

Social Bonding/Integration and Alcohol Use in the Chinese Union of Seventh-day Adventists

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Purpose – The purpose of this analysis is to examine the relationship between alcohol use and attachment and commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist church as well as involvement with and belief in the core doctrines among members of the Chinese Union Mission.

Conceptual Framework – There is a long tradition of examining the relationship between religiosity and substance use. One of the major perspectives used is called Social Control/Bonding Theory (Hirschi, 1969). That perspective does not ask the question “why does someone engage in deviant behavior?, but rather” why don’t they”! Social bonding theory is rooted in Durkheim’s work on social integration (Durkheim, 1995). That perspective argues that human being do not engage in deviant behavior if they are integrated into a group/society that forbids that behavior. Social bonding theory formulated by Hirschi focused on four aspects of control/bonding; attachment to conventional others or institutions, involvement in conventional activities, commitment to the future and belief in conventional norms. There is considerable empirical support for this perspective in Western Culture (Bailey and Timoti, 2016, Baltazar et al., 2010; Burnett et al., 2016; Hopkins et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2014; McBride et al., 2005; 2013; Yang et al., 2013). However there is limited application of this perspective outside of Western Culture.

Methodology – The data were collected as a part of a wider study of global members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The questionnaire was design by a team of researchers at Andrews University and translated into local languages. The project received IRB approval. The questionnaire focused on a very variety of issues from doctrinal adherence, involvement with the faith community, and attitudes toward a wide variety of social and religious issues. Over 1100 useable surveys were collected. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is an alcohol abstinent church, we chose alcohol use in the last year as the dependent variable.

Findings – A consistent significant inverse relationship was found between alcohol use and frequency of attendance at religious meetings, involvement in church leadership, commitment to remaining an Adventist, acceptance of core doctrines, and a positive evaluation of their local church. There was also a significant inverse relationship between social justice commitment and alcohol use. There was a positive relationships between a commitment to social justice and involvement with the Church and adherence to its doctrines.

Conclusions – The data suggest that social bonding/integration is a useful conceptual framework to examining substance use in a major non-western culture. The data imply that for members of the Chinese Union the frequency of involvement with the church, a future

commitment to remain in the church, acceptance of core doctrines and a social justice commitment are protective against alcohol use. These data suggest that engaging members in the church, obtaining a commitment to a future in the church, internalization of core beliefs and a commitment to applying the justice principles outlined by Jesus may have a protective effect on a key component of the health message of the church, alcohol abstinence.

Abstract

The relationship between alcohol use and social bonding with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in China was examined. There was inverse relationship between alcohol and commitment to, involvement with and belief in the Adventist Church in China. These findings indicate that social bonding theory may be useful in non-western cultures.

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