

NEW NATIONAL ANALYSES OF ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS: CHANGES IN DRINKING PATTERNS, DRINKING NORMS AND HARMS SINCE 2008, CONSIDERING COVID-19 EFFECTS

Authors:

ANNE-MARIE LASLETT^{1,3}, ROBIN ROOM^{1,4}, HENG JIANG^{1,3}, DAN ANDERSON-LUXFORD¹, BREE WILLOUGHBY¹, SANDRA KUNTSCHE¹, AMANY TANYOS¹, DIANA EGERTON-WARBURTON⁵, CHRIS DORAN⁶

¹Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Australia, ²National Drug Research Institute, Perth, Australia, ³Melbourne School of Global and Population Health, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia, ⁴Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs, Department of Public Health Sciences, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden, ⁵Monash Health, Clayton, Australia, ⁶Central Queensland University, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Presenter's email: A.Laslett@latrobe.edu.au

Aim: A new national estimate of alcohol's harm to others beyond the drinker is needed to crucially inform alcohol, social and health policies. In this symposium we present the first results from the 2021 survey and secondary analyses of response agency data so far, considering possible effects of COVID-19.

Chair: Prof Steve Allsop

Chair's email: S.Allsop@curtin.edu.au

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This work was supported by the Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP190100698), the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), the Australian Rechabite Foundation (ARF), the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM), Monash Health and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF). AML was supported by an ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award (DE190100329).

PRESENTATION 1: Alcohol's harm to others: effects upon our social scaffolding

Presenting Authors:

ANNE-MARIE L LASLETT, ROBIN ROOM, HENG JIANG, DAN ANDERSON-LUXFORD, BREE WILLOUGHBY, SANDRA KUNTSCHKE, DIANA EGERTON-WARBURTON, CHRIS DORAN

Presenter's email: A.Laslett@latrobe.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Alcohol's harm to others (AHTO) has become a key driver of national and international alcohol policy. The 2008 AHTO Australian survey found over 70% of respondents reported harm in the previous year. We aimed to produce a comprehensive new estimate for 2021, identify correlates of AHTO and study changes in AHTO over this time.

Design and Methods: Using weighted data on combined national samples from random digitally dialled Australian mobiles (n=1,000) and the Life in Australia panel survey (n=1,574), we analysed self-reported harm from the drinking of 2,574 respondents' families, friends and co-workers. Logistic regressions were used to analyse differences in key outcomes from drinkers respondents knew by gender, age and socio-economic status. Confidence intervals around key estimates were used to compare differences in the two national surveys.

Results: In the previous 12 months, 61.6% of the population reported having a heavy drinker in their lives and 22.1% reported being negatively affected by the drinking of one or more people they knew well. Much smaller proportions of respondents reported harm from different categories of drinker than in 2008, e.g., from spouses (2.7%), from other household members (1.1%), other relatives (3.0%), friends (4.3%), co-workers (1.4%) and others (2.8%).

Discussions and Conclusions: A lower prevalence of AHTO from drinkers respondents knew was reported in 2021 than in 2008. Reasons behind these changes will be discussed, including methodological and COVID-19 effects. Survey differences over time will be discussed in comparison with those identified in key national response agency data.

Implications for Policy: National estimates of alcohol's harm to others' highlight the externalities of drinking beyond individuals and act as a lever for policy change and services that address the needs of drinkers and their social connections.

PRESENTATION 2: Alcohol's harm to others from the drinking of strangers during 2021 in Australia

Presenting Authors:

BREE WILLOUGHBY, ANNE-MARIE LASLETT, ROBIN ROOM, HENG JIANG, SANDRA KUNTSCHE, DAN ANDERSON-LUXFORD

Presenter's email: B.Willoughby@latrobe.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: The 2008 Alcohol's harm to others (AHTO) Australian survey identified harm from the drinking of a stranger as the most commonly experienced type of AHTO, affecting 70% of respondents. This paper aims to assess the prevalence of harm from the drinking of a stranger in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, and to identify correlates and changes in this type of harm over time.

Design and Methods: Data was collected via two national parallel surveys utilising random digit dialling and "Life in Australia" panels. The sample consisted of 2574 respondents (48.7% male, 50.6% female, 0.5% non-binary), focusing on the sub-sample (n = 1067) who reported experiencing harm from the drinking of a stranger. Logistic regressions will be used to analyse differences across gender, age, social status and state of residence.

Key Findings: Preliminary analysis revealed 42.4% of respondents reported experiencing harm from a stranger in the previous 12 months (39.3% men, 45.1% women, 75% non-binary), with persons aged 18-24 (54.2%) experiencing the most harm. Being annoyed by strangers' vomiting, urinating, or littering (23.6%) was the most common, with more serious harms (e.g., being physically abused [2.8%]) less common.

Discussions and Conclusions: Initial results indicate a lower prevalence of harm from the drinking of a stranger in 2021 than in 2008. Comparisons between the 2021 and 2008 AHTO data will be explored, looking also at changes in more serious harms, with a strong focus on reasons behind the changes.

PRESENTATION 3: Are heavier drinkers' views on situational drinking norms affected by recent experience of harm from others' drinking?

Presenting Authors:

ROBIN ROOM, DAN ANDERSON-LUXFORD, SANDRA KUNTSCHKE AND ANNE-MARIE LASLETT

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

Introduction/Issues: Situational drinking norms – the acceptability of drinking in different social situations – vary, particularly between heavier drinkers, lighter drinkers and abstainers. Moreover, heavier drinkers are more likely to experience harm from others' drinking. How does this experience of harm affect views on acceptable levels of drinking?

Method: Respondents in a 2022 Australian combined sample from random digitally dialled mobiles and a panel survey (n=2,574) were asked what level of drinking is acceptable in 11 social situations chosen to include "dry", "wet" and "in-between" situations where drinking might be generally unacceptable, somewhat expected, and "in-between". Besides their own drinking patterns, respondents were also asked about their experience of harm from others' drinking in the last 12 months. Regression analyses were used to examine the relation between experiencing such harm and views on how much drinking was acceptable in different situations, controlling for the respondent's own level of drinking.

Results: Heavier drinkers were more likely than others to have experienced harm from others' drinking. Among heavier drinkers, those who experienced such harm did not differ significantly in their normative acceptance of any drinking in the situations, but were more accepting of drinking enough to feel the effects, particularly in "wet" situations.

Discussion and Conclusions: These results thus do not suggest that experiencing harm from others' drinking resulted in a net change to be less accepting of drinking to intoxication. On the contrary, the results may reflect heavier drinking on the part of those experiencing harms from others' drinking.

Implications for Practice: Brief interventions, counselling or therapy for heavier drinkers might identify the risks not only from one's own drinking but from others', particularly in heavier drinking situations. The effectiveness of efforts to persuade heavier drinkers to change their norms on acceptable levels of drinking in "wet" situations should be studied.

PRESENTATION 4: Caring for drinkers and their dependents during COVID-19

Presenting Authors:

HENG JIANG, DAN ANDERSON-LUXFORD, BREE WILLOUGHBY, AMANY TANYOS, SANDRA KUNTSCHE, ROBIN ROOM, ANNE-MARIE LASLETT

Presenter's email: Jason.Jiang@latrobe.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Caring experiences associated with the drinking of others are rarely discussed in Australia and internationally, especially, the impact of COVID-19 that may lead to more burden of caring for others due to someone's drinking as more home drinking behaviours were found during the COVID-19 period. This study will explore the prevalence and predictors of caring for others due to someone's drinking during the COVID-19 period.

Design and Methods: A national representative Alcohol's Harm to Others survey was conducted among 2574 Australian adults (18 years and over) in November 2021 with a combination of CATI (n=1,000) and "Life in Australia" Panels (n=1,574). Respondents were asked whether they have heavy drinkers in their life in the last 12 months. Among those respondents who reported having heavy drinkers (n=1,585), they were asked their experience of caring for the drinkers and taking extra caring responsibility for drinkers' dependents in the last 12 months. Logistic regressions will be employed to predict factors that associate with the prevalence of caring for others due to others' drinking in Australia during the COVID-19 period.

Results: Our preliminary results show that during COVID-19 in 2021, 8.8% of Australian adults had spent time caring for the drinkers around them. Over 4% of Australian adults had to take extra responsibilities caring for drinkers' children or other dependents. About 8.8% and 11.5% of respondents reported they had cleaned after the drinkers' drinking and picked them up or taxied them to somewhere due to the drinkers' drinking. There were 19.7% of Australian adults had cared for others due to others' drinking during the COVID-19 in 2021.

Discussions and Conclusions: The prevalence of caring for drinkers and their dependents was high in 2021 with one in five people experiencing some caring burden due to others' drinking. Age, gender and socio-economic status are likely to be significant factors associated with the experience of caring for others due to their drinking.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Home drinking became more prevalent in Australia, particularly due to the impact of COVID-19, and may persist in the post- COVID-19 era. Brief interventions, such as drinking moderation, family-related AOD counselling and controlling home delivery of alcohol may help to reduce the caring burden due to others' drinking in Australia.

PRESENTATION 5: Trends in alcohol-related assaults during COVID-19 in Victoria, Australia

Presenting Authors:

DAN ANDERSON-LUXFORD, HENG JIANG, AMANY S. B. TANYOS, ANNE-MARIE LASLETT

Presenter's email: D.Anderson-Luxford@latrobe.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Previous studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes in patterns of alcohol consumption and violence. However, the impact of these changes on alcohol-related assaults in Australia remains understudied. This study utilizes police-reported assaults data to assess the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on trends in the prevalence of alcohol-related assaults in Victoria, Australia.

Design and Methods: Using Victorian Police data from January 2017 to September 2020, interrupted time series analyses were conducted to assess the impact of key COVID-19 policies on total and alcohol-related assaults. Four policies were examined: the national lockdown (on 29th March 2020), the easing of restrictions in Victoria (on 11th May, 2020), stage 3 restrictions which included home confinement and bar closures (on July 8th, 2020), and stage 4 restrictions which include a curfew after 9pm (on 2nd August, 2020).

Key Findings: Between January 2017 and March 2020, there was a significant reduction in rates of alcohol-related assaults, while total assault rates remained stable. Overall, periods of more restrictive COVID-19 restrictions were associated with significant reductions in both alcohol-related and total assaults. Whereas the period of eased restrictions (11th May to 8th July 2020), was associated with significant increases in rates of assaults.

Discussions and Conclusions: In addition to the reduced opportunities for offending due to social distancing measures, the study also highlights the influence of on-trade alcohol consumption on rates of alcohol-related assaults, as evidenced by significant fluctuations in alcohol-related assaults in response to changes in on-trade alcohol availability.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Policies aimed at reducing the physical availability of alcohol are among the most effective measures for reducing alcohol consumption and harms. This study provides evidence that reducing the accessibility of on-trade alcohol likely reduces rates of alcohol-related violence.

Discussion Section: Alcohol's Harm to Others is used to leverage stricter alcohol policies, albeit more in lower-income countries than in Australia, although harm to children from road injuries was a factor linked with the introduction of national drink-driving regulation. In 2008 it seems more people reported being harmed by others' drinking than did so in 2021. Whether this is due to changes in underlying prevalence of drinking, or due to changes in where and how people drink, are important issues. Anne-Marie's paper highlights that the majority of Australians, even in COVID-19 affected society, continued to experience AHTO. Bree's research indicates that decreased drinking in public likely quite drastically reduced AHTO from strangers' drinking. Robin questions whether drinking norms are associated with AHTO and Jason describes how a fifth of the Australian population continued to report caring for other people due to their drinking. COVID-19, affecting both patterns of socialisation and exposure to others' drinking, complicates our understanding of these changes over time. Using both survey and secondary data provides an opportunity to explore these changes carefully. As Dan shows exploring response agency assault data, COVID-19 lockdowns were asynchronised with alcohol-related assaults. This series of papers raises many questions that we will ask the field as we frame our interactive discussion:

- The prevalence of AHTO in 2021 remains a significant problem – what aspects of AHTO should we be most concerned about?
- Has AHTO decreased since 2008? If so, why? Is this because
 - the prevalence of drinking and/or problematic drinking in Australia is declining?
 - of COVID-19?
 - methodological changes come into play, particularly when we are now compelled to use combined random mobile sampling and panel survey methods?
- Contrasting survey and response agency data what do we learn?
- What does a reduction in problems mean for policy and treatment advocacy and options?
- How do we translate stronger evidence from lockdown related analyses into safer policy without reducing social connectedness?
- Finally, some argue that highlighting alcohol's harm to others increases stigma for people who drink and their social connections. Others describe how this work gives voice to people who experience pressure to hide the problems they experience because of people who are important to them. How do we present AHTO data without increasing stigma?

Please note: we plan to shorten each of the presentations slightly to 8 minutes to enable discussion.