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Longitudinal Alcohol Use From Mid- to Late Adulthood: a Northern Finland Birth Cohort 1966 Study

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Background: Longitudinal alcohol consumption in early adulthood has been studied, but reports from later adulthood are scarce.

Objectives: Finding longitudinal trends in alcohol consumption using prospective birth cohort data.

Aims: To investigate trends in self-reported alcohol consumption in adulthood.

Methods: In the Northern Finland Birth Cohort 1966 (N=5,621) alcohol use was studied with questionnaires at ages 31 and 46. Participants were classified into steady drinkers, increasers and decreasers based on the change in consumption (g/day). Multinomial regression analysis was conducted with educational, marital and employment baseline statuses and their changes, and baseline alcohol use as factors influencing the change in alcohol consumption.

Results: 70% of alcohol users were classified as steady drinkers, 10% as decreasers and 20% as increasers. In all, daily alcohol consumption rose over 30%, particularly among women. The unemployed, singles and low-educated consumed the most ($P<0.01$). Being a divorced male (OR 1.5; 95%CI: 1.0-2.1) or a long-term unemployed female (1.6; 1.0-2.6) predicted increase in alcohol use. The probability of decrease was higher among single men (OR 1.6; 1.0-2.4) and women (2.8; 1.7-4.4) at 31y, among men entering a relationship (1.9; 1.2-3.1), and among divorced women (2.4; 1.4-3.8) and entering a relationship (2.1; 1.3-3.5).

Conclusions: Alcohol usage among middle-aged Northern Finns is rather stable and increase is more exhibited than decrease. Gender differences in predictors existed: changes in relationship status predicted decrease in usage in women, whereas in men divorce predicted increase in usage and a new relationship predicted decrease. Long-term unemployment predicted increase only in women.