Are too many drinking too much too early? Alcohol use in middle childhood among Ugandan children

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Background
• Substance misuse among children outside adult care are acknowledged, but this is not known in the general population.
• Objective: Investigate alcohol use in middle childhood (5-8 years) among children with adult care in Uganda.

Subjects and methods
• Instruments: Child psychiatric assessment by a child psychiatrist (JN) using MINI-KID (DSM4).
• Site, time: Mbale district, Eastern Uganda (Fig 1), 2014.
• Research project: ‘SeeTheChild - Mental child health in Uganda’ (STC).

• 149 children were recruited from the study “PROMISE Saving Brains (SB) in Burkina Faso and Uganda” *.
• Vulnerable children were selected based on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ), parent version.
  ✓ 122 vulnerable children with SDQ score of ≥ 14 (SDQ high).
  ✓ 27 control cases with SDQ score < 14 (SDQ normal).

Results
• Similar socio-demographic characteristics for SDQ high and SDQ normal children, Table 1.
• Alcohol abuse was frequent (8.2%) among SDQ high children, Table 2.
• Type of alcohol used was local brew: Malwa, Indali, Busera made from millet.

Table 2. Alcohol use among 5-7 year old children with high and normal SDQ scores

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<tr>
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<th>SDQ high</th>
<th>SDQ normal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol abuse</td>
<td>10/122 (8.2%)</td>
<td>1/27 (3.5%)</td>
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<td>Alcohol dependence</td>
<td>5/122 (4.1%)</td>
<td>1/27 (3.5%)</td>
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Table 1. Mean socio-demographic data

Maternal age, years | SDQ-high | SDQ-normal |
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<td>33.4</td>
<td>33.7</td>
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Maternal education, years | SDQ-high | SDQ-normal |
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<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
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Child age, years | SDQ-high | SDQ-normal |
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<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
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Child schooling, months | SDQ-high | SDQ-normal |
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<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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Socio-economic quintile | SDQ-high | SDQ-normal |
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<td>2.6</td>
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Conclusion
• Alcohol misuse should be suspected and explored in middle childhood among children eligible for referral to child psychiatrists or scoring high on screening tools like SDQ.
• Alcohol misuse in middle childhood also exist where there is adult care.

Qualitative citations from clinical interviews:
“Alcohol makes them men” - A Father
“For me I am old enough to drink but my brother is still young” - 7 year old boy
Source: Nalugya J. 2014

Study registry number: ClinicalTrials.gov: NCT01882335
The PROMISE SB cohort included 5-7 year old children having participated in a exclusive breastfeeding promotion trial “PROMISE EBF” in infancy. Of 765 enrolled mother – newborn-child pairs in the PROMISE EBF study (2006-2008), Promise Saving Brains in Uganda saw 543 (71%) child-caretaker pairs again when the children had reached 5-7 years.