

Alcohol, Gender and Drinking Problems

Perspectives from Low and Middle Income Countries



World Health
Organization

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**World Health
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FOREWORD

In the year 2000 the Department of Health of the Government of Valencia, Spain, received a proposal from the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence (now Substance Abuse) of the World Health Organization for technical cooperation and financial support for several projects on alcohol programmes and policy. The projects suggested in the proposal included data gathering, management of alcohol problems through dissemination of brief intervention, the development of global alcohol policy initiatives, and support for technology transfer in the field of substance abuse in general.

The reason behind this request for cooperation was a recognition of the growing role of alcohol in global public health, especially in developing countries, and the need for more funding to continue some of the World Health Organization's outstanding work on alcohol. For example, though WHO projects on screening and brief intervention (SBI) in primary health care settings had been recognized as an effective strategy in reducing harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption in several developed countries, the strategy had not been tested in developing countries. The proposal also recognized the need for dependable and comparable data on gender and alcohol issues, including differences between men and women in patterns of drinking and related problems.

Data from a variety of sources, especially WHO's Global Alcohol Database (GAD) and the annual world health reports, support the contention that alcohol indeed has become a major risk factor for disease and disability in many countries across the world. That this risk is increasing in, for example, the low-mortality developing countries of Asia and South America where alcohol is often the highest contributor to disease burden.

Considering its interest in global public health, the Valencian Government was pleased to approve the signing of a cooperative agreement with WHO in 2001 and the agreement has been renewed every year since then. The agreement focused on work in the following areas: gender and alcohol, alcohol policy, and knowledge transfer through training. One of the first activities in the agreement was a meeting of experts to discuss the implications of alcohol marketing to young people's drinking which took place in Valencia in March 2002. The product of that meeting is expected to serve as a major resource in our understanding of the role of alcohol marketing and promotion in youth drinking behaviours.

Support provided through the agreement has also been used by WHO to fund projects on brief intervention for alcohol problems in Brazil and South Africa. It has also led to this book which is the product of the gender and alcohol project in seven countries on four continents (namely,

Argentina, Costa Rica, India, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda).

I am indeed pleased to contribute the foreword to this book which publishes contributions on gender and alcohol from six of the countries funded through the Valencia-WHO cooperative agreement and two other countries. The book will go a long way in enhancing our appreciation of gender issues in alcohol research and in the management of alcohol-related problems not only in primary care but in other settings, e.g., prenatal clinics and the workplace. I am sure that the book will contribute to the development of alcohol policy and the provision of service to men and women with alcohol-related problems not only in the countries in the reports but all around the world. The Government of Valencia, through the Department of Health, is happy to be associated with WHO's commitment to reducing alcohol problems globally and will continue to support its efforts in achieving this goal.

Dr Bartolomé Pérez Gálvez

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Department of Health
Autonomous Government of Valencia
Spain

PREFACE

This book presents data and addresses significant issues on gender and alcohol in eight low and middle income countries where such data are often not available. The book is a product of the multinational collaborative project on "Gender, Alcohol and Culture: an International Study" (GENACIS). GENACIS was funded by the European Commission, the U.S. National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA), the Swiss Office of Education and Science, the German Federal Ministry of Public Health, the World Health Organization, government agencies and other sources in individual countries.

The study was conceived by the International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol (IRGGA), a group of researchers affiliated with the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol (KBS). Beginning with a few countries in 1999, GENACIS grew to include projects in more than thirty countries and 50 researchers, all united by a common interest in seeking greater understanding of gender and alcohol issues.

GENACIS uses a centralized data analysis and standardized measures to assess the differences between men and women within and across cultures in the following areas:

- patterns and contexts of drinking;
- prevalence of alcohol problems;
- the experience of drinking-related violence in close relationships;
- how social inequalities and social roles influence drinking and heavy alcohol consumption;
- the relationship of societal-level factors (e.g., gender equality, drinking culture norms) to drinking and alcohol-related problems.

The study grew out of earlier projects in Europe and the U.S. and seeks to clarify further the factors associated with men's and women's drinking and alcohol-related problems.

GENACIS is truly an international project; participating countries are drawn from all parts of the world, especially from countries where harmful use of alcohol poses a threat to public health and social welfare. Funding provided to WHO by the Government of Valencia, Spain, made it possible

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