Reviewer's report

Title: Do changes in social and economic factors lead to changes in drinking behavior in young adults?

Version: 2
Date: 14 July 2014
Reviewer: Gonneke AHM Willemsen

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript presents an interesting and necessary analysis of change in circumstances related to change in drinking behaviour in young adulthood. The manuscript is well written and the data are sound, but the use of the data and the discussion is somewhat limited.

Major compulsory Revisions.

When focusing on change it is important not to ignore the baseline data, as has been done by the authors. Anyone reading the current manuscript is left wondering what the association is when the data are examined cross-sectionally. If these were examined and reported elsewhere, please also refer to this in detail in the paper. If not published elsewhere, these should be added to the results here.

In addition, the effect of change in circumstances may be related to the initial circumstances. A decile increase in individual deprivation may be different when an individual comes from a high or low deprivation. According to your rather brief description of the model, only changes where included in the model. Similarly, sex and age (18 vs 24) may also be important in this respect. For women, a decrease in alcohol consumption may be stronger after starting a family than for men. Has this been examined? Please address this.

Along the same line. The last paragraph in the discussion preceding the conclusion seems odd, why not include this analyses as you have the data and this seems the appropriate paper for it?

In the methods you indicate that you used a different definition for hazardous drinking. Why and what are the consequences? Would you have different results if you used the standard definition? This should be addressed in the discussion.

In your full model, you do not include increase in household income. You state in a comment with the Table that this is because personal income is deemed more appropriate. If this is so, why did you include it in the first place? Also, more discussion is needed on this in the text.

Discussion. Page 11, line 15-17. In what way would the studies be biased?

Discussion. Page 12, line 9-11. You state your findings are in contrast with the findings in an adolescent sample. Becoming a parent as an adolescent will be problematic for any young person, independent of educational level. For young
adults, there may be groups within the population, e.g. lower education and income groups for whom becoming a parent is a more natural, planned event. When making these statements and comparisons, please provide some discussion.

Throughout the discussion, ensure that you talk about change in circumstances, e.g. page 12, line 12-13. It was change in individual deprivation that was related to change in drinking behaviour. You related change in individual deprivation here to being able to afford food, but as stated above this may also be related to the initial level of individual deprivation. When this was already low and decrease further, then ability to afford food may be affected.

In the discussion, page 12/13, you suddenly report the effect on change in self-rated health. This is a topic by itself – in 18-24 year olds it is unlikely to see major changes in subjective health. I take it there are no data for the other factors mentioned.

Some discussion in the text of the generalizability of the results would be good. Are there any indicators whether the 23% non-responders and the drop-outs scored higher on alcohol use and lower on detrimental social factors? Is your population representative in drinking behaviour, with 13% not drinking? There are also quite a few persons not in education and not employed – is this also corresponding with general population figures?

Table 1. The inclusion of drinking status in Table 1 is confusing. The variable has not been defined in the text – when is someone classified as drinking?. Either treat this as a true variable and describe it fully in the method section, or remove it from the variable and just state in the text that more than 87% of the sample drinks alcohol.

Minor Essential Reviews
Page 2, line 18. Provide also the details for the result on the modest increase in frequency.
Page 2, line 22. Minimization is spelled wrong
Page 15, line 22-24. Reference format is wrong. Please check references.
In the results section, there is a lot of repeating the analyses. E.g. page 9 and page 10, line 16-19.
Table 1. I have difficulty understanding the N for the current drinkers only reports. E.g. for wave 3 there are 1050 drinking but you have frequency for 1055, while stating that frequency was measured in current drinkers only?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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