

International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol

Sixth Annual Workshop

Florence, Italy, May 30 - 31 & June 2, 1998

The sixth annual workshop of the International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol (IRGGA) was held May 30 and 31 and June 2, 1998, in Florence, Italy, in conjunction with the annual symposium of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol. IRGGA members share an interest in gender-related influences on drinking behavior and drinking-related problems, and many members have conducted social and epidemiological research on women's drinking. Forty-one persons attended the Florence workshop, representing 21 countries. A membership and attendance list accompanies this report. The workshop format included presentations on selected research topics, working group meetings and reports, and group discussion of collaborative projects and future research directions. Sharon Wilsnack (USA) served as workshop chair; a joint session of IRGGA and the EU BIOMED-II Women and Alcohol Project on June 2 was co-chaired by BIOMED project coordinator Kim Bloomfield (Germany).

Update on Collaborative IRGGA Papers. Sharon Wilsnack reported that the paper, "Should alcohol consumption measures be adjusted for gender differences?" by IRGGA members Kate Graham (Canada), Richard Wilsnack (US), Deborah Dawson (USA), and Nancy Vogeltanz (USA) was scheduled for publication in the August 1998 issue of Addiction. The collaborative paper, "Gender differences in alcohol consumption and adverse drinking consequences: Cross-cultural patterns," which includes 10 IRGGA data sets, has also been accepted for publication in Addiction subject to minor revisions. A third paper analyzing relationships between alcohol consumption levels and adverse drinking consequences in female data sets from five countries is described below. A fourth paper by Kate Graham and Sharon Wilsnack, describing longitudinal relationships between alcohol problems and prescription drug use in U.S. women, is currently under editorial review.

Final Report: Consumption x Consequences Analyses . Nancy Vogeltanz summarized revised analyses by IRGGA members Jillian Fleming (Australia), Ludek Kubicka (Czech Republic), Rudie Neve (The Netherlands), Fredrik Spak (Sweden), Thomas Greenfield and Karen Trocki (USA), and S. Wilsnack et al. (USA) of associations between consumption variables (frequency, quantity, and heavy episodic drinking) and drinking-related problems among women. The overall results indicated partial support for the hypothesis that associations between women's consumption patterns and drinking-related problems differ between countries with high vs. low rates of female drinking. For example, drinking frequency predicted problem consequences only in the two countries with the lowest percentage of female drinkers (U.S. and The Netherlands). In group discussion it was suggested that the consumption x consequences analyses be repeated using the single consequences item, criticism of respondent's drinking by others. The criticism item, which is available in all data sets in this study,

may have a lower drinking-level threshold, greater cultural sensitivity, and perhaps greater reliability than questions about physical or psychological harm from drinking. At the time of writing this report, the group had made the recommended changes and completed the new data analyses. Results will be presented at the BIOMED Alcohol and Gender in Europe Conference to be held in Berlin in March, 1999, following which the paper will be submitted for publication.

Alcohol Consumption among Women in Mexico . Martha Romero Mendoza (Mexico) summarized and discussed a paper prepared for the IRGGA workshop titled, "Alcohol consumption among Mexican women: Implications of a syncretic culture" (with Jorge Villatoro and Ma. Elena Medina-Mora). The authors described the syncretic, or hybrid, nature of Mexican women -- with tensions and contradictions between traditional and modern norms and values -- as important for understanding various characteristics of women's drinking in Mexico. These characteristics include high rates of abstention among women, but also high rates of hidden drinking; greater stigmatization of female drinking, resulting in greater abandonment and rejection of problem drinking women, and greater psychological problems among them; expectations that women will be caretakers who limit the excessive drinking of others; and extensive barriers to and uncertain outcome of alcoholism treatment services for women. Martha illustrated many of these points with data from two Mexican surveys -- the 1989 National Household Survey on Addictions and the 1991 National Student Survey -- as well as with data from her own qualitative research on sexuality and mental health of alcohol-addicted women. Three research efforts appear likely to extend knowledge about heavy drinking Mexican women: (1) the 1998 National Survey on Addictions, which includes special attention to alcohol and violence, to combined use of alcohol, medical drugs, and illegal drugs, and to the time course of progression of alcohol dependence; (2) a study of alcohol dependence treatment, and barriers to access, in women; and (3) research on alcohol and drug use in Mexican females who migrate to the United States. Workshop participants expressed appreciation for the presentation and enthusiasm about the opportunity to include for the first time Latin American data sets in future IRGGA collaborative analyses.

Alcohol Advertising Study. Approximately 15 IRGGA members participated in a meeting of the alcohol advertising working group, chaired by Shoshana Weiss (Israel) and Robin Room (Canada). Participants from several countries (including Israel, Italy, Portugal, Russia, and the United States) showed samples of alcohol advertisements from leading magazines (and, for Russia, billboards) in their countries. Group discussion focused on similarities and differences in advertising themes cross-nationally. As one example, intergenerational family images (e.g., a grandmother and granddaughter carrying a basket of grapes) present in wine advertisements in Italy or Portugal were totally absent in ads of all other countries. Ads in Israel and Russia were frequently futuristic and surreal. Alcohol ads in most countries continue to include blatantly sexual images (usually but not always of women), although in some countries (e.g., the U.S.) sexuality may be presented in a humorous context that seems to allow advertisers to present the sexual images while at the same time disavowing any serious intent in doing so.

Members of the ads group developed a protocol for a comparative study to be conducted during the coming year. Alcohol ads will be chosen from magazines, newspapers, or billboards aimed at women, at men, or at both. In each country 20 persons who typically read the magazine/newspaper will be shown the ads and asked a series of open-ended questions about the ads' attractiveness, intended message, portrayal of women and/or men, and impact on the viewer's likelihood of buying the advertised product. Information on demographic characteristics and drinking behavior will be obtained from each respondent. Each investigator will prepare a qualitative description of major patterns in the interview data and will bring this, plus the raw interview responses, to the 1999 workshop in Montreal. The group will then devise coding procedures that will be applied systematically to all interview data. Any IRGGA member interested in joining this study is encouraged to contact Shoshana Weiss for more information.

Marital and Family Influences. Chaired by Jillian Fleming (Australia) and Meir Teichman (Israel), the working group on marital and family influences on alcohol abuse addressed a number of issues, including (1) available data sets; (2) measures of child abuse and domestic violence in IRGGA data sets; (3) methodological limitations of existing data sets and measures; (4) other data sets potentially available for IRGGA analyses; and (5) hypotheses about associations between sexual abuse and alcohol use/abuse and between domestic violence and alcohol use/abuse.

Group members identified four general population data sets (from Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, and the U.S.) and one clinical data set (from Canada) that include measures of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), physical abuse, and drinking behavior among women respondents; four of the five data sets also include measures of emotional abuse and (a different) four of the five include measures of domestic violence. Given the availability of some CSA measure in all five data sets, the group agreed that this would be the most promising area for comparative analyses. Several research questions were posed: (1) Does CSA predispose survivors to later substance abuse?; (2) Does CSA lead to abuse-insensitive parenting?; and (3) Does parental substance abuse create an environment that places children at risk of CSA?

In subsequent discussion of methodological differences across data sets with CSA measures, the suggestion was made that the group consider writing a position paper which outlines the existing gaps and challenges of measuring and analyzing associations between CSA and drinking cross-nationally. Group members agreed that this would be a valuable project, which could identify what is needed in future surveys (in terms of samples, variables, and measures) for adequate comparative analyses of CSA - alcohol links.

Members of the marital/family working group - and any other interested IRGGA members - are asked to e-mail their suggestions for the position paper to Jillian and Meir. Louise Nadeau (Canada) and Richard Wilsnack volunteered to help with a literature search for other data sets (including non-English language research) that contain CSA and drinking measures. Jillian and Meir will draft an outline for the

position paper and circulate it to other group members for their comments.

IRGGAnet Listserve. IRGGAnet currently has 40 subscribers from 18 countries. Nancy Vogelanz reminded IRGGA members to send her any new or changed e-mail addresses so that she can keep the IRGGAnet address list up-to-date. Nancy also reminded members about procedures for posting messages to individual members as compared with messages to the entire list. She encouraged members to make increased use of IRGGAnet for discussion of theoretical and methodological issues in gender and alcohol research, as well as for requests for specific information and announcements of IRGGA and working group activities. Anyone with questions about signing on or off IRGGAnet or with problems in receiving messages should contact Nancy at Vogelanz@badlands.nodak.edu.

Seminar on Qualitative Research Methods. On May 31 Jacqueline Wiseman (USA) presented a half-day seminar, open to IRGGA members and other KBS participants, on qualitative research methods. The seminar continued a theme from previous IRGGA workshops of interest in using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, in complementary ways, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of relationships among gender, culture, and alcohol use.

Beginning with an overview of theoretical underpinnings and distinctive features of qualitative research, Jacqueline described a number of specific data collection methods, including observation, participant observation, depth interviews, ecological research, case studies, and content analysis. She discussed the nature of sampling in qualitative research, differences between qualitative and quantitative reporting of research findings, and some issues in assessing and enhancing reliability and validity of qualitative data. With regard to combining qualitative and quantitative methods, she advocated the initial collection of quantitative data to identify broad patterns and tendencies, followed by qualitative research to add depth, richness, and meaning.

The qualitative seminar stimulated lively discussion of a number of conceptual and methodological issues. IRGGA members who would like additional information about the seminar content, or who are interested in participating in ongoing discussions of qualitative research within IRGGA, are encouraged to contact Jacqueline Wiseman.

Joint BIOMED/IRGGA Meeting. On June 2 a joint meeting was held for all members of IRGGA, including those presently participating in the European Union BIOMED-II project, "Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Problems Among Women in European Countries" (here abbreviated BIOMED). Coordinated by Kim Bloomfield, the BIOMED project is entering its third and final year of funding, which will culminate with a major conference, "Alcohol and Gender in Europe," to be held at the Free University, Berlin, March 24-29, 1999.

BIOMED Update. Kim provided an overview of BIOMED tasks and progress to date, including completion of a report by Ronald Knibbe (The Netherlands) evaluating the reliability and validity of alcohol consumption measures used in general population

surveys in the BIOMED countries); preparation of papers comparing women's and men's drinking patterns (Salme Ahlström, Finland) and drinking-related problems (Moiria Plant and Patrick Miller, Scotland) across the BIOMED countries; and evaluation of measures of alcohol-related morbidity and mortality in the participating countries (Francesco Cipriani, Italy, and Fredrik Spak, Sweden). Findings from these collaborative efforts were reported in several papers at the Florence KBS Symposium, and final reports will be presented at the conference in Berlin.

Gender-Role Indicators. Giora Rahav (Israel) facilitated a discussion of prospects for comparative analyses of associations between women's and men's drinking behavior and indicators of gender-role modernity or gender equality. Giora has reviewed approximately 10 IRGGA data sets with regard to available individual and societal level gender-role indicators. Given the diversity of the samples and indicators, he recommends that one or two IRGGA members use existing sources (e.g., Saegers World Atlas of Women) to develop instructions for recoding existing measures into comparable gender-role indicators. Each investigator would recode his/her own data and send the recoded variables to the project coordinator who would create an integrated data set that could then be analyzed by any IRGGA collaborator. Reaction to this proposal was favorable, and group consensus was that Giora would be the ideal coordinator of such a project. Further information about this task will be provided during the coming year.

Multi-National Survey of Women's and Men's Drinking . A major focus of discussion in the BIOMED/IRGGA session was the possibility of conducting a multi-national study that would use a new gender-sensitive common instrument to collect data on women's and men's drinking in participating countries. Participants agreed that there will never be a culture-free "gold standard" for gender-sensitive measurement of drinking behavior, given that all drinking behavior occurs and is defined within a specific cultural context. Nonetheless, members felt that considerable progress has been made in IRGGA and BIOMED efforts to assess and improve existing measures. This progress could form the basis for designing new, improved measures which could then be "tested" against alcohol consumption measures currently in use in participating countries. Common measures of variables needed for other IRGGA projects (e.g., marital/family variables, gender-role indicators) could also be included. Most participants favored a model in which a set of common core questions is developed, which members can then negotiate to have included in existing or planned surveys in each of their countries. A number of national surveys are planned or scheduled with which IRGGA members already have some connection. These include national surveys in Australia in 2000, Finland in 2000, Israel in 2000-2001, Mexico in 2000 or 2001, Sweden, the UK in 2000-2001, and the US in 2000 (Alcohol Research Group) and 2001 (UND/Wilsnack); additional regional studies known to IRGGA members are planned for the Czech Republic in 2000 and Sweden in 2000-2001.

There was considerable discussion of sources of funding for a coordinated international study. In addition to cooperating wherever possible with existing national surveys, funding would be needed for data collection in countries without opportunities for such cooperation, and for costs of central coordination and data analysis. One

potential source is the European Commission Programme of Community Action on Health Monitoring, which will fund cooperative EU projects from 1997 through 2001. Kim Bloomfield and a German colleague Ludwig Kraus plan to submit to this agency a proposal for coordination and centralized data analysis of independently funded surveys of alcohol (and perhaps prescription drug) use/abuse in EU countries. Other potential funding sources are the U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's Collaborative International Projects Program and the U.S. National Institutes of Health's Fogarty International Center. Although substantial funding from the World Health Organization is unlikely, an official affiliation with WHO may help to legitimize this project as we approach various individual governments for their cooperation.

The scope and complexity of a new multi-national study made a mid-year meeting for further planning seem advisable. A decision was made to hold this meeting in conjunction with the March 1999 BIOMED conference in Berlin. All BIOMED partners and other IRGGA members able to attend the Berlin conference will be welcome to participate in the planning meeting. In preparation for the Berlin planning meeting additional information about potential funding sources will be gathered, as well as instruments from other international collaborative studies (e.g., the AUDIT and the WHO Action Plan 12 questionnaire). Further information about the planning meeting can be obtained from Kim Bloomfield or Sharon Wilsnack, who will also welcome suggestions about resource materials for that meeting.

1999 Workshop. The seventh annual IRGGA workshop will be held in Montreal, Canada, Saturday and Sunday, May 29 and 30, preceding the Kjetil Bruun Symposium May 31 - June 4, 1999. Members and working groups are asked to send agenda items for the workshop to Sharon Wilsnack by April 1, 1999. Additional information about the workshop will be provided in early 1999.