

## Exploring risk perceptions of alcohol consumption among older people

NUALNONG WONGTONGKAM<sup>1</sup>, VICTORIA KOSTADINOV<sup>1</sup>, SOPHIE POINTER<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia*

Presenter's email: [victoria.kostadinov@flinders.edu.au](mailto:victoria.kostadinov@flinders.edu.au)

**Introduction and Aims:** Australia has an ageing population, and alcohol use is a significant contributor to the burden of disease among this group. It is currently unknown how risk perceptions are related to consumption patterns among older people. This study sought to examine how older people understand the risks associated with drinking alcohol and weigh them against perceived benefits of consumption.

**Design and Methods:** A mixed-methods study was undertaken of Australians aged 65+ who drank alcohol at least once a week. Participants completed a survey about their consumption, demographics, and alcohol-related knowledge, and participated in a semi-structured interview. Descriptive analyses were conducted on quantitative data, with qualitative data subjected to content analysis.

**Results:** More than a third (38%) of participants (N=32) drank alcohol at least five days per week, with 16% drinking more than 4 standard drinks per occasion. Most participants did not discuss their consumption with healthcare professionals. Key benefits of alcohol consumption were reported to be relaxation and socialisation. Some participants noted that alcohol helped them deal with loneliness, past trauma, or other problems. Most did not perceive their personal level of consumption to be risky and many reported risk-mitigation strategies (e.g., never driving after drinking). Many stated that they would reduce consumption if their circumstances changed (e.g., declining health, more caring duties).

**Discussions and Conclusions:** A targeted education program addressing the correlates of risky drinking among older Australians is recommended. The relationship between alcohol consumption and previous experiences, such as trauma, requires further attention among this population.

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