

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN INITIAL SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL USE DISORDER AND PROGRESSION TO DIAGNOSIS: FINDINGS FROM THE A PROSPECTIVE COHORT STUDY

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Introduction: Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a major contributor to the burden of disease and is most prevalent among young adults. Prevention and early intervention of AUD is a public health priority, yet relatively little is known about how AUD emerges, which symptoms of AUD come first and whether there are modifiable risk factors that forecast the development of the disorder.

Method: Data for this study came from the RADAR study, a prospective cohort study of 565 regular alcohol users (mean age 18.9 at baseline, 48% female) interviewed five times every six months across a 2.5year period. AUD symptoms and diagnoses were assessed according to DSM-5 and ICD-11 diagnostic criteria by trained clinical psychologists using the SCID-IV-RV. Survival analyses modelled the time from first alcoholic drink to the emergence of any AUD symptom and determined which first-emergent AUD symptoms were associated with a speedier transition to disorder.

Results: By the final time point 54.8% of the sample had experienced at least one DSM-5 AUD symptom and 26.1% met criteria for DSM-5 AUD. The median time from first AUD symptom to a diagnosis of AUD was 4 years. Social problems from drinking or drinking despite impacts on work/school/home as the first onset symptoms were associated with a speedier transition to alcohol use disorder.

Discussions and Conclusions: When social or role problems emerge as the first symptoms of AUD the transition to AUD occurs at a faster rate. Targeting these symptoms with appropriate prevention/early intervention approaches might help avert a significant proportion of AUD cases developing.

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