

# **Alcohol Consumption in Lambton County: A Community Profile**

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## Introduction

Alcohol consumption is a common element of our society, one which has few positive effects and many negative outcomes. On the positive side, alcoholic beverages have a cultural and social association with many rituals, religious and family celebrations, and in very moderate amounts, has been proven to reduce risk of heart disease in some instances. The negative effects of heavy or regular alcohol consumption far outweigh the positive, and include undesirable health effects such as increasing the risk for liver disease, heart disease, stroke, and several forms of cancer, as well as mental health problems. Family violence, motor vehicle collisions, domestic assault and other forms of criminal behaviour, are very often related to drinking.

The objective of this report is to identify local trends in the consumption of alcohol by gender, age group, income and education. Identifying the attitudes and behaviors involving the consumption of alcohol in the County of Lambton is the first step towards planning and evaluating effective prevention strategies. The Community Health Services Department has a mandate to work with community agencies and groups to support policies and educate the public about and targeted groups about low risk drinking, and to measure and report on alcohol use and health status (Mandatory Health Programs and Services).

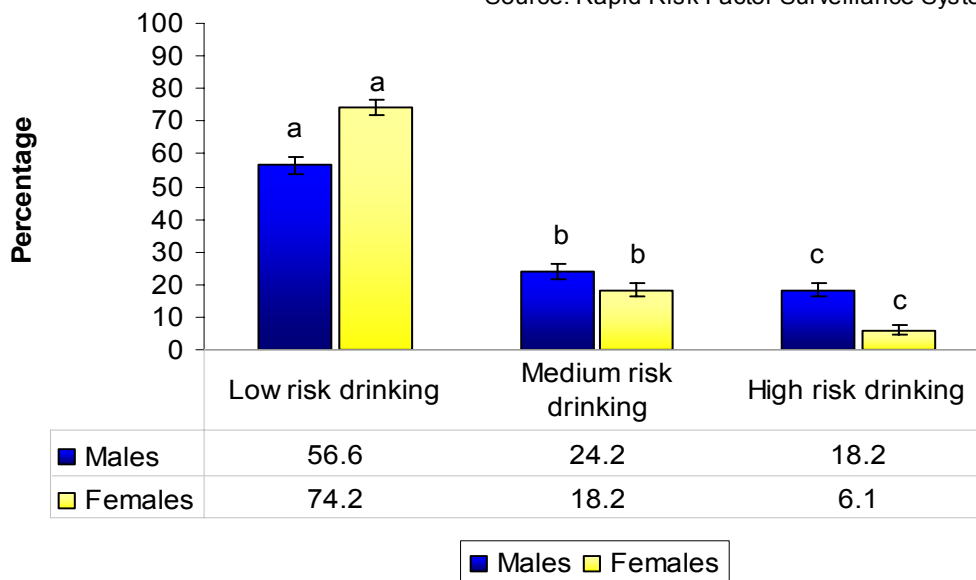
This report was prepared by Health Promotion and Program Support team staff. Data available from the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) were analyzed and results from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS, 2006) were used to identify the alcohol consumption habits of the residents of Lambton County. RRFSS data were collected on 3244 respondents between of 2002 and 2005. The CCHS surveyed 804 Lambton respondents in each of the respective years, 2003 and 2005.

### ***Lambton Residents' Drinking Behaviour – Highlights (self reported):***

- More males (17.2%) consumed alcohol every day compared to females (6.8%).
- More seniors (22.6%) aged 65 years and over had a daily drink, compared to younger counterparts (18-64 years of age).
- More males (17.2%) admitted to driving after consuming 2 or more drinks in the hour before driving compared to 2% of females.
- Of those who drove after two drinks, significantly more 18-24 year olds (15.1%) and those aged 25-44 years (11.5%) admitted to getting behind the wheel
- More males (26%) than females (18.8%) drank 3-4 times a week
- More males (11.6%) than females (5%) drank 5-7 times a week
- Significant difference in income for respondents who had 3-4 drinks per session on days when they drank: 25.5% of medium risk drinkers earned more than \$60,000; and 18.1% earned less than \$30,000.
- Risky drinking behaviour increases as level of education decreases. More non-high school graduates (15.2%) were more likely to be high-risk drinkers (5 or more drinks) than high-school graduates (13.4%) or individuals with post-secondary education (university or college) (9.4%).
- More were more likely to be high-risk drinkers (5 or more drinks) than individuals (9.4%) with higher education (university or college)

All of the above statistics are from the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), York University Institute for Social Research.

Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System

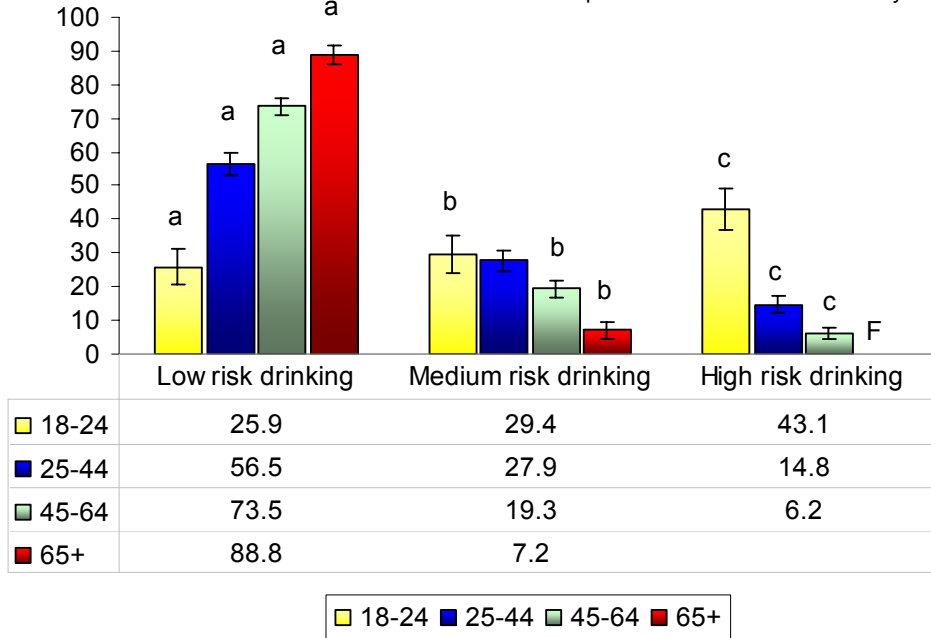


**Figure 1: The percentage of males and females by level of risk**

- a Significantly more females are *low risk drinkers* compared to males
- b Significantly more males are *medium risk drinkers* compared to females
- c Significantly more males are *high risk drinkers* compared to females

- A significantly higher percentage of females (74.2%) were low risk drinkers compared to males (56.2%) (Figure 1)
- A significantly higher percentage of males (24.2%) were medium risk drinkers compared to females (18.2%) (Figure 1)
- A significantly higher percentage of males (18.2%) were high risk drinkers compared to females (6.1%) (Figure 1)

Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System



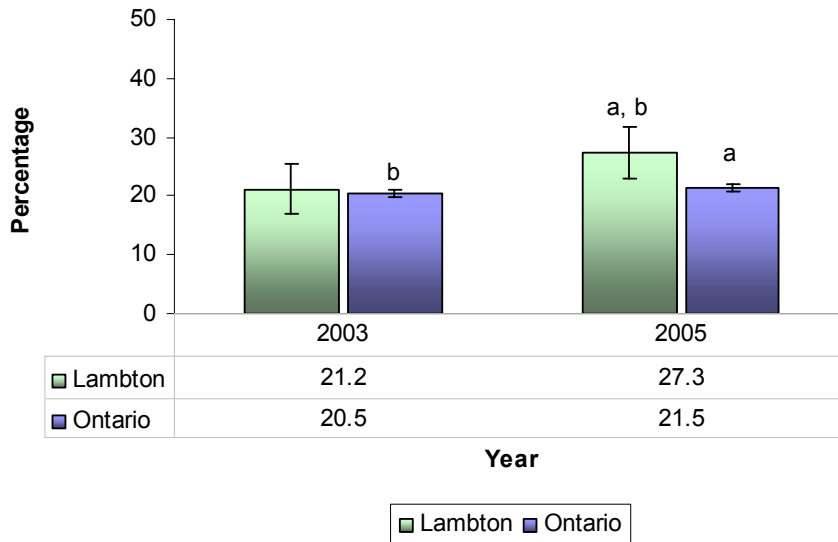
**Figure 2: The average number of drinks consumed per sitting on days that a respondent drinks alcohol were grouped into low-risk (1 or 2 drinks), medium-risk (3 or 4 drinks) and high-risk drinking (more than 5 drinks)**

a Significant differences in the percentage of *low-risk drinkers* among the age groups  
 b Significant differences in the percentage of *medium-risk drinkers* among the age groups  
 c Significant differences in the percentage of *high-risk drinkers* among the age groups  
 F Too unreliable to publish

- Age group 18 to 24 years of age (43.1%) had a significantly higher percentage of high risk drinkers than respondents aged 25 to 44 (14.8%) and 45 to 64 (6.2%) (Figure 2)

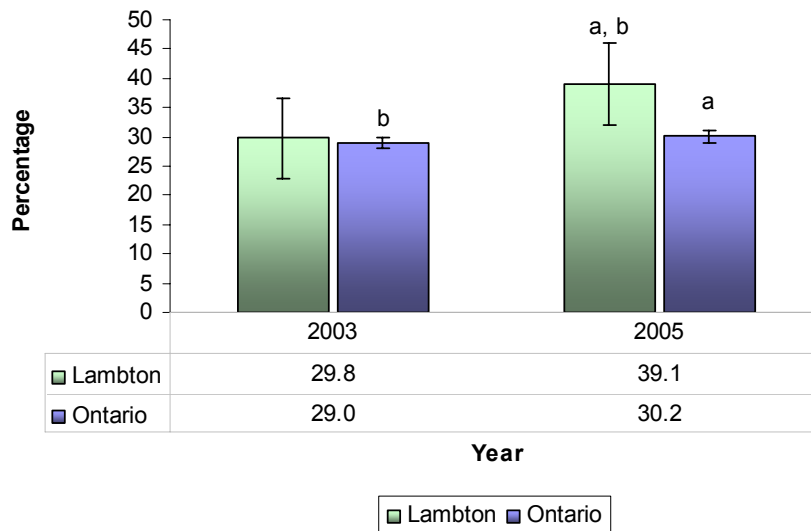
**Highlights of the Canadian Community Health survey (CCHS) on Lambton respondents:**

- The percentage of females who had 5 or more drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year compared to the provincial average was not significantly different from the provincial average.



**Figure 3: The percentage of males and females from the County of Lambton and Ontario who had 5 or more drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year**

- a. Males and females in the County of Lambton were significantly more likely to drink 5 or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year in 2005 compared to males and females in Ontario during 2003.



**Figure 4: The percentage of males from the County of Lambton and Ontario who had 5 or more drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year**

- a Males (39.1%) in the County of Lambton were significantly more likely to drink 5 or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year in 2005 compared to the Ontario average in 2005 (30.2%)

## **Conclusions**

The results from RRFSS and CCHS surveys were consistent. The County of Lambton had a significantly higher percentage of high-risk drinkers compared to the provincial average. High-risk drinking is strongly associated with age and gender, with males aged 18-24 at the greatest level of risk. About 15% of respondents aged 18-24 years and 11.5% of respondents aged 25-44 years admitted to drinking 2 or more drinks a hour before driving. Significantly more respondents that did not finish high school or had only a high school education, were high-risk drinkers compared to respondents who finished university or college.

Risky drinking is a community problem. This report establishes that Lambton residents are at an increased risk of negative outcomes from excessive alcohol use. The financial costs in terms of employee absenteeism, property damage, injuries, law enforcement and chronic disease treatment are significant (more than 4 billion dollars annually for Ontario alone). The human costs are far greater, as anyone who has lost a loved one to due to alcohol-related disease, or as a victim of a drunk driving collision, will know. Many of these costs can be reduced, and there are models of successful community interventions designed to reduce the burden of excessive alcohol use.

Current public health scope and funding levels are insufficient to plan, engage community stakeholders to sustain an effective community-wide effort to reduce harm from alcohol use.

## **Recommendations:**

1. That staff research and report to council on models for successful community interventions designed to prevent alcohol misuse and reduce the harms associated with alcohol use.
2. That County Council petition the local members of Provincial Parliament and the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion to provide "Focus Community" funding for Lambton County. This funding is currently available to 22 Ontario communities, and is designed to support broad multi-sectoral community initiatives designed to reduce the burden of substance abuse.