

Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability Inquiry into the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in Australia

About this submission

This submission was prepared by Natalie Townsend and Prof Deborah Loxton on behalf of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) and the Centre for Women's Health Research, University of Newcastle.

This submission focuses on findings from ALSWH, a long-established national study that takes a comprehensive view of health, and the factors that affect health, across a woman's lifespan. Since 1996, ALSWH has collected data from over 57,000 women in four age cohorts using regular surveys and individual record linkage to administrative health databases, including government-subsidised health services (Medicare Benefits Schedule), government-subsidised medication (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme), hospitals, and perinatal data. ALSWH provides evidence to inform policy development and the provision of health services, and to support new and revised clinical guidelines for health professionals. In this submission, we present findings from women in three ALSWH cohorts (born 1946-51, 1973-78, and 1989-95), which capture experiences across the life course in relation to violence and substance use.

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Violence and substance use: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health

Domestic violence, smoking and alcohol use

- ☐ Women born 1973-78 and 1946-51 who had reported experiencing domestic violence were more likely to smoke than those who had not reported experiencing domestic violence (1, 2, 3).
- ☐ Among women born 1989-95, e-cigarette use has been found to be associated with experiences of domestic violence (4).
- ☐ Women born 1973-78 who were extremely frequent binge-drinkers were more likely to have experienced domestic violence (16% versus 6%) than women who were very infrequent binge-drinkers (5).

Sexual violence, smoking, alcohol and other drugs

- ☐ Experiencing sexual violence was associated with illicit drug use, high-risk alcohol consumption, and current tobacco use among women born 1989-95 and 1973-78 (6, 7).
- ☐ Women born 1989-95, 1973-78 and 1989-95 were 16 to 73% more likely to engage in high-risk alcohol consumption if they had experienced sexual violence, compared to women who had not experienced sexual violence (6).
- ☐ Women born 1989-95 and 1973-78 who had experienced sexual violence were approximately 30% more likely to have recently used illicit drugs than women who had not experienced sexual violence (6).
- ☐ Among women born 1973-78, experiences of forced sex have also been shown to be associated with illicit drug use (8, 3).

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

FINDINGS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

WOMEN AGED 24 TO 30, 40 TO 45, AND 68 TO 73*
WHO HAD EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE WERE

16-73% more likely

to engage in **high-risk alcohol consumption****

COMPARED TO THOSE WHO HAD NOT EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE



WOMEN AGED 24 TO 30 AND 40 TO 45*
WHO HAD EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE WERE



26-60%
more likely to be
current smokers



~30% more likely
to have recently used
illicit drugs**

COMPARED TO THOSE WHO HAD NOT EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

*women aged 24 to 30 in 2019, 40 to 45 in 2018, and 68 to 73 in 2019.

**risk ratios varied for women aged 24 to 30 in 2019, 40 to 45 in 2018, and 68 to 73 in 2019.

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