

## Alcohol surveys in Australia, South Africa, Switzerland, and Tanzania: Different methods, settings, patterns and harms

### Editorial

Welcome to this issue of the International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research (Volume 11, Number 2) which consists of papers all of which concern the theme of *alcohol surveys*. The focus of the first paper is on methodological issues pertaining to a survey on alcohol's harms to others which originated in Australia (Rintala et al., 2023). The remaining papers describe studies which used surveys to measure predictors and patterns of alcohol consumption (Rashied, 2023); patterns of alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland (Labhart & Gmel, 2023); and patterns of alcohol consumption and drunk-driving related harm in Tanzania. As is usually the case for our international journal, the papers involve studies conducted in diverse settings, and in this issue they include both high-income (Australia and Switzerland) and middle-income (South Africa and Tanzania) countries.

The paper by Rintala and colleagues (2023) describes the methods that were used to assess alcohol's harm to others (AHTO) in the Australia AHTO survey. First conducted in 2008 in Australia, the survey was repeated in 2021, while meanwhile it had been adapted for implementation in studies in many other parts of the world. The paper describes numerous modifications made to the original 2008 survey including a move away from traditional telephone interviewing methods. The 2021 survey combined two types of surveys – one using a random digit dial (RDD) method on mobile phones and a second using a panel survey with respondents recruited for continuing involvement in diverse surveys. The paper also describes the questionnaire and its measures, as well as the survey procedures employed, and the application of weights to improve the sample's representativeness. A final aspect of the paper is the examination of whether survey mode (RDD versus continuing sample) yielded different results in terms of several crucial alcohol consumption outcomes. This paper is likely to be a valuable read for those who may be interpreting results from AHTO surveys as well as those who may be interested in implementing an AHTO survey in their own country.

Rashied's (2023) paper describes the socio-economic factors associated with alcohol consumption and heavy episodic drinking in South Africa. Analysing secondary data from Wave 4 of the National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS) conducted in 2014 and 2015, Rashied found that 28.7% of the South African respondents reported drinking and that of

this group, 46.9% reported heavy episodic drinking in the previous year. Around one-third of women as compared with two-thirds of men reported drinking in the previous year. The factors associated with alcohol use and heavy episodic drinking in South Africa were generally as expected (e.g. being a man and being younger), yet at other times less intuitive. For instance, the direction of the relationship between perceived health status and exercise, and heavy episodic drinking among women was somewhat unexpected.

Labhart and Gmel (2023) conducted a survey of 1,693 people to assess drinking patterns before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland. Noting that many people either reduced or increased their alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic, they hypothesised that these results might support polarisation in drinking, depending on different socio-economic characteristics. The study did provide evidence of polarisation of drinking behaviours in many segments of the population. Young adults (15-24 years old), those afraid of COVID-19 and its financial and other effects, and those who experienced a precarious work situation were more likely to exhibit polarisation in their drinking patterns. Novelty, the authors used and conducted Chi-squared tests and regression models to assess the absolute value of the change in drinking habits and found these techniques were suitable for measuring polarisation effects.

The fourth paper (Staton et al., 2023) describes a survey conducted in emergency rooms in Moshi, a city in the northern part of Tanzania. The study sought to examine the relationship between alcohol consumption and road traffic injuries. The sample comprised 375 patients who had been involved in road traffic injuries and were recruited in emergency rooms. Just over one quarter of the sample reported having consumed alcohol shortly prior to the road traffic injury; and just under 30% tested positive on an alcohol breathalyser test. Among the authors' specific findings of the study were a dose-response relationship between alcohol consumption and road traffic injuries. They also found that even very low levels of alcohol consumption were associated with road traffic injuries. The strongest associations between road traffic injuries and alcohol use were observed among those whose injuries involved motor cycles, as compared to those with injuries associated with motor cars and trucks. The need for more effective drunk-driving interventions in Tanzania are evident from the study.

This paper is accompanied by a Commentary by Monica Swahn (2023) who provides valuable background and contextual information regarding the harmful use of alcohol in East Africa, and discusses important interventions for preventing alcohol-related road traffic injuries and other alcohol-related problems in the region.

Following our successful gathering in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Alcohol Epidemiology Symposium of the Kettil Bruun Society (KBS) we have continued to collate papers for our two Special Issues. Articles for the first Special Issue, titled, “*Alcohol Prevention Research and Policy Development in Low- and Middle-Income countries (LMIC): Facilitating Partnerships, Capacity and Impact*” have started being uploaded on *Early View* and will continue to be published during the course of 2024. We are grateful to the Guest Editors of the Special Issue: Monica Swahn, Eva Braaten, Sawitri Assanangkornchai, Kristina Sperkova, Joel Francis and Sebastián Peña for their contribution to *IJADR*.

The second Special issue is the inaugural “*KBS 2023 Annual Symposium Issue*”. We hope it will become a tradition for *IJADR* to publish an issue dedicated to papers presented at each annual KBS Symposium. We have extended the deadline for submitting your articles from the 2023 KBS symposium to 26 January 2024. This Special Issue is being led by Rachel O’Donnell who is working with her Co-Guest Editors, Jack G. Martin, Nic Taylor, Gemma Mitchell and Inés Henriques-Cadby. We also continue to welcome submissions to our regular issues of *IJADR*.

We would like to express our gratitude to Christine Buchanan, Florian Labhart and Elin Bye, without whose efforts, production of this issue of *IJADR* would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the *IJADR* Editorial Team for processing the manuscripts, as well as all those who reviewed and provided valuable feedback on the papers in this issue.

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