ADVERSE EFFECTS OF DRINKING ON AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES: PERSPECTIVES FROM POPULATION SURVEYS AND FROM AGENCY CASELOADS

Robin Room and Anne-Marie Laslett
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Intrinsic harmfulness -- ratings by psychopharmacologists: harm to others rated highest for alcohol; it’s >1/2 of alcohol’s harm

Harm from others’ drinking occurs in many different relationships
Harm from others’ drinking occurs in many different relationships

- Our primary focus today is on families and children
- Setting violence in a larger frame of domestic harms from drinking
- Part of a wider series of studies of the diverse harms from others’ drinking
Four frames for seeing alcohol’s harm to others: population level and societal response level

- **The viewpoint of the drinker**
  - Population surveys of problems from drinking

- **The viewpoint of the “other”**
  - Survey on harm to the respondent from others’ drinking

- **As noticed by official agencies responding to problems**
  - Agency records data – police reports, welfare agencies, etc.

- **As included in economic studies of the social costs of alcohol**
  - Using combinations of data – including agency records data and survey data

- Population surveys on drinking have focused primarily on adverse consequences of drinking for the drinker, not for those around the drinker

- Social cost of alcohol studies have focused primarily on costs for governments and for the drinker, except for some coverage in drink driving and crime
A gap in social costs for adverse effects on the family -- as noted in the UK Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit 2004 report on social costs of alcohol

“cost not quantifiable”
I. The general population window:
as reported by the drinker
(NDSHS, 2004; Livingston & Room, Drug Alc Dep 101:169-175, 2009)

Delinquent behaviour score – in the last year, while under the influence of alcohol,...
Created a public disturbance or nuisance
Caused damage to property
Stole money, goods or property
Verbally abused someone
Physically abused someone

Problem score

Age group

Male delinquent behaviour
Female delinquent behaviour
i) Harm to the respondent from the family or household member whose drinking had the most adverse effect

- **17%** adversely affected by a relative or intimate partner’s drinking in the last year (2008)
  - 7% of the harm was from a household member (spouse/partner 4%)
  - 8% adversely affected “a lot”

- **50%** of those harmed by a family member’s drinking in 2008 were so harmed again in 2011 (9% of total respondents)

- In 2008, because of their drinking, you:
  - felt emotionally hurt or neglected: **11%**
  - had a serious argument but no physical violence: **11%**
  - felt threatened by them: **4%**
  - were physically hurt by them: **1%**
Harm from drinking of family member with most harmful drinking in last year (from a total adult pop. sample of 2649)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Total (415)</th>
<th>Partner (88)</th>
<th>Ex-partner (55)</th>
<th>Close family (195)</th>
<th>Extended family (77)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally hurt or neglected</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious argument without violence</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to stop seeing them</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broke or damaged something that mattered to you</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was out at risk in a car they were driving</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically hurt</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced or pressured into sex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Australians are likely to have heavy drinkers among their relatives and friends

% who reported a heavy drinker for each relationship category, and average no. of heavy drinkers (HD) for each relationship category, 2011 reinterview, by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% reporting HD in household (HH)a</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. HH HDs</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>% reporting HD (non-HH) relatives and intimates (R+I)</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>28.6**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average no. R+I HDs</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% reporting HD in HH and non-HH R+I</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>35.0**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. HH and non-HH R+I HDs</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.52*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% reporting HD among friends</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>34.3**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. friends HDs</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.44**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% reporting HD among co-workers</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>14.3**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. co-worker HDs</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.66*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% reporting any known HD among respondent</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. HD overall</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.75**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

HD = heavy drinker, someone who is “a fairly heavy drinker, or drinks a lot sometimes”.
HH = household; R+I = relatives and intimate partners.
Gender difference: * p < .05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.
a Household members include partner, son or daughter, parent, sibling, and non-family household members.
Among family/friends: characteristics of the drinker with the greatest adverse effect in the last year

- Drinker’s gender: male 71%
- Drinker’s average age: 40 years
  - Affecting respondents aged 18-29: 29 years
- Average number of standard drinks when drinking heavily 13 drinks
- Average number of days in a week that the drinker consumes 5+ standard drinks 4 days

-- drinkers with adverse effects on others drink quite a lot
ii) harm to children from adults’ drinking

- 22% of carers reported their children had been harmed by others’ drinking in the last year (2008)
- 3% reported their children had been harmed “a lot”
- 35% of the children harmed in 2008 had been harmed again in 2011 (i.e., 7% of carers reported harm to their children both years)

In 2008, because of an adult’s drinking, children:

- were yelled at, criticised or verbally abused: 9%
- were left in an unsupervised or unsafe situation: 3%
- witnessed serious violence in the home: 3%
The follow-up survey: Stability or change in harm to adults and to children

Living in heavy-drinking circles predicts harm in 2011

i) Harm from a family member to the respondent:
   • Being harmed by a family member’s drinking in 2011 was predicted by having been harmed in 2008, by heavy drinking by household members and relatives in 2008, and by increase in the numbers of heavy drinkers in the household and among relatives between 2008 and 2011.

ii) Harm to children of the respondent:
   • Children being harmed in 2011 was predicted by a parallel set of factors.
Qualitative interviews: stories from the 10 where children were harmed “a lot”

- She’ll be yelling and screaming and get in the f-ing, you know speaking like that, terrible language. [The 7 year old] has got in the car crying.... Now [the 13 year old’s] gone to live with her father she realises that he’s worse than the mother because he goes off and then comes home drunk and wakes her up and is abusive.

- He actually one night was physically abusive to [their] mother and the three of them witnessed it.... When he got in the door he actually tried to strangle her.

- [My children] were in the car with [my sister] one day when she had been drinking and I followed her and stopped the car and asked them to get out and then took them myself.
What societal response agencies see: some examples

- The police and intimate violence incidents
- The Child Protection Service: substantiated child maltreatment cases with carer drinking involved
- Care episodes in Alcohol and Other Drug services for those affected by others’ alcohol or drug problems
- Counselling calls to helplines about others’ drinking
Family violence incidents with definite alcohol involvement, 2001–13

--- large numbers, trends mostly upwards
Child Protection System findings, Victoria, 2001-2005

-- greater alcohol involvement in more serious cases
Care episodes for those seeking treatment for someone else's alcohol or drug use, Australian Alcohol & Other Drug services, 2011–12

The system is not well prepared for such cases, and the state/terr. funding model may not allow for them.
Family members calling Family Drug Support, DirectLine and Counselling Online about someone else’s alcohol use

Number of calls

- DirectLine
- Counselling Online
- Family Drug Support

- 2006-07: 110, 2462, 3420
- 2007-08: 128, 2173, 3363
- 2008-09: 342, 1893, 4048
- 2009-10: 286, 1740, 4095
- 2010-11: 295, 1700, 5505
- 2011-12: 223, 1591, 5927
- 2012-13: 258, 1638, 5966
The two windows:
General population cases are much more numerous than those noticed by agencies, but most are less serious

... But there are many more cases of serious harm in the general population than come to official attention; for instance,

• About 1/10 as many children in the Child Protection system as an adult’s drinking as there are children in the general population whose parent or responsible adult considers they were harmed “a lot” by another’s drinking in the last year.

• Harms from drinking are fairly equally spread across social classes in the general population, but marginalised poor families and their members predominate in Child Protection systems; the attention of professionals and the state is differentially on the poor.
Pyramidal model of risks to children affected by alcohol-related problems (Laslett’s dissertation)

1. **Tier 1**: Children in the child protection system where a carer’s problematic drinking is a factor.
   - 10,166 children (0.2% of all children)

2. **Tier 2**: Children substantially affected by others’ drinking, not in the child protection system.
   - 142,582 children (3.0% of all children)

3. **Tier 3**: Children affected in some way by others’ drinking.
   - 1,045,598 children (22.0% of all children)

4. **Tier 4**: Children living in a household with a risky drinker.
   - 1,470,000 children (30.9% of all children)

5. **Tier 5**: All Australian children.
   - 4.75 million children
Some conclusions

- Harm to children and families from others’ drinking includes sporadic exposure to less than ideal parenting practices and family life experiences at one end, and ongoing serious forms of violence, injury and emotional abuse at the other.
- Harms to children and adult family members from drinking of others in the family are widespread in the population.
- Harms to adult family members are greater among younger than older adults, a little more among women than men, quite evenly spread by social class and across urban/region/urban.
- Harms which are registered from official actions (Child Protection, police, etc.) are at the serious end, concentrated among marginalised poor families, in part because of the “social gaze” of the authorities.
- A public health approach suggests broad-based solutions, specific changes to service delivery systems, and options for further research about which changes may be most effective.
Three reports by CAPR and a Policy Options report by FARE are available on this website: http://www.fare.org.au/hto2015/

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