

Migrant women, alcohol use, and gendered drinking experiences: A narrative review of qualitative research

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Introduction / Issues: Migrant women's alcohol use has been understudied despite evidence that gender, culture, and migration shape alcohol consumption and drinking experiences. This narrative review aimed to synthesise qualitative research from the past 25 years on how migrant women experience host-country drinking cultures, their gendered drinking experiences and factors influencing their alcohol use.

Methods: The review, following PRISMA-ScR guidelines, was conducted across five databases (ProQuest, Dimensions, Scopus, PsycINFO and PubMed). Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed qualitative studies in English examining migrant women's experiences with alcohol and drinking cultures. Findings from included articles were synthesized using thematic analysis.

Key Findings: Eighteen articles were included in the review with studies conducted in four Western countries. Four key themes were identified: (1) coping with emotional challenges; (2) acculturation and drinking cultures; (3) policing of femininity through gendered norms regulating women's drinking behaviours; and (4) fear of violence: gendered outcomes of drinking alcohol. Findings show that some women drink alcohol to soothe the loneliness of displacement; others abstain yet risk social exclusion in 'wet' drinking cultures. Gendered double standards persist, as while drinking may offer fleeting belonging, it also invites judgment and vulnerability.

Discussions and Conclusions: Across countries and cultures, migrant women face an intricate balancing act. Drinking can simultaneously facilitate social inclusion and reinforce host-country exclusion. Findings highlight how alcohol use among migrant women is deeply intertwined with broader structures of gender, cultural adaptation, and social belonging.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Public health responses should adopt intersectional, gender-sensitive, and culturally competent approaches to better prevent alcohol-related harms among migrant women. Tailored interventions and inclusive social environments are essential to support migrant women develop healthier coping strategies and mitigate alcohol-related risks without reinforcing stigma.

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