Reviewer's report

Title: Problem drinking among Flemish students: beverage type, early drinking onset and negative personal & social consequences

Version: 0 Date: 11 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Joanna Bragg

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and novel piece of research addressing an evident gap in the literature as clearly identified by the authors. The findings are important and relevant to policy makers as well as to health practitioners in terms of harm prevention, eg preventative work to delay the early onset of drinking.

I recommend this article be published and offer the following questions/observations/suggestions for consideration at your discretion:

1. I wondered where 'head in the clouds?' came from - was it specifically designed for this study or a pre-existing (validated) measure? You give a more thorough description of the CADS_D - was this incorporated as part of/along with the 'head in the clouds?' - I assume it was packaged as one survey for students to complete rather than separately.

2. line 58-60 - when you state that "students systematically overestimate the amount of alcohol they need to drink to experience certain negative consequences ... in turn leads to heavier drinking" - can you clarify? do you mean they inadvertently drink more heavily than they need to for the desired level of intoxication or because they drink more, they habitually drink more as a result? It just seems a little ambiguous.

3. line 85-87 - "almost no studies incorporate both" - is it worth citing those that do for comparison purposes (if there are any) particularly in the discussion section? I think you refer to this point in line 98-99?

4. line 100 - "we hypothesise ..." could you give some indication/suggested explanation here of why earlier drinking onset might equate to more consequences - eg have the younger starters developed into heavier drinkers, are they more impulsive, less considered and sensible, more susceptible to peer influence?? Are the drinking consequences a reflection of the 'type' of drinker or drinking culture? for example, beer drinkers might be different to spirit drinkers (in the UK context, pub culture compared to bars/club culture) - this might be something to include in your discussion section.
5. line 140 - "1=never" rather than "1=not" makes more sense from an English language perspective.

6. line 152-154 - I don't understand the coding here - can you make it clearer?

7. Personally, I find PNC and SNC a bit 'clunky' - they're ok as abbreviations and I understand that you may have selected them for this reason, but 'Negative social consequences' and 'Negative personal consequences' would be more correct.

8. line 174 - typo "We used ..."

9. line 178 - "separate regressions were ran ..." it would be better to say "separate regressions were conducted ..."

10. It would be helpful to have a little more discussion about the sample, perhaps reflecting on how representative of the student population it might be, was there a particular 'type' of student more likely to respond, are any obvious 'groups' missing from the sample as far as you can tell? Also, how did you select the 11 institutions? and again, were particular 'types' of institution likely to be more responsive to your survey? Did response depend on the proactive nature of your contacts in those institutions? Do you know anything about the drinking cultures in those institutions? Do certain places have a reputation for more drinking - perceived 'better' student life etc? Just wondering about factors that might impact on your findings.

11. Table 1 - I would quite like to see the data arranged with the frequency of drinking as the row headings and drink type/gender as column headings - helpful/interesting to see the figures alongside each other more easily.

Very interesting findings, I look forward to reading your published article in print!

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
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