

Screening for Drinking Problems in the Elderly in Singapore Using the CAGE Questionnaire

Clarissa WY Ong^{*}, ¹BA, Vathsala Sagayadevan^{*}, ¹BPsych (Hons), Edimansyah Abidin, ¹PhD, Saleha Binte Shafie, ¹BSocSci, Anitha Jeyagurunathan, ¹MA, MPhil (Social Work), Goi Khia Eng, ²BA (Social Sciences), Louisa Picco, ¹MPH, Janhavi Vaingankar, ¹MSc, Siow Ann Chong, ¹MMed, MD, FAMS, Mythily Subramaniam, ¹MBBS, MHSM

Abstract

Introduction: Given that past research on drinking problems has focused primarily on younger samples, the present study sought to examine the prevalence and correlates of alcohol use among the elderly in Singapore. **Materials and Methods:** Data were extracted from the Well-being of the Singapore Elderly (WiSE) study, a cross-sectional, epidemiological survey conducted among a nationally representative sample of Singapore residents (n = 2565) aged 60 years and above. Variables assessed include drinking problems, depression and anxiety symptoms, obesity, smoking status, chronic physical disorders and disability. **Results:** The weighted prevalence of drinking problems (CAGE score ≥ 2) in our sample was 4.2%. Male sex, Indian ethnicity, and being divorced or separated were associated with a significantly higher likelihood of drinking problems. Participants with drinking problems were also more likely to have subthreshold depression. There were no significant differences in disability among those with drinking problems, those without drinking problems and non-drinkers, after adjusting for demographic variables. **Conclusion:** Our findings contribute to the body of research that indicates an association between drinking problems and depressive symptoms among the elderly. Thus, screening for depressive symptoms in the elderly with drinking problems may be useful in identifying such comorbidities in order to aid treatment planning.

Ann Acad Med Singapore 2016;45:456-65

Key words: Alcohol consumption, Epidemiology

¹Research Division, Institute of Mental Health, Singapore

²Division of Psychology, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Address for Correspondence: Ms Vathsala Sagayadevan, Research Division, Institute of Mental Health, 10 Buangkok View, Singapore 539747.

Email: vathsala_sagayadevan@imh.com.sg

^{*}Clarissa Ong and Vathsala Sagayadevan are joint first authors.