Drinking trajectories from adolescence to the mid-forties among alcohol dependent men

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DRINKING TRAJECTORIES FROM ADOLESCENCE TO THE MID-FORTIES AMONG ALCOHOL DEPENDENT MEN

D. N. Howell, T. Jacob, K. K. Bucholz, C. Sartor & P. Wood

Grant Support: This study was supported by grants AA11667, AA11822, and Center Grant AA11998 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and from a Merit Review Grant (TJ) from the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Research Service, Washington, DC.
Objective:

The purpose of this study was to identify differences in developmental pathways of alcoholism from onset of drinking into middle adulthood.

Method:

Alcohol-related behaviors and psychiatric status were assessed in 330 men having a lifetime diagnosis of alcohol dependence (AD). Using the Lifetime Drinking History (LDH) (Skinner and Sheu, 1982), distinct drinking phases were identified which differed in terms of quantity, frequency and context of drinking.
ABSTRACT

Results:

Using Latent Growth Mixture Modeling, a 4-class model was identified: Severe-Persistent Problem Drinkers (SPPD); Severe-Limited Problem Drinkers (SLPD); Young Adult Problem Drinkers (YAPD); and Late Adult Problem Drinkers (LAPD).

Conclusions:

Present findings support the existence of different alcoholism trajectories and provide a more complete understanding of the variability of alcohol dependence over time.
SPECIFIC AIMS

To identify an alcoholism classification system based on differences in developmental course.

- Fundamental in building theories of alcoholism etiology and course over the lifetime
- Important for clarifying diagnostic issues and implementing treatment/intervention strategies
ALCOHOLISM TYPOLOGIES

- Typologies have been constructed around various dimensions:
  - Severity
  - Drinking patterns
  - Chronicity
  - Comorbidity
  - Etiology

- A core aspect in differentiating alcoholism subgroups is the developmental nature of drinking over one’s lifetime.
  - Comparisons of community and treatment samples point to differences in alcohol-related symptoms and behaviors (Bucholz, et al, 1994; Schuckit et al., 1995)
Studies of drinking from adolescence to young adulthood have investigated the development characteristics of problem drinking (Bennett et al., 1999; Schulenberg et al., 1996; Chassin et al., 2002; Jackson et al., 2000; Hill, et al., 2000).

Most of the relevant literature has identified two prevalent patterns:

- unremitting/chronic use
- reduction in problem drinking
QUESTIONS IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS

➢ What happens during subsequent years?

➢ Do the patterns stabilize after young adulthood or does variability and change continue?

➢ Do other drinking pathways emerge at later ages which could not be anticipated from young adult studies?

The current study investigates the course of alcohol use from drinking onset to the fourth decade of life as a means for classifying subtypes of alcoholism.
PARTICIPANTS

VIETNAM ERA TWIN REGISTRY (VETR)

- 330 men who at sometime in their life met lifetime DSM-IV AD criteria as assessed by the Lifetime Drinking History (LDH) and who were 41 years of age or older at the time of assessment.

PRIMARY ASSESSMENT DOMAIN

LIFETIME DRINKING HISTORY

- Phase data was converted into ‘person-year’ data beginning with the year the person first became a regular drinker and ending at 41 years of age

DATA ANALYSES

LATENT GROWTH MIXTURE MODELING

- Diagnosing probabilities (DPs) - odds of diagnosing at a given age group - determined class membership
- estimates used to assign individuals to a particular class
CLASS CHARACTERISTICS

- CLASS 1 – SEVERE-PERSISTENT PROBLEM DRINKERS (SPPD)
- CLASS 2 – SEVERE-LIMITED PROBLEM DRINKERS (SLPD)
- CLASS 3 – YOUNG ADULT PROBLEM DRINKERS (YAPD)
- CLASS 4 – LATE ADULT PROBLEM DRINKERS (LAPD)

Diagnosing Probabilities For Each Of Four Latent Classes
Lifetime Psychiatric Diagnoses Across Classes

- Class 1: Severe-Persistent Problem Drinkers (24%)
- Class 2: Severe-Limited Problem Drinkers (11%)
- Class 3: Young Adult Problem Drinkers (37%)
- Class 4: Late Onset Problem Drinkers (28%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPPD</th>
<th>SLPD</th>
<th>YAPD</th>
<th>LAPD</th>
<th>$P^2$</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 77.68</td>
<td>n = 37.24</td>
<td>n = 123.71</td>
<td>n = 91.37</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug Dependence</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicotine Dependence</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antisocial Personality Disorder*</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPPD=Severe-Persistent Problem Drinkers  
SLPD=Severe-Limited Problem Drinkers  
YAPD=Young Adult Problem Drinkers  
LAPD=Late Adult Problem Drinkers

**Drinking Characteristics Across Classes**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPPD n = 77.68</th>
<th>SLPD n = 37.24</th>
<th>YAPD n = 123.71</th>
<th>LAPD n = 91.37</th>
<th>F or P²</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age First Drink</td>
<td>15^bc</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>14^c</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>16^ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age First AD</td>
<td>21^b</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>18^d</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>22^c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age First AB or AD</td>
<td>20^a</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>21^a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age First AD sx</td>
<td>19^ab</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>17^b</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>20^a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any Phase</th>
<th>Any Phase</th>
<th>Any Phase</th>
<th>Any Phase</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binge Drinking*^a</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drinking - Alone*^a</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<td>0.039</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drinking - Mornings</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<td>Ever Sought Treatment</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPPD=Severe-Persistent Problem Drinkers
SLPD=Severe-Limited Problem Drinkers
YAPD=Young Adult Problem Drinkers
LAPD=Late Adult Problem Drinkers
FINDINGS

Counterparts for three of these trajectories can be found in the larger alcoholism literature and now provide a more complete understanding of their developmental nature

Developmentally Limited Alcoholism
Antisocial Alcoholism
Negative Affect Alcoholism
(Zucker, 1994)

The fourth type – Severe-Limited Problem Drinkers - has not been previously described, notwithstanding its seeming importance and prevalence.

These findings build on the larger alcoholism literature identifying alcoholic subgroups and provide important information regarding alcoholism trajectories and associated features
LIMITATIONS/FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future studies are needed with regard to:

- better understanding the psychosocial influences related to the different alcoholism trajectories
- characterizing the different trajectories as individuals transition into older age
- finer grain, longitudinal studies clarifying the nature of these different alcoholism classes
REFERENCES


