

## **Adopting the Alcohol Cultures Framework to inform health promotion practice and social change in drinking cultures**

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### **Aim of Abstract:**

There has been growing policy and academic interest in 'drinking cultures' as targets of investigation and intervention. However, there remains ambiguity around the concept of drinking cultures. While much academic discussion focuses on national drinking cultures, in which the cultural entity of concern is the nation or society as a whole (macro level), drinking patterns and norms, as with other social behaviours, are not uniform in a large modern nation. In fact, there are often variations in drinking norms between different coherent subgroups in the population, necessitating a focus on cultural entities within the culture as a whole (micro level).

The aim of this symposium is to introduce a novel framework for defining drinking cultures and designing and implementing interventions aimed at addressing alcohol harms. Presentations will introduce the Alcohol Cultures Framework and discuss methodological approaches to identifying and conducting research with members of heavy drinking subcultures. Findings will be presented from research with three heavy-drinking sub-populations, with a focus on drinking patterns, perceptions, social norms and pressures, and potential opportunities for changing drinking cultures. Lastly, findings will be presented from a project applying the Alcohol Cultures Framework to identify and disrupt unhealthy drinking cultures among young adults in night-time entertainment precincts in metro-Melbourne.

The symposium brings together researchers, policy-makers and health promotion practitioners with an interest in micro-level interventions for the reduction of alcohol-related harm.

### **Presentation 1 - Development of the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework**

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#### **Introduction and Aims:**

The influence of cultural factors on alcohol consumption and harm is widely recognised, but poorly defined in evidence-based alcohol harm reduction activities. We describe the process of development of the world's first evidence-based framework for public health action on alcohol cultures, and initial implementation in Victoria, Australia.

**Method:**

In May 2015, a literature review of the key concepts in defining and changing drinking cultures was conducted by the Centre for Alcohol Policy and Research which recommended a range of pathways forward, one of which was further conceptual work in the topic of alcohol culture change. Further formative research was then conducted including interviews with key alcohol control stakeholders and thematic concepts explored at a stakeholder workshop.

**Key Findings:**

The literature review provided several key recommendations for planning alcohol culture change initiatives, including consideration of the social and interactional nature of drinking, critical partnerships, targeting subpopulations to complement whole-of-population drivers, further conceptual and empirical work on subpopulations of risky drinkers and planning for a sustained process in creating culture change. We have defined alcohol culture and identified four frames for intervention: societal, setting, subculture and family-individual. The Framework outlines examples of factors that influence the way people drink across the frames and suggests critical questions to consider when planning health promotion strategies.

**Discussion and Conclusions:**

These findings show a clear way forward to create and measure evidence-based, coordinated action for alcohol harm reduction through alcohol culture change in Victoria.

**Implications for Practice or Policy**

1. New approach to alcohol harm reduction to complement legislative reform
2. Definition of alcohol culture
3. New planning tool to influence alcohol cultures

**Presentation 2 - Identifying and recruiting members of 'risky' drinking subpopulations: a novel method for guiding culture change research and interventions**

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**Introduction and Aims:**

In researching drinking cultures, conventional and one-dimensional methods are ill-equipped to identify, access and recruit members of heavy drinking subpopulations. This paper describes novel methods for identifying and recruiting heavy-drinking subpopulations and reflects on their strengths and limitations.

**Method:**

The project focused on middle aged and older adults. To identify potential risky drinking (5+ standard drinks) subpopulations we drew upon three data sources: 1) existing survey data, 2) literature review, and 3) stakeholder consultation. Using criteria around triangulation of data sources, reachability and scalability in terms of culture change efforts, we selected three subpopulations for in-depth research. An online survey was designed, with item

construction informed by the Alcohol Cultures Framework. Participants were recruited via Facebook.

### **Key Findings:**

When considered in isolation, each of the three data sources had unique limitations. These included a lack of granularity in the quantitative data, gaps in the literature around non-youth drinking cultures, and the limitations of stakeholder perspectives. However, when considered together they yielded useful information to guide the selection process. Online surveys provided unique challenges for understanding drinking cultures. Facebook recruitment was effective for two of three subpopulations. Participants self-selected into subpopulations and were not necessarily members of a subcultural drinking group.

### **Discussion and Conclusions:**

On-line surveys were a time and cost-effective means for recruiting and studying heavy drinking subpopulations, although provided some challenges for researching drinking cultures. Methods that involve recruiting a group of people in contact with one another may overcome these challenges.

### **Implications for translational research**

1. A multi-pronged method for identifying risky drinking subpopulations may overcome the limitations inherent in one-dimensional approaches.
2. The method described may be able to be applied to identify risky drinking subpopulations for further research and targeted culture change interventions.

## **Presentation 3 - Drinking cultures among heavy-drinking subpopulations of middle aged and older Victorians**

### **Presenting Authors:**

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### **Introduction and Aims:**

To describe the drinking patterns, social norms and pressures, and potential opportunities for cultural change, within three heavy drinking subpopulations among middle aged and older Victorians.

### **Method:**

Online surveying of mixed-sex sports bar attendees (Generation X or Baby Boomer), same-sex attracted women (Generation X), and male construction workers (Generation X), recruited via Facebook. Survey questions were developed based on the 'critical questions' from the Alcohol Cultures Framework. Quantitative data are summarised using descriptive statistics. Open text responses were coded in NVivo to identify key themes and categories.

### **Key Findings:**

A large majority of male sports bar attendees and construction workers reported drinking 5+ drinks on a single drinking occasion at least monthly. Around 50% of female sports bar attendees and same-sex attracted women drank at these levels. Sports bar attendees described cultural associations between sport and alcohol. Drinking was described as an important element of social inclusion for male construction workers. Many same-sex attracted women said that meeting other same-sex attracted women was often organised around drinking. Across the groups, social pressures such as teasing and mocking often encouraged drinking. Round-buying was a strong social norm, which may increase the likelihood of greater alcohol consumption.

**Discussion and Conclusions:**

Efforts to change a drinking culture are more likely to succeed if they recognise and build on the social nature of most drinking. Our findings provide some insights into drinking norms and practices among three subpopulations that may suggest potential opportunities for intervention.

**Implications for translational research:**

The 'critical questions' provide valuable guides for data collection and can provide useful 'before' and 'after' data for evaluating interventions. To increase confidence that an intervention is accessing a drinking subculture, samples should be constituted in terms of participants in contact with each other.

**Presentation 4 - Implementation of the Alcohol Cultures Framework to guide project design in metro-Melbourne****Presenting Authors:**

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**Introduction and Aims:**

The relationship between alcohol-related harm and the physical and social environment of night-time entertainment (NTE) precincts is well known. The Victorian Local Government Areas of Port Phillip, Melbourne and Stonnington were awarded a grant from VicHealth to apply the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework (ACF) in practice. We describe key findings of applying the ACF to explore drinking cultures in metro-Melbourne NTEs.

**Method:**

The project focused on young adults aged 18 to 24 years in metro-Melbourne NTEs. A literature review and analysis of existing data was undertaken to understand the cultural factors that influence drinking in NTEs and opportunities for culture change. Stories from young people (n=27) were collected to test assumptions about the ways young people drink alcohol in NTEs. An adapted version of the Most Significant Change technique was applied in analysing the stories.

**Key Findings:**

The literature review and analysis of existing data highlighted several key factors influencing young adults' drinking in NTE in Melbourne. These included norms to drink to intoxication, that not drinking is unacceptable, for young men alcohol may be important in performances of masculinity, and atmospheres of places can influence how young adults drink. The story analysis confirmed these key factors.

**Discussion and Conclusions:**

The story method was effective in understanding alcohol cultures, as well as being a means of generating stories that are 'culture transporters', to foster change in relation to alcohol use and associated harms. Using young adults' stories as a way of disrupting unhelpful cultural norms around alcohol and cultivating new ones is a potentially fruitful avenue for facilitating alcohol culture change.

**Implications for Practice and Policy:**

New approach to alcohol harm reduction using young adults' stories to identify and disrupt unhealthy drinking cultures.

**Discussion Section**

Those attending the symposium will gain an understanding of an agreed definition of 'drinking culture' and a systematic process for identifying and developing interventions to change unhealthy drinking cultures. Attendees will be able to:

- Identify how the Alcohol Cultures Framework approach differs from other approaches to reducing alcohol-related harms in populations.
- Recognise some limitations and challenges of adopting an alcohol cultures approach.
- Assess the utility of the Alcohol Cultures Framework for their own professional practice as researchers, practitioners and policy-makers.

The Chair will invite the audience to take part in a discussion to help identify and give further substance to the policy and practice implications of the Alcohol Cultures Framework approach. Led by the Chair, the guided discussion will consider two key questions:

1. What are the implications for research, policy and health promotion activities of taking an Alcohol Cultures Framework approach?
2. How can research and health promotion address the challenges of identifying and intervening with heavy drinking subcultural groups?

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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