

The intersection of stigma reduction with research and policymaking on reducing alcohol's harm to others

Robin Room^{1,2}, Eleanor Costello³, Koen Smit², Anne-Marie Laslett¹

¹ *Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3086, Australia;* ² *Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs, Department of Public Health Sciences, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden;* ³ *Alcohol and Drug Foundation, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051, Australia*

Presenter's email: R.Room@latrobe.edu.au

Introduction. Alcohol intoxication is associated with injury and other harms to others, and research literature on occurrence and prevention of such harms is growing. Another line of analysis focuses on stigmatisation of drinkers and how this might be reduced. The intersection of these two conflicting lines of thinking and research is considered, and whether and how both aims -- minimising alcohol's harms to others and eliminating drinking-related stigma -- can be reconciled.

Approach. Recent literature in both topical areas is analysed, for alcohol's harms to others studies in terms of moralisation of the drinker, and for alcohol and stigma discussions in terms of mentioning and handling alcohol's harm to others.

Key findings. Recognising alcohol's role in harms to others inevitably raises the question of the drinker's responsibility, with potential for stigmatisation – by those affected and by the social environment.

Discussion and conclusion. While analyses and prevention efforts can be framed in ways minimising the conflict between the goals of preventing harm and minimising stigma, implementing policies which diminish harms from others' drinking may well be more effective in reducing rates of stigmatisation related to drinking.

Implications for practice and policy. It is crucial that policy and practice concerning alcohol take into account actual or potential harm to others. While drawing attention to this dimension potentially brings stigmatisation, so that careful framing is needed, policies and practices which effectively reduce harm to others from drinking will diminish events which promote stigmatisation.

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