

## The paradox of drinking amongst young people in Jayapura and Sentani, Papua

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**Introduction and Aims:** Rates of alcohol-related harms are high in Papua, an Indonesian province on New Guinea island. This research explored alcohol practices and their impacts on the daily life of youth in Papua, along with influences from the socio-cultural contexts in which young people live.

**Method:** In fieldwork in 2019–2021, 47 youths aged 14-30 were interviewed and participated in focus groups. Conversations were also conducted with Elders, NGO workers, Health Workers, and youth activists.

**Key Findings:** The socio-historical and political conditions in Papua influence how alcohol contributes to the configuration of ethno-racial and gender constructions. Alcohol was found to provide justification for racism and the exclusion of young Papuans from employment opportunities, while alcohol availability brings profit to politically dominant interests. The governments were aware that harms related to drinking were prominent and have led to the deaths of many young Papuans. But almost nothing has been done to reduce alcohol-related deaths. Aiming to stop these deaths, youth in Sentani conducted an anti-alcohol protest, favouring total prohibition. However, the young people maintained their drinking practices. In their powerless condition, these marginalised youth found support for a good life through alcohol and from friends they drank with in drinking circles.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** The inherent paradox in the situation of marginalised youth at the focus of this paper, between protesting for the prohibition of alcohol yet remaining committed to their drinking circles, reflects the exploitative nature of official licensing of alcohol sales. Similar paradoxes have been found in some past temperance movements elsewhere.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Explanation of how the socio-economic conditions in Papua influence decisions surrounding youth's drinking practices brings an important perspective for policy makers concerned with reducing alcohol-related harms.

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