

Acculturation and drinking among immigrant youth in Western Australia

ustine Dandy³, Amanda M. George², Caroline Ng Tseung-Wong², Vilma Palacios⁴ & Byron L. Zamboanga¹

¹*Department of Psychological Science, University of Arkansas, Arkansas, United States,*

²*Discipline of Psychology, Faculty of Health, University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia,*

³*School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia,* ⁴*Health Promotion/Public Health, North Metropolitan Public Health, Perth, Australia*

Background: While alcohol use is common among young people in Australia, less is known regarding use among immigrant youth. This is important to examine, especially considering that many have emigrated from contexts in which alcohol use is uncommon and/or disapproved of.

Method / Approach: A mixed-methods investigation of influence of heritage cultural factors and mainstream Australian cultural norms on alcohol and other drug (AOD) patterns, attitudes, motives for use and service utilisation was conducted. Nine focus groups (N = 55; 22 female, 33 male; aged 16-30 years) were held with participants from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds (80% first generation immigrants) from Perth, Western Australia. They also completed a brief survey and six interviews with service providers were conducted.

Key Findings/Results: Acculturation challenges of reconciling heritage cultural identity with Australian identity were apparent. Participants reported drinking to fit in with perceived norms and bond with mainstream youth. Some aspects of heritage cultures were protective against AOD use, but others, such as the absence of modelling of safer drinking practices due to an abstinence approach, were risk factors. Barriers to help-seeking reported by both young people and service providers included stigma, lack of mental health literacy in the community and trust/confidentiality concerns.

Discussions and Conclusions: More permissive AOD use norms and greater AOD accessibility can pose risks for young people from CaLD backgrounds. Some aspects of heritage cultures may be protective, but others, such as an abstinence approach, can be counterproductive. There is a need for further research regarding the prevalence, predictors and services to address AOD-related harm among youth from CaLD backgrounds across Australia.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Findings highlight the challenge of finding the right balance between providing culturally attuned services and neutral and safe spaces to support CaLD youth with AOD-related matters.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

This work was supported by a Western Australian Health Promotion Foundation (Healthway) Grant (33625).