

How might we support alcohol reduction for midlife women in different social classes? The potential role of wellness activities

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Background: We explored how women in different social classes had differential access to resources and services to enhance their 'wellness', resulting in social classed reasons/roles for alcohol consumption.

Method/Approach: We analysed data from a qualitative study of 50 midlife women on alcohol consumption by midlife women in South Australia and employed the analogy of a 'toolkit' in order to understand the structural patterning of 'wellness tools'. Bourdieu's relational model of social class guided our exploration of women's inequitable opportunities for wellness.

Findings: Higher social class women had 'choices' facilitated by bulging wellness toolkits, such as yoga, exercise and healthy eating regimens - alcohol consumption was not essential to promoting 'wellness' and did not have an important place in their toolkits. Middle class women had less well-stocked toolkits and consumed alcohol in a 'compensation approach' with other wellness tools. Alcohol consumption received positive recognition and was a legitimised form of enjoyment, fun and socialising, which needed counterbalancing with healthy activities. Working class women had sparse toolkits—other than alcohol—which was a tool for dealing with life's difficulties. Their focus was less on 'promoting wellness' and more on 'managing challenging circumstances'.

Discussion/Conclusion: Our social class-based analysis is nestled within the sociology of consumption and sociological critiques of the wellness industry. Women's uses of alcohol as part of their wellness toolkits, and the reliance on alcohol in a sparse toolkit for working class women, warrants consideration from a social policy angle.