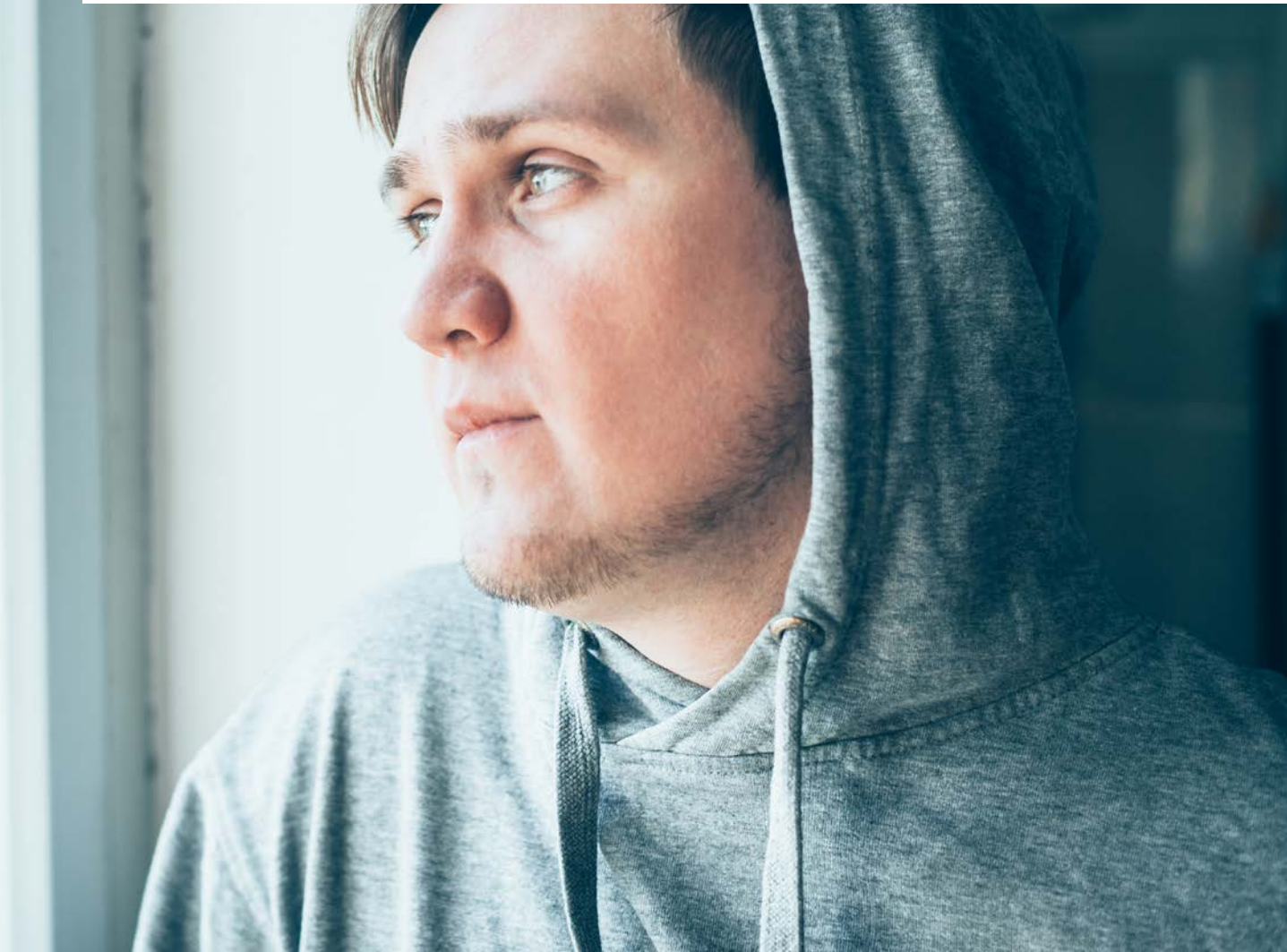


H20 Nordic - A research network on alcohol's harm to others

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF ALCOHOL - CONSEQUENCES BEYOND THE DRINKER



norden

Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues



Project: H2O Nordic – A research network on alcohol's harm to others

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The Ripple Effect of Alcohol – Consequences Beyond the Drinker

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of alcohol-related harm has since the mid-twentieth century been defined mainly as harm to the person consuming alcohol. Harm reduction, alcohol policy and treatment services have thus been largely constructed with the drinker in mind.

In recent years, however, there has been growing concern about the effect of drinking on a population level. The shift in framing the issue of the effect of drinking from the individual alone to a population level is evident both in the Nordic countries and internationally.

With the exception of Denmark, the Nordic countries have traditionally exercised a population-level alcohol control policy in order to reduce harm from drinking. Taxation, a state monopoly on alcohol sales and limited availability are the key elements of this harm reduction.

What we need to do now in the debate on alcohol-related questions and the need for alcohol control policies is to broaden the scope of alcohol's effects on society. Most alcohol-related harm afflicts others than the drinker. The negative effects from drinking puts children and families at particular risk. Harm experienced during childhood not only affects young children, but tends to have long-standing impact on many areas in life, such as health, well-being and education. In order to tackle the effects from drinking we must know what these effects are and what areas of society are affected.

Alcohol-related harm does not necessarily derive from problematic heavy drinking alone; drinking and drunkenness affect people in many different arenas such as urban public places, night-life settings, at home and in the workplace. Compared to several other alcohol research approaches, the effect of others' drinking has thus far been relatively under-researched. Recently, though, interest in this field of research has grown internationally and in the Nordic countries alike.

In order to strengthen the national research projects and promote research collaboration, the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues took the initiative in 2013 to launch a Nordic research collaboration on alcohol's harm to others (H2O Nordic). This project has led to a number of Nordic comparative studies and publications. Importantly, the collaboration has helped to create a stronger Nordic exchange of knowledge about alcohol's harm to others and how it can be studied. The Nordic research network has also pioneered ways of conducting international research on harm from others' drinking.

This booklet will outline the key findings of the H2O Nordic research network. By highlighting a number of life areas and situations in which people experience harm from others' drinking, the booklet summarises the research findings in a practical context, supported by the many different research approaches. We hope that this booklet will provide useful new perspectives to how drinking and alcohol affect us as individuals and as a society.



Ewa Persson Göransson

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ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS: WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Nina Karlsson

Alcohol-related harm is commonly regarded as harm to the drinker, but it extends far beyond the drinkers themselves, as it affects others in a number of arenas and social situations.

Alcohol's harm to others adds to the total burden of alcohol-related harm particularly in the areas of health and social services and years lived with disability (Hope, 2014). Workplaces, public settings and the home are often cited as typical settings for experiencing harm from others' drinking. Various groups, such as children, families and young adults may also be at particular risk from the adverse effects from the drinking of others.

Considering the effects of problem alcohol use beyond the drinker is not a novel approach. Harm from others' drinking and, in particular, harm to children and families were already on the agenda of the European and American temperance movements, as well as on the agenda of women's rights movements in the early twentieth century. Recently the harm to others approach has resurfaced.

– Alcohol's harm to others as a concept was re-invented in the early 2000s partly as a response to the fact that harm from alcohol to the drinker had been extensively researched, while research on harm from others' drinking was largely neglected, says researcher **Katariina Warpenius** from the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland.

CHALLENGING TERMINOLOGY

The issue of alcohol's harm to others is also gaining attention in the field of policy-making.

Knowledge about the adverse effects of others' drinking is an essential requirement for policy-making which aims to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm. So far, however, there appears to be no consensus on what exactly the issue should be called.

– In Australia and New Zealand the adverse secondary effects of alcohol are often called alcohol's harm to others, while “externalities” and second-hand effects are the terms of choice in the United States and Canada. In the Nordic countries harm to others and third-party harm seem to be the commonly used concepts, Katariina Warpenius lists.

Warpenius says that the issue of finding a universally accepted and useful expression has been discussed in the research community, and terms such as “collateral damage” have been suggested, but consensus has not been reached thus far. Consensus on terminology may seem trivial, but finding a useful and cogent expression that captures the full extent and variety of adverse secondary effects of alcohol is key to furthering and emphasising the broad scale of adverse effects of alcohol.

Uniform terminology is particularly relevant for non-governmental organisations as they raise awareness and lobby for public health thinking in alcohol policy-making.



HARM AS AN OUTCOME OF SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Population data on drinking habits and perceived harm from others' drinking provide an overview of the occurrence of experienced adverse effects of others' drinking. However, to gain a deeper understanding of adverse effects from others' drinking it is necessary to explore the context and social situation in which this harm is experienced.

– Because the perception of harm from others' drinking is linked to the social situations in which it is experienced, it is problematic to focus only on the end result of experienced harm. To appreciate more fully how and why people experience harm from others' drinking, we need to keep in mind that harm is experienced through and as a result of social interaction, Katariina Warpenius points out.

Alcohol's harm to others provides an outlook into the effects of alcohol consumption on a broad scale. By adding this burden to society, such as the effects on young adults, women, children and working life, it may also influence decision-making on alcohol policy. There are however elements to this approach that require caution:

– The concept of alcohol's harm to others is politically loaded with a host of ambitions and interests. On a political level, it entails a risk of stigmatising the individual drinker as an inducer of problems for innocent parties. We must exercise caution to avoid shifting from a public health-oriented alcohol policy on a population level toward individually targeted control policies, Katariina Warpenius sums up.

*Katariina
Warpenius*

Photo: THL



*Kristiina
Hannula*

Photo: EHYT ry.



ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF AN NGO

Nina Karlsson

The Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention EHYT highlights alcohol's harm to others in policy-making advocacy. EHYT emphasises harm to others in events and meetings with politicians and decision-makers and summarises research in a popular scientific format. There is much interest in the subject of alcohol's harm to others among Finnish grassroots organisations working with harm reduction.

– We make the point that alcohol-related harm cannot be reduced to personal problems of the individual. The individual is most often part of a community – a workplace or a community for leisure activities, the family unit, friends, etc. – that will also be affected by the problems of the individual. Making research more accessible to the general public serves the professionals as well as the volunteers whom we as an organisation reach out to, says **Kristiina Hannula**, CEO of EHYT.

Given that the interest in the adverse effect of others' drinking is growing, the prospects are good for drawing attention to these effects on society in a broader perspective. But Kristiina Hannula also sees challenges, as parallel to this process, the nature of the Finnish alcohol debate has changed.

– Alcohol appears to be considered a basic right among Finns, and a restrictive alcohol policy is viewed as an insult to the rights of the individual. Finnish decision-makers seem to take a similar stand to the issue of alcohol policy. The restrictive alcohol policy line has lost some of its previous support. This is particularly problematic, as an overhaul of the Finnish alcohol legislation is currently underway. In order to have an impact in such a debating atmosphere, the approaches to communicating research on the adverse effects of alcohol to society must be carefully considered, Kristiina Hannula concludes.



Photo: Victoria Henriksson

— H2O NORDIC: A RESEARCH NETWORK ON — ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS

Nina Karlsson

The research network H2O Nordic was established in 2013 as an informal structure for Nordic and northern European researchers studying alcohol's harm to others. The network is coordinated by the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, and the participating researchers represent a number of research organisations from all the Nordic countries as well as Ireland and Scotland.

H2O Nordic is best described as an informal and organic network. During 2013–2015, the participating researchers collaborated in three sub-study groups focusing on quantitative research, register-based research and qualitative research on alcohol's harm to others.

Harm from others' drinking can be encountered in a number of situations, and the types of harm also vary. A harm familiar to many is being kept awake at night because of noisy drunken people in the street. At the other end of the spectrum, there may be physical harm, being attacked,

for example, or robbed by a drunken person. The H2O Nordic survey group included researchers from all the Nordic countries, and had access to nationally collected population survey data on alcohol's harm to others. The data originated in surveys conducted in 2008–2013, representing the adult population until the age of 69.

The survey research group set out to map the questions used in the Nordic and Scottish surveys to find out what items were comparable across the countries. Although the questions about harm from others' drinking seemed at first glance relatively similar, detailed comparison revealed many challenging differences for the researchers committed to combining the comparable items into a joint Nordic-Scottish data set.

– To get a sense of actual differences in harm from others' drinking between the countries, it is important that the wording of the questions is as similar as possible. Otherwise, differences may originate in measuring different matters rather than differences in harm across the countries. We aimed to have comparable items for all six countries included in the two studies, but in some cases we had to exclude some countries from a certain analysis, as their questions differed too much from the others. In other cases, we had to exclude harm variables, because the wording of the questions varied a lot across the countries, says participating researcher and doctoral student **Erica Sundin** from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden.

The researchers selected five types of harm from others' drinking:

- Physical harm
- Clothing or other belongings being ruined
- Experience of verbal abuse
- Fear of drunk person (in a public place)
- Being kept awake at night

The group focused on two general categorisations: harm experienced from strangers and

harm experienced from the drinking of family and friends.

HARM FROM STRANGERS' DRINKING

The data from the Nordic and Scottish surveys showed that experiencing harm from strangers' drinking was common. The share of respondents who reported having experienced at least one of the harms investigated varied per country between 25 percent and 53 percent. Of the five listed harms, being kept awake at night due to someone's drinking was most commonly reported: 15–33 percent of the respondents reported having been kept awake at night due to someone's drinking during the past 12 months. Experiences of physical harm because of someone's drinking were the least reported in all countries. The percentage of respondents having experienced such harm varied between two and six.

Throughout the countries, most experiences of harm from others' drinking was reported by young people living in urban areas. In some of the countries women had experienced more harm from others' drinking compared to men. The researchers also found that in some of the studied countries respondents' own drinking levels seemed to correlate with their reported experience of harm. Moderate and binge-drinking respondents reported more harm from others' drinking compared to those who themselves drank less.

– It is possible that young, urban and single people report more harm because they expose themselves more to situations where people drink alcohol and are therefore more likely to be harmed. For instance, our findings show that younger age groups are more commonly harmed by others' drinking, and as we also know that young people drink more than older people, one could assume that younger people more often interact with others who are drinking, Erica Sundin points out.

HOW ARE WE AFFECTED BY THE DRINKING OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

The second Nordic-Scottish comparison using the survey data explored experiences of negative consequences from the drinking of people known to the respondents, such as family, friends, ex-spouses or co-workers. The researchers also looked into the reports of harm from people who had reported having had a heavy drinker in their lives, that is, a person who they thought had often or intermittently drunk too much alcohol.

Although there was variation between the countries, up to a quarter of all respondents had experienced harm from others' drinking. The Finnish and Icelandic respondents reported most frequently harm while least harm was reported by the Scots. The respondents also gave estimations of how severe they thought the harm they had experienced was. The Scottish respondents reported the most severe harm, while Finns and Danes estimated the harm as less severe. Such results raise questions about tolerance and how it affects people's experiences of having been harmed by someone's drinking.

– The cultural norms around drinking in Scotland suggest that drinking at hazardous or harmful levels equals “acceptable” drinking patterns and only those at the extreme end of the drinking spectrum are seen as problem drinkers. This high tolerance of excessive drinking in Scottish society could also shape the respondents' evaluation of what constitutes harm from other drinkers. They may thus report only the most serious harms. The high tolerance of harms from others' drinking may also reflect their own perceived “normal” risky drinking patterns and associated “minor” misdemeanours, says **Ann Hope**, research associate from Trinity College Dublin and Principle Investigator for the Scottish study on alcohol's harm to others commissioned by Alcohol Focus Scotland.

Hope also suggested that as the interviews were conducted face to face in the homes of the respond-

ents, there may also be a reluctance to expose private matters taking place within the home setting.

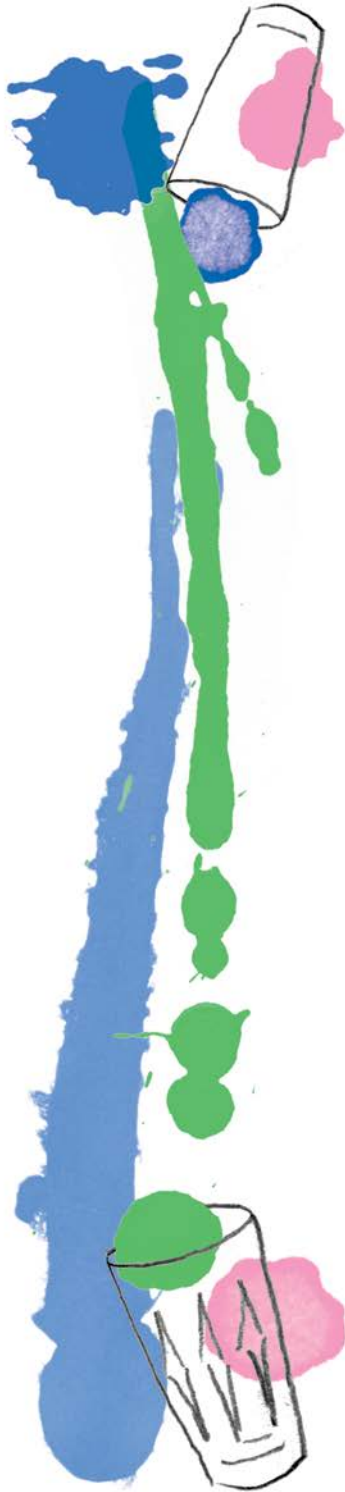
As in the case of harm from strangers' drinking, harm from known persons' drinking was most reported by the younger age groups, by women, single persons and people living in urban areas. The researchers concluded that the comparative research approach brought to light some interesting common traits. In order to understand the respondents' answers better, future studies could explore how the respondents' tolerance of harm and attitudes to alcohol may influence their reporting of harm from others' drinking. Having been “negatively affected” turned out to be a somewhat ambiguous phrase. Being negatively affected may exclude personal experiences of distress or worry about someone's drinking.

TOLERANCE AND HARM

Studying self-estimated figures of experienced harm does not tackle the issue of tolerance of harm from others' drinking. What defines our levels of tolerance? How do the drinking situations and participants affect our tolerance of harm? Are we as intolerant or tolerant of alcohol-related harm in the company of adolescents as we are in the company of small children? What are the regional and national differences in tolerance of other people's drinking? These are some of the questions proposed by the researchers participating in the qualitative sub-study of the H2O Nordic network (*see also page 14-17*).

Tolerance of harm from others' drinking is a fairly understudied area. The researchers began with designing a new study based on group interviews with adolescents aged approximately 15 years and with parents of 15-year-old adolescents. Interviews were conducted with parents and adolescents in Helsinki, Finland and in Oslo, Norway.

The Norwegian data explores attitudes to drinking in the presence of children, differences in attitudes to mothers' and fathers' drinking in the presence of children and how attitudes vary in



different age groups. The researchers set about looking at correlations between population-level drinking frequencies and volumes among the adults and attitudes to drinking in various situations. The key question was how and why is it or is it not problematic to drink in various situations. It seems that drinking in the presence of children was not considered problematic as such, but attitudes become stricter with higher levels of drinking and with the adults showing visible signs of drunkenness. The Norwegian interviewees made no difference in attitudes and strictness between genders, age groups or attitudes to mothers' versus fathers' drinking.

The Finnish study focuses on the attitudes to alcohol consumption in various situations as well as on tolerance of drinking. In the interviewed groups both adults and adolescents expressed remarkably similar attitudes to drinking situations and similar views on the appropriateness of drinking in these situations.

– Parents and adolescents use the same criteria for assessing the acceptability of drinking. The criteria are: the amount of alcohol consumed, the manner in which it is consumed, drinking behaviour and the presence of children. Although the criteria were uniform, parents and adolescents emphasised them in a different way. Among parents the presence of children was the guiding criterion for the acceptability of drinking, while adolescents also emphasised drinking behaviour and the amount of drinking, says senior researcher **Jenni Simonen** from the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare.

Among the interviewed adults the adolescents' age appeared to be a main criterion when assessing whether or not drinking in various situations is or is not objectionable. The adults expressed a considerably more permissive approach if the persons participating in a drinking situation were 18 years or older. For the adolescents, however, the level of drunkenness and the amount of alcohol con-

sumed were more relevant criteria than age.

– This may be a sign of the differences in generational experiences related to alcohol use: parents and adolescents have been socialised into different alcohol-related attitudes and drinking practices. The parents have grown in a more liberal alcohol culture in which the adolescents' alcohol consumption has been higher. Finnish adolescents today start drinking later and binge-drink less than previous generations. Such changes may be reflected in attitudes among adolescents, who distance themselves from heavy drinking and uncontrolled drinking behaviour, Jenni Simonen points out.

As for tolerance of drinking in the presence of children, both adults and adolescents emphasised similar criteria, such as the amount of alcohol consumed, how often drinking situations occur and the age of the children present. Somewhat surprisingly, both adults and adolescents in the Finnish data seemed to have different criteria for tolerance if the children present did not belong to the family. Both adults and adolescents expressed less tolerant attitudes to drinking if, for instance, the children of a family had friends visiting.

Based on the Finnish and Norwegian analysis, it appears that alcohol represents a potential source of trouble for the safety of children and a disrupter of the family unit having a pleasant time together. The researchers will continue to explore tolerance and attitudes to drinking with a Finnish-Norwegian data comparison.

STUDYING ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS USING REGISTERS

The third group of researchers set out to explore how alcohol's harm to others can be explored using data from Nordic health and social service and other registers. The researchers decided to look into the consequences to children of their parents' drinking. The group discovered that while all the Nordic countries have excel-

lent registers, the extent to which they can be used in research varies a great deal. Different regulations and approaches to data collection made it clear that a comparative study using the existing register data would be difficult.

Ongoing Finnish, Danish and Swedish projects use registers to follow the health and well-being of children with one or several substance-abusing parents. In Norway register data entries for children could be linked to population studies of adults' self-estimated alcohol consumption. Register data from social and health care generally offers insight into severe misuse and its effect on others. Looking at the drinking habits of those who do not end up in care services could provide knowledge about the effects on children of moderate levels of drinking.

The researchers have access to data illustrating a spectrum of harm to children from parents' drinking, but none of the planned projects were sufficiently similar in order to be comparable. Some countries were limited by regulations concerning the use of data, and a Nordic comparison would have meant compromises for those not restricted by such regulations.

Another challenge for the group has been data access. Two of the researchers participating in the register data group have been waiting for several years for the data they have applied for. This in turn has postponed the Nordic comparative collaboration. Meanwhile, the register data group has mapped the possibilities for Nordic studies and plans to continue the collaboration.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR H2O NORDIC?

The H2O Nordic network applied and was granted a two-year grant for collaboration from the Joint Committee for Nordic research councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOS-HS). The three Nordic research projects on harm from others' drinking carried out within the network are funded by incorporating Nordic comparative elements to nationally funded research projects on alcohol's harm to others. In addition to coordinating the network, the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has funded network meetings and participation. After the initial three-year period the researchers are eager for continued research collaboration on alcohol's harm to others.

The decision not to begin the collaboration by applying for joint research funding was partly influenced by the fact that many of the participating researchers were able to add Nordic elements to ongoing national research projects.

– We wanted to experiment with what can be done using existing national resources instead of going through the laborious and time-consuming process of applying for a research grant for international collaboration, **Nina Karlsson**, coordinator of the H2O Nordic network, explains.

Despite the lack of particular research funding, all three projects found areas of collaboration. It also became apparent during the three-year period that some data were more suited for comparative studies than others. The researchers in the qualitative group were able to collaborate at an early stage within the framework of nationally funded projects. They were thus able to design a study that would work well for both national research and Nordic collaboration.

Research grants for international collaboration



Project manager Nina Karlsson

Photo: Victoria Henriksson

often prioritise extensive projects and multiprofessional research consortia, which offers excellent opportunities for in-depth long-term research collaboration. At the same time, this also eliminates some of the agility and flexibility of collaboration in a more specialised field of study.

– There is a strength in establishing research networks in areas of international interest. Networks provide a springboard for developing ideas and quickly responding to the need of information. The model of inserting Nordic elements to nationally funded projects appears to work best when the collaboration can be planned early on. As the collaboration has gone on for some years now, the participating researchers are well aware of each other's expertise and research interests. Our extended network is by now extensive. We aim to use these resources for further Nordic research projects as well as international research applications, Karlsson concludes.

ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS AS A REFLECTION OF CULTURE DEFINED TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE

Jessica Gustafsson

In which situations do adolescents and adults think that alcohol use is acceptable or unacceptable? When is the parents' alcohol use in the presence of children acceptable and what makes it less so? These are some of the key questions in the qualitative study by a group of researchers from Norway and Finland.

– The aim of the study was to investigate how people in Helsinki and Oslo tolerated other people's drinking. We designed the study from the very beginning in cooperation with the Norwegian research group to ensure better comparability, says senior researcher **Christoffer Tigerstedt** from the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland.

PICTURES AND STORIES OF VARIOUS SOCIAL SETTINGS

The researchers did group interviews with teenagers (aged 14–17) and parents (all female in Finland). The interviewees were shown five pictures representing different drinking situations in different social settings. The interviewees were also presented with introductions of three stories (*see fact box on page 17*) that they were asked to discuss.

– The social settings varied, but we focused especially on adults' alcohol use in the presence of children, say researchers **Janne Scheffels** and **Inger Synnøve Moan** from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

The pictures included such settings as a laid-back garden party with small children present, a grown-up party outdoors with people drinking and partying with small children present, and a party at a house with a group of teenagers drink-

ing, flirting and a passed-out person in the corner. There was also a picture of a family dinner where the adults were drinking wine in the presence of children and a picture of some teenagers at home, drinking alcohol moderately during daytime.

– The participants in the focus groups were asked to describe what was going on in the picture and to give their immediate response to and evaluation of the situation. They were also asked how familiar the situation was to them and to describe when situations they defined as positive could change into something negative, Scheffels and Moan explain.



Senior researcher Christoffer Tigerstedt says, that the adults and adolescents are somewhat like-minded regarding attitudes towards alcohol consumption. Photo: Jessica Gustafsson



*Adults' drinking in the presence of children was seldom regarded as problematic in itself, according to researchers Janne Scheffels and Inger Synnøve Moan.
Photo: Folkehelseinstituttet*

SIMILAR APPROACH TO DRINKING SITUATIONS

Quite surprisingly, adolescents' and their parents' attitudes to drinking have seldom been compared in Finland.

– Maybe the general idea has been that the differences in the attitudes would be so significant and obvious, but in fact our study partly proves the opposite. There are some very obvious similarities in how adults and adolescents view alcohol consumption, Tigerstedt says.

The Finnish study shows that the criteria by which adults and teenagers evaluated the acceptability of the drinking situations were quite similar, even if they tended to emphasise different things. The teenagers observed how you behave when you are drinking, and in what way and how much you are consuming alcohol. The adults, in turn, stressed the legal drinking age of 18 and were quick to point out the presence of children, especially if small children were involved.

– According to the adults it's not accept-

able if both parents are drunk. One of them has to be sober and take care of the child. There was however no discussion about whether the adults should drink at all with children present, Tigerstedt summarises.

NARROWING GENERATION GAP?

The largest variations were noted in how the teenagers and parents interpreted the picture of a party with only teenagers. The adults associated the picture with their own experiences as young but also with their present drinking behaviour. The teenagers were more disapproving of the situation because of the heavy alcohol consumption implied. When asked what would need changing in the picture for them to want to join in the party, the teenagers distanced themselves from the passed-out person, the losing of control and the binge drinking.

– The overall results from the study show that the attitudes toward different drinking situations were quite similar among the adults and the teenagers. Do the values and behaviour of the younger generation increasingly meet the

expectations and hopes of the older generation, then? Is there a more open dialogue between parents and their children, and is alcohol losing some of its rebellious potential among teenagers, Christoffer Tigerstedt wonders.

CONCERN ABOUT CHILDREN'S SAFETY

In Norway the main results showed that adult drinking in the presence of children was seldom regarded as problematic in itself.

– However, the definition of what was too much alcohol varied, from one glass to one bottle and to “how much one can take”, Scheffels and Moan comment.

Obvious intoxication, defined as the point where children notice that their parents behave differently, was typically seen as the limit between moderate and unacceptable drinking with children present. Overall, the parents and the adolescents were more similar than different in their attitudes toward drinking in the presence of children.

– The teenagers seemed to be more concerned about situations that could involve risk to children's safety, such as parents drinking at a beach bar where the children could wander off to the sea on their own, Scheffels and Moan say.

The adults focused more on the children's emotional experience, how children might feel unsafe or insecure if the parents became intoxicated.

RESEARCHERS EXPECTED PARENTS WOULD BE MORE RESTRICTIVE

– We expected that the parents would express more restrictive attitudes to drinking in the presence of children than they did. We assumed so, because the interviews were conducted in a social setting similar to parents' meetings, in school buildings with other people. We experienced that the parents spoke openly and reflected on both negative and positive aspects of drinking in the presence of children, say Scheffels and Moan.

– We were also a little surprised that there was almost no difference regarding the tolerance of women and men who drink in the presence of their children.

The Finnish and Norwegian researchers will conduct a comparative analysis between the Norwegian and the Finnish research material.

– Our first impression is that the similarities between the two countries are much larger than the differences, the researchers conclude.

Facts about the H20 Nordic qualitative study

- Data collection in Helsinki and Oslo in 2014-2015
- Four group interviews with 14-17 year olds
- Four group interviews with parents (not necessarily parent/child pairs, in Helsinki only mothers)
- Pictures and stories used as stimulus material
- The interviews have been analyzed separately in Norway and Finland and a combined analysis of the material is in the making

Story 1

Parents drinking in the presence of children

A mother, a father and their children, aged 7 and 10, are on holiday in the Canary Islands. The family have planned to spend the day at the beach. At the moment they are having lunch at a beach restaurant and the parents have shared a bottle of wine with lunch. The children have finished eating and would like to return to the beach, when the mother says “why not order some more wine, it is a holiday after all...”

Story 2

Drinking in a public place

A 15-year old girl is on her way home in the metro train from the city centre on a Friday evening. A group of 18-19-year old visibly drunk boys enter the metro carriage and sit down near the girl...

Story 3

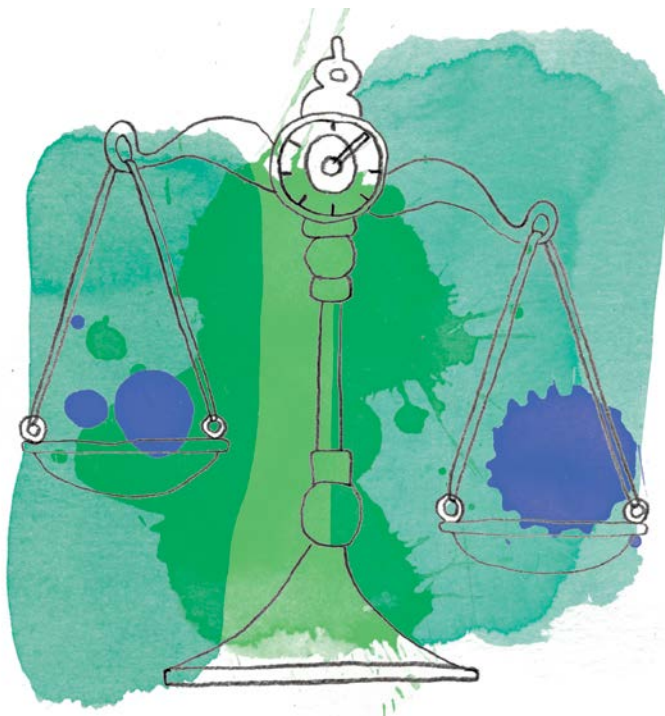
Family violence in the neighbourhood

The couple who live next door are arguing loudly. It seems as if they are drunk. You know they have two small children, who are at home at the moment...

1. What do you think about this situation? How do you feel and what is your immediate response to the situation?
2. How do you see this situation evolving, what is going to happen? What is the first thing that comes to your mind?
3. What would be the best thing to do? Would you do something in this situation and what would that be?
4. What if this happened multiple times? What if the argument got worse, you would for example hear shattered glass?
5. To adults: “Let’s return to the original story. Does this seem familiar to you, something that could happen to you or your friends (does this sound like an ordinary situation or is it a unusual one)? If you have experienced something similar do you remember how you experienced it (what did you think/feel)?
To children: Is this something you have experienced. If yes, do you remember what it was.

MEASURING HARM IN EUROS

Tom Kettunen



Expressing alcohol's harm to others in terms of monetary metrics can be tempting from a policy perspective. A big number can be used to make a persuasive case, but there are many methodological and conceptual difficulties involved in estimating costs. A cost of alcohol approach may give us a false sense of precision. The approach will not give us a clearer understanding of the nature and scope of alcohol related problems.

Alcohol consumption has an array of negative effects beyond personal networks of family members, friends, co-workers, strangers and significant others. These harms to society in a wide sense can include traffic accidents and violent crimes, treatment costs and work-related harms such as absenteeism, reduced productivity and unemployment. However, in our socially connected lives, no harms can be said to be exclusively personal or societal. A person's illness, financial troubles or death are never only their

personal concern: these will also affect the lives of those close to them and society as a whole.

John Stuart Mill's harm principle is interesting when discussing alcohol's harm to others. Mill asked to what extent the state has the right to restrict and control people's behaviour. In *On liberty* he writes: "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either

physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant” (1869, I.9). At first glance, in terms of alcohol policy, this passage seems to recommend that we should avoid paternalistic measures to reduce someone’s drinking if these are done only for the good of the drinker. However, restrictions on individual drinking are acceptable if others are at risk.

Mill’s discussion of harms to others is much more complex than it first seems. For example, he does not say that all self-harm should be allowed, and he acknowledges that harming oneself can cause harm to others and even to society as a whole. Mill does not define harm. He uses concepts such as hurt, damage, loss and injury to describe it. He notes that we can interfere with someone’s actions, for example, if they are unable to control their spending, if they are drunk while performing their public duty, or if the harm a person does to themselves causes grief to their family. Following Mill, it may be difficult to find a situation where someone’s drinking does potentially not harm anyone else.

ESTIMATING THE COST OF HARMS

These types of questions are relevant for cost-of-alcohol studies, where researchers ask which costs are relevant for understanding the problem at hand. In a recent article written for the journal *Addiction*, Aweek Bhattacharya presents various approaches in cost-of-alcohol studies and discusses some of the limitations in the numbers produced. Bhattacharya, who is a Policy Analyst at the Institute of Alcohol Studies (UK), writes that estimating the total costs of alcohol to a nation is the most comprehensive and direct approach; it helps politicians and government officials to compare alcohol-related problems to other issues, giving a sense of the scale of the problem.

One could also do a cost-benefit analysis to see if alcohol is good or bad for society, but there are many problems to this approach. First, it is unclear what kinds of policy recommenda-

tions one could make from the total balance, as a total ban of alcohol is unlikely. From an economist perspective it is more interesting to look at how the balance changes in relation to various policies. Second, translating the alcohol consumer’s psychological judgements of benefits and costs of drinking into monetary figures is both problematic and impractical.

Most conventional economic theories assume that all individuals taking part in an activity are fully informed and behave rationally, but alcohol consumers often misunderstand the risks and their judgements are impaired when inebriated. A popular approach in cost-of-alcohol studies is to bypass the drinker altogether, and to focus exclusively on external costs imposed by alcohol consumption. Bhattacharya argues that focusing on externalities is expedient, because it fits into the standard economic framework, and because it focuses on questions that almost anyone can agree are policy-relevant. However, distinguishing between private and external costs is difficult. Bhattacharya writes, for example, that reduced productivity at work has a bearing not only on the drinker, but also on colleagues, employers and society.

Suppose that we were to come up with a reliable estimate for the external cost from alcohol in a nation. What do we do with the number? Who determines whether the cost is acceptable? Bhattacharya writes that according to the standard economic view, we should try to internalise the externality. In the case of alcohol, it would mean imposing costs on the drinker (raising taxes, for example) to generate revenue equal to the external costs.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

When interviewed, Aweek Bhattacharya agrees that cost-of-alcohol studies do not change anyone’s mind and notes that politicians tend to use numbers as a cover for what they have already decided to do.



*Policy Analyst Aveek Bhattacharya,
Institute of Alcohol Studies (UK).
Photo: Tom Kettunen*

– There is a propaganda value in a big number, and numbers can be used to make a persuasive case. As numbers are used to make political moves, there is a need for transparency in methodology in cost-of-alcohol studies, Bhattacharya says.

Bhattacharya also talks about some of the methodological difficulties in these studies.

– There are methodological issues across the board. It is hard to find reliable data for a host of questions. And you always have to make judgement calls: how do we extrapolate from this data point to something else?

Bhattacharya also acknowledges difficulties in measuring intangible costs.

– How do we deal with emotional distress or being a victim of crime? These do not have a clear financial value, but it is not appropriate to disregard them.

Cost-of-alcohol studies often focus exclusively on tangible costs, for intangible ones are inherently more difficult to value. Although the practical reasons for focusing on tangible costs are understandable, Bhattacharya emphasises that we should always remember that this approach will underestimate the full cost of alcohol.

CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

In an article (2012a) and a commentary (2012b) published in the *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Klaus Mäkelä discusses the use of monetary metrics in describing alcohol-related problems. Mäkelä writes that the only function that cost studies serve is drawing attention to alcohol-related problems. He stresses that alcohol policies are not value free, and values need to be discussed openly. Our values should not be hidden behind monetary metrics.

According to Mäkelä, the essential problems related to cost-of-alcohol estimations are conceptual – not technical – and using money as a measure for a complex assemblage of problems creates a false sense of precision. It is important to try to understand the impact of alcohol on the drinkers, their nearest and society, but if we want to understand the scope or the nature of alcohol-related problems, especially alcohol's harms to others, cost calculations will not be very useful, because expressing the problems in euros will not deepen our understanding.

Definitions

Externality

A consequence of an (economic) activity that is experienced by unrelated third parties.

Tangible cost

The loss of resources that could otherwise be used for consumption or investment (e.g. health care costs, criminal justice costs).

Intangible cost

An unquantifiable cost relating to an identifiable source (e.g. fear of crime, loss in productivity).

— THE POLICE IN GREENLAND AIMS TO REPLACE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH DIALOGUE —

Jessica Gustafsson



When the police in Greenland is summoned to a home due to domestic violence, the doorbell rings again the following day. A multiprofessional team of a police officer and a social worker will visit the house to tackle the problems once and for all. The motto of the successful method, which is called “Samtale i stedet for husspektakler” in Danish, is conversation instead of violence.

– In Greenland domestic violence is the most common reason why the police is summoned to a home. The partner or the neighbours reach out for help, we’ll go there and sort things out. Once back at the police station, we evaluate if there is a need for a revisit. If that is the case, the police will visit the house the following day, this time accompanied by a social worker, says police inspector **Viggo Johansen** from the Greenland Police Department.

Johansen estimates that alcohol is linked to 95 percent of the cases. Alcohol and alcohol’s harm to others are a big challenge in Greenland, although the alcohol consumption has decreased

substantially during the twenty-first century. The consumption is now about 8.6 litres of pure alcohol per capita (15+years) annually.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

The multiprofessional team usually makes their revisits unannounced when a person is no longer under the influence. According to Johansen, timing is everything.

– The most effective way is talking to a person who is suffering from an emotional hangover, which is one to three days after the first encounter. People tend to be very willing to accept help, the will to make a change



*According to police inspector Viggo Johansen it is crucial to focus on families with children.
Photo: Peter Grønvold, Grønlands Politi*

is strong. At moments like that we are, for example, able to direct people to rehab.

The multiprofessional team finds it very important to approach the families as fellow humans. One of the main principles of the method is to replace violence with dialogue. During a revisit the role of the police is mainly to secure safe surroundings for the conversation that the social worker is carrying. The team usually visits the house in the afternoons, when the whole family is more likely to be at home.

– Children are in an especially vulnerable place in household conflicts. We know how important it is for children to have stable sur-

roundings growing up, so it's crucial that we focus on these families, Johansen says.

A CRY FOR HELP

– Violence and other domestic conflicts are a serious cry for help from suffering families. We aim to make a meticulous investigation in order to find out the reasons behind the problems. We discuss what exactly happened and focus on individual help to all of the family members. And we try to make sure the family is able to avoid similar incidents in the future, says Johansen.

According to him the families are usually well aware of what kind of help they require, but they need advice and guidance in order to move on.

The project on revisits by the police started in 2011 as a pilot in the city of Sisimiut, with 42 revisits made during the first year. The project expanded to the whole of Greenland in 2013 after a thorough evaluation. Between 2013 and 2015 the multiprofessional teams made almost 900 revisits and were told on only two occasions that they were not welcome.

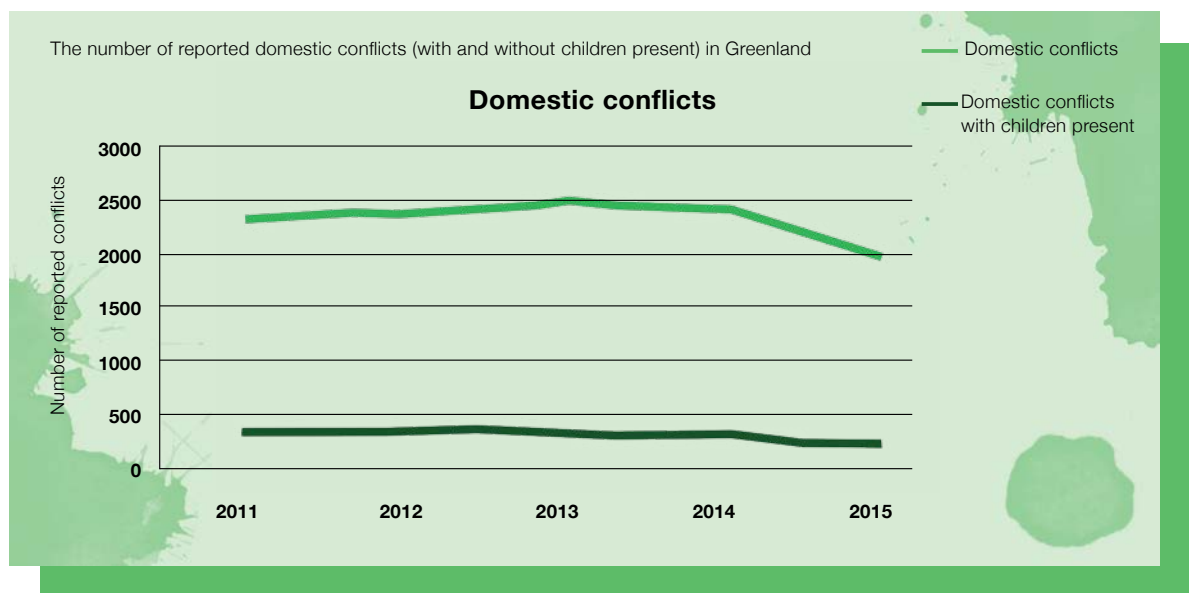
– The people of Greenland are very open-minded and maybe not as dismissive as in other cultures. The Greenlandic police is well-respected, and the people are willing to talk to us. We’ve received a lot of positive feedback for the help we offer, Viggo Johansen says.

GOOD RESULTS, FEWER DOMESTIC CONFLICTS

The method, which is now used in all Greenlandic cities with a police force, shows good results and has a strong political backing, both locally and nationally. The number of reported domestic conflicts has decreased clearly. When the project started back in 2011, the police was summoned to homes about 2 800 times, while there were 2 100 such calls in 2015.

For the moment the multiprofessional teams consist of a police officer and a municipal social worker, but Viggo Johansen hopes for a future cooperation with other health officials, such as mental health experts. At the same time, the limited resources are one of the biggest challenges.

– Both the police and the social workers are overloaded with work and it can be tricky to find the time for revisits. But we do it all the same, because we see it as an investment for the future if we are able to end the vicious circle.



“NO HARM DONE”

DOES ALCOHOL HARM PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE DRINKER IN DENMARK?

The topic of alcohol’s harms to others has gained international attention in the last several years. Recent research efforts include projects in a variety of countries. This wave of research seemed to begin around 2010, when scientists in Australia and New Zealand started to publish their findings. Around the same time an international research group was established, supported by the World Health Organization and the government of Thailand, and is poised to begin publishing their findings. With such funding, it was feasible for several low and middle income countries in Southeast Asia and in other parts of the world to join this scientific and comparative effort. In addition, and to the best of my knowledge, other national research projects either have been conducted (Finland), are currently running (United States) or are being proposed (Sweden). There could be several more.

With the rise of this new wave of research, I, too, became interested in studying in Denmark how one’s drinking (or more exactly, one’s risky drinking) can harm people other than just the drinker. So far, I have only been able to do so on a limited basis, by analyzing a small number of questions from a recent national general population survey that was conducted by my institute and also by comparing them within the research conducted in the Nordic collaborative project on alcohol’s harms to others. The publications from the Nordic project have been produced on a very modest budget coordinated by the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues. However, for the last five years I have also applied to both

public and private Danish funding bodies in order to conduct a “proper” self-standing project within this area in Denmark. Unfortunately, I have had no success to date. In essence, the responses that I have received from all of my applications can be summarised in one word: disinterest; this topic was said, in so many words, to have low priority.

Yet, at the same time that I have been seeking funding for a study in Denmark, I have, together with two longstanding fellow American colleagues, succeeded in obtaining financial support for a four-year international comparative study of alcohol’s harms to others. This funding comes from the prestigious U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), more precisely, from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Denmark is involved as one of several study countries. Thus, in regard to my own scientific efforts, the first proper funding that I have received for a project on this topic comes from the U.S.

Regarding my applications to Danish funders, I had begun to question whether my proposals were really of such poor quality. Was I applying the wrong methods or approach to study these problems? Is there really no need for research in this area? For me, as a non-native resident of Denmark, I do not immediately have the answer as to why such a topic is not seen as a social and/or health problem in need of study. But in the meanwhile, it has become quite clear that the problem has found resonance in the rest of the Nordic realm as well as across the globe.



Kim Bloomfield
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Aarhus University*

Photo: Tom Kettunen

LOCAL PREVENTION

RESPONSIBILITY AND COOPERATION KEY TO MINIMISING NIGHTLIFE VIOLENCE

Julius von Wright



An increase of restaurants resulted in a rise of reported violence in Sweden. This was the starting point for the prevention method “Responsible Beverage Service”, based on cooperation between bars, the police and municipalities, and emphasising the training of bar staff. Now the method is being used across Sweden and has proven to be effective in reducing violence.

Research shows that there is a relation between heavy drinking and violence. About 40–50 percent of reported acts of violence in Sweden are estimated to be alcohol-related. This can be especially troublesome

in countries where binge drinking is common, as is the case for the Nordic countries. The number of alcohol licences for restaurants increased markedly in Sweden in the mid-1990s. The bar and restaurant scene was blooming,

binge drinking became more common and the restaurants were struggling to meet the demands of the customers. This led to ever more inexperienced staff in bars, especially in Stockholm.

Inexperience leads to uncertainty. This uncertainty is what STAD, *Stockholm prevents alcohol and drug problems*, is trying to combat. The project has developed the “Responsible Beverage Service” method (“Ansvarfull alkoholserving” in Swedish) on the basis of a similar American model to minimise alcohol-related violence in restaurants.

Daniel Müller, who has led the STAD project for the last ten years, says that the method relies on three main pillars: training of staff, cooperation between nightlife operators and supervision.

– All three pillars are important if we are to get a good effect, though different actors may see differently on this. The police and the municipalities may consider supervision the most important part, while the restaurants may regard cooperation as the most important element, says Müller.

An evaluation of the method has shown that violence has decreased in municipalities where the method has been implemented. A comparison between two neighbourhoods in Stockholm showed that reported violence decreased by a third in the neighbourhood that implemented the method. This has led to the method quickly spreading from the capital across all of Sweden, supported by *The Public Health Agency of Sweden*. And it has not stopped there: the method has also inspired similar efforts in the Netherlands, Norway and Finland and is the main component in the EU-project “STAD in Europe”, aiming at reducing binge drinking and its negative consequences in seven European countries.

IDENTIFYING POSSIBLE CHAINS OF EVENTS

The bar staff should realise the consequence that their decisions may have later in the



*Project manager Daniel Müller from STAD.
Photo: Stad.org*

evening. One served drink too many can easily lead to problematic situations, not necessarily in the bar, but on the customer’s way home.

– We want the staff taking the course to understand the context of serving an intoxicated person alcohol and what it can lead to. We talk a lot about what consequences this might have, says Müller.

This is done also using personal experience. An overview of bar staff’s drinking habits show that over 80 percent of the personnel have a risky consumption. This is why the course also addresses the staff’s own alcohol habits.

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

Municipal resources vary a lot depending on size, so adapting the method locally is inevitable. Methods like this one run the risk of losing effect as they spread around

the country, which can be problematic.

– In Stockholm we focus a lot on guaranteeing quality. This has been hard to maintain as the method has spread. When I've attended the course in different municipalities I've noticed they vary a lot. We are trying hard to make sure that all who take this course will come away with the same knowledge, Müller says.

An evaluation has shown that the method is most effective in small municipalities and that local cooperation networks between the municipality, the police and restaurants have had a significant effect on reported violence. According to the evaluation, restaurants participating in these networks have had a great impact on the positive results.

Cooperation within these networks is not always easy. Müller admits that there has been a number of crises of trust.

– It happens very easily that trust between the parties crackles. What takes years to build up takes minutes to demolish and most often it's caused by simple communication breakdowns, says Müller.

Responsible Beverage Service

- The method consists of three parts: training in responsible beverage service aimed at bar staff, creating a network of the local police, municipality and restaurant owners, and developing an effective supervision.
- Reported violence decreased by 29 percent in Stockholm City, where the method was implemented, compared to Södermalm (also in Stockholm), where it was not.
- Over 90 percent of the 290 Swedish municipalities had by 2008 in one way or another used the method.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON ALCOHOL'S HARM TO OTHERS

Nina Rehn-Mendoza

“The glass is half empty until alcohol’s harm to others is part of a broader alcohol policy framework” (Ann Hope, Ireland)

The current trend of research on alcohol’s harm to others can be said to have started with a study in Australia released in 2010, which demonstrated how individual acts of alcohol misuse ripple through families, workplaces and communities. Measuring “third-party” harms from alcohol had not previously been explored that systematically. Earlier, piecemeal research was done on some single aspects of harm to others. The study and its new, comprehensive methodology is now used as a model for international work across the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe.

So why is interest in the harm to others perspective increasing?

One possible explanation is the link to passive smoking and the success of that concept in bringing about actual change in many countries. The question is if “passive drinking” can play a similar role. Researcher **Ann Hope** from Trinity College Dublin in Ireland thinks it could.

– The effects of passive drinking are greater in the range of harms and the long-term effects on individuals and quality of life of communities than passive smoking, Hope says.

Researcher **Briony Enser** from Oxford Brookes University (UK) also believes in the importance of learning from the tobacco experience, but recognises that the effects are still a long way off the level of public recognition and concern that would be needed to prompt a policy response.

Senior researcher **Thomas Greenfield** from the Public Health Institute (US) emphasises that the topic has great policy significance.

– By analogy with second-hand smoke, those experiencing the second-hand effects of alcohol tend to support alcohol control policies, Greenfield says.

Another explanation is that while there has been an increase in the recognition that addressing alcohol-related harm requires a whole-of-society approach, the measures – such as price increases – have still focused primarily on the drinkers. Also, among the main alcohol-related problems in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) are traffic accidents, injuries and violence, but in many cases their link to alcohol is not recognised. In both cases, time has come to fill the gap in knowledge through documenting and monitoring the harms to others aspects systematically and across a large number of countries.

From a Thai perspective there is increasing global momentum on violence against women and children, which in this case would mean protecting them from alcohol harms.

– Attention to foetal alcohol spectrum disorder is also increasing but is more limited to the (public) health sector, says researcher **Orratai Waleewong** from the Health Promotion Research Center in Thailand.

Thomas Greenfield says the paradigm shift to examine harm from the victim’s perspective has



only recently taken root and remains largely understudied, especially in the United States.

We can see signs that in the research community interest is growing, but can the results really change policies in different settings? In mature countries where alcohol policies are mostly already in place, can the harm to others bring some additional focus or emphasis to counter the forces to deregulate alcohol?

– In a Europe where trade regulations have limited the capacity of member states to implement the full rigour of effective policies, the development of a sound science base for arguing the effects of passive drinking could provide additional attention and stronger focus on reducing alcohol-related harm, says Ann Hope.

– Research in the UK has really only begun to

grapple with this issue in the last couple of years. Recognition of harm to others in the UK outside the field of academic research is poor, including in policy circles. At street level it seems to be largely unseen; its effects are there for all to see, but it remains hidden in plain sight, says Briony Enser.

According to the Secretary General of the Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network, **Lauri Beekmann** (Estonia), the harms to others aspect is the driving argument behind several recent policy changes in the Baltic states, for example a total ban in Lithuania on alcohol sales at petrol stations, adopted in January 2016.

Is the situation different in countries that do not yet have policies in place? Can the harm to others perspective push an agenda forward? In Chile one of the first important steps is the need to collect data in a routine fashion from

all relevant human services agencies, such as health and social services, police and courts.

– Data can then be used to make decision-makers aware of the consequences and their cost to both individuals and society, says researcher **Ramon Florenzano** from Universidad del Desarrollo in Chile.

Professor **Isidore Obot** from University of Uyo (Nigeria) states that if anything has the potential to influence the action of policy-makers, it is the showing of the fact that alcohol plays a role in many of the social problems afflicting societies and communities.

– In Nigeria there is some plan by the Ministry of Health to develop a national alcohol policy, and the data on harms to others will be used in that process, Obot says.

In Lao PDR and Vietnam the research has already contributed to changes in policy. For example, in Lao a comprehensive alcohol policy has been developed. Having national data, not only on drinkers but those around them was an important lever for the government's response according to senior researcher **Anne-Marie Laslett** from the National Drug Research Institute and the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research in Australia.

In LMICs the research is still small-scale but is arguably growing. Thailand is at the forefront in terms of alcohol policy among these countries, but the harms to others perspective has not been so far used extensively for policy-making.

– This year, however, the national alcohol conference will have a strong focus on harms to others; a first in introducing this to the broader Thai audience, Orratai Waleewong says.

– For countries with little policy and a strong influence from alcohol industry, the only way to fight is evidence. Because evidence is the truth and it is a tool we can use to inform the pub-

lic to get political attention, researcher **Jintana Jankhotkaew** from the Health Promotion Policy Research Center in Thailand points out.

How to move forward on the topic of harm to others?

Besides being able to report on the magnitude of the harms, there is a lot of development that needs to be done in terms of making the presentation of the data more objective and easy to understand by the public, such as some index of harm to others or the costs of harm to others, according to Orratai Waleewong.

– Comprehensive national reports on harm to others such as those made by Ireland and Thailand are very important in showing the way to countries that have not yet done so, Lauri Beekman says.

– A written policy about routine data recording at different agencies would help to measure the harm to others, Ramon Florenzano argues.

Jintana Jankhotkaew from Thailand says that evidence and know-how transfer is important, while networks of researchers, both north-south and south-south can be used to increase the research capacity. Anne-Marie Laslett from Australia states that researchers and advocates need to continue informing health departments and legislative bodies of the role of alcohol in precipitating harms to others in a substantial proportion of problems, namely among families, in street violence, in the workforce and as it contributes to poorer public amenity.

– The research gap in the US is being filled by a project on state-level alcohol policies and how regional drinking cultures affect harm risks and severity. Implications of recent harm to others findings for community mobilisation and legislative agenda setting (municipal, county, state and federal) still need to be better understood, Thomas Greenfield concludes.

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