

The Experience of Alcohol Use in Young People with Severe Mental Illness: An Interpretive
Phenomenological Analysis

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Clinical Psychology

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Declarations

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library**, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a published paper/s/scholarly work of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint publication/s/scholarly work.

Acknowledgement of Collaboration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, clearly outlining the extent of collaboration, with whom and under what auspices.

I, Caroline Anderson, attest that I was responsible for the review of literature and writing of the manuscript contained within this thesis. I conducted the recruitment of

participants, the semi-structured interviews, transcribing of data, and analysis of data.

Professor Amanda Baker and Sonja Pohlman designed the study, and Sonja Pohlman also independently analysed the data. Both Sonja Pohlman and myself contributed to the interpretation of the data and implications of the findings. Drafts of the manuscript were forwarded to Professor Amanda Baker, Associate Professor Sean Halpin, Dr Kristen McCarter, and Sonja Pohlman for review, and amendments were made based on their feedback.

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Manuscript formatted for the Qualitative Report (See Appendix A for the Instructions to Authors for this journal)

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Abstract

Poorer health for Australians living with a mental illness is a public health concern. There is a high prevalence of comorbid substance misuse in people living with severe mental illness (SMI), and alcohol misuse is a key factor in cardiovascular disease, cancer and obesity. Research suggests a better understanding of how people with SMI use substances such as alcohol is needed. The present study aimed to explore the experience of young people with SMI who use alcohol. Participants ($n=8$, aged 18-25) were residents of a medium term mental health treatment facility, and completed interviews and self-report questionnaires. Data was analysed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach, with five superordinate themes emerging: mental health and wellbeing; alcohol as a means to navigate the social world; alcohol to control internal states; alcohol to feel normal; and ambivalence about alcohol use. Questionnaire data suggested alcohol was the most commonly used substance amongst participants, participants tended to understate their alcohol consumption in interview, and alcohol was most frequently used for social and enhancement reasons. Alcohol use was seen as an important social tool, a way to control aspects of life that SMI had impacted, and a way to feel normal around peers. The results aid understanding of how and why young people in Australia with a SMI use alcohol and may assist with future interventions to reduce alcohol related harm. Interventions for young people with a SMI who misuse alcohol should take a holistic approach and explore the function of alcohol in the young person's life.

Keywords: alcohol, motivation, severe mental illness, youth