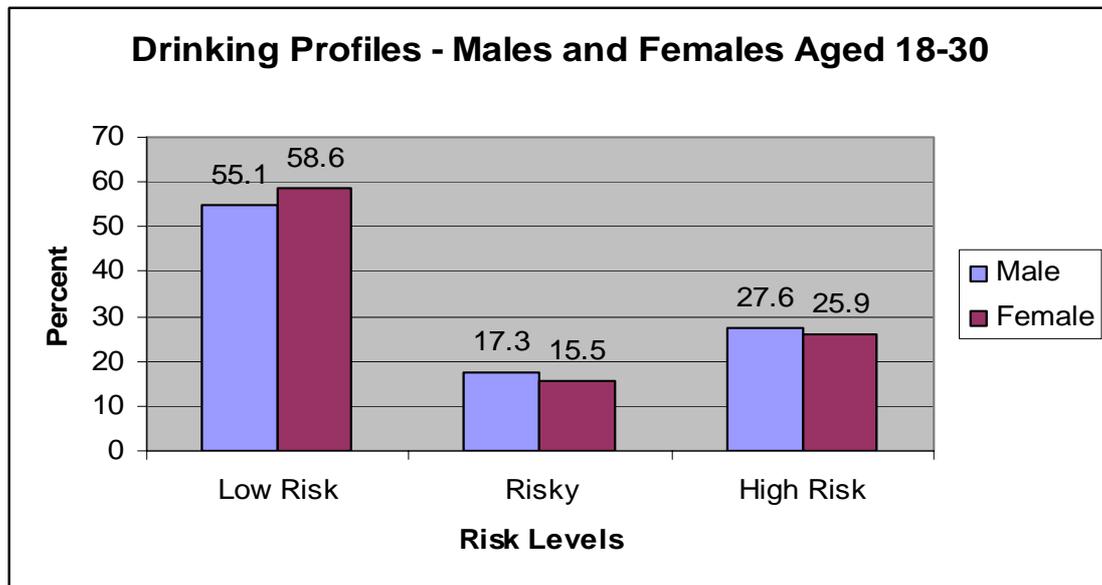
However, more serious patterns of harm were recorded among survey respondents aged between 18 and 30. The survey revealed that over a quarter (27.6%) of all males aged between 18 and 30 are drinking at levels that risk short term harm every time they drink at their sporting club. Similarly, 25.9% of women are drinking at such levels on every occasion of drinking. It is important to note that these levels of risky drinking are higher in sporting clubs than the national averages for both males and females as revealed in the latest National Drug Strategy Household Survey – the most authoritative national drugs and alcohol study (see AIHW 2002). The 2001 NDSHS (AIHW 2002:19) reveals that

some 14% of males aged 20-29 years report drinking at levels that risk short term harm (compared to 27.6% in the present study), whilst 9% of women in the national cohort report such drinking patterns (compared to 25.9% in the present study). Clearly, respondents to the present study are drinking at much riskier levels than their peers.



**Figure 5: Short Term Risk Profiles – Males and Females Aged 18-30**

An even more dramatic picture emerges in relation to the long term risk profiles (see below). Here it was found that some 45% of males and 41% of females aged 18-30 are regularly drinking at levels that risk a range of long term harms. Comparing these findings to the national averages reported in the Household Survey is once again instructive. According to the 2001 Survey (see AIHW 2002:18), around 14% of males aged between 20 and 29 are drinking at levels that risk long term harm (c.f. 45% present study); whilst around 15% of females in this age group are drinking at such levels (c.f. 41% present study).



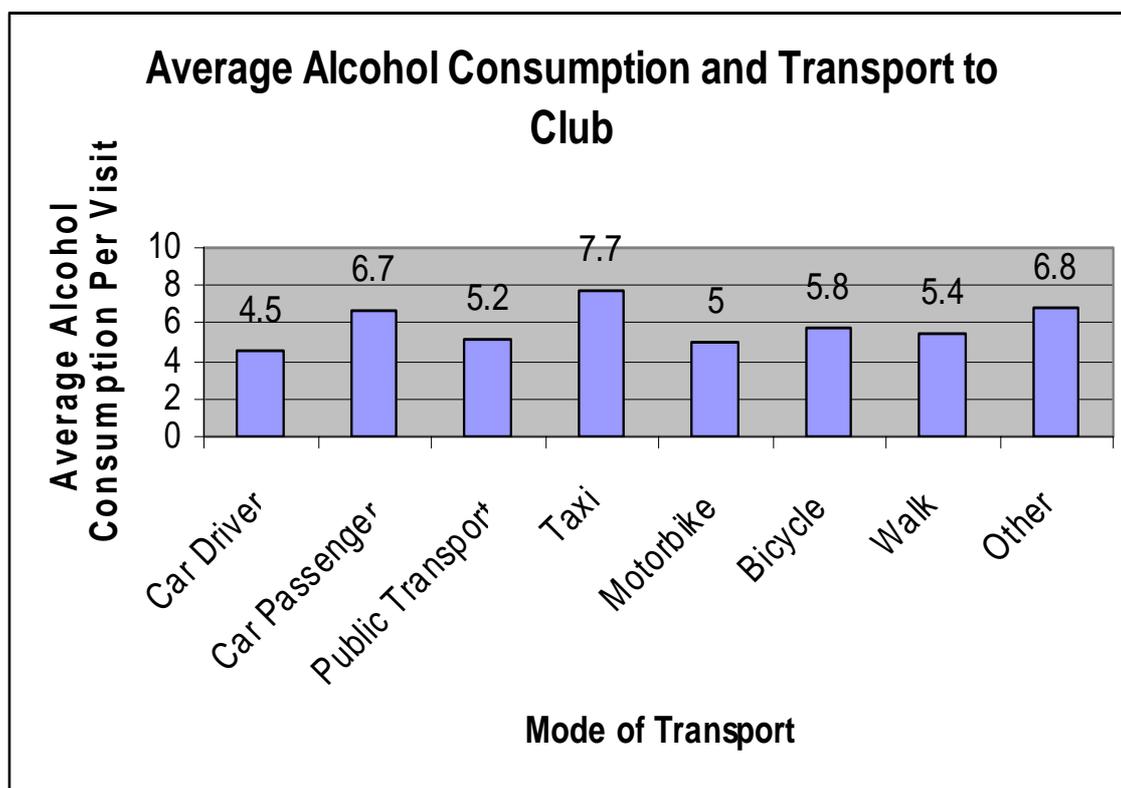
**Figure 6: Long Term Risk Profiles – Males and Females Aged 18-30**

Given the nature of these drinking profiles among young club members aged between 18 and 30, it would appear most vital that more specific alcohol prevention and harm minimisation strategies are introduced in community level sporting clubs. These strategies will need to be carefully targeted at young people to ensure the most effective reductions in alcohol related problems in and around the club.

#### Drinking Profiles and Transport Mode (Home to Club)

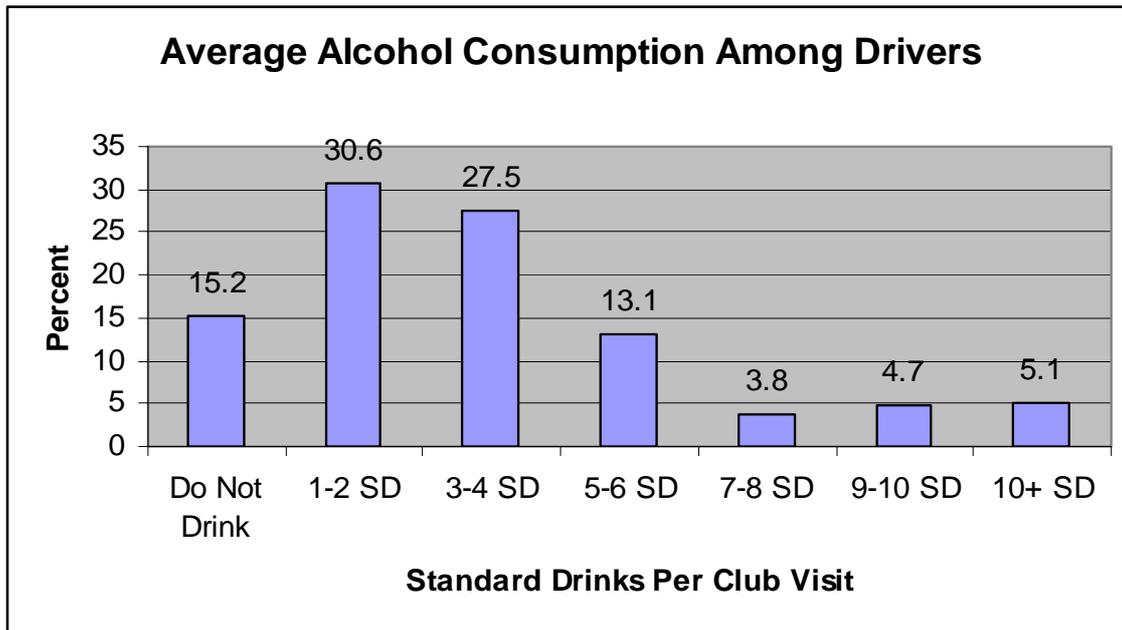
In another interesting research finding (referring now to the full survey sample of 1,742 participants), the survey revealed that average alcohol consumption patterns also varied according to the mode of transport that respondents typically utilised in travelling between their sporting club and their home. Somewhat alarming, those who reported that they drive from their club to their home (some 80% of all survey respondents) also reported that they consume an average of 4.5 standard drinks each time they consume alcohol at their club. Whilst this is not necessarily an indication of pervasive drink driving in such clubs, given that most drivers also reported spending between 1 and 3 hours drinking at their club on each occasion, it certainly does give rise to some serious concerns. Even higher levels of alcohol consumption were reported by those respondents

who typically travel to their clubs as passengers in a friend’s car, or via public transport or taxi, though it must be noted that only very small numbers reported utilising these latter modes of transport. Full findings for drinking profiles and typical modes of transport are presented in the figure below.



**Figure 7: Mode of Transport and Average Alcohol Consumption**

With more specific focus on the drinking habits of those respondents who reported driving to and from their sporting club, quite alarmingly, it was found that around one quarter of all drivers typically consume 4 standard drinks or more each time they drink at their sporting club – 5.1% reported drinking 10 or more standard drinks each time! Given the relative absence of safe transport strategies in the vast majority of surveyed sporting clubs, coupled with the high incidence of risky drinking in such clubs, it is very likely that a sizable proportion of club members are driving home whilst over the 0.05 BAC legal limit on a reasonably regular basis. Full results are presented below.



**Figure 8: Drivers' Average Alcohol Consumption per Club Visit**

Trends in Alcohol Consumption at Sporting Clubs

Participants were also asked to characterise the amount of alcohol consumed at their sporting club in relation to three categories: excessive, moderate, and negligible. The vast majority, over three quarters (78.3%) of those surveyed, reported that alcohol consumption at their sporting club was in the moderate range. Smaller numbers reported that alcohol consumption at their sporting club was negligible (15.7%) or excessive (6%). Moreover, the majority of those surveyed (79.2%) reported that levels of alcohol consumption had remained about the same over the last 6-12 months at their sporting club, whilst 13.5% reporting that it was gradually decreasing and 7.3% reporting that it was gradually increasing.

Meanwhile, almost three quarters of those surveyed (72.3%) reported that under-age drinking of alcohol never occurs at their sporting club, and 18.9% stated that it rarely occurs. Seven percent of participants reported that under-age drinking of alcohol sometimes occurs at their sporting club, and 1.5% reported that under-age drinking always occurs. Furthermore, a small proportion (6%) of club members reported that they

were always concerned about a club member driving after drinking alcohol at their sporting club, and over a quarter (29.8%) reported that they were sometimes concerned. Just under one third (32.9%) reported that they were rarely concerned, and 31.3% reported that they were never concerned about club members drink driving.

#### Attitudes to Alcohol at the Sporting Club

One of the most innovative features of the present study involved the attempt to explore club members' attitudes regarding the *culture* of drinking in their sporting club. This research aimed to reveal something of the wider social meaning of alcohol consumption in and around the club. Interestingly, it was found that these attitudes had considerable bearing on reported patterns of alcohol consumption at clubs. To summarise, the survey asked participants to record their level of agreement/disagreement in response to seven statements about the place of alcohol in the life of their sporting club. These statements addressed the tradition of drinking within sporting clubs; whether or not drinking is considered important for celebrating; for maintaining club camaraderie; for facilitating relaxation after matches and training; for maintaining the unity of members; for enhancing club members' enjoyment of their time at their club. Finally, club members were asked whether they think drinking is an important way of enhancing family socialising at their club. Survey respondents indicated more agreement than disagreement with respect to all statements.

To briefly summarise the findings, 80% of survey respondents reported some level of agreement with the statement that "Drinking is a good way to relax after training or playing a match"; over three quarters of participants (78.9%) reported some level of agreement with the statement, "Drinking is an important part of club camaraderie"; three quarters (77.6%) of survey respondents agreed that "Drinking is an important part of celebrating after the match"; almost three quarters (73.9%) reported some level of agreement for the statement, "Drinking at my club is an important tradition". The statement, "Drinking is important for my enjoyment of the time I spend socialising at my club", received less agreement than the previous statements, though, over two thirds (67.3%) still agreed with this statement to some degree. Of all the attitudinal statements

presented in the survey, the statement, “I drink at my club because it is a good way for my family to socialise” received the lowest level of agreement (58.9%).

#### Alcohol Related Policies and Strategies at Sporting Clubs

The final section of the survey asked participants to indicate whether any of a number of alcohol-related policies and strategies had been implemented at their sporting club in recent times. The first of these asked respondents whether their sporting club had a written policy regarding responsible serving and consumption of alcohol. Almost two thirds of those surveyed (62.4%) reported that their sporting club had implemented such a policy, 9.9% reported no such policy, and just over a quarter (27.8%) reported that they didn't know if their club had such a policy. Participants were also asked whether bar-staff at their sporting club received formal training, for example, in pouring standard drinks, dealing with customers who are drunk, and the like. Just over half of those surveyed (52.2%) reported that the bar-staff at their sporting club received such training. A third of participants reported that they didn't know whether bar-staff at their club received such training, and 14.8% reported that bar-staff at their club did not receive this type of training. Meanwhile, only 18.5% of those surveyed reported that their sporting club had a 'designated driver' program; 43.6% reported that their club did not have a designated driver program, and over a third (37.8%) stated that they didn't now if such a program existed at their sporting club.

Over a third (38%) reported that their sporting club always has proper meals available, and similar numbers reported that their club sometimes has proper meals available (37.5%). A small proportion of participants (9.8%) reported that their sporting club rarely has proper meals, while others reported that proper meals were never available at their sporting club (14.8%). Finally, participants were asked how important it was to them that their sporting club has a written policy about alcohol consumption. Approximately three quarters of those surveyed indicated that they felt such a policy was important to some degree, with 30.2% reporting it was very important, 22.7% claiming it was important, and 19% reporting it was somewhat important. Just over 11% felt that such a policy 'is not important at all'.

**Conclusions**

Given the widespread prevalence of the consumption of alcohol within sporting clubs, as well as the broader prevalence of a range of significant risks and harms associated with this use, it is vital that effective and timely harm minimisation strategies are implemented within community level sporting clubs around the country. The broad, nation-wide roll-out of the Good Sports program should thus be supported as a matter of some urgency.