

Psychological perspectives on alcohol use among young adolescents: Mental health and personality

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Psykologiska institutionen, 2018

Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligens förvaras fredagen den 30 november klockan 10.00 i föreläsningssal 1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Opponent är professor Jörg Richter från University of Hull i Storbritannien och betygsnämnden består av docent Carolina Lunde från Göteborgs universitet, professor Mimmie Willebrand från Uppsala universitet och professor Torbjörn Forkby från Linnéuniversitetet.

Doktorsavhandlingen består av följande arbeten:

- I. Boson, K., Berglund, K., Wennberg, P., & Fahlke, C. (2016), Well-being, mental health problems, and alcohol experiences among young Swedish adolescents: A general population study. *Journal for Person-Oriented Research*, 2(3), 123-134.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17505/jpor.2016.12>
- II. Boson, K., Brändström, S., & Sigvardsson, S. (2018). The Junior Temperament and Character Inventory (JTCI): Psychometric Properties of Multi-Informant Ratings. *Psychological Assessment*, 30(4), 550–555.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pas0000513>
- III. Boson, K., Berglund, K., Fahlke, C., & Wennberg, P. *Personality traits and mental health as predictors of alcohol inebriation among young adolescents: Gender-specific patterns*. Manuscript submitted for publication.



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Abstract

Boson, Karin (2018). Psychological perspectives on alcohol use among young adolescents: Mental health and personality. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, PO Box 500, SE-405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.

Alcohol use is an important risk factor in psychosocial development through adolescence that has been incompletely examined among the youngest adolescents. The aim of this doctoral thesis is to investigate how mental health and personality traits are related to alcohol use and inebriation in early adolescence. Participants were recruited through the Swedish multidisciplinary Longitudinal Research program on Development In Adolescence (LoRDIA). In **Study I**, patterns of self-reported internalizing and externalizing problems and well-being in relation to alcohol experiences were investigated among 1383 adolescents aged 12 to 13. Person-oriented analyses were applied to the data with the purpose of finding specific configurations (“types”) that were more frequent than expected by chance. Boys with early alcohol debut reported generally high well-being and no concurrent internalizing or externalizing problems. Girls with both internalizing problems and low well-being, however, were statistically over-represented among those with alcohol experiences. Hence, both gender and mental well-being need to be taken into account when describing and explaining early alcohol initiation among young adolescents. In **Study II**, the psychometric properties of a Swedish version of the Junior Temperament and Character Inventory (JTCI), a personality measurement for children and adolescents, were investigated, as was congruence between self and caregiver ratings. The study included 1046 girls and boys aged 12 to 14 years and 654 caregivers. Internal consistency and convergent validity were analyzed. Norms for the Swedish self and caregiver version of JTCI were established and the congruence on these reports was investigated. The internal structure of the JTCI was not fully satisfactory; the dimension Persistence did not form a reliable construct in the Swedish self-report version. Revision and expansion of this dimension is therefore suggested. Obtaining the child’s own perspective as well as the caregiver’s is preferable to using just one report to provide a thorough understanding of the child’s personality. The results also support the importance of age- and gender-specific norms on the JTCI. **Study III** aimed to predict alcohol inebriation and potential gender-specific patterns among 853 adolescents, aged 13 to 15 years by using a biopsychosocial model of personality traits and a two-continua model of mental health (internalizing and externalizing problems plus well-being). Pathways to inebriation were more similar than different for girls and boys and high Novelty Seeking, low Cooperativeness (direct effects) and low Self Directedness (indirect effect via externalizing problems) were significant predictors. Specifically for girls, low Harm Avoidance (direct effect) was a significant predictor. Mental well-being had no effect on inebriation and interestingly internalizing problems had a “protective” effect for boys. Findings from this thesis improve our knowledge of how mental health (both positive and negative aspects) relate to early alcohol use, and how personality traits (i.e., temperament and character) function as important underlying factors in both mental health and alcohol use. Gender-specific considerations are suggested when developing and conducting preventative interventions targeting psychological risks and protective factors against early alcohol use among young adolescents.

Keywords: alcohol debut, alcohol inebriation, gender-specific patterns, mental health problems, mental well-being, personality, JTCI, young adolescents, LoRDIA

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