

Describing the alcohol harm paradox: twenty years of data from Victoria, Australia

Michael Livingston^{1,2}, Nic Taylor^{1,2}, Sarah Callinan³, Yvette Mojica-Perez³, Alex Torney³, Gabriel Caluzzi³, Klaudia Kepa³, Amy Pennay³

¹National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Melbourne, Australia, ²Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia, ³Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Presenter's email: michael.livingston@curtin.edu.au

Introduction: *It is well established internationally that rates of alcohol-related harms are generally higher among socio-economically disadvantaged groups, despite higher or similar levels of drinking in socio-economically advantaged groups. There is very little Australian data published on socio-economic disparities in alcohol harms, and none that has examined changes over time. This paper aimed to describe trends in socio-economic inequalities in key measures of alcohol-related harm over 21 years in Victoria, Australia*

Method: *Data on hospital admissions for alcohol-related liver disease and emergency department presentations for alcohol-related disorders were compiled between 2000 and 2020 via the Victorian Agency for Health Information. Rates were estimated by neighbourhood socio-economic quintile for males and females, by age. Differences in rates were assessed using Poisson regression, with interaction models used to examine whether the social gradient in harms had changed over the study period.*

Key Findings OR Results: *Alcohol-related harms were higher for people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods for both acute and chronic outcomes and across men, women and nearly all age groups. For example, male rates of alcohol-related liver disease were nearly twice as high in the most disadvantaged quintile as in the least disadvantaged quintile (IRR 0.54, CI: 0.50, 0.58). On some measures there was evidence that the gap between socio-economic groups had widened over time.*

Discussions and Conclusions: *Alcohol-related harms are disproportionately experienced by socio-economic groups in Victoria. Urgent work is needed to understand the mechanisms driving these inequalities and to reduce them.*

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