

EXPLORING ALCOHOL USE IN SABAH, MALAYSIA: PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN THE KADAZANDUSUN CULTURE.

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Introduction and Aims: Research exploring drinking practices in Indigenous cultures with a traditional cultural link to alcohol is limited. The ways alcohol is used seems to have been well documented in Western and high-income countries but is under researched in low-to-middle-income countries. The current study explores perceptions of alcohol in the Kadazandusun culture of Sabah, Malaysia where alcohol has a key place in cultural ceremonies and has been brewed in the home, using traditional methods, for centuries. We consider cultural changes over time and explore the implications of this for the communities.

Method / Approach: An ethnographic approach is used in the research to help explain cultural practices in communities. Participant observer, Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews were used to collect data, with word for word transcription and thematic analysis of the data.

Results: Initial explorations suggest a strong desire to preserve the culture and to reduce the harm being caused by alcohol. Alcohol is seen as part of the culture by many communities and a program that is 'anti-alcohol', rather than 'anti-alcohol related harm' could be viewed as a threat to culture.

Discussions and Conclusions: Understanding reasons for alcohol consumption across cultures can help inform more effective alcohol-harm minimization programs. Implications for public health suggest a change in direction from the didactic western style of educational workshops and brochures, to a culturally appropriate and relevant approach that allows for the traditional cultural beliefs and includes discussion of cultural changes.

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