Social Capital and Alcohol Consumption: A Review of the Literature

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Alcohol abuse has a significant impact on health and death rates. Excessive alcohol consumption has been linked to a number of chronic and acute diseases, i.e., liver damage and heart disease. Higher levels of social capital have been associated with a number of health-related states. For example, obesity, self-rated health and infectious disease.
To examine reported associations between social capital and alcohol consumption

Identify the proposed underlying mechanisms that promote and/or protect against harmful alcohol consumption
Methods

The PubMed database was used to identify published, peer-reviewed English literature. Search criteria consisted of two parts:

- “social capital”, “social trust”, “social participation” or “social networks”
- “alcohol”, “alcohol consumption” or “binge drinking”

Studies had to be observational in which the main variable was one of the socio-relational terms and the primary outcome was alcohol consumption.
Results

25 articles were identified and selected for the review

- 8 individual studies
- 2 ecological studies
- 9 multilevel studies
- 6 longitudinal studies

Overall, the results appear to be mixed

- a number of articles reported social capital to be protective, others found social capital to promote alcohol consumption, and a few reported no association
Individual-level Studies

Social Trust
- Significantly associated with alcohol consumption in 2 studies
- 1 study found no significant correlation

Social Participation
- 2 studies found that social participation was not significantly associated with alcohol consumption
- High and medium social participation decreased the odds of alcohol use compared to low social participation

Social Networks
- Measures of social networks were not always significant in the relationship between social networks and heavy drinking and alcohol problems
- Composition of the network was found to be strongly associated with drinking patterns
The findings of these studies suggest that social participation can increase the probability of drinking. Social trust did not appear to have a significant relationship with alcohol consumption. Increased village social capital reduces the number of times drinking.
At the individual-level social participation appeared to reduce harms associated with alcohol consumption. The associations at the community or neighborhood level were not always significant. Social trust showed mixed results.
The literature showed mixed results.
- Significant and non-significant associations were found.
Network selection and influence can have positive and negative impacts of drinking.
Adolescent characteristics were related to alcohol consumption.
Peer and Adult support were found to be related to alcohol consumption.
Evidence suggests that social capital may be a significant predictor of alcohol-related outcomes. Inconsistencies of social capital and alcohol consumption measures need to be addressed. Need to determine causality: do drinking behaviours influence the development of social capital, or does social capital influence drinking behaviour?
Thank You


