Challenges and potential of collecting data on alcohol use

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Purposes for collecting data on alcohol use

- Epidemiological surveys
  - Consequences of drinking alcohol by: volume of drinking, drinking pattern, beverage type, type of consequence etc.

- International comparison - benchmarking

- Monitoring changes
  - Changes and developments beyond per capita consumption trends:
    - Changes in population subgroups
    - Changes in drinking patterns
    - Changes in situations where alcohol is consumed

- Insights for prevention and intervention possibilities
  - E.g. locations of intoxication drinking

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Relations between alcohol consumption and social / health consequences
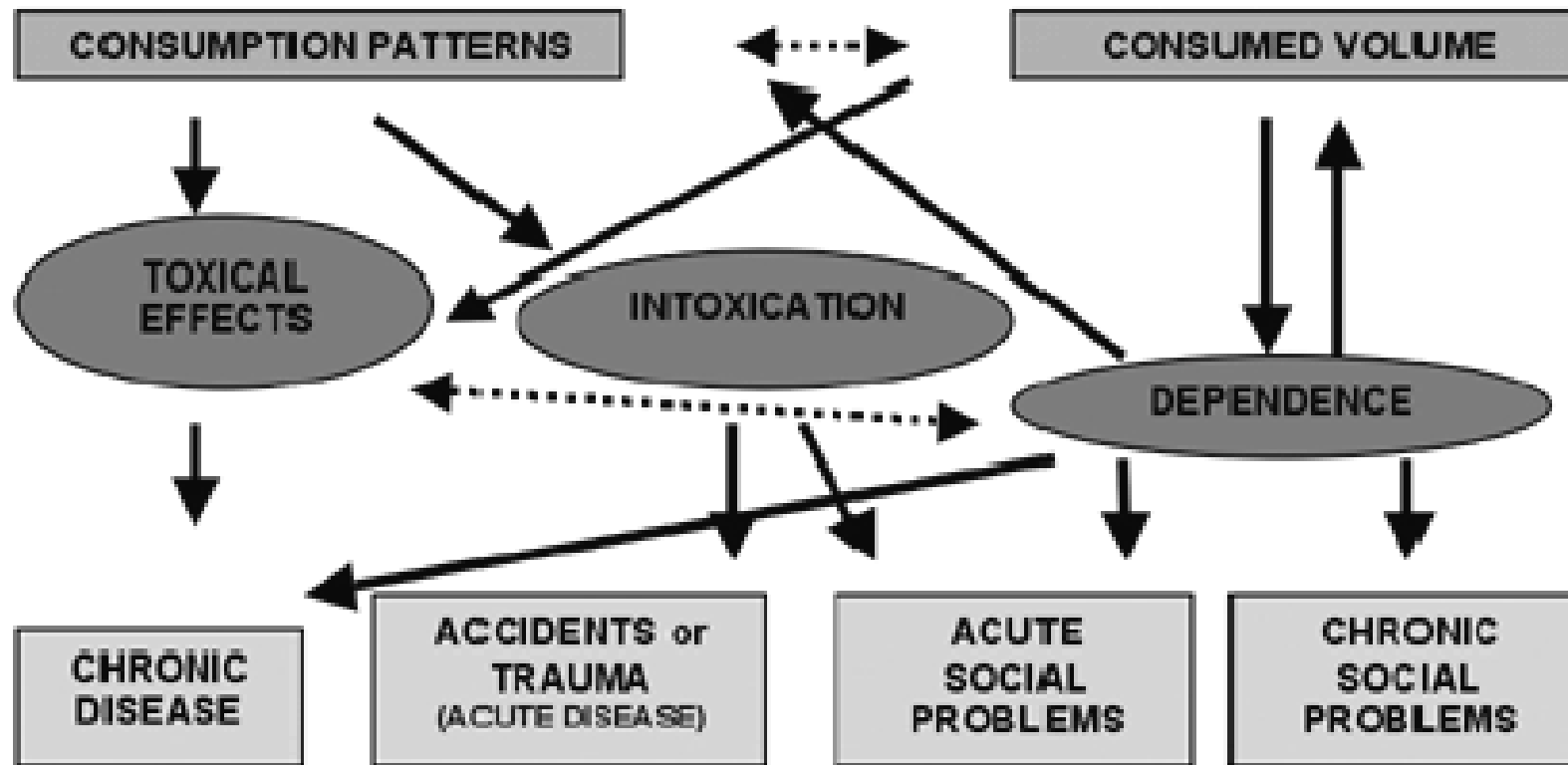
Source: Babor et al., Alcohol: no ordinary commodity, 2003

Drinking as a social behavior: central aspects of drinking patterns

- Participation in drinking at all
  - Measure: abstainer/ drinker (often 12-month basis(

- How often alcohol is consumed?
  - Measure: Frequency of drinking

- How much alcohol is used at a time?
  - Distribution, for each individual
  - Measures, often:
    - How often X+ drinks?
    - How much typically?
    - Maximum amount

Distribution of drinks for 1 individual

Number of drinks

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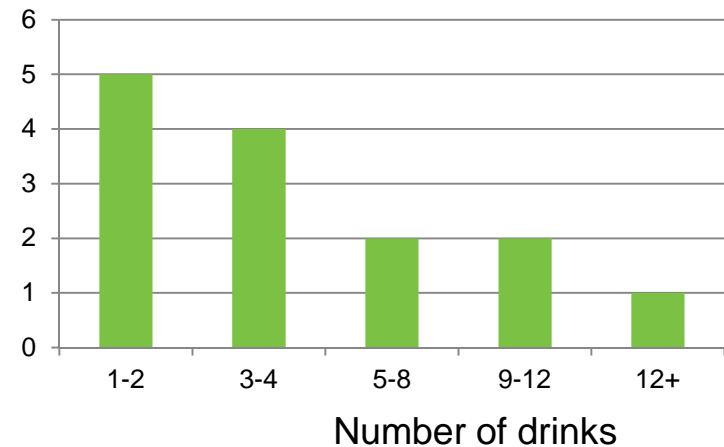
Additionally…

- Context: location, company, timing

- Beverage types

- Sources of alcohol (recorded, unrecorded)

- Behavior while drinking (e.g. driving a car)

- Diagnostic measures: alcohol use disorders, harmful use, dependence

- Other, subjective measures of consequences or harm

- Norms and functions, use-values, meanings, motivations.. (e.g. nutrition vs. intoxicant)

In sum: central measures to be monitored

- **Abstainer / drinker** – division (typically 12-month basis)

- **Frequency of drinking**

- [**Volume of drinking** – this is central, but it has greatest measurement error]

- **Frequency of drinking X+ drinks** on one occasion [60g]

Challenges for measurement: cultural differences

- Anecdotally, 1 question suffices to detect drinking problem in Italy: "do you ever drink outside of meals?"

- Behavior which is most relevant for drinking problems in one country does not make an understandable question in another

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# Challenges in measurement: averageing

- Irregularity of drinking is common in many countries:
  - Everyday life contexts vs. non-everyday life contexts
    - holidays, parties and celebrations
  - weekdays vs. weekend
  - summer vs. winter

- How can people then respond to "how often do you typically drink" or "when you drink, how much do you typically drink at a time"?

- What is a meaningful period to ask about?

  Italy / regular drinking patterns: 1 week ?

  Finland / irregular drinking patterns: 12 months?
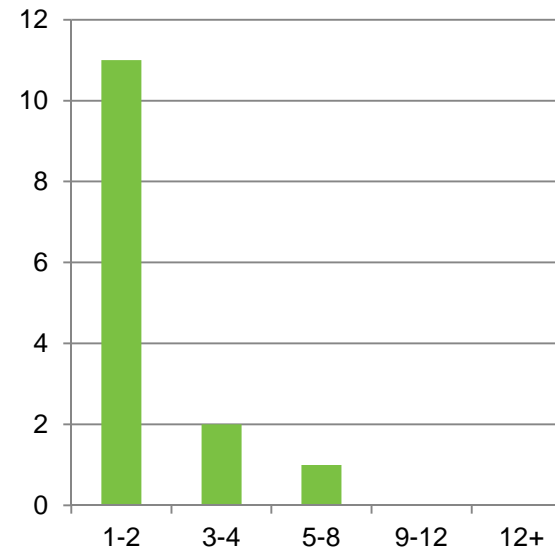
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Challenges in measurement / averageing

- Problems for comparison of countries

How much do you drink at a time? People answering '1-2 drinks'

Prototypical Finn

Prototypical Italian

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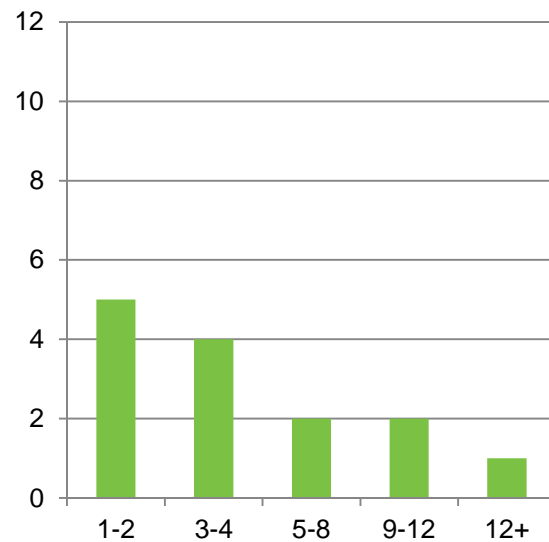
Problems in measureing: amounts

- Particular challenge: units, standard drinks, grams of alcohol.

- Answer often: define a comparable gram limit, and translate that into units understandable in each country (à 8g, 10g, 12 g)
  - Same or different cut-point for men and women?

Approaches chosen for measurement / EHIS

EHIS= European Health Interview Survey (EHIS wave 2)

- Overall drinking frequency (12 months)

- Drinking frequency 1) *Monday to Thursday* & 2) *Friday to Saturday*

- Typical quantity 1) *Monday to Thursday* & 2) *Friday to Sunday*

- Frequency of drinking [**60 grams / 6 or more**] drinks on one occasion

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Approaches chosen for measurement /RARHA:

RARHA= Reducing Alcohol-Related HArm – a joint action project between EU countries

- Beverage-specific quantity-frequency questions (3 x 2)

- Overall drinking frequency

- Maximum number of drinks in 12 months

- Frequency of drinking [60g men/ 40g women] on one occasion

- Frequency of drinking [120g men/ 80g women] on one occasion

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