

Under which circumstances do beneficial roles become a risk for alcohol use? Integrating role conflicts and drinking motives in a larger social role framework

Summary of research plan

Current state of research: Alcohol use is a major individual and public health burden. Based on the assumptions of two contradictory theories (role accumulation theory vs. multiple burden hypothesis), previous studies have found that holding multiple social roles can have either protective or detrimental effects in terms of chronic alcohol use. Combining work demands and family duties is a difficult task. Thus, the absence or presence of role conflicts may explain the contradictory findings regarding the effect holding multiple roles has on alcohol use, i.e. multiple roles without role conflict are expected to be protective vs. multiple roles with conflict are likely to be harmful. Authors assume that role conflicts result in higher alcohol use as individuals drink to relieve their stress. However, whether this is actually the case or whether people in such situations endorse other motives for their drinking is still unknown. Moreover, as social roles are based on enduring relationships, role conflicts arise that will not only influence those directly involved in the conflict (e.g. working mothers) but also the child.

Objectives: The proposed study aims to address four research gaps: (1) the impact of structural conflicts, i.e. work-family conflicts in the interplay between level of employment and alcohol use (4 hypotheses); (2) the impact of conflicts related to the couple's gender equity, i.e. gender role attitudes on the interplay between level of employment and alcohol use (3 hypotheses); (3) the impact of drinking motives as mediators in the interplay between paid labour, conflicts and alcohol use (5 hypotheses); (4) the impact of structural and gender equity conflicts on young children's psychosocial adjustment (5 hypotheses).

Sample and Method: Based on a multi-informant approach, 360 parents (204 mothers, 156 fathers) of 301 children aged 3 to 6 were surveyed. The parents completed a questionnaire whereas the children participated in the Berkley Puppet Interview. All data were collected in the context of the project "What do the little ones know? Alcohol knowledge and expectancies among preschoolers" (SNSF-Grant 100014_140294 / 1-3). Multiple linear regression models will be used to test the above mentioned Goals 1 to 4.

Expected value: This proposal aims to close the explanatory gap between the role accumulation theory and the multiple burden hypothesis by considering two types of role conflicts to be central in whether holding multiple roles is protective or detrimental regarding chronic alcohol use. Even if chronic alcohol use occurs, it makes a tremendous difference whether those with multiple roles drink for enhancement or social motives or for coping motives. The proposed project will provide evidence as to what kind of groups prevention efforts should target, as enhancement/social or coping drinkers are likely not only to differ in their drinking motivation but also in the problems they face. Given the multi-informant approach, over and above parental alcohol use, the proposal will provide empirical evidence to what degree role conflicts have an impact on the child's depression, anxiety and social competence. In this respect, the use of the age-appropriate Berkley Puppet Interview will help to overcome the limitations of parental reports on child's psychosocial adjustment.

Dissemination strategies: Four articles will be published in international peer-reviewed journals and findings will be presented to an international and national audience at scientific conferences. It is also our firm intention to inform the general public of the study's findings by means of press releases.