

International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol

Seventh Annual Workshop

Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 29-30, June 1, 1999

The seventh annual workshop of the International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol (IRGGA) was held May 29-30 and June 1, 1999, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, preceding the annual symposium of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol. IRGGA members share an interest in gender-related influences on drinking behavior and drinking-related problems, and many members have conducted social and epidemiological research on women's drinking. The Montreal workshop was attended by 49 persons from 22 countries. Several countries were represented for the first time, including Brazil, Japan, and Nigeria. A membership list updated after the Montreal workshop accompanies this report. The workshop format included working group meetings of the Alcohol Ads Study and of six groups developing survey measures for the proposed multi-national study of gender and alcohol; a report from the Ads Study Group and general discussion of future directions of qualitative research in IRGGA; reports from the survey measures working groups; presentations by directors of two other international collaborative research projects; and general discussion of design, funding, and organizational issues related to the multi-national gender and alcohol study. Sharon Wilsnack (USA) served as workshop chair.

Update on Collaborative IRGGA Presentations and Publications . Sharon Wilsnack reported on the status of five collaborative papers by IRGGA members: (1) an article originally prepared as part of IRGGA comparative analyses of drinking patterns and consequences, "Drinking patterns, psychosocial characteristics and alcohol consequences," by Jean Lock Kunz and Kate Graham (Canada), was published in the July 1998 issue of Addiction (Vol. 93(7), pp. 1079-1090); (2) the article, "Should alcohol measures be adjusted for gender differences?" by Kate Graham, Richard Wilsnack, Deborah Dawson, and Nancy Vogeltanz was published in the August 1998 issue of Addiction (Vol. 93(8), pp. 1137-1147); (3) the article, "Gender differences in alcohol consumption and adverse drinking consequences: Cross-cultural patterns" by Richard Wilsnack and 26 additional IRGGA members from 10 countries, has been revised to address reviewers' suggestions and is in press in Addiction; (4) a paper by the consumption x consequences working group (Nancy Vogeltanz, Rudie Neve, Jillian Fleming, Tom Greenfield, Ludek Kubicka, and Fredrik Spak) entitled "The relationship between women's alcohol consumption patterns and drinking-related problems: Findings from the International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol" was presented by Nancy Vogeltanz (USA) at the Alcohol and Gender in Europe Conference held in Berlin in March, and is presently being revised for publication; and (5) a paper by Kate Graham and Sharon Wilsnack, titled "The relationship between alcohol problems and use of tranquilizing drugs: Longitudinal patterns among American women," has been accepted for publication in Addictive Behaviors: An International Journal. Kate Graham distributed reprints of the two 1998 Addiction papers to IRGGA participants.

Berlin Alcohol and Gender Conference. Kim Bloomfield (Germany) reported on the Alcohol and Gender in Europe Conference held March 24-26, 1999, at the Free University of Berlin. More than 100 persons attended the conference, representing more than 24 countries. The conference was designed to report findings from the three-year EU BIOMED-II concerted action project, "Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Problems Among Women in European Countries," coordinated by Kim and including research partners (most of whom are also IRGGA members) from nine European countries. In addition to eight plenary presentations of BIOMED research, the conference included nine paper sessions (with approximately 70 papers) on gender issues and gender differences in drinking behavior, consequences, and intervention, as well as a plenary session reporting another BIOMED study of alcohol and the family, and presentation of the Addiction Research Institute Rotterdam (IVO) Award for young researchers in addiction to Pia Mäkelä of Finland. IRGGA members who attended the conference congratulated Kim and the other BIOMED partners on the success of the conference and of the Women and Alcohol Project more generally.

Alcohol Advertising Study. A group of IRGGA members, led by Shoshana Weiss (Israel), is using qualitative research methods to study how women and men are portrayed in alcoholic beverage advertisements cross-nationally, and how gender-related images and symbols are used in such ads. In Part A of the study, eight members of the Ads Study group from six countries (Israel, Mexico, Portugal, Russia, Sri Lanka, USA) completed semi-structured interviews with 10 females and 10 males in each country to learn their perceptions and interpretations of four selected alcohol ads from magazines (billboards in Russia) in that country. In Montreal, Ads Study members summarized their interviews, discussed similarities and differences in advertising images and themes across the six countries, and identified several methodological challenges in attempting to systematically analyze patterns in the depth interview data. Based on these discussions and feedback from other workshop participants, the ads group members decided that Part B of the study will involve the use of a standard coding process that classifies ads on a limited number of variables, including gender composition, respondents' affective (positive-negative) responses to the ad, perceived power differences between women and men in the ads, and others. Patterns identified in the ads will be related to respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and social background. Shoshana has recently distributed coding instructions to Ads Study members who attended the Montreal meeting, as well as to four additional members (from Australia, Canada, Nigeria, and USA) who will complete both Parts A and B of the study during 1999-2000. She has also contacted researchers from five additional countries who have expressed interest in qualitative IRGGA research in the past, in the hope that they will also join the Ads Study during the coming year.

Future Directions of Qualitative Research in IRGGA . Jacqueline Wiseman (USA) provided comments on the Ads Study report and discussed other more general issues concerning future qualitative research on gender, culture, and alcohol use. As a participant in the Ads Study, Jacqueline felt that the study was a good first step in using depth interviewing as a research tool. It gave participants some experience in open-ended

probing and also revealed some of the decisions to be made in analyzing such data as well as in planning future projects.

Regarding other possibilities for qualitative research within IRGGA, Jacqueline urged IRGGA participants to design sub-sample depth interview investigations within their larger quantitative survey projects. Depth interviews could explore topics for which respondents are likely to have more long-held and salient views than they do, for example, when asked to discuss alcohol advertising. Depth interviews could illuminate quantitative findings with details on respondents' experiences, opinions and/or feelings related to drinking contexts, drinking or abstinence decisions, therapy and therapists, and lifestyle factors such as family, health, sociability, and work. Sub-samples for depth interviewing could be drawn from typical demographic clusters (age, sex, social class, education, income, occupation) but could also be theoretically constructed from important variables emerging from the survey data: e.g., physically healthy or not; types of therapy experienced; aid received from families; job satisfaction; and experience with parents, siblings, or spouses.

With regard to the proposed multi-national survey of gender and alcohol, Jacqueline suggested that if one or two representatives from each of the six survey domains (see below) would design sub-sample depth interviews within each domain, such qualitative investigations would greatly enrich the ultimate findings of the multi-national study. A sign-up list was circulated for persons interested in designing qualitative components for the multi-national study, and Jacqueline volunteered to coordinate post-Montreal communication among members of this group. Any other IRGGA members interested in joining this qualitative work group should contact either Jacqueline Wiseman or Sharon Wilsnack.

Multi-National Study of Gender and Alcohol: General Issues. A major focus of the Montreal workshop was the multi-national study of gender and alcohol that was initially proposed at the 1998 IRGGA workshop in Florence and discussed further at a planning session during the March Alcohol and Gender Conference in Berlin. The intent of the multi-national study is to use standardized gender- and culture-sensitive questions in surveys (some already planned, some designed specifically for this study) in as many countries as possible, in order to produce better and more comparable data on gender-related drinking patterns and their antecedents and consequences. Discussions at the Montreal workshop addressed the following aspects of the study.

Timing and Feasibility. After six years of analyzing existing IRGGA survey data sets, and with the completion of the three-year BIOMED Women and Alcohol project, most workshop participants felt that the timing is favorable for a concerted effort to collect new data, using the experience of both IRGGA and BIOMED to develop an improved gender- and culture-sensitive data collection instrument. An additional timing consideration is that the Wilsnack research group at the University of North Dakota (UND) has recently received support from that university to help develop research proposals for funding the costs of planning and coordinating a multi-national gender and alcohol study. The UND group has agreed to submit an initial proposal for such funding

within the next 12 months.

Funding Prospects. Coordinating Costs. Possible sources for funds to coordinate the multi-national study include an international collaborative/developmental grant program of the U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the Fogarty International Center, both components of the U.S. National Institutes of Health. Some funding may be available for European countries through a forthcoming "quality of life" research initiative funded by the European Commission.

Survey Costs. As presently conceptualized, costs of carrying out the surveys will need to be borne by individual countries themselves. A few surveys have already been funded, including a 1999-2000 Alcohol Research Group survey and a 2001 UND survey in the United States. Participants in the Montreal workshop identified an additional 25 surveys in 17 countries that are either planned or expected to occur during the next three to four years. In some cases the planned surveys will be directed by IRGGA members themselves, while in other cases the surveys will be conducted by government or other agencies that might be persuaded to include limited numbers of questions that would facilitate cross-national comparisons. In still other cases, IRGGA members expressed interest in seeking new funding from their own countries to conduct new regional or national surveys as part of the multi-national project.

World Health Organization Involvement. Maristela Monteiro (Switzerland) of the World Health Organization's Substance Abuse Department participated in this year's IRGGA workshop. Maristela indicated that the proposed multi-national study is consistent with current WHO priorities on gender and women's health and expressed personal interest and support for the project. She suggested several ways in which WHO might become involved with the multi-national study, including (1) collaborating on coordination and survey design; (2) providing technical support; (3) collaborating on preparation of proposals for funding; and (4) playing a leadership role in efforts to include more developing countries in the study, and efforts to obtain funding for survey costs in developing countries. It was generally agreed that a formal affiliation between WHO and IRGGA as sponsors of the multi-national study would make applications for funding from individual governments and international agencies more attractive and competitive. WHO could also provide valuable technical and administrative support, and substantive and methodological input on study design. Subsequent to the Montreal workshop, Maristela has forwarded considerable information on WHO procedures and policies, and questionnaires and other materials from previous WHO-affiliated international projects, which will be useful in the design of the multi-national gender and alcohol study and in the preparation of funding proposals.

Survey Questionnaire. IRGGA participants envision a multi-national survey instrument consisting of (1) a limited number of essential core questions that each participating country will be expected to include, and (2) additional optional measures to be included in all surveys where length, study priorities, and resources permit. All questions will be designed to be optimally gender-sensitive and culture-sensitive, drawing on previous experience of IRGGA and BIOMED, and on other survey research

expertise in relevant content areas worldwide.

At the March 1999 Berlin planning meeting, six working groups were formed to review existing survey measures and to identify specific measurement issues, related to alcohol consumption and consequences and to five domains of potential antecedents and/or consequences of alcohol consumption. The six working groups met during the Montreal workshop and presented recommendations to the entire workshop membership. Working groups and their chairpersons are: (1) Drinking Variables (including patterns, contexts, and consequences), Nancy Vogeltanz (USA), chair; (2) Family Factors, Salme Ahlström and Marja Holmila (Finland), co-chairs; (3) Health and Lifestyle (including physical and mental health and other substance use), Anne Andersen (Denmark) and Moira Plant (UK), co-chairs; (4) Sexuality and Intimacy, Karin Helmersson Bergmark (Sweden), chair; (5) Work and Social Networks, Gunnel Hensing (Sweden) and Richard Wilsnack (USA), co-chairs; and (6) Violence/Victimization, Hildigunnur Ólafsdóttir (Iceland), chair. Following discussion by all workshop participants, each working group met again to plan its post-Montreal strategy for continuing to refine the survey measures recommendations. Working groups were asked to submit their initial recommendations for core items -- together with information on the sources, rationales, and cross-cultural reliability and validity of the recommended measures -- to the UND research group by July 10, 1999. The UND group will draft summaries of the recommended core measures which will be circulated to members of each working group. Eventually, a draft instrument with core items from each working group will be distributed for review and comment by all participants in the Montreal workshop and other interested IRGGA members.

Lessons Learned from Other International Studies. The directors of two recent cross-national collaborative projects were invited to discuss their projects and experiences with IRGGA workshop participants. Jussi Simpura (Finland) described the two-year European Health Interview Studies Project (EUROHIS) funded by the EU BIOMED program, and Bjorn Hibell (Sweden) described the ongoing European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD). The helpful discussions identified several issues to be considered in designing the multi-national gender and alcohol study. These include (1) the value of drawing on established expertise worldwide (e.g., in selecting small numbers of survey questions in specific content areas) and making optimal use of existing data sets and resources, rather than "re-inventing the wheel"; (2) the cost-effectiveness of inserting small numbers of alcohol questions into other large or multi-purpose national or multi-national studies, in addition to surveys designed specifically as part of the gender and alcohol study; (3) the need to carefully evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of centralized vs. decentralized project data analysis; (4) the value of having a common core questionnaire used by all countries, and additional optional modules that participating countries can use as space/time/priorities allow; (5) the importance of clear-cut timelines (e.g., for participating countries to secure funding or submit standard reports); and (6) the need for regular contact and communication among collaborating researchers (e.g., via joint meetings and newsletters).

Project Organization and Administration. Despite the high level of enthusiasm for

the proposed multi-national study, IRGGA participants agreed that the success of the project will depend in large part on its organization and structure. Annual workshops, held since IRGGA began in 1993, are clearly not sufficient for planning and carrying out a project of this scope and complexity. A structure allowing increased contact and coordination is essential.

At the final workshop session on June 1, Sharon Wilsnack indicated that the UND research group is willing to use its university resources to seek initial funds for coordinating the multi-national study, provided that other IRGGA members want them to do this and are themselves prepared to commit time and effort to the new study. Many IRGGA members expressed such commitment, including willingness to chair or serve on working groups, serve as members of a steering or advisory committee, and make other contributions to the proposed project.

The need for a smaller leadership group with more frequent meetings is clear. One model discussed consists of a relatively small (6-8 member) steering committee that would meet 3-4 times a year, and a somewhat larger advisory committee (for additional geographic and content/methodology representation) that would meet annually or semi-annually. It will probably be desirable to designate geographic coordinators, perhaps one for Europe, one for developing countries, and one for all other countries. Other suggestions have been submitted by IRGGA members following the Montreal meeting; and additional suggestions and additional nominations or volunteers to serve on the steering committee or advisory committee are still welcome. By late August the UND team will propose an organizational structure for the multi-national study which will be circulated to IRGGA members for their feedback. Funding from the NIAAA developmental grant to be submitted October 1 would be available, at the earliest, in July of 2000. In order to sustain the momentum of the multi-national study planning process, the UND group will explore other possible sources of funding for a mid-year planning meeting in late 1999 or early 2000.

IRGGAnet List Serve. Our list serve, IRGGAnet, presently has 67 subscribers from 24 countries. Nancy Vogeltanz reminds all IRGGA members to send her any new or changed e-mail addresses so that she can keep the IRGGAnet address list current. Any questions about signing on or off IRGGAnet, or any problems receiving messages, should also be sent to Nancy at Vogeltan@badlands.nodak.edu. We will continue to send IRGGA information via fax to all members without e-mail addresses.

2000 Workshop. The first official IRGGA workshop of the new millennium will be held in Oslo, Norway, the Saturday and Sunday preceding the 2000 Kettil Bruun Symposium. Additional information about plans for the Oslo workshop, and announcements of any midyear planning meetings for the multi-national study, will be provided via IRGGAnet during the coming year.

This workshop report was written in July 1999 by Sharon Wilsnack with assistance from Richard Wilsnack, Arlinda Kristjanson, and Nancy Vogeltanz. Maristela Monteiro,

Shoshana Weiss, and Jacqueline Wiseman provided material for specific sections of the report.