

The Effect of Moderate Alcohol Consumption on Health-Related Quality of Life Over Time in Older Adults

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Introduction: Some research shows a J-shaped relationship between alcohol consumption and health (i.e., moderate alcohol consumption reduces the risk of morbidity/mortality compared to non or heavy drinking). Other research contends that the J-shape relationship is spuriously concluded due to confounding and the sick quitter effect. Therefore, there is a need for research that addresses this confounding and bias. This research is important for older adults who are at higher risk of alcohol-related harm due to age-related physiological changes.

Method: Data obtained from older adults (≥50 years) who drank alcohol consistently for at least three waves of the New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement Cohort study (n = 2,258) were analysed using linear mixed-effects modelling. The effect of alcohol consumption on SF-12 health-related quality of life (HRQOL) scores was assessed. Analyses were adjusted for socioeconomic status and other sociodemographic characteristics and were stratified by gender.

Results: Alcohol consumption did not have a significant effect on physical and mental HRQOL scores in males. For females, any level of drinking was significantly associated with higher HRQOL scores compared to lifetime abstainers (p<0.001). Females who drank 1 to < 2 drinks/day had the highest increase in physical HRQOL compared to lifetime abstainers. Furthermore, ≥ 2 drinks per day was significantly associated with lower scores in mental HRQOL in females than lifetime abstainers (p<0.05).

Conclusions: In this study, the effect of moderate alcohol consumption on HRQOL differed according to gender, with only females reporting a significant health-protective effect of moderate drinking on physical HRQOL.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

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