

Bottoms up! Older Australians: an investigation of the association between alcohol use and social context.



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Complexity of alcohol & ageing?

- ▶ Many older people do not disclose info about their drinking because they have a sense of embarrassment or shame
- ▶ Many are isolated with minimal social contacts or networks making problem use difficult to detect
- ▶ Reluctance to raise alcohol as an issue
- ▶ Alcohol problems –masked by other conditions linked to ageing e.g. falls, insomnia, depression, confused state.

Causes and triggers of drinking

- ▶ **Emotional and social problems**
 - Bereavement, loss of friends and social status, loss of occupation, impaired ability to function, family conflict, reduced self-esteem
- ▶ **Medical problems**
 - Physical disabilities, chronic pain, insomnia, reduced mobility, cognitive impairment
- ▶ **Practical problems**
 - Impaired self care, reduced coping skills, dislocation from previous accommodation (Dar, 2006)

Alcohol and potential benefits

- ▶ heart disease
- ▶ high-density lipoprotein cholesterol
- ▶ mortality
- ▶ psychosocial benefits
 - social engagement
 - inclusion



Research questions:

- ▶ Gender and levels of consumption
- ▶ Alcohol consumption and place of residence
- ▶ The social context, constraining and facilitating factors which influence older people's alcohol use.

What did we do?

- ▶ Purposive sampling 65-74 year old current drinkers
n= 42
 - ▶ Recruitment brochures:
 - Retirement villages
 - Bowling clubs
 - Curtin radio
 - Have a Go Seniors newspaper
 - Senior citizen centres
 - ▶ Snowballing
 - ▶ Interviews : 15 June till 19 Sept 2011
 - ▶ Demographics, alcohol consumption, social activities, perceptions about drinking in private homes versus retirement villages, rituals associated with drinking.
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	NDSHS 2010 (60-69 years)		Current research sample	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Sample			20	22
Daily drinking	17.8%	8.8%	45%	32%
Lifetime risk (>2 SD/day)	27.9%	7.5%	30%	33%
Single occasion (>4 SD on any occasion at least 1/month)	26.9%	4.8%	25%	13.6%

Results

	Retirement Village		Private Homes	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Sample size	10	10	10	12
Average age	71.3	70.5	69.7	69.6
Daily drinking	40%	50%	50%	18%
Average SD	3.5	2.1	2.4	2.1
SD yesterday	3.3	1.6	2.8	2.0
Q/F	3.1	1.7	1.9	1.2
CAGE	1	1	1	1

Social engagement

- ▶ *I'm always organising outings – I have the family, I've got tennis friends, friends here [in the village] now, caravan friends. We've got a lot of friends and a lot of things that we are involved with. We've been in the caravan club for 12 years. With tennis friends, we go out to dinner, or someone has a party – just normal everyday things. There are 12 of us and we get together when each has a birthday, so that is an average of once a month. We have morning tea at tennis and one of our ladies is 80 next week so we are all going to have lunch in the little hall next to where we play tennis. I play tennis once a week and see them socially about every two months. Caravan friends – we go out once a month. Happy hour – every night. We play cards up to three times a week. I play indoor bowls once a week and darts twice a week. Bingo once a week. The family comes here for diner once a week. Every Sunday night we go out for a meal. [30RR_F_V]*

Social activities and alcohol

- ▶ *“Drinking is a social thing, and a lot of people don’t have a drink by themselves and here there are a lot of social activities”*[24MK_F_V].
- ▶ Alexander and Duff (1988) noted that “a strong relationship was found ... between greater social interaction and alcohol use” (p.635).

Frequency vs quantity

- ▶ In my youth I may have gone out to get drunk occasionally, but [I] have never been a big drinker. I probably drink more regularly now, but no increase in the amount... I probably drink more wine now – 10 years ago it would have been more beer. [25BT_M_P]
- ▶ I have reduced my alcohol intake on each occasion, but drink more frequently. [4BD_M_V]
- ▶ We are drinking more now... not a lot more, but more frequently because we are more relaxed. [3LD_F_V]
- ▶ I probably drink a bit more now than I did 10 years ago because of the social thing. Not a bigger glass but maybe on more occasions. When you are in a married situation you come home and have a meal and [it] didn't used to enter my head – but now if I am out socialising, [I drink alcohol] a bit more. [20MA_F_P]

Living arrangements

- ▶ Higher social engagement - increased frequency of consumption
- ▶ Variation amongst villages in social engagement
- ▶ Majority of residents felt no difference between RV and PH
- ▶ “I think it might be more in a retirement village because they get together once a week for happy hour”. [31CR_M_V]

- ▶ **Not having to drive**
- ▶ **Ready made social group**

- ▶ Reduced household chores e.g. Gardening and hence more time to socialise

Facilitating

- ▶ **Driving after drinking**

- ▶ **Only one participant indicated health as a constraining factor**

Constraining

Rules and strategies about alcohol

- ▶ Time of day for commencing drinking
- ▶ No alcohol without meals
- ▶ Don't mix drinks
- ▶ Reward and demarkation of end of working day.



- ▶ “Only if it is in the evening. I don’t like drinking during the day, and would only have the odd drink during the day. Once I have a drink I would tend to keep drinking. I don’t normally drink before 6pm. Those are my internal rules, it limits the alcohol intake. I don’t feel right after drinking during the day which is why I tend not to.” [CT_F_P]
- ▶ “At home we would never drink wine at lunch. We don’t even have a drink before 6pm if we are home. If I went to lunch I would have a glass of wine”. [3LD_F_V]

So what?

1. Greater social engagement leads to increased opportunities to drink
2. Social context dual purpose

“So they are encouraged by the social activity of getting together at least once a week or sometimes twice, to come down with a bottle and some nibbles. It is the encouragement to socialise and with socialisation goes a drink.” [4BD_M_V]

Strengths and limitations

- ▶ No previous research in Australia RV
- ▶ Comparing residence
- ▶ Social dimensions of alcohol use with older Australians
- ▶ Mixed methods.
- ▶ Small sample size

The end.....

- ▶ “I think some of the vitriol needs to be toned down a bit. People need to recognise that you are who you are and make your own decisions and as long as you are not being stupid, like driving drunk or hurting people, then I think you should be able to live your life the way you want to live it!”

[29DM_M_P]