

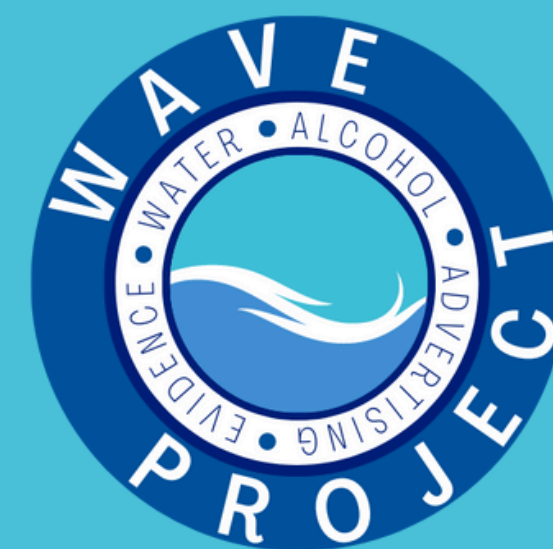
# Research Summary:

## What do we know about young people's alcohol use in and around water?

September 2024



Curtin University



## The issue

Alcohol consumption is heavily influenced by the broader social and commercial context, including alcohol advertising and promotion. There is evidence for the concept of an aquatic alcogenic environment, whereby alcohol use around water is normalised through advertising, social influences, and peer behaviours. Accordingly, alcohol use is a strong risk factor for injury, including both fatal and non-fatal drowning, especially among young people. The Alcohol Project Team (APT) from the **Water Alcohol adVertising Evidence (WAVE) Project** conducted a scoping review of relevant literature to gain greater insight into the issue.

## What did we do?

A scoping review was conducted to explore and summarise the peer-reviewed literature related to alcohol consumption among young people (aged 15-34) in the context of aquatic environments. The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Scoping Review (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines and the Arksey and O'Malley methodological framework, and was registered on the Open Science Framework. Five electronic databases were searched to identify relevant articles.

### Search Strategy

**POPULATION:** Young people aged between 15 and 34 years

**EXPOSURE:** Alcohol use in or around recreational aquatic environments

**OUTCOME:** Unintentional fatal or non-fatal drowning

## What did we find?

A total of 24 peer-reviewed articles were included. The included studies addressed various aspects of young people's alcohol use in recreational aquatic environments. Thirteen studies investigated the prevalence and risk factors (e.g., gender, age, location) of alcohol use by young people in aquatic environments; nine addressed the epidemiology of alcohol-related unintentional drowning; and three studies reviewed and/or evaluated interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm in aquatic environments.

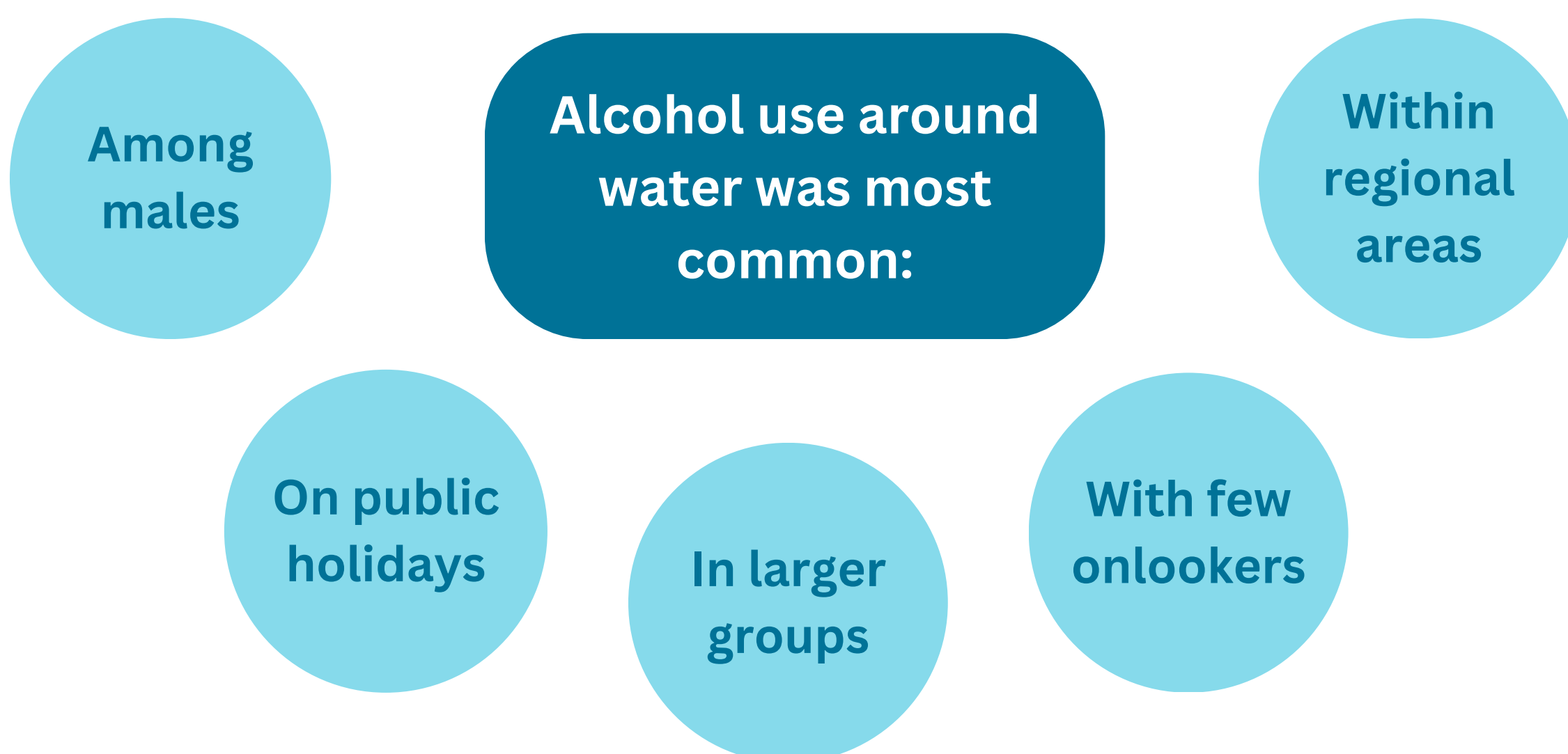
## Prevalence and risk factors of alcohol use by young people in aquatic environments

Studies investigating prevalence and risk factors explored young adults' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours about alcohol use around water. Alcohol use around water was found to be common among young people, and particularly among males, on public holidays, and among those living in regional areas. The use of alcohol around water was found to be associated with other risky behaviours, including swimming unsupervised, outside of patrolled areas, and/or while alone.

Reported prevalence of consuming alcohol in aquatic environments among young people ranged from **25% to 61%**

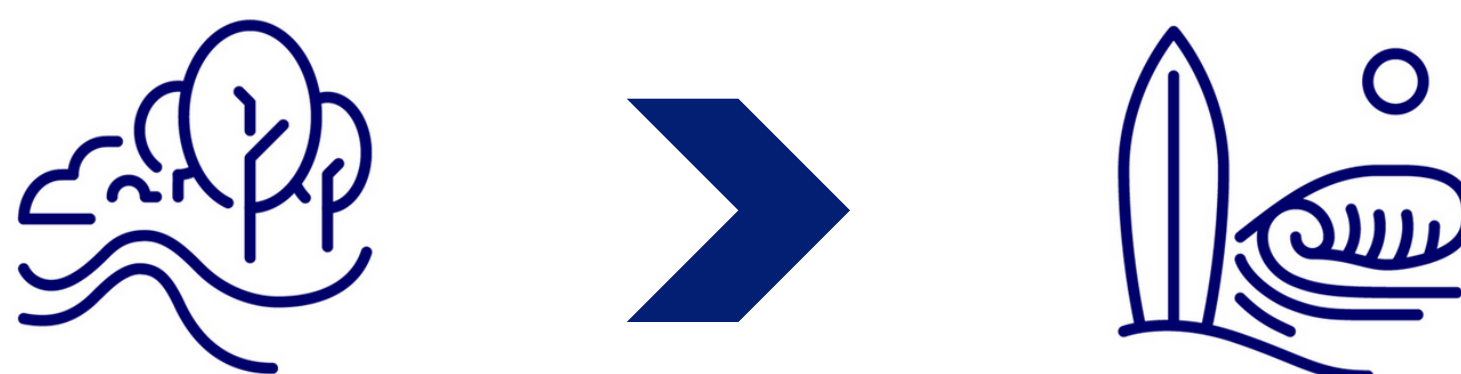
### Perception of risk

Risk perception was found to be an important determinant of behaviour, with those more concerned about risks being less likely to swim after consuming alcohol. While some studies found that most young adults recognised that drinking alcohol around water increased risk, others found that many thought the behaviour carried no or low risk.



## Epidemiology of alcohol-related unintentional drowning in young people

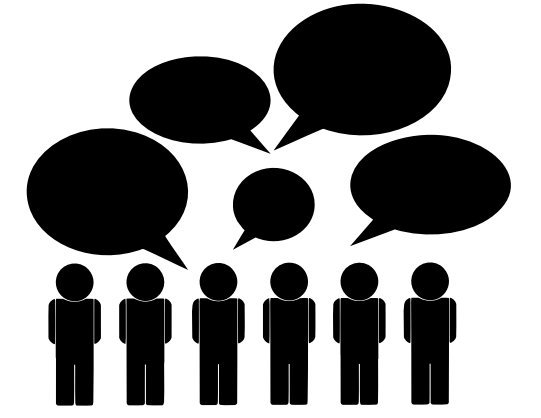
Alcohol involvement in drowning deaths ranged from 8% of coastal drownings in Australia to 72% of all unintentional drownings in Finland. Rates of alcohol involvement were generally higher in countries other than Australia, and were broadly similar across Australian and New Zealand studies.



Alcohol was involved in more river than coastal drowning deaths. The age group with the highest rate of alcohol involvement differed across studies, and was generally higher in males compared to females.

## Interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm in aquatic environments

Three intervention studies were identified. All used group and population strategies, predominantly education and communication. The findings highlight the need for ongoing education campaigns that prioritise community involvement and emphasise program evaluation in future research.



## So what?

The findings of this review provide insights for addressing the complex social, environmental, and increasingly commercial factors which form the aquatic alcogenic environments experienced by young people.

### Findings highlight that:

**Young people, particularly males, commonly use alcohol in and around water.**

**The risk of unintentional drowning increases with alcohol use.**

**Many young adults were aware of the risks associated with alcohol use around water, but this awareness did not always result in less risky behaviour.**

**There are many influences on young adults' alcohol use around water, including risk perception, the surrounding context, and peer influence.**

**Interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm around water among young people need to be comprehensive and consider environmental influences and supports to minimise the effect of the aquatic alcogenic environment.**

While many studies addressed the prevalence of and risk factors for alcohol use around water, no studies investigated the wider cultural and commercial determinants of this behaviour. There is a need for future research to explore the wider context around the aquatic alcogenic environment, particularly commercial interests including alcohol advertising and promotion. In addition, very few studies looked at interventions to reduce alcohol use around water, suggesting that many prevention campaigns have not undergone any formal evaluation. There is therefore a need for further evaluation of existing prevention campaigns in order to inform future intervention strategies.

Scan here to read the full article:

