Reviewer’s report

Title: Drinking behaviours and blood alcohol concentration in four European drinking environments: a cross-sectional study

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Reviewer: Michael Livingston

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This study presents a comparative analysis of drinking in night-time entertainment districts in four European cities. The study provides a rare cross-cultural comparison of drinking by young adults with a specific focus on night-time drinking environments, highlighting stark differences between drinkers in the UK and in the three other countries studied. The study is well-written, clearly presented and has produced some very interesting findings. I have a few suggestions for potential improvements in the manuscript.

Minor essential revisions

1. The eligibility criteria for the study are not clearly laid out – on page 6, there is discussion of respondents being excluded for a variety of reasons (age and nationality in particular), but it’s not clear to the reader who is being excluded here. Were tourists excluded from the study? Respondents over certain ages? This needs to be explicit in the methods section.

2. I think the authors need to discuss the potential biases that arise via the exclusions of heavily intoxicated people. It’s striking that the most exclusions came from Spain, whose actual respondents were among the lowest drinkers. Is it possible that interviewers’ perceptions of how intoxicated is too intoxicated were culturally determined such that people in the UK were interviewed who would have been excluded in Spain?

3. I think the paper needs to be a bit clearer about what it’s setting out to do – a paragraph extending the last para of the end of the introduction laying out clearly what questions are being answered and why they matter here would help orient the reader a bit.

4. Similarly, a brief discussion of the characteristics of the cities chosen for the study would help set this study up – should we be expecting great differences in drinking across these four sites? Is there any relevant qualitative literature on the night-time economy in these four countries that might provide a framing to the quantitative data presented here? It might be worth having a quick look at the England, Spain and Netherlands chapters of Nightlife and Crime (edited by Phil Hadfield) to see if it provides any useful context.

5. Some discussion of the validity of the variables based around respondents expectancies (i.e. how many drinks will you have, how long will you stay out etc)
would be helpful. How often do people end up drinking as much as they intend to when they’re out on the town?

6. Page 7: The brief explanation of ‘botellon’ that is included in the results would be better placed here for readers not familiar with it.

Discretionary revisions

7. Table 3: This is a relatively minor issue, but I’m not a fan of using the conditional step-wise model building approaches that stats packages allow you to – I’d prefer that the authors presented here a model with all the covariates included, unless issues of collinearity require some exclusions.

8. One of the problems is that there’s so much interesting data in this paper that the reader is left with questions that don’t get answered or discussed in any great depth. The data presented is rich and bits and pieces jumped out at me that I’d have appreciated some further discussion of – for example, the gender differences in pre-loading in the UK seem substantial (and greater than the other sites); the low prevalence of pre-drinking in Slovenia (are on-premise drinks not as expensive there?); the disparities between BAC and self-reported units – particularly where gender differences existed on one and not the other in Spain. Etc. I’m not sure how to squeeze these issues into the current paper, but perhaps if the research questions are laid out more clearly than the reader’s expectations will be more appropriate. It might be worth a brief discussion of areas for further research that come out of this study – there’s plenty to move onto.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests