

Changed Attitudes And Alcohol-related Harm Among  
Women Who Frequent Bars In South Africa: A  
Qualitative Study

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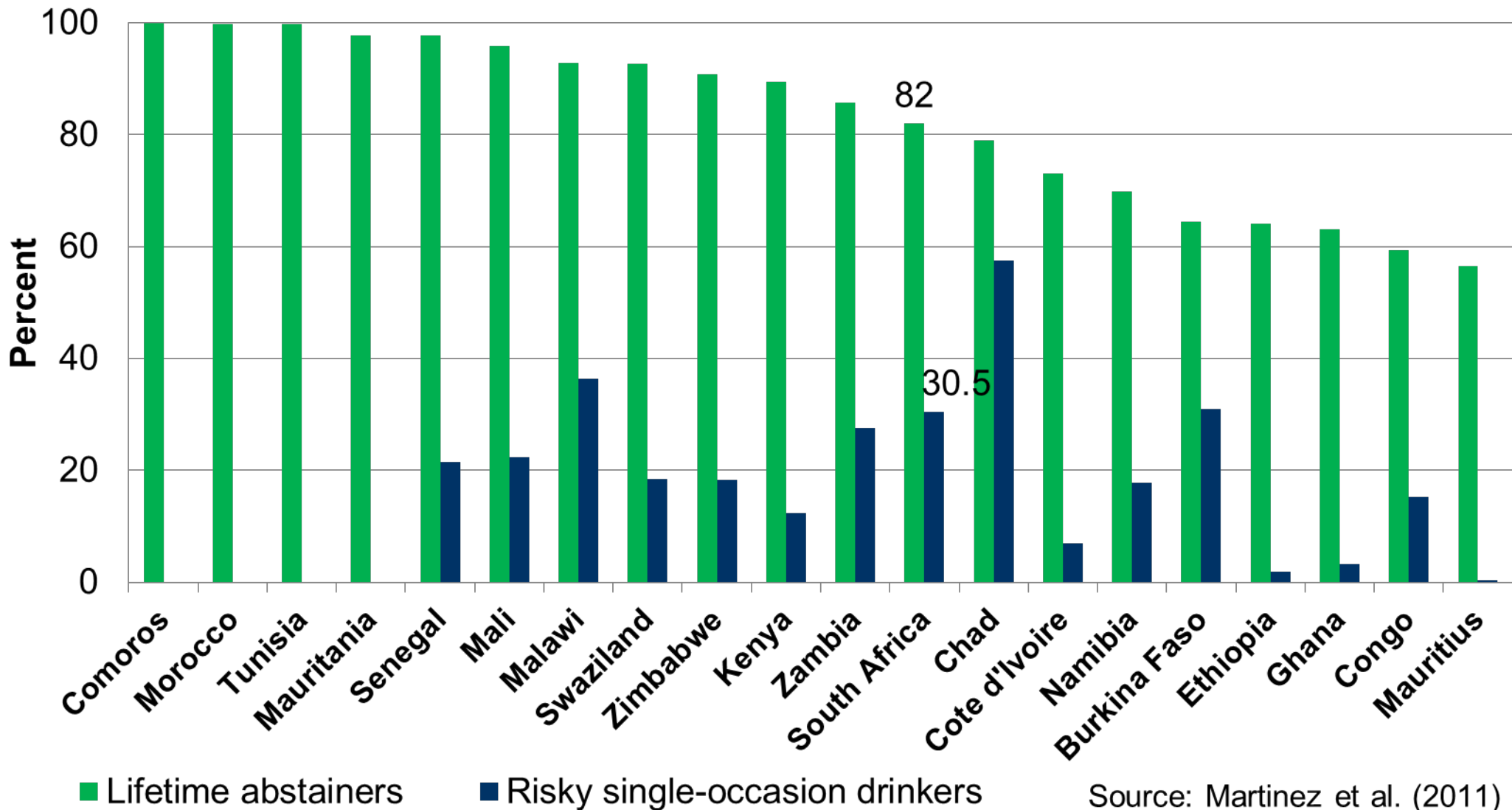
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- Women in sub-Saharan Africa have undergone changes in their degree and patterns of alcohol consumption over the past few decades
- In South Africa women and girls have become more inclined to drink alcohol, drink more frequently and more heavily than previously (Peltzer et al., 2011; Pisa et al., 2010; Ramsoomar & Morojele, 2012)
- Public drinking (consumption in bars, taverns and shebeens) seems to also be on the increase among women
- However, the attitudes and perceptions of bar personnel and fellow bar patrons towards women's alcohol consumption in drinking venues have been under explored

# Lifetime abstainers and risky single-occasion drinkers (current drinkers) among women in 20 African countries

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Source: Martinez et al. (2011)

# Aim of the study

To examine the attitudes and perceptions of bar patrons and servers in North West province (South Africa) regarding the nature and consequences of alcohol consumption among women who frequent drinking venues in North West province, South Africa.

# Setting

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## South Africa

- Socio-economic inequalities
- Unemployment
- Hazardous and harmful use of alcohol
- Gender-based violence/sexual assault

## North West Province

- Two rural communities
- High levels of unemployment, especially among women
- Low literacy
- Poverty



# METHODS

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## 10 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

- 4 groups comprised male bar patrons
- 4 groups comprised female bar patrons
- 2 groups comprised male bar managers/servers

### Participants:

- 58 bar patrons and servers

### Sampling

- Purposive sampling

### Instrument:

- FGD Guide

### Procedure:

- Trained facilitators conducted the FGDs.
- FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed, and themes relating to tavern-going women's alcohol consumption were extracted

Ethical approval granted by the Medical Research Council (MRC) Ethics Committee and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

## 1. Women's drinking behaviour:

- Drinking motives
- Beverage preferences
- Drinking can be beneficial
- Women need to drink responsibly

## 2. Women's alcohol-related harms:

- Types of alcohol-related harms
- Causes of alcohol-related harms
- Overall attitudes towards women in drinking spaces
- Responses of bar personnel and authorities

# Drinking motives

***“I think some people drink for fun.. I mean most of us don't have problems, we just like to chill and enjoy ourselves and dance.. it's about fun.. .“ (Female bar patron)***

***“You enjoy yourself because they say it (alcohol) relieves stress“. (Female bar patron)***

***“When you are a woman and facing problems in your house with your husband not contributing financially you might decide to go to the tavern where you will meet someone who can at least buy you a beer...” (Female bar patron)***



# Beverage preferences

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*“...ladies they like what we call, things like Reds, Castle light, they like that.”  
(Female bar patron)*

*“...in the bars you will mainly find youth. In the evenings, the youth drink ciders. During the day you will find older men drinking beers. **Obviously we are on the cider side.**” (Female bar patron)*

**But, women very often rely on men to buy them alcohol:**

*“...it depends who is buying.. for instance ...you find a group of seven or eight (women) who all depend on this person for drinks. When we are done with him we go to others. You don't buy for yourself.. when you get there and they drink Lite, you do the same, when they buy Cider, you drink the same” (Female bar patron)*

## Drinking can be beneficial

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*“Alcohol is needed/good for you.” (Female bar patron)*

*“According to me, from my side, drinking alcohol.. I agree, neh.. the doctor said this.. there is no total-total, the doctor said you need some wine but they have to tell you how to drink it, you see. They did not say just drink as you wish, they are allowing it so people can get some wine.”  
(Female bar patron)*

# Women need to “drink responsibly”

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*“..alcohol does not bring itself to us, he-eh (no), it is you. A person needs to know what he or she can drink.. when you feel you are getting drunk you need to excuse yourself. You should not just go with the flow.. drink Black Label when someone offers, then Castle.. that is (alcohol) abuse.”  
(Female bar patron)*

*“The problem is the person drinking it.” (Female bar patron)*

# Alcohol-related harms

***“Most of the time in the tavern it is full of people who have the intention to have sex. So when they get in they have to drug a girl, so that she can do the things he wants her to do. It is a pill...they put it in the girls’ drinks, and the girls becomes helpless. She cannot see anything and the guys come and do something they call the belt.” (Male bar server)***

***“It is risky to go (home) alone because you don't know how drunk you will get and who is targeting or following you. You might ask someone to walk you home.. someone you know and are sure about but he can turn against you by demanding that you return the favour.” (Female bar patron)***

# Women are responsible for alcohol-related problems in bars (men)

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*“When you are drunk things happen. Negative, negative and then you become HIV positive (following an unprotected encounter). If only women did not drink.” (Male bar patron)*

*“Most of the fights which happen at the tavern are because of relationships. People, relationships cause problems here. We are all at the taverns having fun. Someone came to the tavern with his girlfriend and I have mine. As time continues I see my girlfriend talking to someone in the corner. And that is where the problems begin. When I approach them I will not find out what they are talking about because I will be drunk, high and feeling insecure with my heart. I will end up hurting him.” (Male bar patron)*

# Women are responsible for alcohol-related problems in bars (women)

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**Facilitator:** *“What can people do to ensure that after drinking they will not be caught in risky sexual practices.”*

**Participant:** *“I say we should respect ourselves.”* (Female bar patron)

**Participant:** *“Respect ourselves, neh?”* (Female bar patron)

**Participant:** *“Eya (yes)...we need to respect ourselves and quit this thing of being at the tavern from Monday to Monday or from weekend to weekend.... We need to respect ourselves and decrease so that you can go home in a better condition.”* (Female bar patron)

## Attitude towards women who frequent bars

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***“Women did not used to go to taverns. The women of today are loose. What kind of woman are you who goes to taverns?” (Male bar patron)***

***“We cannot say it (alcohol misuse) is a problem that is affecting men only because even women now are drinking terribly. You cannot believe it. If you can go to taverns now...the shebeens around...you are going to find women there. When you look at them you cannot believe that such a kind of person can get involved in such kind of behaviour.” (Male bar patron)***

# Attitude towards women who drink alcohol

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***“That is why I say women are not good. Women who like alcohol are not good.” (Male server)***

***“Please forgive me for what I’m about to say. A woman who loves alcohol, is not a woman.” (Male server)***



## Responses of bar personnel and authorities

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***“...there is a type of dance called 'tshwetla' and when someone is drunk or pretends to be she will dance seductively and undress while guys are watching. That (sex with a woman who behaves in this manner) cannot be rape and when the police come, others will testify that you asked for it.”***  
(Female bar patron)

***“Going home at that time (2 am) is risky, you might be killed or raped. When you go and report the incident in the morning they will ask you where you were and what time you left. If you say that you left the pub at 2 am they will ask, “what you were thinking?”.”*** (Female bar patron)

***“What I like most about our pubs is that when someone bothers you, you can report them. They will chase the person away or deal with them, they don't just ignore the situation.”*** (Female bar patron)

# DISCUSSION

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- **Alcohol consumption and drinking spaces continue to be gendered**
  - Women are not fully accepted in drinking venues (men's terrain)
  - If women do drink, they are expected to keep it under control
  - Women are at risk of sexual risk behaviour, violence, rape
  - Women (but rarely men) are blamed for problems that occur in drinking spaces
- **Many aspects of the women's manner of drinking resemble media messages about alcohol consumption**

# Issues/Limitations

- **Transferability of findings to other settings (e.g. urban settings)**
- **Sole reliance on focus group discussions**
- **Social desirability of responses**

# Implications

## Interventions

- **Appropriate gender transformative programmes and policies are needed to minimise harms/increase safety among women who frequent bars, taverns and other drinking venues in rural communities**
- **Need to sensitise tavern-goers, community and police about gender equality**

## Further research

- **Quantitative**
- **Replication in diverse communities**

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