



Bulletin No. 11

March 24, 1993

Alcohol Consumption Among Alaskan Women, 1991

The Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS) is a telephone survey conducted by the Health Promotion Program -Division of Public Health. We used the 1991 survey results to estimate the prevalence and characteristics associated with alcohol consumption among Alaskan women of childbearing age (18-44 years).

Methods: In 1991, 1,534 surveys were completed statewide. We selected women aged 18-44 years (n=519) for our analysis. We used three survey questions to determine alcohol consumption levels:

1. "During the past month, how many days per week or per month did you drink alcoholic beverages, on the average?"
2. "On the days when you drank, about how many drinks did you drink on the average?"
3. "...how many times during the past month did you have 5 or more drinks on an occasion?"

We grouped alcohol consumption into three categories:

- non-drinker -no alcohol use reported in the past month,
- light drinker -consumption of 30 or fewer drinks during the past month, and
- heavy drinker -consumption of greater than 30 drinks during the past month or consumption of 5 or more drinks on at least one occasion during the past month.

The estimated prevalence of alcohol use by drinking category is based on weighted data which can be extrapolated to the Alaskan population. The other analyses are not weighted and cannot be extrapolated to the general population.

Alaskan population estimates for 1991 were obtained from the Alaska Department of Labor.

Results: There were 511 women of childbearing age who responded to the survey and whose alcohol consumption during the past month could be determined. Pregnancy data were available on 473 respondents.

Of the 511, 405 (79%) were non-Native, and 106 (21%) were Native. Sixty-two (12%) were 18-24 years, 219 (43%) were 25- 34 years, and 230 (45 %) were 35-44 years of age.

Heavy drinkers (12%) were less likely to be college educated compared with light drinkers (35%) and non-drinkers (22%).

Heavy drinkers were less likely to be living as married (married or unmarried couple) than either light drinkers or non-drinkers (55%,72%, and 73%, respectively).

Heavy drinkers reported having a child in the house less often than either light drinkers or non-drinkers (58 %, 72 %, and 75 %, respectively). Among those with a child in the household, heavy and light drinkers were less likely than non-drinkers to report having a child under 1 year old in the household (7%, 7%, and 14%, respectively).

Of 473 women, 27 (6%) reported they were pregnant at the time of their interview. Of those who said they were pregnant, four (15%) reported alcohol consumption during the past month; three were heavy drinkers.

We observed no or only slight differences in employment and age by drinking category.

Discussion: The BRFS is a useful tool for looking at behavior patterns in the population. Because this work depends on self-reported alcohol use, the accuracy of the data cannot be verified. Past month alcohol consumption may not be representative of usual drinking patterns.

These results indicate that as many as 22,481 Alaska women between 18 and 44 years of age (17% of 132,240) are heavy drinkers. These women, should they become pregnant and continue to drink, are at risk for delivering an alcohol-affected infant.

Health care providers should routinely ask all their patients about alcohol consumption and take advantage of opportunities to help patients reduce or eliminate alcohol use. Special efforts should be directed at women of childbearing age.

Figure 1. Unweighted Prevalence of Past Month Alcohol Consumption by Race Among Alaskan Women, Age 18-44, BRFS 1991 (n=511)

