

**Summary Report: Second Annual Workshop of the International Research Group  
On Gender and Alcohol, Ruschlikon, Switzerland, June 4 – 5, 1994**

The International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol (IRGGA) held its second annual workshop June 4-5, 1994, preceding the Kettil Bruun Symposium in Ruschlikon, Switzerland. IRGGA members share an interest in gender-related influences on drinking behavior and drinking problems, and many have conducted community, regional, or national surveys of women's drinking behavior. Twenty-seven persons attended the workshop, representing Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Russia, Scotland, Sweden, and the United States. A list of persons attending the Ruschlikon workshop and others interested in affiliating with IRGGA is attached to this report.

Workshop Format and Organization. A major focus of the workshop was 14 presentations by IRGGA members, reporting analyses of survey data sets from their countries (see attached workshop schedule). These analyses used standard measures developed during the preceding year to describe consumption levels and the prevalence of selected drinking-related problems and alcohol dependence symptoms among survey respondents. Group members used the standard measures to describe drinking levels and drinking consequences in their total samples and in specified gender x age subgroups. Group discussion addressed both substantive questions about cross-national differences in gender- and age-specific drinking patterns, and methodological questions about how to improve the standard drinking measures.

Following the presentations, workshop participants divided into three work groups to discuss the following topics: (1) improving the standard drinking measures; (2) hypotheses involving gender comparisons that might be tested across the IRGGA data sets; and (3) hypotheses specific to women that might be tested across the IRGGA data sets. At a final meeting, all participants heard reports from the three work groups and identified several goals and tasks for IRGGA activities in the coming year.

Methodological Issues: Improving the Standard Measures. Review of the proposed standard measures of drinking behavior and drinking consequences included discussion of how best to measure alcohol consumption, given the substantial cross-national variations in drink sizes. Instead of specifying a single "standard drink" size to be used in all data sets, or allowing each country to define its own standard drink, participants decided to convert all alcohol consumption data to milliliters of absolute alcohol (ethanol). Some surveys have asked about alcohol consumption in ml units (or in grams or ounces, which can easily be converted to ml). However, collaborators whose surveys asked only about "drinks" will need to determine the average size of various beverage-specific drinks (beer, wine, spirits) in their countries, so that these averages can be used to estimate the quantity and monthly consumption variables in terms of ml of absolute alcohol.

For participants using data sets from North America or Great Britain, we are attaching

to this report a list of customary drink servings prepared by the Brewers' Society of the UK in 1993. If these drink sizes and ethanol equivalents seem reasonable estimates to Canadian and U.S. members (at present Nadeau/Guyon, Graham, Andrews/Webster, and Ferris/Bondy/Ferrence in Canada, and Trocki/Greenfield and the Wilsnacks in the U.S.), we suggest using them in all the North American data sets for consistency. Collaborators from other countries represented by more than one data set (e.g., Ahlstrom/Mustonen and Haavio-Mannila in Finland, Rahav/Teichman and Weiss in Israel) should communicate directly with one another to arrive at consistent procedures for calculating alcohol consumption in ml of ethanol. When preparing summary tables for our first article (see below), it may be best to show consumption distributions for each country in terms of ml, without arbitrarily labeling light, moderate, and heavy drinking levels.

Two other decisions regarding the standard measures were to (1) calculate the median as well as the mean for average frequency and quantity of drinking; and (2) to calculate beverage-specific frequency and quantity variables based only on those respondents who reported any consumption of that beverage (i.e., not for all drinkers).

Methodological Issues for Future Data Collection . Workshop participants also considered several ways in which gender-sensitive measurement of drinking behavior could be improved in future data collection (e.g., if IRGGA would plan a coordinated cross-national survey at some future time). Several participants raised the issue of the optimal recall period for self-report of drinking behavior. Shorter periods (e.g., the past seven days) tend to produce more accurate recall but may not adequately represent a respondent's typical drinking behavior, particularly in the case of lighter or episodic drinkers.

Other measurement issues discussed included (1) advantages and limitations of telephone interviews as compared with personal interviews (telephone surveys may not be feasible in former East bloc countries in the foreseeable future, because a large proportion of the population lacks telephones and there is widespread reluctance to reveal sensitive information by phone); (2) impact of interviewer gender (several participants felt that female interviewers were clearly preferable for female respondents, but others felt that other personal characteristics were more important than interviewer gender); (3) the need for clearer questions about and definitions of abstention (e.g., self-definition vs. actual behavior) and of intoxication; (4) the need for more consistent and gender-sensitive thresholds for heavy episodic drinking (members felt that the 10 or more drinks criterion used in some surveys is clearly too high for women); and (5) the need to specify glass size, perhaps by use of pictures (in some countries such as Israel, wine in particular is sometimes served in very small glasses.)

Research Questions for Future Analyses. Participants suggested a number of research questions and hypotheses that could be tested in coordinated analyses across the IRGGA data sets. These included: (1) comparisons of the meanings or functions of drinking for women and for men (e.g., anxiety reduction, social, celebratory) across different beverage types and drinking contexts; (2) cross-national differences in rates of, and subjective meanings of, female and male abstention and intoxication; (3) cross-national and gender

differences in associations between level of alcohol consumption and level of adverse drinking consequences (including relationships between drinking consequences and various thresholds of heavy episodic drinking); (5) relationships between social roles of women and men (employment, marital, family) and drinking behavior and drinking consequences; (6) role relationships between women and men as predictors of female and male drinking behavior; (7) gender differences in beverage preference and beverage specific drinking consequences; (8) reasons for the very low reported rates of alcohol-related employment problems among female respondents in several IRGGA data sets; (9) patterns and correlates of women's combined use of alcohol and other drugs; (10) relationships between women's drinking and that of their partners and other family members; (11) associations between sexual experience, sexual dysfunction, and women's drinking; (12) sexual abuse, sexual assault, and other violence as predictors of women's drinking and drinking problems; (13) exploration of possible reasons why women's drinking in most countries is not "converging" with that of men despite recent expansions of women's roles; (14) "pockets" of heavy alcohol use in women (i.e., subgroups of women who do abuse alcohol despite general norms of female moderation); (15) social support and social networks as risk and protective factors for women's drinking; (16) social class differences in women's drinking behavior; and (17) generational or cohort effects on drinking (are these stronger for women than for men?).

Plans for Coming Year. Among the many possible collaborative analyses, workshop participants identified three tasks that should have high priority for the coming year:

1. Preparation of an article for publication that presents results of the descriptive analyses of drinking levels and drinking consequences reported at the 1994 IRGGA workshop. Sharon Wilsnack, Richard Wilsnack, and Nancy Vogeltanz at the University of North Dakota will prepare a first draft of this article for review and input from all workshop presenters. A memo included with this report indicates what further information we will need from each collaborator in order to begin organizing this article.

2. Coordinated analyses of relationships between consumption levels and adverse drinking consequences. Early next year, the UND team will propose a standard analytic plan for review by other collaborators. Results of these analyses will be presented at the 1995 IRGGA workshop in Porto.

3. Development of a plan for coordinated analyses of relationships between women's and men's social roles and drinking behavior . Salme Ahlstrom, Elina Haavio-Mannila, and Heli Mustonen will assume primary responsibility for coordinating these new collaborative analyses.

Third Annual IRGGA Workshop. The third annual IRGGA workshop will be held in Porto, Portugal, in June 1995, in conjunction with the Kettil Bruun symposium. Because of role conflict in the UND team (a Wilsnack family graduation occurs one day before KBS begins), together with a desire to reduce schedule conflict between the IRGGA workshop and the pre-Symposium workshop on qualitative research, the 1995 IRGGA workshop will be held during rather than before the main symposium. Tentative plans

are to schedule one evening meeting during the symposium (perhaps Tuesday evening, when there is usually no social program) and to request one three-hour paper session and the Thursday afternoon “conversation hour” for IRGGA presentations and discussion. Comments about the proposed schedule, and suggestions for alternative schedules, are welcome. More information about the 1995 workshop will be sent to IRGGA members as plans progress.