

Drinking to cope with social anxiety

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Introduction and Aims: Drinking motives have been empirically supported as constituting a final pathway to alcohol use. Emerging literature points to social anxiety as a risk factor for alcohol misuse, yet the explanatory motives remain unclear. Existing drinking motives measures are unable to distinguish between drinking to cope with general problems versus drinking to cope with social anxiety.

Design and Methods: The Youth@Night study collected event-level data on young adults' behaviour in the nightlife. A total of 201 participants completed both baseline and discharge questionnaires. The baseline questionnaire included the Drinking Motives Questionnaire Revised Short-Form (DMQ-R SF) with added social anxiety items. The discharge questionnaire included alcohol consumption measures and related consequences. Bivariate and multivariate multilevel models were used to explore and confirm the structure of the instrument.

Results: Structural Equation Modelling results showed that social anxiety represents an independent dimension from the four motives of the DMQ-R SF. Drinking to cope with social anxiety was associated with increased alcohol consumption on weekends. Drinking to cope with social anxiety was also associated with range of consequences including risky sex, drinking more than planned and spending more than planned.

Discussions and Conclusions: Drinking to cope with social anxiety appears to be an influential and specific factor, over and above the four traditional drinking motives, for different alcohol consumption and harm patterns among young adults. Drinking to cope with social anxiety may represent a new line of inquiry to better understand processes in social drinking occasions, particularly in high-risk drinking events.

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