Factors influencing alcohol trajectories in emerging adulthood (FIAT)

Summary

Unhealthy alcohol use and alcohol use disorder (AUD) peak in emerging adulthood (18–25 years old) and then generally decrease (mature out) for most individuals transitioning in adulthood. However, not all individuals follow the same developmental trajectories. Some individuals fail to mature out, others with low or no risk in the early 20s further develop at risk alcohol use, whereas others show low / no risk trajectories. Prevention requires a better understanding of the risk and protective factors associated with the development of unhealthy alcohol use and AUD.

Earlier studies identified a range of factors from different domains associated with favourable / detrimental trajectories, e.g., family background, peer environment, mental health, personality, endorsement of social roles. However, most studies were conducted among college students and in countries (USA and Northern Europe) with different drinking cultures than in South-Western European countries like France, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy. Moreover, several studies suffer of insufficient data quality to make causal inference and failed to consider the contribution of a large number of factors simultaneously.

The present proposal seeks funding to overcome these limitations by taking advantage of the data from the Cohort Study on Substance Use risk factors (C-SURF), a recently terminated study. C-SURF is a four-wave cohort study of 6528 Swiss young men followed from age 20 to 28. At age 20, 21, 25, and 28, participants completed questionnaires on alcohol use and AUD, and on a large number of hypothesized associated factors. C-SURF has many strengths including a large sample from the general population covering 21 out of 26 cantons, high response rates and minimal non-response bias.

The general aim of this project is to investigate the factors associated with the development of alcohol use and AUD in emerging adulthood using the four waves of the C-SURF dataset. More specifically, it aims to explore the development of alcohol use and AUD from age 20 to 28 and to identify prototypical developmental trajectories (aim 1), to investigate the associations of factors measured at age 20 (aim 2) and changes in social roles from age 20 to 28 (aim 3) with these developmental trajectories. The fourth aim is to investigate the mutual influence and the co-development of AUD, depression and ADHD.

The proposed project addresses an important public health issue. The availability of a four-wave dataset over 8 years offers the opportunity to capture significant changes and to use complex models with the flexibility to identify non-linear developmental trajectories. From a theoretical, clinical, and public health perspective, the identification of the factors associated with the development of unhealthy alcohol use and AUD has important implications. It can inform the development of evidenced-based prevention and intervention strategies to target specific behavioural, environmental, or social factors contributing to unhealthy alcohol use and AUD and can potentially foster early detection of vulnerable individuals and their orientation to structures of care.