

# SOCIALLY STABLE ALCOHOLICS: WHAT CHARACTERISES THEM?

Drinking patterns, personality and health aspects  
of psychosocial and clinical importance

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligen försvaras fredagen den 16 januari 2009, kl. 10.00, sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Mats Fridell, Institutionen för psykologi, Lunds universitet

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This thesis consists of a summary and the following four papers, which are referred to by roman numerals:

- I. Berglund, K., Fahlke, C., Berggren, M., Eriksson, M., Balldin, J. (2006). Individuals with excessive alcohol intake recruited by advertisement: demographic and clinical characteristics. *Alcohol & Alcoholism*, 41, 200-204.
- II. Berglund, K., Fahlke, C., Berggren, U., Eriksson, M., Balldin, J. (2006). Personality profile in type I alcoholism: long duration of alcohol intake and low serotonergic activity are predictive factors of anxiety proneness. *Journal of Neural Transmission*, 113, 1287-1298.
- III. Berglund, K., Roman, E., Balldin, J., Berggren, U., Eriksson, M., Gustavsson, P., Fahlke, C. Personality profile in socially stable men with excessive alcohol intake. Manuscript.
- IV. Berglund, K., Balldin, J., Berggren, U., Fahlke, C. (2008). Self-reported substance use and health functioning in Swedish alcohol-dependent individuals: age and gender perspectives. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 62, 405-412.



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## ABSTRACT

Berglund, Kristina (2009). *Socially stable alcoholics: What characterises them? Drinking patterns, personality and health aspects of psychosocial and clinical importance*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

People who misuse alcohol are a heterogeneous group with different etiology, social and clinical characteristics. This thesis includes four studies whose aim was to characterise so called socially stable alcoholics (i.e. individuals with preserved psychosocial functioning) regarding personality, physical and mental health and drinking patterns. Specifically the aim of **Study I** was to describe demographic and clinical characteristics in male individuals with excessive alcohol intake ( $n = 367$ ) recruited by advertisements and to compare these individuals according to their prior experience of treatment. The results showed that individuals with no prior treatment history ( $n = 238$ ) were found to be more often cohabitant and employed. They also reported fewer on-going psychiatric symptoms than individuals with prior treatment histories. The aim of **Study II** was to study personality traits in relation to central serotonergic neurotransmission and years of excessive alcohol intake in 33 alcohol-dependent male individuals. More individuals with low serotonergic neurotransmission as well as long time-period of excessive drinking had elevated levels of anxiety proneness. Long time-period of excessive drinking was the strongest predictor for anxiety proneness. The aim of **Study III** was to investigate personality profile of socially stable male alcoholics ( $n = 100$ ) in comparison to a population-based male control group ( $n = 131$ ). There were differences between the two groups although the differences were mainly small to moderate in magnitude. Further analyses showed a more heterogeneous pattern among alcoholics than controls in the personality traits impulsiveness and anxiety proneness. The aim of **Study IV** was to investigate alcohol-dependent men and women ( $n = 125$ ) in an inpatient treatment setting and analyse specific characteristics such as substance use and health functioning in these individuals. Gender and two age-groups were compared, respectively, in these characteristics. Differences between genders were found in drinking patterns whereas differences between the two age-groups (29-47 years and 49-69 years) were found in drinking patterns as well as in somatic and mental health. The four studies reveal that there are several important characteristics among socially stable alcoholics that are related to personality, mental and somatic health, drinking patterns as well as treatment experience, barriers for help-seeking and serotonergic neurotransmission. Furthermore, the results suggest that one way to reach these alcoholics could be via alcohol treatment programs at working places and centres of learning and not via the health care system since many of them are less likely to seek treatment for psychiatric and somatic symptoms. It may also be of importance to have an age-perspective in treatment planning for alcohol-dependent individuals, where younger individuals need more of psychiatric consultations whereas their older counterparts instead need more of consultations by medical professionals.

Key words: age, alcoholics, clinical characteristics, social stability, demography, gender, health functioning, personality, serotonin, substance use

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