

research snapshot

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What affects immigrants' alcohol use?



What is this research about?

Drinking patterns are different for immigrants and those who were born in Canada. Immigrants generally report drinking less alcohol and have fewer related problems. Still, there are large differences in drinking patterns within immigrant populations based on ethnic group and country of origin.

There is limited data on drinking patterns among specific immigrant groups. Therefore, Ontario researchers examined the associations between ethnicity, country of birth, age at arrival, length of residence in Canada, and alcohol use among immigrant and Canadian-born populations in Ontario.

What did the researchers do?

To find out if there are differences in the prevalence of alcohol use among immigrant and Canadian-born populations, researchers used data from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Monitor, which surveyed 13,557 Ontario adults between January 2005 and December 2010. The survey captured demographic information such as ethnicity, country of birth, age at arrival, and length of residence in Canada. As well, it gathered alcohol-related measures including drinking status, high-risk drinking, and quantity/volume of alcohol consumed.

What you need to know:

Immigrants report lower rates of alcohol use than the Canadian-born population. Immigrants of European descent report higher rates of alcohol use and high-risk drinking than immigrants from other ethnic groups. The duration of residence in Canada and country of origin also affect immigrants' alcohol use. A better understanding of drinking patterns in different immigrant populations is important for the development of alcohol prevention and treatment programs.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found several key results:

- Rates of alcohol use and high-risk drinking were generally lower among immigrants than Canadian-born individuals.
- Immigrants of European descent, and those who identified as Canadian, reported higher rates of alcohol use and high-risk drinking than immigrants from other ethnic groups.
- Rates of alcohol use and high-risk drinking were generally higher among immigrants who arrived in Canada before the age of 19.

- Regardless of place of birth and age at arrival to Canada, ethnicity predicted lifetime, current, and high-risk drinking.

What are the limitations of this research?

The potential limitations of this research include the cross-sectional make-up of the data, the potential for sample selection bias, and the self-reported nature of the results. Other possible limitations include the estimates for high-risk drinking, the combining of some ethnic groups, and the small sample size in some ethnic groups. Future research should investigate factors that influence alcohol use by immigrants from particular ethnic groups, as well as the factors that differ within these groups.

How can you use this research

This research may be useful to alcohol treatment providers and program planners in the development and targeting of interventions for alcohol-related problems for certain ethnic groups. It also highlights the need to consider and incorporate social factors (such as gender, age, immigration, and social status) into health promotion, prevention, and treatment strategies.

About the researchers

Dr. Branka Agic is the Manager of Health Equity at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and Assistant Professor, Clinical Public Health Division, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto. **Dr. Robert E. Mann** is a Senior Scientist within the Social and Epidemiological Research Department at CAMH. He is also an Associate Professor with the Dalla Lana

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Substance use, residential treatment, aftercare, recovery, counselling

This *Research Snapshot* is based on an article that was critically appraised for quality and susceptibility to bias.

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