International Journal of Drug Policy 34 (2016) 88–95

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Drug Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/drugpo

Research paper

Divergent drinking patterns and factors affecting homemade alcohol consumption (the case of Russia)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 24 January 2016
Received in revised form 24 April 2016
Accepted 28 April 2016

Keywords:
Alcohol consumption
Homemade alcohol
Drinking patterns
Russia

ABSTRACT

Background: Unrecorded homemade alcohol consumption has been less examined in the literature. Previous studies of homemade alcohol in Russia have almost entirely focused upon the use of samogon (moonshine) attributed to the northern style of drinking. No systematic analysis is available regarding the production and consumption of homemade wine. This paper explores the drinking patterns demonstrated by consumers of samogon and homemade wine in Russia. The main factors affecting the consumption of these beverages are investigated.

Methods: Data were collected from a 2014 nationwide survey of 14,986 respondents aged 15+ years. Beverage preferences, volume of consumed alcohol, drinking habits, and alcohol availability were the main measures reported. Demographic, socio-economic, spatial, and policy-related factors affecting homemade alcohol consumption are examined using logistic regression.

Results: The percentages of samogon and homemade wine consumers were similar, although a greater volume of samogon in pure alcohol was consumed compared to homemade wine. The groups of samogon and homemade wine consumers showed very little overlap. Unlike homemade wine consumers, samogon drinkers consumed larger amounts of alcohol and were more engaged in frequent and excessive drinking, drinking without meals and drinking in marginal public settings. Gender, education, regional affiliation, and type of residence showed opposite associations with regard to the consumption of samogon and homemade wine. Availability of homemade alcohol in the neighbourhood was the most influential predictor due to respondents' own production, presence of homemade alcohol in friendship networks and at illegal market. The prices of manufactured alcohol and the consumption of homemade alcohol did not show significant relationships.

Conclusion: Consumers of samogon and homemade wine demonstrate contrasting drinking patterns that are largely driven by different factors. Samogon is consumed in a more hazardous manner, whereas homemade wine is consumed in a more moderate and law-abiding way. Illegal commercial samogon should be a special concern for alcohol policy.

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Introduction

Drinking is deeply ingrained in the values and culture of societies, which implies that the scope of analysis should not be confined to the level of alcohol consumption. It is vitally important to find substantial differences in drinking patterns that are intrinsically linked to social variables (Rehm et al., 1996). Due to these linkages, country-specific drinking styles are not homogeneous (Grant, Houghton, & Kast, 1998). Nation-states should not be treated as whole cultures but rather as collections of rich cultural variations (Stimson, Grant, Choquet, & Garrison, 2007).

Previous studies have identified Russia as a country with a prototypical northern style of drinking (Popova, Rehm, Patra, & Zatonski, 2007; Volkov et al., 2012). This style implies a prevalence of spirits over other beverages, a high level of per capita alcohol consumption and excessive drinking, especially among males (Haworth & Simpson, 2004). However, recent changes must also be considered. The recorded adult per capita consumption of vodka and other spirits has declined since the mid-1990s, according to the official Rosstat statistics (Denisova, 2010; Neufeld & Rehm, 2013). Survey data have also demonstrated that the percentage of drinkers of vodka and other spirits has declined, whereas the consumption of beer and wine has increased (Radaev, 2015;

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.04.016
0955-3959/© 2016 Published by Elsevier B.V.

Roshchina, 2012). These observed changes in beverage preferences correspond to global trends in societies with the northern drinking style moving towards the Central European and Mediterranean styles, which are associated with the consumption of beer and wine (Mäkelä, Tigerstedt, & Mustonen, 2012; Popova et al., 2007). We argue that a broader assessment is highly relevant for Russia, a large country with climatic variations and divergent cultures. It is particularly important to explore internal differences and to understand the factors that could affect this divergence.

While relevant for manufactured alcohol, by which we mean alcoholic drinks produced by alcohol beverage companies, the previously cited results are not clear for homemade alcohol because its consumption is largely unrecorded and has been far less examined in the existing literature (Lachenmeier, Taylor, & Rehm, 2011; Rehm, Kanteres, & Lachenmeier, 2010). Previous studies of the use of homemade alcohol in Russia have almost entirely focused upon samogon (moonshine), whereas no systematic statistical or survey data exist on the use of homemade wine fermented from grapes and various fruit materials. Official Rosstat data were collected about samogon only from 1980 to 1989. Expert estimates of unrecorded alcohol, undertaken by Vladimir Treml over the period from 1960 to 1993 and Alexander Nemtsov from 1981 to 2001, were also mainly confined to samogon (Nemtsov, 2009; Treml, 1997). In addition, survey data were also confined to samogon consumption prior to 2012.

In this paper, we will use new survey data collected from 2012 to 2014 to explore a group of homemade wine consumers and compare it with a group of samogon consumers. We will examine if these two groups overlap and how their drinking patterns differ with regard to the volume of consumed alcohol, the frequency of drinking, excessive drinking, the combination of drinking and meals, and the settings in which drinking occurs (Dawson & Room, 2000; Grant et al., 1998). We will also investigate demographic, socio-economic, spatial and availability factors that might affect beverage preferences. Alcohol availability and prices of manufactured alcohol are particularly important because a new alcohol policy that imposes numerous restrictions on the manufacture and sale of alcohol and accelerating excise taxes on manufactured alcohol in Russia was implemented in 2010–2014 (Radaev, 2015).

Methods

Data sources

We used data from the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring survey (RLMS-HSE), established by "Demoscope" and the Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1992 and conducted with the National Research University Higher School of Economics since 2010. RLMS-HSE is a nationally representative panel survey of households and individuals that uses multistage probability sampling, with primary sampling units selected from geographically determined strata. The data represent the adult population in all regions of Russia and in all types of residences from 1994 to 2014.[1] The study met the standards for the ethical treatment of participants. It was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and by No. 96-0478, Monitoring the Social Safety Net in Russia, with renewal approved 06/02/2014.

An extended set of questions on alcohol consumption including homemade wine was introduced to the RLMS-HSE regular survey for the first time in 2012. We used data collected from the 23th RLMS-HSE round (2014), with 14,968 adults aged 15+ years, for a detailed cross-sectional analysis (see descriptive characteristics of the sample in Table 1).

[1] See detailed sampling overview: http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/rlms-hse/project/sampling. Retrieved 18 January 2016.

Measurements

Drinking patterns

We used percentages of samogon and homemade wine consumers during a reference period of 30 days preceding the survey as our main dependent variables. Drinking volumes were computed based on the frequency and usual quantity of drinking for specific beverage types. To calculate the pure alcohol content of different beverages, we used coefficients developed specifically for the Russian conditions by Andrienko and Nemtsov (2005). These authors assumed that manufactured and homemade spirits contain 40% pure ethanol, fortified wine contains 18%, manufactured and homemade dry wines contain 12%, cocktails contain 10%, manufactured beer contains 5%, home beer and homebrew (braga) contains 3%.

The drinking patterns also included the incidence of frequent and excessive drinking. Frequency of drinking was measured as the number of drinking occasions per week (Dawson & Room, 2000). We defined frequent drinking as the use of alcohol more often than once per week. The thresholds for excessive drinking suggested by Roshchina (2013) were defined as 800+ grams of pure ethanol for males and 400+ grams of pure ethanol for females over a reference period of 30 days.

Given the importance of differentiating the drinking context (Dawson & Room, 2000), we used questions on drinking with or without meals. We also investigated the associations between homemade alcohol consumption and the settings in which drinking occurred. The latter included drinking at home as a traditional setting for Russians, drinking in bars and restaurants as a less traditional setting, and drinking in streets and parks as marginal settings that are not appropriate for drinking.

Factors affecting alcohol consumption

Among demographic factors, we considered differences across gender, assuming that men are more active drinkers of alcohol (including homemade alcohol) than women (Stimson et al., 2007) and that men drink alcohol in a more hazardous manner (Andrienko & Nemtsov, 2005; Leon, Shkolnikov, & McKee, 2009). However, we expect that women drink less samogon but more homemade wine, similar to the consumption of manufactured alcohol. Regarding age, we expect that older people follow more traditional habits drink homemade alcohol, particularly samogon, at significantly higher rates (Zaigraev, 2004).

Addressing socio-economic factors, we hypothesized that highly educated people use homemade alcohol less frequently because of their greater awareness of alcohol-related problems, given that the quality of homemade alcohol cannot always be

Table 1
Descriptive characteristics of the sample (RLMS-HSE, 2014), 14,968 respondents aged 15+, %.

Gender		**Employment status**	
Male	42.6	Employed	56.4
Female	57.4	Non-employed	43.6
Age		**Personal income (30 days)**	
15–19	6.4	No income	10.3
20–29	17.8	<10.000 RUB	21.7
30–39	196	10.001–25.000 RUB	45.9
40–49	15.7	>25.000 RUB	22.1
50–64	23.7	**Type of residence**	
65+	16.9	Urban	75.4
Education		Rural	24.6
No university degree	74.8	**Regions of Russia**	
University degree	25.2	Southern	13.9
		Non-southern	86.1

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