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Informal social control of drinking in intimate relationships – a comparative analysis

Klara Hradilova Selin, Marja Holmila, and Ronald Knibbe

Abstract

A number of studies have shown that pressure from others is an important element in decision making concerning entering treatment and that the pressure most often comes from one's partner. It has also been found that, besides actual drinking habits, togetherness of drinking, i.e. proportion of drinking occasions spent together with partner, is reversely connected to pressure from partner to drink less. The purpose of this paper was to examine these relationships in a comparative perspective, using GENACIS survey data from 16 countries. The results confirmed that on both individual and aggregated level, there is a relationship between drinking and pressure from partner. There is more pressure reported in 'dry' cultures and heavy drinking individuals are more often the object than others – in all cultures studied. In only a few countries with rather different drinking culture, drinking together prevents the pressure, also when controlled for actual consumption. Except for Uganda and UK, men are generally more exposed to pressure to drink less exerted by their female partners and this cannot only be explained by the fact that they actually drink more.

Keywords

intimate relationships; pressure to drink less; drinking culture; togetherness of drinking

Introduction

There are several studies on informal pressure of drinking based on data from Western countries, or at least the Nordic countries and the USA. Our knowledge is, however, much more limited when it comes to other cultures, such as African, Asian or Latin American countries – both in terms of informal controls and, in fact, drinking habits as such. The present data offer a unique opportunity to make comparisons including countries from these parts of world as well. The purpose of this paper is to compare the way informal control functions when it comes to intimate relationships, based on national or area population surveys from sixteen countries with profoundly different drinking cultures.

Men and women meet daily in a number of alcohol-related circumstances but the interaction around alcohol is likely to be more complex in close relationships, with a character of a more continuous process. A heavy drinkers' partner is probably the first person to react to heavy or problem drinking and to do so in a systematic and regular manner. Research shows that such an individual might also be the person having a good chance of actually affecting a drinker's behaviour, at least when it comes to drinking less. For instance, a number of studies have shown that pressure from others is an important element in decision making concerning entering treatment (Storbjörk, 2006; Room, 1996; Room, 1989) and that the pressure most often comes from one's partner (Room et al., 2004).

Recently, an interrelationship between attempts to influence one's partner's drinking, "togetherness" of drinking and actual drinking habits has been examined, using Swedish general population data (Hradilova Selin, 2004). The analysis controlled for a number of circumstances: children in the household, education, income, region of residence and how happy the respondent felt about the relationship. It was found that frequent binge drinking was, unexpectedly, not a predictor of partner's attempts to make the respondent drink less. At the same time, a negative relationship was found between binge drinking and drinking together with partner, and it was suggested that binge drinking occasions perhaps do not result in more control from the spouse simply because they are not very often witnessed by him or her. The best predictor of the risk of being controlled by partner turned out to be a low relative frequency of drinking together, which also has been found to be true for Finland (Holmila, 1988). Higher mean consumption was related to pressure from the partner to drink less, but only for men. The fact that drinking a lot on average predicts being controlled while binge drinking does not might indicate that the informal control in intimate relationship tends to be less situational and more a question of an ongoing process, not necessarily associated with drinking occasions. Further, the results showed that men more often experienced pressure from their female partners than the reverse and that this relationship weakened, but remained significant, even when controlling for their actual volume and pattern of drinking. Similar conclusions were also made in the Finnish study by Holmila, described in the section on previous research.

The relationship is rather complex and very likely to be culture-specific – something that probably can be said of informal social control mechanisms in general. The main question is: can the main patterns, found in Sweden and Finland, be observed elsewhere or are there cultural differences? More specifically, is togetherness of drinking a confounder in the relationship between binge drinking and pressure from partner to drink less in other cultures as well? Is a woman's role as the 'controlling wife' a common phenomenon even in other, non-western countries? How much of the informal control can be explained by differences in actual drinking observed between individuals within each country as well as between countries? Is this control stronger in countries where alcohol is not a part of everyday life – and then is it perhaps more directed to women? Or is it the other way around – the higher the consumption, the more reason to control? Are individual differences in drinking habits and togetherness of drinking predictors of pressure from the partner in both 'wet' and 'dry' drinking cultures? These are issues addressed in the present analysis.

Previous research

Even though there are large differences between men's and women's drinking habits, documented in most countries where drinking has been studied (Wilsnack et al, 2002), they cannot be seen as independent from each other. Drinking is typically a social activity. We prefer to drink together with others – with our friends, family members, work-mates – men often interacting with women. Former studies, mostly in Europe and North America, show that how much we drink is largely affected by drinking company – both within and outside family and, not the least, in couples (Bruun, 1959; Skog, 1983; Holmila, 1988; Hammer, 1992, Room et al., 1992, Hemström, 2002). Hammer (1992) has studied Norwegian couples and found that men to a higher degree than women are influenced by their partner's consumption, while the results from a longitudinal study by Leonard et al. (2003) point in the opposite direction: the husbands' drinking habits prior to the marriage predicted the wives' habits a year after that. Several studies have shown that there is a correlation between partners' drinking (Demers et al., 1999; Corbett et al., 1991).

The already mentioned study by Holmila (1988), based on interviews with married Finnish couples, concentrated on mainly four conditions and the relationship between them: frequency of alcohol consumption, how happy the marriage was, how often those interviewed drank

together and, finally, attempts to affect each other's drinking. The results showed that the spouses quite frequently tried to control the other's drinking, but there was a considerable gender difference. Half of the men but only 12 percent of the women reported having been exposed to control from their partner. To try to convince the spouse was the most commonly used influence strategy but quarrels were not unusual. The more often the husband or wife consumed alcohol, the more frequently they experienced control from the partner. However, the wives often tended to control their husband's drinking even in those cases when the men's alcohol habits appeared quite moderate. Another finding indicated a negative correlation between the togetherness of drinking and attempts to control each other. The hypothesis that men who more often drink together with their wives tend to drink less was not supported by the results; no such relationship was observed. On the other hand, togetherness of drinking was positively correlated with how happy the interviewee felt about their marriage.

A study of informal control using a comparative approach and partly focusing on couples (Hemström, 2002) compared six European countries and found certain differences. It was, for instance, more common in Italy than in the other countries to try to make another person drink less. Sweden and France ended up, conversely, below the study's average. It was more common for women and young people to try to exert control upon others. The differences observed between countries could mostly be explained by differences in men's behaviour.

The matter of who the typical controller is, however, by no means a constant. The overall control level can shift over time and at the same time there can be a redistribution in who tends to control whom. According to data from the US, the general degree of informal control of drinking became stronger in the period of 1979-1990 at the same time as control from partner decreased (Room et al., 1992). This implies that others besides the partner were becoming more involved in influence attempts over time.

Data and method

The data used in the present analysis has been collected within the framework of the GENACIS (Gender, Alcohol and Culture: An International Study) project, an international comparative study directed by IRGGA (International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol) and including over 30 countries from many parts of the world. The aim has been to make the measures as comparable across countries as possible, even though there is still a considerable variation between the questionnaires. That implies that not all countries can be compared in all respects. Only eleven countries included all the studied items in their questionnaires and the regression models are mainly concerned with these countries. These are: Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Japan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Sweden, Spain, Uganda and United Kingdom. In the descriptive part of the analysis, on item level, those countries are included from which the particular item was available. Some of these analyses include then also Iceland, Hungary, Norway, Germany and the USA. For these five countries, no data on togetherness of drinking was available, however.

The descriptive section is followed by comparisons conducted on two levels: on *between-countries* level, with countries as observation units, and *within-countries*, with individuals as observations.

Since partly different measures of annual volume were used in the surveys, it was rather difficult to obtain completely standardised consumption estimates across the studied countries. Therefore, the volumes estimated by the WHO and included in the Global Alcohol Database (www3.who.int) were used to validate the self-reported data in the analysis on *between-countries* level. These are estimates of pure ethanol in litres of total alcohol, and separately for beer, wine and spirits consumed per adult (15 years and older) in the country during a calendar

year, as calculated from official statistics on production, sales, import and export, taking into account stocks whenever possible. Since there was no more recent information available for some of the countries, 1999 year's data was applied¹. There is a positive and significant correlation between the country-aggregated self-reported mean volume of drinking and the estimates from the Global Alcohol Database by WHO (Spearman's $\rho=0.58^*$). One explanation of the correlation not being perfect is the fact that some of the countries in the Genacis study (e.g. Brazil, Argentina, Uganda or Nigeria) were area surveys and the sampling frame was not the country.

The estimates of abstainer rate as well as binge drinking in each country are based on survey data. As abstainers are defined those reporting no alcohol consumption during the past 12 months. Binge drinking was measured by annual frequency of heavy drinking occasions (5 or more drinks in most cases, 6 or more for Sweden and Japan), but the frequency scales are not equally detailed. However, to reach better comparability, all responses were recoded to number of binge drinking occasions per year. On the *between-country* level, i.e. in order to get an estimate of the overall degree of binge drinking for each country, those who drink heavily at one occasion at least 1-2 times a week were classified as frequent binge drinkers. No binge drinking estimates could be obtained for Spain and the United Kingdom.

In the *within-country comparison*, self-reported volumes of drinking assessed in the surveys were used. Heavy consumers were identified by dichotomising each country's estimates into highest ten percent of the total consumption versus the rest, partly in an attempt to standardise the volume measures. The number of binge drinking occasions during the past 12 months was categorised into 0=current drinkers with no binge drinking occasions, 1=some binge drinking occasions but below 1-2 times a week, and 2=frequent binge drinking (1-2 times a week or more often). Two logistic regression models are tested for each country with experiencing pressure from partner as the dependent variable. The first model controls for gender (not for Spain, including only a male sample since no woman reported pressure from partner), age, togetherness of drinking and volume of drinking, while in the second model, binge drinking is added. The aim is to see to what extent these two interrelated dimensions of drinking behaviour, i.e. drinking volume versus drinking pattern, independently contribute to the variation in informal control for each country.

Only current drinkers and respondents having a partner are included in the analyses. Consequently, the numbers of observations are, in some of the models, rather low, which affects the power to detect significant influences; nonetheless, examining the overall trends in the data is considered worthwhile.

Results

Pressure from partner to drink less

In Figure 1, proportions of those reporting pressure from their spouse or partner to drink less are shown for sixteen different countries, for men and women separately. Sri Lanka and Uganda have the highest proportion of male respondents reporting pressure from a partner, 59 and 50 percent respectively. Also about one third of all partnered male consumers in the Czech Republic and Costa Rica report such pressure. When it comes to women being controlled by their partner, these events are most often reported in the two African countries, Uganda (23 percent) and Nigeria (16 percent), followed by Sri Lanka and Brazil (13 percent each). In

¹Conversion factors used to estimate amount of pure alcohol in (barley) beer is 5.0%, wine 12% and spirits 40% of alcohol (other conversion factors were used for some types of beer and other beverages). Data are collected and calculations made mainly using three sources: FAOSTAT - United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Statistical Database, World Drink Trends, regularly published by Produktschap voor Gedistilleerde Dranken (Netherlands) and in some cases direct government data.

Sweden, Norway and Spain, the percentages are very low for both men and women; no woman in Spain (out of 223 interviewed) reported being pressed by her partner and only 4 percent Spanish men did, which is the lowest proportion compared to the other countries, though for males not very different than in the Nordic countries.

In all the analyzed countries, men tend to be clearly more often the object for pressure from their spouse. The male/female ratio based on percentages reporting such pressure is shown in Figure 2. Argentina is the country showing a particularly strong gender difference, men being eleven times more often influenced by their partner to drink less than the reverse. Also in Iceland and in the former Eastern European countries, Hungary and Czech Republic, there is a considerable difference between men's and women's experience of influence attempts. The difference is least pronounced in Uganda and Nigeria, and also in Brazil and United Kingdom. Even in these cases, however, men tend to be controlled by their partner about twice as often as women are.

For a limited number of countries (see Table 1), the response alternatives were slightly more detailed rather than simple yes/no. It is obvious that in most cultures the pressure from partner, in case it occurred at all, was a rather infrequent event reported as happening only once or twice during the referenced period (past 12 months). However, Brazil and Sri Lanka, and to a lesser extent Costa Rica and Uganda, seem to be exceptions. In Costa Rica and Uganda there is about an equal likelihood that pressure from a partner will be reported more than once or twice. There is a considerably greater chance of the higher frequencies in Brazil and Sri Lanka; in these countries, the responses are more polarised. Not to be pressed at all is, as elsewhere, reported by a majority of the partnered drinkers interviewed, but if a man reports being controlled by the partner, it seems to happen more frequently, i.e. three or more times, rather than just occasionally (once or twice). Among men in Sri Lanka, the proportion reporting pressure from partner three or more times is even somewhat higher than the proportion not experiencing such pressure at all (44 versus 41 percent). In Brazil, though the male rate of pressure is not as high overall, one is five times as likely to report three or more occasions (20%) as one or two (4%).

Togetherness of drinking

In eleven countries, the respondents were asked to estimate how many of their drinking occasions, during the past 12 months, were together with their partner. The answers ranged between none (=1) and all or almost all (=5). Table 2 gives a detailed picture of how the responses are distributed for men and women across all the response alternatives. It is obvious that the pattern varies a lot between countries. In the three western European countries, i.e. Sweden, Spain and UK (besides also for women in Costa Rica), spending all or almost of their drinking time with the partner is most typical of both men and women and the frequencies decrease gradually toward the 'lower-togetherness' alternatives, ending up with only a few percent reporting 'never' drinking together.

For some other countries, the pattern is the opposite and it is more common to drink apart from the partner. This is particularly true of Sri Lanka, where almost all (97 percent) of male and 65 percent of female current drinkers living in a relationship said that they never have spent any drinking occasion together with their partner (note that only 31 women drinkers with partners are included in this analysis). No male respondent in Sri Lanka has actually spent all or almost all drinking occasions with his female partner. A similar, but less marked, pattern can be observed in the African countries where seldom or never drinking together with the partner seems to be most typical for both men and women. In yet other countries, such as Argentina, Costa Rica (for men) or Japan, the answers are more evenly distributed between the five alternatives. In the Czech Republic, the responses are more concentrated to the mid-alternatives. Most men spend 'some' drinking occasions with their women (37 percent), but

only a few say they spent all or almost all occasions together (9.5 percent) and even fewer (5 percent) report never doing that.

In the last column, differences are shown in the general degree of togetherness of drinking, i.e. in terms of mean values on the five-score scale, for men and women separately. The figures confirm that it is in the western European countries, Sweden, UK and Spain, where drinking together with their partner seems most common for both men and women. Especially large majority of Spanish women tend to spend all or almost all occasions together with their men. Also women in Costa Rica report many drinking occasions spent together with their partner. On the other end of the range are Uganda, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, where low relative frequencies of drinking together with the partner are reported by both men and women and monosex drinking occasions appear to be the rule.

In Figure 3, female/male ratio of togetherness of drinking is presented for each country. In all the studied countries, the proportion of women reporting often drinking together with their partner is higher than compared to men. The difference in terms of the female/male ratio between spending all or almost all drinking occasions together ranges between 1.04 (Sweden) and 1.73 (Sri Lanka); in other words, while there is almost no difference between Swedish men and women, the women in Sri Lanka report almost double frequency of drinking together with their partner compared to men in the same country. In part, the much lower rates of women's drinking in Sri Lanka may help explain the striking discrepancy.

Relationship between actual drinking habits, togetherness of drinking and pressure from partner to drink less

Between-countries level—Table 3 is a correlation matrix with each country treated as one observation. Relationships found significant are further explored in Figure 4a-d.

Irrespective of kind of the estimate used (WHO vs aggregated GENACIS survey data), no relationship can be observed between the overall volume of drinking and either pressure from partner to drink less or togetherness of drinking. However, the aggregated abstinence rate (the best available estimate for abstaining in the areas studied) seems to have a significant role in this context. Respondents in countries with higher abstinence rates, such as Sri Lanka, Uganda, Costa Rica and Nigeria, experience more pressure from their partner to drink less, see also Figure 4a (Spearman's $\rho = 0.63^{**}$). On the other hand, Norway, Germany, Sweden, Iceland, UK and Argentina show low abstinence rates and not as much pressure from spouses is reported there.

The abstinence rate is also significantly related to the degree people living in a relationship tend to drink together in a particular drinking culture, but the correlation is negative (see also Figure 4b). In other words – the higher the abstinence rate, the lower the relative togetherness of drinking (Spearman's $\rho = -0.70^{*}$).

In countries with frequent binge drinking among current drinkers (at least 1-2 times a week), a significantly higher degree of pressure from partners is reported (Spearman's $\rho = 0.71^{**}$; see also Figure 4c). This applies in particular to Uganda, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, while in the Nordic countries – Sweden, Norway and Iceland, there is a surprisingly low relative proportion of frequent binge drinkers and also less pressure from partners is observed. In relation to drinking togetherness, the countries' drinking pattern (assessed by aggregating the dichotomous frequent binge drinking measure) does not attain significance in the limited sample of countries ($n=11$) though the ρ is modestly negative ($-.55$).

On the between-countries level, there is also a highly significant, negative correlation between drinking together and the risk of being pressed by the partner to cut down (Spearman's

$\rho = -0.74^{**}$, see also Figure 4d). In Sweden, Spain and UK people tend to drink rather frequently in their partner's company and the pressure from partner to drink less is relatively low. The opposite can be said about the African countries but especially about Sri Lanka, where drinking with partner is very unusual and attempts to influence each other to drink less are more frequent.

Within-countries level—In the next step, the relationship between drinking habits, togetherness of drinking and pressure from partner to drink less was examined within each country. Logistic regressions were used modelling pressure from the partner to drink less, experienced during the past 12 months, controlling for gender, age, annual volume and togetherness of drinking. In an additional model, binge drinking was added as an indicator variable (Table 4).

The pattern of multivariate relationships is in many respects quite similar in the studied countries, but there are some divergences. With the individual as the unit of analysis, the gender difference in the risk of being controlled by the partner, observed in Figure 2, is significant in most of the countries even when age, drinking habits and togetherness of drinking are controlled. Except for the UK and Nigeria, men in all other countries studied are at a clearly higher risk of being pressed by their partner to drink less, consistent with the fact that they actually drink more. The risk of being controlled is not significantly age related in Sweden, Czech Republic, Spain, Uganda and Nigeria, while in the rest of the cases there is a tendency towards experiencing more control among young respondents.

When it comes to the actual drinking habits, an individual's high drinking volume enhances the risk of pressure from partner in all countries, even though not to the same extent. The relationship is not as strong in Nigeria and Costa Rica compared to the other countries and becomes insignificant once the binge drinking variable is added. Including the binge drinking indicator reduces the effect of mean consumption in all cases, but does not affect the other estimates in any particular way, except for Nigeria, where low togetherness of drinking approaches statistical significance. Frequent binge drinking is itself a significant predictor of pressure from the partner to drink less in all of the countries except Uganda (borderline-significant in Argentina). In Nigeria, it is, in fact, the most important factor among those included in the model. These models, taking account of volume, indicate what might be expected on a conceptual basis, i.e. that intoxication should be more likely to result in feedback than if smaller, even amounts were drunk that add up to the same volume. It can be mentioned that many standard measures of drinking consequences include others' (especially spouse's) complaints items and these consequence measures have always been particularly responsive to binge drinking indicators.

To spend the majority of drinking occasions together with the partner tends to have a protective effect against the partner's attempts to influence the respondent drinking, but significantly so only in Sweden, Czech Republic and Costa Rica. Moreover, in Argentina and Nigeria, a borderline-significant effect is observed. Even if statistically insignificant, the estimates point in the same direction, i.e. indicating a negative association between togetherness of drinking and control from spouse in all the other countries, excepting Uganda.

Discussion

It was suggested in the introduction that one of the confounders explaining the null relationship between binge drinking and pressure from partner previously found for Sweden (Hradilova Selin, 2004), might be the extent to which intimate partners tend to drink alcohol together. Since the relationship between binge drinking and frequency of shared drinking occasions was negative, it was hypothesized that frequent binge drinkers tend to drink outside the partner's

company and thus avoid the more direct, situational type of control. Let us review and interpret our findings with this hypothesis in mind. Four main conditions and the relationship between them have been studied and compared across different drinking cultures: volume of drinking, drinking pattern (frequent binge drinking), togetherness of drinking and pressure from partner to drink less.

In the country-level analyses there was no correlation seen between the countries' drinking level and the overall frequency of pressure from spouse to drink less. At the same time, high abstinence rate was significantly related to more pressure from partner. This, along with other results in this study, is congruent with the observation that in countries where the abstinence rate is very high, those who drink are more often heavy drinkers both in terms of average volume and binge drinking, and are even more likely to be male compared to other cultures (see e.g. Riley & Marshall, 1999). A classic country in this respect included here is Sri Lanka. Thus, the average drinking volume for these countries does not diverge much from the rest, while the dispersion is much higher. This is also the case in, for instance, Nigeria, Uganda and Brazil. In these countries, norms around drinking as such and perhaps about female drinking in particular are probably different from cultures where alcohol is established in both men's and women's everyday lives. In these countries, the overall degree of control from partner is relatively high, in particular control directed to women.

However, within each country, with the individual as the unit of analysis, respondents reporting high annual volumes report more pressure from their partners. Our interpretation of this inconsistency between results from individual versus aggregated analysis would be that, overall, irrespective of drinking culture, individuals who drink more are simply more likely to experience control. Besides that, this relationship might be different when studied separately for men and women. Both the Swedish results described in the beginning of the paper (Hradilova Selin, 2004) and, for instance, the paper by Holmila et al. in this journal issue (on pressure from family members including partners), show that this is only true of men while no significant relationship between drinking volume and pressure from partner can be observed for women. Similar gender-specific analysis was not possible in our case due to the limited number of observations, but it is plausible that such is the case in at least some other countries. This only further supports our conclusion above, namely that in 'dry' cultures, i.e. cultures with high general abstention rates, female drinking *as such* is an object for control, no matter how much alcohol women, in fact, consume. Obviously the male/female ratio for pressure from partner is relatively low even in countries where women's consumption is considerably lower than men's (Uganda, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Brazil).

The difference between men's and women's experiences of control is relatively low in some western cultures as well - such as in United Kingdom, Norway or the USA. But the explanation might be rather different. It is likely that the gap between male and female drinking is smaller in these countries and the relative gender 'equality' in experiencing pressure from partner is a result of that more than (but perhaps also) because of different gender-related norms around drinking. As the regression models in our within-country analysis show, Nigeria and UK are the only countries where no significant gender difference can be observed in pressure from partner to drink less, but the background to this is probably very different in these two hardly comparable drinking cultures. It should, though, be noted here that the Nigerian sample included two quite different groups, a dryer Islamic area and a wetter Christian one. What happens when these get melded together remains to be an unanswered question.

Also pattern of drinking, indicated by frequent binge drinking, has a significant impact on experiencing control from partner. On the aggregated, between-countries level, there is a rather strong positive correlation between the countries' overall degree of binge drinking and the percentage of the population reporting pressure from the partner. It is somewhat puzzling that

countries traditionally classified as binge drinking cultures, such as the Nordic countries, seem to have such a, by our criteria, low proportion of frequent binge drinkers (and low level of informal control). However, the past decade or so there has been a shift from what has been described as a typical Nordic drinking culture towards more 'continental' pattern if drinking characterized by more frequent drinking of smaller amounts. Also, our knowledge about drinking pattern in the developing countries is still very limited and, secondly, a few studies as well as WHO's international data on drinking pattern at least to some extent support what has been found here - that, for instance, in many African countries but also in Sri Lanka, there is a high proportion of abstainers, but those who drink do so heavily. Therefore, it is not quite unexpected that countries like Uganda, Nigeria or Sri Lanka end up in the opposite end of the range, i.e. with high percentage of frequent binge drinkers (among current drinkers) and high degree of informal pressure. The results are more unexpected when only Western cultures are considered, with a lower degree of binge drinking in Norway, Sweden and Iceland than, e.g. in Germany or the USA. In the chapter on alcohol in the WHO's Global Burden of Disease (Rehm, et al., 2004), pattern of drinking is described for many countries in the world by means of a four-score risk scale, with 1 indicating low risk and 4 indicating the most problematic pattern of drinking. In this classification, Sweden, Norway as well as Iceland are ascribed level 3, the USA level 2 and Germany is ascribed the lowest risk pattern, level 1. This is rather different ranking compared to the one observed above in Figure 4c. One reason for this might be that the definition of drinking pattern used by Rehm et al. is more sophisticated, taking into account other factors besides frequency of binge drinking - such as drinking with meals, siesta drinking, drinking in public places, etc. The dichotomy of those who drink heavily within the same occasion once or twice a week versus those who do not is without a doubt a rather crude measure of drinking pattern. Another reason can be the methodological drawbacks discussed earlier, causing lack of comparability.

On the individual, within-countries level, the effect of binge drinking – after taking account of volume – is significant for all countries except Uganda. Concerning Sweden, the finding actually contradicts previous results on which our original hypothesis was built. It should be noted that the hypothesis was derived from a more detailed model of experiencing pressure from partner, where also conditions like children in the household, feeling happy in the relationship, the respondent's education and income as well as region of residence (city vs rural areas) were controlled. This kind of analysis is not as easily achieved when comparing survey data from a number of countries, which should be acknowledged as a limitation in this study. Obviously, besides gender, age, togetherness of drinking and actual drinking habits, there are other individual features that might have a high explanatory value and that are not included in our rather weak models in terms of explained variance. Feeling of satisfaction and happiness in the relationship is likely to be one of the variables found to be important in the studies by Hradilova Selin (2004) and Holmila (1988). On the other hand, irrespective of the hypothesis on togetherness of drinking being a strong confounder, finding a positive relationship between binge drinking and degree of control by partner is conceptually plausible and expected, even if complex and probably influenced by a number of other circumstances – different in different cultures.

Accordingly, excessive drinking habits strongly predict being controlled by a partner in all of the countries we have examined, both in terms of average volume (only on the individual level) and frequency of binge drinking (both on the individual and aggregated level). This relationship is stable even when controlling for gender, age and togetherness of drinking. Further, in countries where men and women frequently drink together with their 'other half', the overall pressure from partner to drink less is significantly lower. Also on the within-countries level, drinking with partner has a more or less 'protective' effect in five of the eleven countries included. Interestingly, it is most pronounced in Sweden, Czech Republic and Costa Rica, i.e. in countries with quite different drinking cultures. Finally, in all countries except Nigeria and

the UK, men tend to be more often exposed to their partners' control attempts and the difference prevails even when controlling for actual drinking. Thus, the previous findings from Sweden and Finland about the wife being the typical controller or care taker, even when there (sometimes) is not much to control, seem to apply to most drinking cultures. The previously mentioned relative lack of gender difference in experiencing pressure from the partner observed in Nigeria and the UK is primarily a result of women's being controlled more regularly rather than men's being controlled less often.

Overall, even though countries with large variation in traditions, norms and drinking cultures were included in the analysis, when studying the mechanisms behind informal control of drinking from one's partner within each country, more similarities than differences were found.

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Figure 1.

During the past 12 months, have any of the following persons attempted to influence your drinking so that you would drink less or cut down on your drinking?... Your spouse/partner/romantic (non-cohabiting) partner? Proportion reporting 'yes'. Current drinkers and partnered only.

Figure 2.
Male / female ratio of proportions reporting pressure from partner. Current drinkers and partnered only.

Figure 3.
Female / male ratio of togetherness of drinking (mean value). Current drinkers and partnered only.

Figure 4.

Figure 4a. The positive relationship between abstainer rate and pressure from partner to drink less. LK=Sri Lanka, UG=Uganda, NI=Nigeria, CR=Costa Rica, BR=Brazil, CZ=Czech Republic, JP=Japan, USA2=USA (one of two data collections), SP=Spain, HU=Hungary, UK=England, ICE=Island, AG=Argentina, GE=Germany, NO=Norway, SE=Sweden

Figure 4b. The negative relationship between abstainer rate and togetherness of drinking

Figure 4c. The positive relationship between binge drinking and pressure from partner

Figure 4d. The negative relationship between togetherness of drinking and pressure from partner

Table 1

During the past 12 months, have any of the following persons attempted to influence your drinking so that you would drink less or cut down on your drinking? ... Your spouse/partner/romantic (non-cohabiting) partner? (Current drinkers with partners; percent.)

Males	N	No %	Yes, once or twice %	Yes, three or more times %
Spain	330	95.7	2.1	2.1
Argentina	192	86.8	7.4	5.8
UK	544	88.8	6.6	4.6
Japan	751	72.8	16	11.2
Brazil	225	76	4	20
Costa Rica	158	67.8	15.3	16.9
Nigeria	350	75.7	16	8.3
Uganda	271	49.8	24.6	25.6
Sri Lanka	236	40.7	15.7	43.6
Females				
Spain	223	100	0	0
Argentina	269	98.8	0.2	1
UK	476	93.7	4.5	1.8
Japan	608	93.9	4.4	1.6
Brazil	198	87.4	3.5	9.1
Costa Rica	200	91.8	6	2.2
Nigeria	131	84	13	3
Uganda	187	76.8	17.7	5.5
Sri Lanka	31	87.1	3.2	9.7

Table 2

During the past 12 months, how much of your drinking has been with your spouse/partner/romantic (non-cohabiting) partner? (Current drinkers with partners; percent)

	N	All or almost all occasions (5)	Most occasions (4)	Some occasions (3)	A few occasions (2)	None/Never (1)	Mean value
Males							
Spain	336	36.6	28.7	15.7	12.0	7.0	3.8
UK	544	36.6	32.5	15.3	12.9	2.8	3.9
Sweden	506	50.5	27.1	8.5	7.5	6.4	4.1
Czech rep.	642	9.5	27.6	37.4	20.7	4.8	3.2
Brazil	165	18.2	12.1	9.1	17.6	43.0	2.4
Sri Lanka	229	0	0.4	1.3	1.8	96.5	1.1
Nigeria	262	0.8	2.3	19.9	34.0	43.1	1.8
Argentina	191	25.6	12.8	20.6	17.6	23.4	3.0
Uganda	270	4.2	6.5	14.5	36.6	38.2	2.0
Japan	751	9.9	23.4	28.6	15.2	22.9	2.8
Costa Rica	157	23.3	23.0	15.5	17.7	20.5	3.1
Females							
Spain	227	65.8	22.2	8.4	1.1	2.5	4.8
UK	507	51.5	28.2	7.5	10.5	2.4	4.2
Sweden	458	61.4	24.5	5.5	4.9	3.7	4.3
Czech rep.	613	20.9	39.5	28.1	9.3	2.3	3.7
Brazil	144	25.0	16.0	6.9	18.1	34.0	2.8
Sri Lanka	311	9.7	9.7	3.2	12.9	64.5	1.9
Nigeria	103	1.9	4.9	21.4	41.8	30.1	2.1
Argentina	269	36.2	5.5	17.9	29.8	10.7	3.3
Uganda	184	7.6	13.6	21.2	26.6	31.0	2.5
Japan	610	20.3	28.9	21.3	17.7	11.8	3.3
Costa Rica	202	63.3	17.0	5.9	5.3	8.5	4.2

Table 3

Correlation matrix, bivariate correlations between drinking, pressure from partner and drinking together with partner. Spearman's rho.

	Pressure from partner to drink less (n=16)	Drinking together (n=11)
Annual drinking volume (WHO)	-0.16 ^{Ns}	0.28 ^{Ns}
Annual drinking volume (GENACIS data)	0.07 ^{Ns}	-0.10 ^{Ns}
Abstinence rate (GENACIS data)	0.63 ^{**}	-0.70 [*]
Binge drinking ¹⁾ (GENACIS data)	0.71 ^{**}	-0.55 ^{Ns}
Pressure from partner (GENACIS data)		-0.74 ^{**}

*
p<0.01,

**
p<0.001

¹⁾ Percentage of current drinkers with frequent binge drinking (1-2 times a week or more often). Excluding United Kingdom and Spain, where no estimates for binge drinking were obtained (i.e. n=14 vs 10).

Table 4

Pressure from partner to make respondent drink less, past 12 months. Logistic regression. Current drinkers and partnered only. Odds ratios.

	Spain (n=329, only males)	UK (n=1050)	Sweden (n=834)	Czech Rep (n=1249)	Brazil (n=307)	Sri Lanka (n=260)
Gender (1=male 2=female)	-	0.70	0.24** 0.34*	0.20*** 0.28***	0.40** 0.43*	0.13*** 0.16**
Age (higher)	0.97	0.98**	1.00 1.01	0.99 1.00	0.98* 0.99(*)	0.98(*) 0.98(*)
Together-ness of drinking (higher)	0.88	0.86	0.63*** 0.64***	0.62*** 0.61***	0.91 0.93	0.75 0.71
Drinking volume (1=highest 10 percent, 0=others)	10.37***	4.92***	4.39*** 3.01**	7.87*** 4.30***	6.10*** 3.17*	12.23*** 7.44*
Binge drinking (0=never, 1=less than once a week, 2=at least once or twice a week)			3.90**	3.35***	2.08**	1.80*
Nagelkerke's R square	0.06	0.05	0.05 0.07	0.21 0.25	0.12 0.15	0.18 0.19
			Argentina (n=460)	Uganda (n=453)	Japan (n=1346)	Costa Rica (n=357)
Gender (1=male 2=female)	0.65	0.65	0.15** 0.23*	0.36*** 0.38***	0.26*** 0.33***	0.29** 0.33(*)
Age (higher)	1.00	1.00	0.95* 0.95*	1.01 1.01	0.98* 0.98*	0.99 0.99
Together-ness of drinking (higher)	0.82	0.75(*)	0.76(*) 0.77(*)	1.02 1.01	0.97 0.95	0.67*** 0.70***
Drinking volume (1=highest 10 percent, 0=others)	2.21*	1.28	7.73*** 5.10**	3.65*** 3.30**	5.84*** 3.90***	2.31* 0.75
Binge drinking (0=never, 1=less than once a week, 2=at least once or twice a week)		2.41***	1.90(*)	1.14	1.83***	3.23***
Nagelkerke's R square	0.03	0.10	0.14 0.15	0.10 0.10	0.15 0.15	0.16 0.22

* p<0.01,

** p<0.001

*** p<0.0001