Reviewer's report

Title: Consumption and drinking pattern of alcoholic beverages among women in Ghana: A cross-sectional study

Version: 2 Date: 17 October 2014

Reviewer: Priscilla Martinez

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Generally, throughout the introduction and discussion, citations are either dated, not provided where necessary, or not exactly relevant. For example

2. In the first paragraph, 3rd sentence, the authors state “alcoholic beverage consumption by women tends to attract more attention probably due to their susceptibility”. This sentence is concerning because it is vague and not backed up by empirical work. There is a wealth of evidence to show that men, not women, are more likely to consume alcohol at all, use alcohol at high and harmful levels, and suffer alcohol-related harms, particularly injury and suicide. Also, what is meant by “susceptibility” is unclear. If in Ghana there has been particular attention paid to alcohol use among women, why this attention was given and how it was documented should be explained. Otherwise, I suggest this statement be removed. Also in this paragraph, the last sentence is true not just for women, but for all people, and references should be provided.

3. In the 2nd paragraph, the term “preferred quantity of alcohol” is not well used in the literature and is confusing.

4. Also in the 2nd paragraph, the 3rd sentence speaks to the “alcohol consumption discourse”, but the guideline given and citation are for American guidelines, which do not represent the entire discussion around alcohol drinking guidelines. This inconsistency should be fixed.

5. Further in the 2nd paragraph the authors state that “Besides, this view is limited to the extent that no mention is made about the level of alcohol content in the drink”. While it is true that the actual amount of ethanol consumed as part of the guidelines isn’t well defined, there is an attempt made to address this with the “standard drink” metric. It is imperfect because of its large variability in meaning and application, but it is a way of addressing the amount of alcohol consumed. This statement thus needs revision.

6. In the 3rd paragraph, citation 12 is dated and not consistent with the statement it is referenced by.

7. In the last paragraph of the introduction, I think the references cited are being misrepresented. The Luginaah paper is a qualitative paper based on focus groups to explore the impacts and perceptions of akpeteshie use in the UWR of Ghana. It provides no empirical evidence as to the consequences of alcohol use among women, but rather community perceptions about the consequences of
alcohol use. Furthermore, the section in the article regarding akpeteshie use and sexual abuse speaks to the impact of men’s alcohol consumption and use of akpeteshie as a date rape drug rather than women's akpeteshie use. Thus, the section of the statement that “akpeteshie use among women predisposing them to sexual abuse, rape” is unsupported, and should be removed or amended.

8. In the methods section, under dependent variables, the second paragraph describing the second dependent variable is redundant. For example, the frequency of use over the past week is described twice.

9. In the bullets listed under independent variables, the term “mothers” is used. I'm assuming “women” was meant here, but this needs to be clarified.

10. In the results, it is unclear what denominator was used to calculate the proportions of frequency of drinking in the past week. The whole sample? Only women who reported ever having a drink? This should be made clear.

11. In the results sections, in all the paragraphs, much of the information is duplicated in the tables. I would suggest shortening these paragraphs to help with readability and referring to the tables.

12. In the second paragraph of the discussion, the authors write “The present study’s finding resonates with a study by Luginaah and Dakubo [33] which suggest that inhabitants of the region increasingly consume alcoholic beverages”....“it supports the present study’s finding that most women in the region had ever consumed an alcoholic beverage.” The current study found that of the 122 women surveyed from the Upper West, 46 (37.7%) reported ever consuming alcohol. This does not support that “most women in the region had ever consumed an alcoholic beverage.” Given the relevance of the Luginaah paper, it would be useful for the authors to describe what reasons this paper gave for the increase in alcohol use in this region.

13. At the end of the second paragraph, the authors write “Probably women in these regions have more social occasions…” is there any evidence to support this? Or is this all speculation?

14. The last sentence of the second paragraph writes about the need for longitudinal studies to better understand differences in use and drinking patterns in the country. Longitudinal studies are useful for identifying temporality and causation, which is one aspect of differences in use and drinking patterns. More detailed surveys that take into account a variety of aspects of alcohol use, such as context, motivations and expectations, would also be useful for improving our understanding.

15. In the third and fourth paragraphs the authors make interpretations that could be answered by their data and with relatively simple analysis. For example, in the third paragraph they write that “These findings can be attributed to the fact that these ethnic groups are found in regions that were associated with alcohol consumption”. This could be expanded on by stating which groups in which regions. What could also be added is if urban vs. rural status also contributed to this difference when taking these other factors into account. In the fourth
paragraph, the authors state “Most of these women probably had attained secondary and tertiary education….” This can also be explored with cross-tabs of their data.

16. In the last paragraph of the discussion, the authors did well to address limitations of the study. I suggest, additionally, that further explanation of the limited time frame be presented, as this is a major limitation of the study. Also, that the cell sizes grew small at the higher frequencies of use, limited reliability of these estimates, and also speaks to the generally moderate levels of consumption of this group and is consistent with other findings. Finally, a natural consequence of these limitations may be to suggest to the GDHS to include better measures of alcohol use.

17. In the conclusion, the statement about recommending to the MoH to roll out educational programmes does not specify that this should be among women, and also seems premature to do at the national level since less than a fifth of the entire sample is currently drinking. It would seem more effective and cost-efficient to cover regions/groups that have shown higher levels of very frequent drinking. And even among these groups, first more research is warranted to assess the consequences and reasons for this use before applying interventions.

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.