

**'IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE IT GETS LIGHTER ON YOUR SHOULDERS': MEN'S
DRINKING WITH MALE FRIENDS IN A LOW-INCOME FARMWORKING
COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

Problem drinking is a pertinent health issue amongst South African men, particularly in rural farmworker communities in the Western Cape Province. Consumption of alcohol amongst these men often takes place in the company of male friends. To shed light on this phenomenon, we draw on data generated through individual interviews and focus group discussions conducted with 13 mid-life men living in one farmworker community. Our thematic analysis of the data resulted in two themes: (i) drinking rooted and maintained in male friendships; and (ii) the therapeutic effect of an exclusive male drinking space. We conclude that gender transformation interventions are needed to address men's problem drinking in this community.

Keywords: men, gender, friendships, problem drinking, alcohol use, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Problem drinking, which refers to a range of alcohol consumption patterns that could result in individual and social health problems, has been identified worldwide as a pertinent issue that negatively affects men's health (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2014). This is also the case in South Africa (Parry, 2005; Peltzer, Davids, & Njuho, 2011) where men's problem drinking has been

linked to negative consequences such as violence, injuries, death, and crime perpetration (Peltzer et al., 2011; Peltzer & Ramlagan, 2009). Research indicates that problem drinking is prominent among men in the Western Cape Province, particularly in rural and farmworker communities (Gossage et al., 2014; May et al., 2007; McLoughlin, Little, Mazok, Parry, & London, 2013; Parry, 2005; Parry et al., 2012). Although some survey-based epidemiological studies shed some light on

the incidence and negative consequences of problem drinking in these communities, Gossage et al. (2014) highlight the need for knowledge about the contextual issues that contribute to problem drinking in Western Cape farmworker communities. Furthermore, Gossage et al. (2014) and Allan, Clifford, Ball, Alston, and Meister (2012), point out that despite an increasing recognition that community and cultural norms play an influential role in alcohol use, limited literature is available internationally about the ideas and practices that contribute to problem drinking in rural communities. In response to this gap in extant literature, we aimed in our study to add to such knowledge by focusing on men's drinking ideas and practices in one Western Cape farmworker community. We specifically explore drinking in the context of men's same-sex friendships, as existing research in Western Cape farmworker communities indicate that problematic alcohol use by men often occur within the context of socialising with same-sex friends. However, many of the men who participated in these studies narrated their alcohol use as unproblematic and as an integral part of their normal friendship and recreational activities in a context where there is a shortage of alternative recreational facilities or options (e.g., De Kock, 2002; Falletisch, 2008; Lesch & Adams, 2016).

A BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE RELEVANT TO MEN'S SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS AND ALCOHOL USE

Internationally and locally, limited qualitative research (e.g., Emslie, Hunt, & Lyons, 2012, 2013; Joseph, 2012) has been conducted to investigate midlife

men's problematic drinking within same-sex friendship contexts. (We want to note here that we alternatively use the terms "same-sex" and "male" to denote men's friendships with people of the same sex.) While there is extensive international literature on men's same-sex friendships and bonding in general (e.g., Thurnell-Read, 2012), South African research on the subject is limited. The studies that we could locate that touch on these topics were conducted in relation to: group rape (Wood, 2005), men's sexual and social networks (Ragnarsson, Townsend, Thorson, Chopra, & Ekström, 2009), and rhetorical representations of masculinities (Luyt, 2003). A number of international (e.g., Joseph, 2012; Thurnell-Read, 2012; Virtanen & Isotalus, 2014) and local (e.g., Townsend et al., 2010; Wood, 2005) studies have covered the relationship between male friendships and alcohol amongst men as part of a broader topic. However, to our knowledge, Emslie et al. (2013) and Clayton and Harris (2008) are the only researchers that have explicitly focused on how alcohol features within male friendships on an international level.

Although the definitions and practice of all friendships are influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors (Butera, 2008), men's same-sex friendships are often interpreted to be performances of masculinity where men are compelled to act in accordance with a collectively constructed notion of legitimised masculinities (Migliaccio, 2009; Thurnell-Read, 2012). According to Migliaccio (2009), men's male friendships that are consistent with the principles of hegemonic masculinity tend to lack expression of vulnerability, emotional needs, and a general establishment of intimacy. It is argued that such expressions are considered to

be feminine and therefore prohibited (Migliaccio, 2009).

In northern/international contexts, drinking alcohol has been found to be an important intermediate activity through which men engage in social bonding (Thurnell-Read, 2012; Virtanen & Iso-talus, 2014). Various studies have concluded that the shared consumption of alcohol and its associated drunken behaviour amongst men is key to the creation and maintenance of male friendships in different population groups, such as the Scottish men in Emslie et al.'s (2013) and the Caribbean-Canadian men in Joseph's (2012) studies. Clayton and Harris (2008) propose that drinking alcohol together offers a "localized sphere" (p. 320) where men come together in a non-threatening space and build close relationships with each other via acts of male hegemony, such as bantering with play insults or sexualised talking about women. Furthermore, according to Thurnell-Read (2012), being drunk with other men could be viewed as a particular manifestation of connectedness.

Men's ability to talk freely about their emotional experiences is often facilitated by the consumption of alcohol (Emslie et al., 2013; Virtanen & Iso-talus, 2014). Men describe how the consumption of alcohol at the right time and place (e.g., at night, in the pub) with their male friends enables a particular relaxed state of being which creates an optimal context for receiving and expressing emotional experiences (Emslie et al., 2013; Virtanen & Iso-talus, 2014). Emslie and colleagues (2013) suggest that drinking with male friends creates a space that enables the enactment of non-hegemonic practices such as sharing and open emotional expression because it briefly relaxes the constraints

surrounding what is considered acceptable or normative gender performances.

The above brief review of the extant literature indicates that the drinking of alcohol often plays a key role in the initiation and maintenance of men's friendships with other men. Most of the research on this, however, has been conducted amongst younger men living in the global north. Our study therefore aimed to explore how a group of South African middle-aged men, living in a Western Cape farming community in South Africa, construct their friendships with other men, and how alcohol features within these relationships.

METHOD

We employed a qualitative method to explore alcohol use within the context of male friendships in our group of participants.

Social constructionism as theoretical departure point for this study

We situated our study within a social constructionist framework. According to this framework, human behaviour is viewed as a product of culture and history, as well as the specific dominant political, social, gender, and economic contexts of their immediate living environment (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2001). These contexts and cultures in which people reside provide instructions, meanings, and norms that inform and regulate gendered behaviour, including men's ideas and practices with regard to being a successful man in their specific context (Willig, 2001). Connell (1995) argues that in any social setting there is a collectively held understanding of ideal male practices which men aspire

to, and which influences their practices and their understanding of themselves. According to Thurnell-Read (2012), it is often in men's interactions with their male friends that specific forms of masculinity become culturally dominant over other forms, and male dominance is legitimised. Men's behaviours are viewed as attempts to position themselves individually and socially in terms of the idealised masculinity notions in their context (Courtenay, 2000). Men in marginalised and low-resource contexts may construct a subordinated masculinity in which hypermasculine behaviours, such as problem drinking, may be enacted as a means to enhance their self-esteem, and position themselves within the gender order of these marginalised contexts (Connell, 1995). Dolan (2011), therefore, argues that there is a need to connect theories of masculinities and health to focus on the social and economic backdrop of individuals' lives in order to create more complex theories concerning the interactions of the factors of social class and gender, and men's health practices.

Social constructionism suggests that the masculinity ideas that prevail in a certain context inform and regulate how male friendships and drinking fit into these masculinity constructions (Willig, 2001). Moreover, the common language or discourses that men in a context share, construct specific behaviours as meaningful in that specific context (Hepworth, 2004). Such understandings of men's friendships and drinking are formed over time in the micro-contexts of people's daily social interactions with family, friends, and members of the greater community (Burr, 2003). These assumptions are usually naturalised, rationalised, and made part of the common sense of

the society in which the assumptions are constructed (Burr, 2003). Social constructionist thought, however, also alerts the researcher to look beyond such hegemonic assumptions and look for ways that participants may contest or disrupt these assumptions (Thurnell-Read, 2012).

The research community

The research community is located approximately 10 kilometres outside of a large town in the Cape Winelands district within the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Many of the farmworkers and their families have lived on farms in the area for many generations (Andrews, 2013; Visser & Ferrer, 2015), and have historically been exposed to or indirectly impacted by colonial and apartheid practices where alcohol was utilised as compensation for labour. (Gossage et al., 2014). Current problem drinking in these communities is viewed as rooted in these historical practices (Gossage et al., 2014; May et al., 2007), and is maintained by the legal and illegal sale of cheap alcohol (Mager, 2004). Moreover, in line with international findings (e.g., Emslie et al., 2013; Willott & Lyons, 2012), South African men's problem drinking in general, including that amongst rural farmworkers, is are thought to be underpinned by hegemonic masculinity ideals (Salo, 2003; Sawyer-Kurian, Wechsberg, & Luseno, 2009). More specifically, problem drinking amongst male farmworkers has been linked to their marginal positions over centuries in patriarchal farm structures and practices (Holtman, Sheldermine, London, & Flisher, 2011) which contributed to masculinity constructions in which problem drinking practices may function as a demonstration of manhood (Salo, 2003).

Participants

Our convenience sample consisted of 13 midlife men who ranged in ages from 35 to 58, lived and worked in the research community, and who drank alcohol. The number of participants in this study was determined by thematic saturation, i.e. when new themes no longer emerged over the course of the iterative data collection and analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The demographic information that we collected from the participants indicated that five participants worked as general farm labourers, whilst the others worked as labourers in industries related to the wine industry that is based in this community, for example, a distillery. They reported an average monthly income of approximately USD 335. Only one of the participants reported completing secondary school education as the highest level of education, while one participant reported that he had no formal school education at all. All the participants reported current alcohol use and the majority consumed alcohol, mostly beer or wine, on a weekly basis. The reported number of units of alcohol consumed in one sitting and over the course of a week indicated that most of the participants' drinking habits fit the World Health Organization's definition of Heavy Episodic Drinking (WHO, 2014) and they can therefore be viewed as problem drinkers.

Data collection method

We utilised both individual and focus group interviews conducted with friendship circles. These interviews were conducted in the participants' first language, Afrikaans, by a trained interviewer guided by semi-structured interview schedules. We decided to use the same interviewer

for both the individual and focus groups as we argued that participants would likely feel more comfortable in the individual interviews with someone they had already come to know in the interviewer role. Questions included asking the respondents to describe: (i) a typical week and weekend day in their lives; (ii) their male friendships; (iii) activities they typically engaged in when they were with male friends; and (iv) how they experienced these activities.

Research procedure.

Subsequent to obtaining ethics clearance from the Stellenbosch University Human Research Ethics Committee (HS944/2013), participant recruitment commenced. We employed a 27-year-old, tertiary educated man who grew up in the research community. He worked in a non-profit development organization in the community at the time of the research where he provided human development interventions. He knew many of the people in the community and seemed to us a well-known and respected community member. He could therefore be considered an insider which Rubin and Rubin (2011) argue contributes to participants feeling more comfortable than they would with an outsider. Furthermore, he impressed us as a warm and approachable person who was able to establish a warm and comfortable interview setting for participants.

This young man recruited participants by visiting men in the community whom he knew fitted the inclusion criteria. Those men who agreed to participate were asked about their friends and the latter were also approached to participate in the study. This process of visiting the men at their homes and inviting them

and their friends to participate resulted in the 13 men who participated in the study. Following the obtainment of written informed consent, participants were first interviewed in small friendship focus groups (one consisting of four, and three consisting of three friends), followed by individual interviews to explore individual participants' constructions more comprehensively.

The interviewer conducted the interviews in Afrikaans in venues that were convenient for both participants and interviewer (e.g., local church hall, participants' houses). Although the interviewer used a semi-structured interview schedule, he was encouraged to cultivate a conversational tone when conducting the interviews and to organically follow the respondents' responses. The interviews were recorded on a cell phone and their duration was between 60 and 90 minutes. We concluded recruitment and data collection when our review of the last focus group and individual interviews indicated that they did not produce new or additional information. Twelve individual interviews (one participant was unavailable for an individual interview) and eight focus group interviews (two interviews with each group) were conducted with a total recorded interview time of 1 144.5 minutes. It is important to note here that although the individual interviews added more detailed information, the content and tone of the participants' responses did not differ between the two sources of data information. This is in line with other research in similar communities that found that participants were remarkably frank in sharing their personal lives and drinking habits with other people (De Kock, 2002; Falletisch, 2008).

Data analysis

Concurrent with data collection, we transcribed the interviews verbatim in the original Afrikaans and used the six-step thematic analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013) to analyse these transcriptions. The analysis process was concluded with the sixth step that entailed the selection of specific themes related to male friendships and drinking, as well as compiling the general narrative that the analysis constructs. We completed the process by selecting salient and convincing examples of excerpts and ascertaining that these excerpts satisfactorily illustrated the themes and subthemes. These selected excerpts were translated into English to make them accessible to a wider audience. We then identified literature relevant to these themes and used it to further expand on our analysis.

Study credibility

Space limitations prevent us from a comprehensive discussion of all the credibility issues pertinent in this study. Therefore, we curtail our brief overview to the social constructionist principles of triangulation and researcher reflexivity outlined by Patton (2002). Firstly, we used researcher triangulation by using both authors' differing and coinciding perspectives; for example, we separately read the interviews and identified themes, and then met several times to discuss the use of the separate analyses. We only used themes that we concurred were prominent in the data. Researcher reflexivity compelled us to continuously reflect on the research process and how the interviewer and researchers' subjectivity may have shaped the data and study findings. We were mindful of how these may have been influenced by aspects such as the socio-economic differences between

the participants (primary and secondary school educated, working-class men), interviewer (tertiary educated, professional man), and us (tertiary educated, middle-class women). Therefore, we consulted with the interviewer, community leaders such as lay pastors, and fellow-researchers who regularly worked with similar groups of men in the specific research community, to build on or challenge our understandings or sense-making of the participants' accounts. These mechanisms helped us stay closer to the participants' worlds and meanings. We want to acknowledge, though, that our positions as outsiders and our lack of direct contact with the research participants may have contributed to a divide between us and the participants. On the other hand, Merriam et al. (2001) propose that such an outsider position may contribute to researchers being less likely than insider researchers to take participants' views and practices for granted, and therefore more likely to interrogate them.

RESULTS

In this section, we present two themes that illuminate male friendships and drinking as viewed and practised by the research participants. Quotations, translated from the original Afrikaans into English to keep as close as possible to the original meanings and sentence structures of the participants, are used to illustrate the themes and subthemes. Please note that we utilise pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

Theme 1: Drinking rooted and maintained in male friendships

In their accounts of the first time that they used alcohol, participants related

with enjoyment that their induction into the use of alcohol and the accompanying experience of intoxication took place with the encouragement and in the company of male friends:

We were at a party and we stole the grown ups' wine in order to enjoy ourselves. We were so drunk that I couldn't reach the house. [Rocky, 38].

Moreover, the participants' accounts indicate that the buying and sharing of alcohol and its associated drunkenness was an important part of the initiation, formation, maintenance, and demonstration of male friendship bonds. Hendrik (38), for example, described how his friend's buying and sharing of alcohol marked the beginning of their current friendship.

...that Friday evening he came to me with a bottle [hard liquor] ...then him and me we sat with a bottle and chilled here, I sat right here, we drank a little...and that's how me and him started to be friends.

Drinking as a social activity to be shared with male friends was further highlighted by the participants' adamantness that drinking should not be a solitary activity, as articulated by Venter (58): *"...you can't drink alone. You must have a friend to drink with, you must have a friend to chat to".*

It was emphasised by the participants that an important gesture of friendship is to make sure that a friend does not miss out on drinking by buying him alcohol even if he does not have the money to pay for it. Div (50) said this gesture is reserved for a special class of friend: *"...it depends on those classes of friends that you have. Not all friends are the kind that*

you would give a beer to.” Also, Marthinus’s (36) account indicates that real friends demonstrate their friendship by sharing alcohol with each other – to the extent of cutting out friends who do not share: *“If there are other guys who come along who don’t give us any, then we say to him: ‘Right, we don’t have anything for you, just go home rather’.”*

Some of the participants indicated that they find it easier to socialise when they use alcohol, whilst others felt that they needed alcohol in order to socialise in the jovial and talkative way that seems to be required and valued in their friendship circles. Rocky (38) explained that without alcohol: *“I don’t have anything to say then, there isn’t any conversation that I can have”*. In contrast, socialising with alcohol felt effortless: *“But if I’ve had a drink, then the words just come by themselves, you can say whatever is on your tongue...”* In the same vein, Hannes (38) said: *“if I don’t have alcohol in me, I am a speechless person”*, and Pieter (58): *“I am not a guy who talks a lot, but if I have had a drink then I am talkative”*.

Many of the participants related how male friends would pressure them to drink alcohol if they (the participants) said that they wanted to abstain or remain sober. Kobus (36), for example, told about his friend’s unsupportive attitude towards his attempt to stop drinking: *“I told him: ‘Man, I want to stop drinking’ and he knew that I must stop but still he kept on at me”*.

The mechanism that friends commonly used to derail attempts at sobriety was to ridicule or question the sobriety attempter’s manhood, as illustrated below:

If I had to give up drinking now my friends will say to me: “Oh my tjommie [slang word for friend] doesn’t

drink anymore, here’s a chocolate for you, here’s a packet of chips for you and so on” [Servaas, 39].

Related to the above, our participants claimed that sobriety could mean the end of their friendships. Markus (38) said that if he gave up drinking, very few of his friends would be interested in maintaining their friendship: *“There will perhaps be one or two who are still interested. But the others will say: ‘That man doesn’t drink anymore so he can’t be a part of our friendship anymore.’”*

Theme 2: The therapeutic effect of an exclusive male drinking space

The participants portrayed alcohol-infused male friendship practices as having a therapeutic effect that alleviates the pressures associated with the provider expectations that men face in this community. They reported that they experienced ‘heaviness’ and ‘pressure’ related to fulfilling these expectations and that they are alone in shouldering these responsibilities:

...it’s a heaviness on you...but that is no one else’s problem, it’s my problem. I have the problem. I am alone, I must go through it alone... I have responsibilities, I must accept them every day, I must be strong by myself [Lukas, 35].

Although twelve of the men were in committed relationships with female partners, they did not perceive these relationships and their homes as spaces where they could share their burdens. Rather, they experienced their female partners and home lives as adding to the pressure they experienced. Div (50) articulated it as follows: *“...it almost feels*

that you are getting smothered at home. Taking care of the wife and everyone. You must be free."

Many of the participants described drinking with friends as a world separate from their home lives where they could escape the responsibilities of female partners and children. For example, Markus (38) said: *"...it's the only little bit of escape that I can get...I know it's wrong, but it's the only way I can escape the pressure I am under."* Furthermore, Lukas (35) portrayed his leaving of his wife to drink with friends when he felt frustrated at home as a consideration of her. He said that he would tell her in such situations: *"...listen here, I don't want you to be stuck here with me, look I am going to turn my back on you for a bit."* He also said that he and his friends would rather share problems with male friends than female partners: *"...to share something with your wife, you don't do it, you rather go and look for advice from your friends"*.

Many participants described their female partners as spoiling their fun and interfering with the flow of the male friendship drinking space. Rocky (38), for example told of how his wife appealed to him to leave the drinking space early:

"Come it's late, we must go home" she says while the guys are still enjoying themselves. Here there is still wine and now you have to go home. They [women] take you away from the pleasure, understand?"

In addition, Markus (37) describes women as inhibiting free talk amongst the male friends:

Ja, for me it's better to drink or party without women, because, when

you maybe want to talk something crude with one of your friends, then a woman will always say: "Watch your language." So for me, it's better to carry on without a woman.

Many of the men described how their own group of male friends would regulate female partners' participation or presence in these male circles. Venter (58) said that he and his friends make their own drinking space outside and that *"women can come in and out; they will come and ask for something, but they won't stay there in our space"*.

Corresponding to various international (e.g., Emslie et al., 2013; Virtanen & Isotalus, 2014) and local studies (e.g., Sawyer-Kurian et al., 2009), the men in this study claimed that when they drink in these exclusive male friendships, they are able to soothe feelings of pressure by talking about it with their male friends. In fact, our participants reported that while intoxicated with friends they experience an almost involuntary, cathartic, and unfiltered outpouring of information.

...because then everything comes out. Now you're talking because you don't worry, there is no one here that will stop you... It's almost like, you share your thoughts. We unburden, yes. The stress is removed now [Louw, 44].

Like Louw (44), the other participants related that they experience talking to their friends under the influence of alcohol as therapeutic and supportive:

...Because the weight is a little bit too heavy so that you don't want to think

about it... Then with the talk it almost feels like it gets lighter on your shoulders [Div, 50].

The above excerpts indicate that for the men in this study, drinking with their male friends creates a space that allows for talk about personal concerns that would ordinarily conflict with masculine norms of emotional toughness and stoicism that are often praised and valued in dominant masculinity ideologies (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015).

DISCUSSION

Similar to the findings of other studies in the global north (Emslie et al., 2013; Joseph, 2012; Keenan et al., 2015), the men in this study described how their friendships with other men are rooted in and maintained by drinking alcohol. They narrated how alcohol facilitates a kind of sociability and social confidence that seems to be required and valued when they socialize with their men friends, and that they are unable to achieve without drinking alcohol. They also recounted feeling pressured by friends to drink when they try to stay sober and that sobriety could lead to the disintegration of their friendship relations. In line with social constructionist masculinity theories discussed earlier in this article, these men's friendships can be considered to constitute a space where men feel compelled to perform certain required masculinities, and where these performances are evaluated and policed by one another (Thurnell-Read, 2012). Furthermore, in low-income, working class contexts such as those in which this study's participants lived, performing successful or thriving masculinities

by attaining traditionally highly valued breadwinner/provider status is challenging for men (Boonzaier, 2005; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Ross, 2010; van der Heijden, 2009). They may, therefore, experience pressure to perform alternative masculinities that are more readily available. In the case of this study's community context, and for men living in similar contexts, where a history of excessive drinking is deeply entrenched in colonial and apartheid labour compensation practices, the alternative masculinity performance that may be more readily available is drinking alcohol and socialising effectively, i.e., telling the best stories and the best jokes (Ross, 2010).

In our second theme, we indicated that men's descriptions of distress caused by pressures of everyday life responsibilities was couched in a kind of disciplining talk implying that they should be tough and sort out their problems themselves. This is characteristic of a kind of tough, self-reliant masculinity that is valued in many communities across the world (Connell, 1995). Furthermore, we highlighted that the participants described that they felt that they could not speak about their problems at home with their female partners. They narrated that they needed to escape from their home lives and partners from time to time and that drinking with friends offered such an escape. These narratives suggest that these men's challenges with regards to attaining the idealised providing and responsible husband and father role, and showing emotional strain and weakness under the pressure to attain this respectable ideal, may result in them expecting to be subjected to uncomfortable judgement and critique by female partners and other members of the household. Given that

research in similar contexts indicate that women are often positioned as judges of successful masculinities (Boonzaier, 2005 ; Van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2016), it is possible that men want to keep women out of their drinking space with male friends because women symbolize and serve as a reminder of these expectations. Alternatively, however, it could be argued that these men are maintaining gender inequality by resisting more assertive or outspoken femininities and barring women from spaces traditionally considered as male spheres. Such an interpretation foregrounds the gender transformation challenge of empowering women whilst acknowledging and navigating men's feelings of disempowerment, without compromising the gender equality project.

The men in this study described that when they were drinking with their male friends, they were able to experience an unfiltered and cathartic outpouring of emotions. This corresponds with various international (e.g., Emslie et al., 2013; Virtanen & Isotalus, 2014) and local studies (e.g., Sawyer-Kurian et al., 2009). It is argued that by drinking to the point of intoxication or drunkenness, men are temporarily able to display vulnerabilities in an unbounded way that is in direct opposition to the rational, controlled and bounded demeanour that is often expected of men (Emslie et al., 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2011). Shefer, Kruger and Schepers (2015) propose that masculinity scholarship should foreground these moments of vulnerability, precariousness and anxieties that come through in the dominant masculine talk, and that these highlight the nuanced, complex and contradictory masculinities that men perform. Moreover, these authors believe that an acknowledgement of men's vulnerabilities

and struggles is key to engaging men and women as agents in gender justice and social change.

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It is important to highlight that our above discussion indicate that our findings are not exclusive to our specific research community. Men's problem drinking across the globe and across social strata has been linked to hegemonic masculinities in which femininity is devalued and characteristics like risk-taking, stoicism and self-reliance are encouraged. In line with the latter point, gender-transformative interventions could play an important role in addressing problem drinking amongst men across social contexts. . The main objective of such programmes should be to challenge and disrupt prevalent hegemonic masculine norms and promote gender equality (e.g., Dworkin, Fleming, & Colvin, 2015; Fleming, Colvin, Peacock, & Dworkin, 2016). A key component of a gender transformative intervention in this context would be to offer safe social spaces that encourage alternative ways of being men where men are able to be vulnerable and openly express their emotions while still retaining social status (Gibbs, Vaughn, & Aggleton, 2015). Part of this could include an open facilitation and exploration of men's feelings

of pressure and stress in their daily lives and the vulnerabilities they feel. Furthermore, Jewkes, Flood and Lang (2015), focussing on ways to address gender-based violence, recommend that gender-transformative interventions in communities that have historically been exposed to adverse and violent life circumstances, should validate men's (and women's) pain as collective victims of a system, and develop means for better livelihoods. These authors also argue that we need more research on the effect of interventions with boys or men that focus not on one area of men's health but interventions that focus on areas that seem to be interrelated, such as substance abuse, psychological distress and violence.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study was not representativity, but to explore a small purposively selected group of men's drinking behaviour with friends in a specific community context. These findings can therefore not be generalised to the broader research community or other communities. Furthermore, we acknowledge that our data and analysis may have been shaped in important ways by differences between the contextual backgrounds of participants, interviewer and researchers. It is, therefore, possible that different accounts may have been obtained by interviewers who were more similar to the participants. It is also possible that the focus group interviews that were conducted by the same interviewer before the individual interviews may have influenced the accounts constructed in the latter interviews. This may explain why the accounts were similar across the individual

and group interviews. Using different interviewers could have facilitated more authentic individual accounts that may have differed from the group accounts.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors confirm that we do not have financial or non-financial conflicts of interest to declare.

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