Author's response to reviews

Title: Alcohol consumption and sport: a cross-sectional study of alcohol management practices associated with at-risk alcohol consumption at community football clubs

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Version: 2 Date: 5 July 2013

Author's response to reviews: see over
5 July 2013

The Editor
BMC Public Health

Dear Editor

RE: SUBMISSION OF A REVISED MANUSCRIPT: ‘ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AND SPORT: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF ALCOHOL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH AT-RISK ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AT COMMUNITY FOOTBALL CLUBS’

We have submitted a revised manuscript addressing comments made by reviewers and the Associate Editor. Please see over the page for a detailed response to these comments.

We look forward to your response to our revision.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Kingsland
Associate Editor's Comments:

"The statistical analyses could be improved using a hierarchical model, in which each level (athlete first level, football club second level) is a source of unexplained variability."

Author response: The method of analysis outlined within the paper (logistic regression, adjusting for clustering at the club level and controlling for gender and age) was considered appropriate given that the primary aim of the study was to examine the marginal effects (rather than within group effects) of predictors of risky drinking. Please advise if hierarchical model is considered essential for the paper to be published.
**Version:** 1  
**Date:** 27 April 2013  
**Reviewer:** Fotis Kanteres  

**Reviewer's report:**  
- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)  

Results and discussion  
Sample section a) – line two “Seventy-two” is written, when 228, is used in previous line – I suggest consistency of terminology, this occurs throughout eg b) Ninety-seven percent, vs. 85% - unnecessary to bounce around.

   **Author response:** These suggestions have been incorporated into the manuscript on page 9.

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)  

Abstract: “At-risk alcohol harm” this is a confusing term – at risk alcohol consumption, or harmful drinking – please clarify and be consistent.

   **Author response:** This was a typo and has been modified in the abstract to read “at-risk alcohol consumption”

Background and Methods:  
“A literature search by the authors identified just one study that examined the association between the alcohol management practices of community (non-elite) sports clubs and alcohol-related harms or consumption [23].” Elaborate on the literature search (key terms, results) or at least mention in the methods section.

   **Author response:** An endnote has been added to this statement to explain the literature review methodology: “The authors search the following databases: The Cochrane Library (1996-2013), MEDLINE (1950-2013), EMBASE (1988-2013), PsychINFO (1806-2013), CINAHL (1956-2010) and SPORTDiscus (1977-2013), using the search terms ‘alcohol’ and ‘sport’. Articles were eligible for inclusion in the review if they examined club-based predictors of excessive alcohol consumption or alcohol-related harm amongst amateur or non-elite athletes/other club members.”

Design and Setting:  
“A cross sectional survey of community football club management representatives and members was conducted in the state of New South Wales, Australia, as part of a larger randomised controlled intervention study [24]” Elaborate on this larger randomised controlled intervention study– so that one does not have to stop and read the article referenced.

   **Author response:** The following brief description of the RCT has been added to this section on page 5 of the manuscript: “The larger study assessed the effect of a two-and-a-half-year alcohol management intervention on at-risk alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms amongst members of community sports clubs.”
Elaborate on the drinking survey questions:
“Alcohol consumption questions were developed based on validated measures of alcohol consumption [29-31].” What was used and what wasn’t, why? Is this the same as (although different citations): “Level of alcohol consumption of club members whilst at their club was assessed using the graduated frequency index, a validated measure widely used in population surveys of alcohol consumption [36-37].” Did the club members ‘witnessing’ of alcohol served to intoxicated people have any relation to the self report drinking patterns? “Club members were also asked how often they had witnessed alcohol being served to intoxicated people at the club and how often they had witnessed intoxicated people being admitted to the club (never/rarely/sometimes/frequently/always).”

Author response: The survey questions used to measuring club member alcohol consumption were based on the Graduated Frequency Index, but modified to only include drinking that occurred at the sporting club and within in the last three months – as was appropriate to capture drinking within the sporting season, when the clubs are operating. The text within the ‘Measures – c) Club member alcohol consumption’ section has been modified to clarify this point and citations regarding this measure have been made consistent. This study did not examine the relationship between club members witnessing intoxication and their self-reported drinking as this was not considered within the scope of the aims of this study.

Results and Discussion
While this is seemingly a subject with limited research, I would also like to see some focus (in the Background or Discussion leading to further research) given to why the (club) athletes are drinking with harmful patterns. What is the connection between (club) athleticism and consumption – why are they drinking at these levels, in this manner? Is the celebratory or recreation component a major factor? What about abstainers, former drinkers, or ‘serious’ health conscious athletes, may they not give care to practice safer drinking practices, and may even be incorporated in administering reduction strategies. I cannot stress enough that the drinker characteristics be expressed clearly. I found it quite difficult to determine the ages, age groups of the athletes, of obvious importance to drinking behavior.

Isn’t part of this study including the drinking characteristics of the club members as well? While I understand the focus is on management practices and consumption, the drinking of the members should also be incorporated – including a table – and the results and discussion should also incorporate this aspect into the management – ie are there patterns of at risk drinking (compared to control, such as a national drinking survey or Global Burden of Disease drinking statistics) amongst the club members – which would in turn validate some of the limited research cited which indicates at risk drinking in sport and/or club settings? I did not find this area given sufficient attention. This could go into Results and Discussion b) Club members, which I think should be expanded and incorporated.

Author response: The following detail (including references) has been added into the background section of the manuscript (page 3) to provide explanation for the link between sports people and risky alcohol consumption: “Explanations as to why excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm are more prevalent amongst people involved with sport include: the ritualism associated with sporting events, with overindulgence more acceptable and even expected; alcohol marketing and promotion
specifically targeting sports; drinking as a reward for sports participation; and drinking as a coping mechanism for dealing with the stresses of sports participation.”

The aim of this study was not to provide data on the prevalence of at-risk drinking amongst sports people/fans nor person-based predictors of at-risk consumption (age, sex etc), as the authors believe this has already been established. As such, the study was not designed to report such data, but rather to assess the club-based predictors of at-risk consumption.

Characteristics of the club members who participated in the study have been moved from the manuscript text to a table (Table 1 – to be inserted on page 10) to provide clarity regarding these. Data describing the alcohol use of participants remains on page 10: “Of the 1335 club members who consumed alcohol, 26% (n=366) reported drinking five or more standard drinks at the club at least once a month”

A statement regarding the need for further research regarding individual and club-based predictors of excessive alcohol consumption has been added to the discussion: “It would also be beneficial if future research investigated the relationship between, and relative importance of, individual and club-based predictors of excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm.”

Additional:
Elaborate on the different types of licenses for alcohol (ie Limited licence-single function vs. Limited licence- multiple function) and how this may effect the alcohol distribution.

Author response: For the information of the reviewer, ‘Limited licence-multiple function’ liquor licences are held by the majority of sporting clubs within the sample, with only a single club holding a ‘Limited licence- single function’ licence. A multiple function licence enables clubs to sell alcohol approximately once a week – to coincide with weekend sporting matches. We have not added this detail into the manuscript given that licence type was not found to be a predictor of at-risk drinking among sporting club members.

While I do not doubt the following statement, per se I suggest making reference to the limited research that exists, with citation or reword. “To our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive study examining the association between the alcohol management practices of community football clubs and the consumption of alcohol by club members.”

Author response: A reference has been added to support this statement (page 11).

Conclusion

The Conclusion is quite light on content, whereas the Results and Discussion edges into conclusion territory – I suggest incorporating some of the thoughts eg. The state of the literature, that this is the most comprehensive, can lead to more research, guidelines, interventions etc. It may also benefit to give examples for the implementation alcohol harm reduction strategies, for instance would they differ because of the club environment? What are directions for further research?

*Author response: The discussion and conclusion have been modified as per the reviewer’s comments.*
The paper starts well and appears original in its attempt to provide actual empirical evidence on disability outcomes

1- The title is important and interesting and the research owns rich data.
2- The authors are requested to provide more details to convince the reviewers of the representativeness of study and low selection bias (in recruitment procedure).

Author response: The following information has been added to the manuscript on page 10: “Study participants were comparable to participants in football across Australia generally in terms of gender (national data: male 82%) and slightly older in terms of age (national data: average age 18-24 years). While equivalent national data are not available for the other variables, national data for all sports indicates that the study sample may have had more employed people (national data for all sports: 65% employed), and more people in non-playing roles (national data for all sports: 15%).”

Given that age and gender are known predictors of excessive alcohol consumption, the sample is considered appropriate for this study.

3- Based on the results of the paper and the justification why such a study is valuable one would expect that the discussion would provide stronger and conclusive arguments at the end. Discussion needs to be revised after resolving the above mentioned problems.

Author response: The discussion and conclusion have been modified as per the reviewer’s comments.

In addition to the above a few details that the authors may want to reconsider are:

Page 4, paragraph 1, last sentence; long-sentence should be revised.

Author response: This sentence has been split into two to address this concern (page 4).

Page 9, paragraph 1, describe 328 (is all football club in Aus) and revised Table 1.

Author response: This sentence has been modified to provide more information regarding the 328 clubs (page 9) – “A total of 328 community football clubs within the study area were identified and contacted.”