



The impact of heavy drinkers on others' health and well-being in Lao PDR and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aims to investigate the relationship between exposure to heavy drinkers and subjective well-being and health-related quality of life in Lao PDR and Thailand. **Methods:** The national surveys were undertaken in Lao PDR ($n=1,212$) and Thailand ($n=1,571$). The questionnaire survey was used to assess the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), the European Quality of Life-5 Dimension (EQ-5D), and encounters with heavy drinkers in the respondents' everyday lives. The association between exposure to heavy drinkers and PWI and EQ-5D utility scores was examined using multivariate analysis. **Results:** Respondents who were exposed to a larger number of heavy drinkers in their lives were more likely to experience reduced scores for the PWI in Lao PDR and Thailand. However, Thai respondents suffered most when they were exposed to heavy drinkers in their households, while Lao respondents experienced more negative effects from exposure to heavy drinkers outside the household. In addition, every heavy drinker outside the household that Lao respondents came into contact with was associated with reduced EQ-5D utility scores. **Conclusions:** Exposure to heavy drinkers has a significant negative impact on well-being among the population in both countries. Thus, the reduction in alcohol's harm to others should be considered in order to promote the well-being of the population as a whole.

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Introduction

Alcohol consumption has become a public health and social problem. The Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health in 2014 shows that alcohol consumption is related to more than 200 diseases and injuries. It also constitutes to 5.1% of the global burden of disease and injury (World Health Organization, 2014) and is a top three leading risk factor contributing to premature death and disabilities at global level (World Health Organization, 2009). Additionally, on the societal level, alcohol consumption is related to crime (Greenfield, 1998), traffic injuries (Gururaj, 2004), and contributes to economic loss, especially through the loss of productivity (Rehm et al., 2009). In this regard, alcohol consumption contributes to public health and societal problems.

To date, evidence on harms to individuals is available in high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2009; World Health Organization, 2005, 2014). Many studies confirm the relationship between alcohol consumption and harm to drinkers' health conditions (Laramee et al., 2015; Roerecke & Rehm, 2013; Tyrtingsson, Olafsson, Bjornsson, & Rafnsson, 2015). For example, a study in Iceland showed that after an increase in alcohol consumption per capita, mortality of chronic liver diseases had a significant increase among males within

approximately 20 years (Tyrtingsson et al., 2015). In this respect, the health of drinkers is negatively affected by alcohol consumption.

However, there is another aspect of alcohol-related harms that should not be neglected which is alcohol's harm to others. The concept of alcohol's harm to others relates to the harms experienced by those other than the drinkers. Indeed, it investigates alcohol-related harms that are caused by drinkers who are in a close relationship with the drinkers such as family members, friends and co-workers. Moreover, it is considered alcohol-related harms that experienced by strangers such as drunken noise (Room et al., 2010). Examples of alcohol's harm to others include traffic injuries. It is not only the drinkers that face those harms which are caused by their drinking, but it also affects the passengers who travel with them. Alcohol-related harms are not bound to affect only drinkers themselves, but people around them (Gell, Ally, Buykx, Hope, & Meier, 2015; Laslett et al., 2010).

Among many aspects of alcohol's harm to others, alcohol consumption relates to experiencing negative effect on health and well-being among those who are exposed to drinkers. Exposure to heavy drinkers both inside and outside households leads to a reduction in well-being and health-related quality of life, even if one abstains from drinking. For example, studies in higher-income countries (World Bank, 2016b)