

## **ALCOHOL: FROM MESOPOTAMIA TO MODERN IRAQ**

M Alansari<sup>1</sup>, K Conigrave<sup>2,1</sup>, A Dawson<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sydney School of Public Health, Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney, NSW, Australia. <sup>2</sup>Drug Health Services, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Camperdown, NSW, Australia. <sup>3</sup>Faculty of Health, University of Technology, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

**Introduction:** Home to one of the oldest human civilisations, Iraq's relationship with alcohol is a long and neglected story. This presentation will outline research undertaken to provide insight into the little known historical context of alcohol use in Iraq. Such insights help to study modern attitudes and consumption patterns.

**Method / Approach:** A structured search of peer reviewed and grey literature was undertaken to identify alcohol related practices, norms and values across the millennia in Iraq. Islamic jurisprudential texts were also examined to identify the Islamic view of alcohol. Contemporary research studies of alcohol in Iraq were analysed to identify knowledge gaps.

**Key Findings:** Archaeological evidence demonstrates that Mesopotamia is one of the first regions where alcohol was consumed. The rise of Islam in the 6<sup>th</sup> century greatly reduced alcohol production and consumption in the region, however alcohol production and use continued until the modern day and is still consumed for cultural, psychological and other reasons.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** In contemporary Iraqi society, alcohol consumption is a multi-faceted issue, influenced by personal and social phenomena. Ongoing conflict, poverty, lack of basic living needs, cultural resistance, religiosity and political instability are all closely linked to people's attitude towards alcohol consumption. Thus, alcohol in Iraqi society, is more than a mere beverage with health consequences, but a substance that reflects the challenges, such as trauma experienced by living in a fragile state, faced by the Iraqi people whose majority is under 30 years of age.

**Implications for Translational Research:** Currently little is known about the attitude and consumption of alcohol in Iraq, especially amongst young people. An understanding of the historical context and background to alcohol is essential to inform research and policy.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** The Australasian Professional Society for Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD) recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in all written publications.

No conflict of interest.