

Alcohol's harms to others

Research approaches and results from Finnish studies

Katariina Warpenius



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE, FINLAND



The structure of the presentation

- I The book
- II Some basics
- III The "interactionist" perspective and political implications
- IV Results from Finland
- V Conclusions

I The book

- Katariina Warpenius, Marja Holmila, Christoffer Tigerstedt (toim.): Alkoholi- ja päihdehaitat läheisille, muille ihmisille ja yhteiskunnalle. THL, Teema 14/2013.
- Katariina Warpenius, Marja Holmila, Christoffer Tigerstedt (eds.): Alcohol- and drug-related harms to other people and society.
- Three sections: Private sphere, public sphere and society (institutional level).
- Available (including summaries in English):
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II Some basics

- Alcohol's harms to other people than the drinker him/herself is a neglected perspective in the research literature (Klingemann & Gmel 2001; Laslett et al. 2010).
- In Nordic Welfare States there have been ethical reasons why population-oriented measures have been preferable:
 - “Strategies which single out individuals ... also [carry] social costs in that [they tend] to be applied to those with the least social resources to protect themselves” (Bruun et al., 1975, 67).

=> avoidance of moral labeling and discrimination of users.
- Historically not a new approach: Alcohol was clearly linked to harms to others in 19th and 20th Century Temperance ideas.

... some basics

- There are two main alcohol-specific literatures:
 - (1) The survey research tradition of asking about problems
 - (2) The tradition of studies of the social costs of alcohol (& register data in a more general sense) (Laslett et al. 2010)
- Qualitative research is badly needed (as harms to others emanate in culturally embedded social situation).

... some basics

- Depending on discipline or focus, several concepts have recently been suggested to grasp the fact that drinking has negative effects on other people and society as well.
- Concepts applied are “externalities”, “second-hand effects”, “third party damages”, “collateral damages” and “passive drinking”.
- Alongside these concepts “harms to others” (HTO) has gained the status of a keyword in scientific databases in the last few years.

III The “interactionist” perspective...

- Below, the HTO approach is related to three established research traditions within alcohol studies:
 - (1) In the individual approach harms are identified as problems primarily for drinkers. The “individual harms approach” concentrates on risks or pathologies concerning the individual patient or client.
 - (2) The “public health approach” emphasizes the correlations between the health status of a particular population and the aggregate amount of alcoholic beverages consumed.
 - (3) The “community approach”, in turn, is primarily concerned with the social dynamics operating in different agencies and bodies belonging to a local community.

... the “interactionist” strand

- In drawing attention to the social nature of alcohol-related harm, the HTO perspective adds something essential to three established approaches within alcohol research:
 - ⇒ The HTO perspective challenges the narrow scope embedded in the “individual harms approach”;
 - ⇒ it puts the finger on shortcomings within the “public health approach”;
 - ⇒ and it provides a critical complement to the “community approach”.

III The “interactionist” perspective...

- Focusing on alcohol's and drugs' harms to other than the user him/herself improves our understanding of the social dynamics of such harm...
- Drinking's harm to others is inherently interactive (Room 2000):

When we are investigating HTO we are dealing with social interactions and situations – and mainly from the perspective of the “other” suffering from harms from drinkers in different social contexts.

III The “interactionist” perspective...

- In the previous research approaches harms to other people or to social institutions remain of secondary or no interest – especially in the individual approach.
- HTO approach is a specific research “perspective” enriching the study of how harms evolve in social interaction and how harms are experienced by other people around the drinker in social drinking situations.

III ...and political implications

- The HTO perspective highlights that there are many harms and costs, broadly distributed, that constitute “externalities” in society...
- ...but terminology applied in research literature varies at the moment.

III ...and political implications

- The term “passive drinking” is alive among some NGOs:
“This is an attempt to problematize drinking drawing on the successful campaign against ‘passive smoking’.” (Burgess 2009)
- The parallel to passive smoking is still referred to among researchers:
”Harms to others need to be taken into account in the discussion of alcohol control policy in the same way that the role of passive smoking has been considered in the debate and development of healthier public policy in relation to tobacco.” (Caswell et al. 2011)
- Thomas Babor proposed the term “*collateral damage*”, borrowed directly from military vocabulary:
”there is the need for a term that captures the popular imagination for social marketing purposes in the public health sense.” (Babor 2011, 1612)

III ...and political implications

- So, indeed, AHTO “provides sound reasons why regulation and effective public health measures should be implemented, in addition to the ethical reasons why drinkers themselves should be cared for.” (Laslett 2012)
- Focusing on second hand effects of drinking has a potential for in creating political will to move the alcohol policy agenda forward...
- ...but the question of a suitable and credible term is unresolved.
- NGOs and researchers are actively aching for an adequate slogan/term.

IV (Some) Results from Finland: private sphere

- Altogether 26 per cent of teenagers reported on some degree of harm that was related to adult alcohol use in the home. (*Janne Takala & Mira Roine*)
- Children with a substance abusing mother had more injuries, illnesses, disorders of psychological development and behavioral and emotional disorders than other children, and they were placed in out-of-home care considerably more often than other children. (*Marja Holmila & al.*)

IV (Some) Results from Finland: private sphere

- Every third child who became a client of open-care child protection services and every second child placed in out-of-home care had a parent with a substance abuse problem. *(Heino)*
- Alcohol use, with binge drinking in particular, affects the incidence of domestic violence. Typically the victim of long-term domestic violence is a woman. *(Piispa)*

IV (Some) Results from Finland: public sphere

- Women in general and young women in particular suffered the most from intoxicated peoples' unpleasant behaviour in public places. (*Tigerstedt & Huhtanen*)
- A considerable portion of Helsinki inhabitants have at some time in their life felt concerned about the drug use of a person they have known, while one in ten had had these feelings during the last year. (*Hakkarainen & Jääskeläinen*)

IV (Some) Results from Finland: public sphere

- Night-time violence in public places is related to the closing time of licensed premises and to intoxication-oriented drinking. The victims and the offenders are most often young men. (*Warpenius & al.*)
- Drunk drivers cause some 12 per cent of all traffic accidents resulting in injuries and some 26 per cent of all fatal traffic accidents. (*Karjalainen & al.*)

IV (Some) Results from Finland: institutions

- The harms experienced by significant others are manifold, but the help provided by the substance abuse treatment system for significant others is not sufficient. (*Itäpuisto & Selin*)
- In 2011 about 12 000 alcohol- and drug-related visits to social and health services were documented during the 24-hour count. (*Kuussaari & al.*)

IV (Some) Results from Finland: institutions

- Alcohol consumption is clearly associated with the increase in sickness absences. The positive relationship between alcohol consumption and sickness absence is particularly pronounced for low-educated males. (*Böckerman & Uutela*)
- Some 12 000 Finns on average received annually a disability pension granted by the Social Insurance Institution on the basis of an alcohol-related disease. (*Gockel & al.*)

IV (Some) Results from Finland: institutions

- In 2010 the costs of alcohol to law and order, social services and health care amounted to some EUR 1.3 billion, (with EUR 1 billion being covered by the public sector)... (*Jääskeläinen & Österberg*)
- ... and the drug-related costs amounted to at least EUR 240 million (*Jääskeläinen & Hakkarainen*)

V Conclusions

- As the broad spectrum of negative consequences demonstrate, drinking is not just a private lifestyle risk to autonomous consumers – but a collective risk.
- Focusing on alcohol's and drugs' harms to others raises several questions and challenges concerning politics and ethics.
- The HTO perspective includes a change in the ideas of modern privacy and consumer freedom:
“The individual's right to freedom and risk taking that we value so much, does not include the right to inflict harms upon other people who have no control over the harmful effects – or who have no choice.” (Fekjær 2011)

V Conclusions and questions

- Does AHTO approach imply that an individual user will be held responsible for harms caused to others?
- Is there a threat that population-based/universal measures (covering the whole population and drinking culture), are replaced by measures singling out, pointing finger at and marginalizing individual alcohol and drug users?
- This approach may be resulting in greater stigmatization of users.

V Conclusions and questions

- Finally, economic calculations of costs related to alcohol and drug use do not form an adequate basis for political decisions.
- Such decisions are always value-loaded, involving the fundamental question: to what extent is a given society willing to tolerate various kinds of alcohol- and drug-related harms, as well as risks and costs connected to those harms?

-> The results from HTO research may affect the degree of tolerance and political will in a given society ...

... which, in turn, demonstrates that we are dealing with historically and culturally relative questions.

Thank you for your attention!