

Peer Review Report

Review Report on Relationship between Alcohol Consumption and Risky Sexual Behaviors among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Meta-Analysis

Review, Int J Public Health

Reviewer: Reviewer 1

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EVALUATION

Q 1 Please summarize the main theme of the review.

This study undertakes a systematic review and meta-analysis of the relationship between alcohol consumption and 'risky sexual behaviours.' It is overall a solid piece of work, particularly in regard to methodological rigour. However, the framing of the topic needs to be reconsidered both in terms of language and from an evidence-based perspective.

Q 2 Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

Please see below

Q 3 Please provide your detailed review report to the authors, structured in major and minor comments.

Framing (Introduction/Discussion):

1. This is related to both the introduction and discussion of this manuscript. The way that you report in this article on the findings of the study swings between neutral descriptions (good - this avoids unconscious bias) and language that implies that some parts of sexuality are inherently less valuable. E.g., the number of sex partners is not inherently a 'risk' and should not be discussed as such. Furthermore, I have an issue with sex itself being discussed as a 'risk' - it is not, including for adolescents. There is a case here to be made that more appropriate and neutral language is used throughout the manuscript.

The paper is not particularly scrupulous in avoiding claims of causality that the data don't support. Please ensure that no unjustified causality creeps in. E.g., is alcohol what leads to teenagers being more likely to take 'risks' or are those who initiate alcohol consumption earlier also more likely to accept other risks?

2. There are also some points made in the introduction that are not consistent with the current body of evidence. One issue is that sexuality is deeply rooted in culture and what is and isn't appropriate is often the result of cultural socialisation. Since this systematic review is 'global', this presents an unfortunate issue as some statements made in the introduction are true for some countries but not for others including that "the age at which adolescents start drinking alcohol is becoming younger" - this is not true for many countries. In fact, studies over the past 15 years have shown that adolescents start drinking at a later age, less harmful and with an increasing proportion of young people not consuming alcohol at all.

3. The definition of binge drinking as 'binge drinking with more than two glasses of alcohol' is rather adventurous and not very commonly applied.

4. The authors also state that 'some studies defined the age of early sexual experience as 14 years [...] indicating that the age of early sexual initiation is becoming younger' - again, this is not consistent with the current body of evidence for many countries that suggest that the age of sexual initiation is, in fact, rising in many jurisdictions.

5. The discussion is somewhat underdeveloped and largely focuses on comparing the findings with other studies. Overall, I believe that this manuscript would benefit from a more theoretical contribution through the inclusion of a theoretical framework. This may also address some of the comments I have made above.

Methods

The methods are overall well described and appropriate for the topic and data at hand. I have only few comments for this section:

1. Please provide a flowchart outlining the inclusion and exclusion of articles.
2. Provide a general justification why these particular databases have been used.
3. Provide a justification as to why studies focussing on sexual minorities were excluded considering the scarcity of research in this population and topic.
4. Provide a stronger description of the review process itself from title screening to inclusion.

Results

The results are well described, I do not have comments for this section.

PLEASE COMMENT

Q 4 Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?

No, the introduction and discussion needs to be reframed and requires an extensive review of the literature in this particular field.

Q 5 Does this manuscript refer only to published data? (unpublished data is not allowed for Reviews)

Yes.

Q 6 Does the manuscript cover the issue in an objective and analytical manner

No.

Q 7 Was a review on the issue published in the past 12 months?

No.

Q 8 Does the review have international or global implications?

Not as it stands at the moment. However, this is an interesting and important topic that goes beyond borders and as such would be a good fit for the journal. This particular aspect is not sufficiently discussed in the manuscript.

Q 9 Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

No, not all behaviours that were looked at in the study can be automatically defined as risky sexual behaviours.

Q 10 Are the keywords appropriate?

The keywords are largely consistent with the title and hence are not particularly useful.

Q 11 Is the English language of sufficient quality?

Yes

Q 12 Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 13 Quality of generalization and summary



Q 14 Significance to the field



Q 15 Interest to a general audience



Q 16 Quality of the writing



REVISION LEVEL

Q 17 Please take a decision based on your comments:

Major revisions.