

High alcohol use is a strong predictor of high risk sexual behaviour among men and women in South Africa

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BACKGROUND

The HIV and STI burden in South Africa is one of the highest in the world. Many studies showed increased risk of HIV in those using alcohol (Fisher et al. 2007 and Shisana et al. 2009). Alcohol is also associated with HIV and sexual risk behaviours in several settings (Weiser et al. 2006, Thompson et al. 2005, etc.) We evaluated the associations between alcohol use measures and sexual risk behaviours in South Africa using national data.

METHOD

A nationally representative cross-sectional survey conducted in 2009 recruited 4,437 men and 5,291 women aged 16 to 55 years. The associations between three measures of alcohol use (ever use, frequency of drinking and hazardous drinking) and three sexual risk behaviours (multiple sexual partnerships, transactional sex and unsafe sex, defined as not using a condom with non-primary sexual partner) in men and women were assessed. We also explored associations with composite risk behaviour which was computed by adding up the number of sexual risks reported by respondents. All models adjusted for eight a priori confounders.

RESULTS

More men (57%) than women (33%) reported ever consuming alcohol (Table 1).

In men, all three measures of alcohol use were independently associated with multiple sexual partnerships. Men who drink daily were about three times more likely to have multiple sexual partners than non-drinkers (Adjusted OR [AOR]: 3.4, 95% CI: 2.4-4.7) and two times more likely to practice unsafe sex (AOR: 1.8, 95% CI: 1.1-2.9).

In women, alcohol use measures were associated with multiple sexual partnerships but not transactional sex or unsafe sex. In both groups, the frequency of composite risk behaviour increased with the frequency and quantity of alcohol use (Proportional odds ratio for women who drink: 1.7, 95% CI: 1.1-2.4). These associations were generally more pronounced in women than in men.

CONCLUSION

Alcohol use was associated with several sexual risk behaviours in men and women. Understanding the role of alcohol in HIV risk behaviours in men and women is important for social and behavioural change communication as well as structural interventions for reducing HIV incidence.

	Men (n = 4,437)	Women (n = 5,291)
Mean age	31	32
Single	54%	48%
Completed matric	32%	32%
Unemployed	35%	57%
Ever drank alcohol consumption (Y)	57%	33%
Drink several times weekly	13%	3%
Hazardous drinking	40%	14%
Sex under alcohol influence	16%	8%
Shebeen one-night stand	7%	4%

TABLE 1: PATTERNS OF ALCOHOL USE

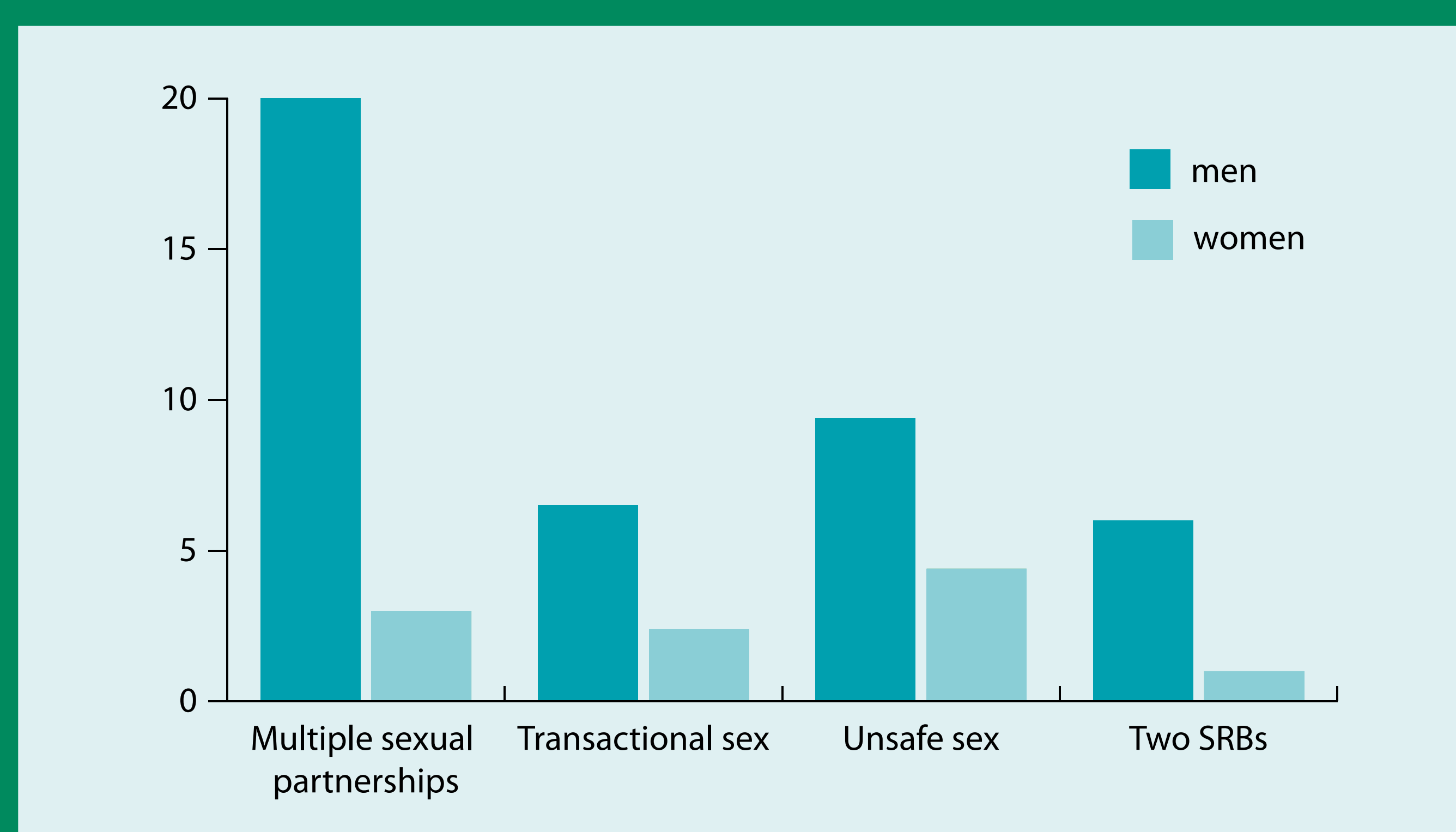


FIGURE 1: PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOURS

	Multiple sexual partnerships AOR (p-value)	Transactional sex AOR (p-value)	Unsafe sex AOR (p-value)	Composite risk AOR (p-value)
Ever drank alcohol				
No	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Yes	2.4 (<0.05)	0.8 (>0.05)	1.2 (>0.05)	80%
Frequency of drinking				
None	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Not in the past month	1.7 (0.05)	1.1 (>0.05)	1.2 (>0.05)	1.5 (<0.05)
Once a month	1.8 (<0.05)	0.4 (<0.05)	1.0 (>0.05)	1.2 (>0.05)
Once per week	2.6 (<0.05)	0.9 (>0.05)	1.2 (>0.05)	1.8 (<0.05)
>Once per week	3.4 (<0.05)	1.0 (>0.05)	1.8 (<0.05)	2.3 (<0.05)
Hazardous drinking				
None	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never/rarely	1.7 (0.05)	0.8 (>0.05)	1.5 (>0.05)	1.4 (<0.05)
Sometimes	2.1 (<0.05)	0.8 (<0.05)	0.8 (>0.05)	1.4 (<0.05)
Often	3.7 (<0.05)	1.4 (>0.05)	1.9 (<0.05)	2.6 (<0.05)

TABLE 2: ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN MEASURES OF ALCOHOL USE AND SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOURS: MEN

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