

# Women & Alcohol Project: Phase II

## FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

### FOCUS GROUPS & COHORT

Six semi-structured focus groups were conducted between March and April of 2019 with a total of 47 women aged 35-59yrs in attendance. All women resided on the Northern Beaches of Sydney at the time of the research.

66%

lived with their partner and child/ren

66%

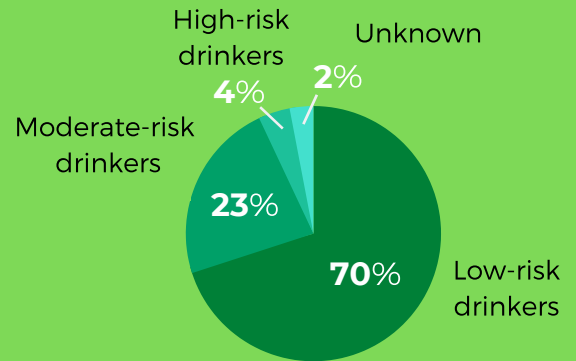
had an education level of 'University or higher'

68%

were working either full-time or part-time

34%

were born outside of Australia



Alcohol-risk screening scores

### IDENTIFIED THEMES

#### SHORT TERM RELEASE AND ESCAPE TURNED HABIT



**Short term release.** Participants expressed the need for a short-term “stress release” to cope with the complexities and “pressures” of a woman’s life. *“There is a lot more expectation for women to have a career, (a) family” and when life’s stressful you “reach for whatever the crutch is”*

**Escapism.** Every woman has their own personal story encompassing varying adversities. To cope with these adversities, women reiterated they need an escape, alcohol being the “pain numbing” fix. *You “just go buy a bottle”, “just basically to block out what was happening”*

**Habitual practice.** Participants saw drinking alcohol as a common habitual practice. Women believed whilst they drank for a release and an escape, it became engrained into their “schedule”. *“Monday to Friday. It just becomes a ritual of sort”*

#### “GO ON HAVE ANOTHER ONE”: LIVED EXPERIENCE OF JUDGEMENT AND PRESSURE TO FIT IN



**Choosing not to drink.** The pressure and judgement for women who choose not to drink is prevalent in social settings and leaves women feeling like “there is something wrong with” them. *“I actually get pressured into it, no I don’t want a drink, ok I’ll just have one”*

**Drinking less than others.** When choosing to only have “one or two” drinks women described being treated “differently” and not feeling “socially accepted”.

*“People will notice that you’re sitting on one drink and comment.”*

**Inner guilt.** The difference in behaviour between those drinking versus those not drinking can make women who drink “feel uncomfortable” and reflect on their own drinking.

*“it’s inner guilt”*

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### "IT BRINGS US TOGETHER": CREATING AND STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



**Deepens connection with partner.** Drinking alcohol provided a space within which women could strengthen their relationship with their partner.

***"(it's) a time to connect with my husband"***

**To make and keep friends.** Alcohol and socialising with friends were strongly linked. For some, drinking was a strategy they consciously employed to make new friends.

***"it would be very, very rare I'd say on the beaches if you went out with friends that alcohol wouldn't be involved"***

**Socialising as a parent.** Drinking was identified as a convenient way to maintain existing friendships whilst accommodating family needs. Women also reported that alcohol featured prominently in child-specific environments.

***"I don't think I've been to a kid's birthday party without alcohol"***

### "YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT'S GOING TO KILL YOU RIGHT NOW"



**Living in the now despite concern about later.**

Women overlook the negative short and long term health effects of alcohol, such as "hangovers", "weight gain" and impact on "gut health" in favour of the positive short term effects; it makes them "more bubbly, chatty and confident" in social situations.

***"you don't feel like it's going to kill you right now"***

**Varied perceptions of health impacts.** Women find it difficult to make informed decisions about drinking given their exposure to "conflicting" health messages from friends, family, media, research and medical professionals.

***"red wine is good for health" but "everyone knows the link to breast cancer"***



### WHERE TO NEXT?

A survey of the cohort will be conducted to explore the population prevalence of these themes and behaviours



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W: [www.nshealthpromotion.com.au](http://www.nshealthpromotion.com.au) E: [NSLHD-HealthPromotion@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:NSLHD-HealthPromotion@health.nsw.gov.au)

This project is approved by the NSLHD Human Research Ethics Committee: 2019/ETH11953.



**Health**  
Northern Sydney  
Local Health District