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Alcohol and Health Inequalities: Life Stories of Middle-aged Men in Lithuania

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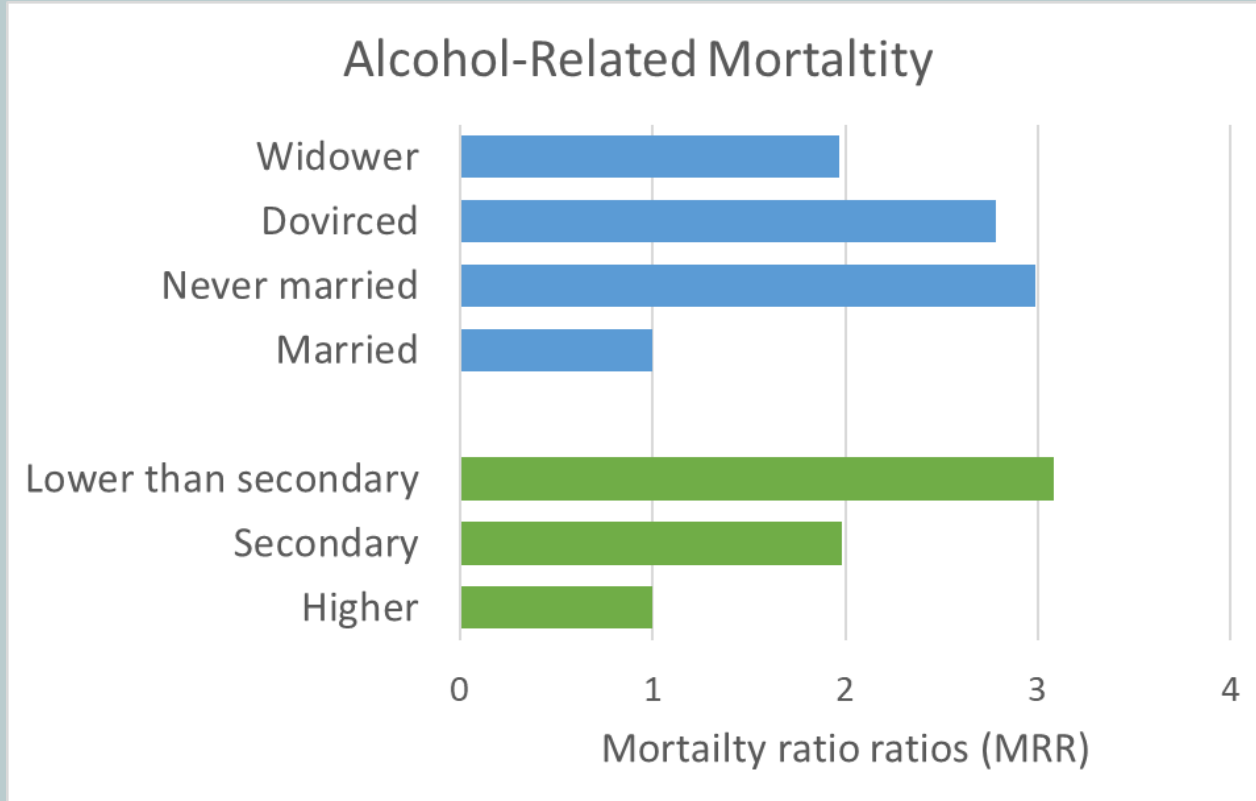
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Background. Fewer Chances to Survive

- Previous studies show that in Lithuania, men were experiencing high socioeconomic mortality differentials, high mortality from external causes of death and high **alcohol-related** mortality (Stumbrys et al., 2020; Jasilionis et al., 2015).
- Alcohol-related mortality was higher among men with lower levels of education, unmarried, unemployed, and in manual work (Jasilionis et al., 2015; Stumbrys, 2023).

Socio-Economic Differentials in Alcohol-Related Mortality



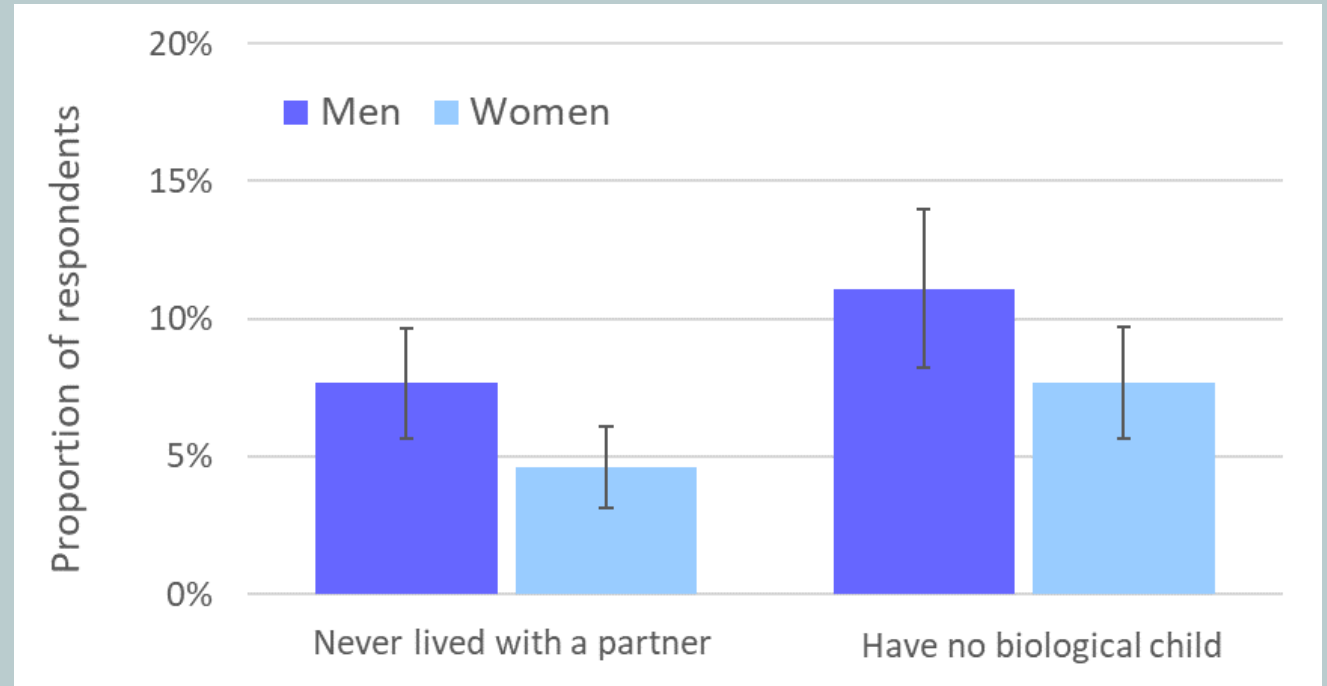
- The risk of alcohol-related mortality was higher among men who lived **without a partner**.
- The risk of alcohol-related mortality was higher among men who were from **lower socio-economic** status groups.

Background. Fewer Chances to Have Children

- Previous studies have shown that **men** population with no biological children has been found to be higher than that of women (Rotkirch & Miettinen, 2017; Stumbrys et al., 2024).
- Recent study found that in Lithuania, higher proportion of childless men were among those with lower education levels and **lower incomes** (Stumbrys et al., 2024).

Men Childlessness

- The difference in having a biological child was largest between men from low and high **income** categories
- Findings indicate the strong relationship between individual's **socioeconomic** background and childlessness (Stumbrys et al., 2024).



Note. Data source: European Social Survey (9), 2018. Differences between genders were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

Aim of the Presentation

The aim of this presentation is to reveal how health-damaging behaviour is internalized and reproduced among middle-aged men in Lithuania. Furthermore, I aimed to reveal the associations between health inequalities, alcohol abuse and childlessness.

Data and Methods

- Analysis is based on two samples:
 - 22 qualitative interviews with **heavy-drinking men** aged 30-59 in Lithuania (2019).
 - 24 qualitative interviews with **childless men** aged 45-59 in Lithuania (2023).
- Interviews were analysed using standard procedures of qualitative analysis (Ritchie and Lewis 2013).
- Qualitative data analysis tool – MAXQDA.

Findings

Five main thematic clusters

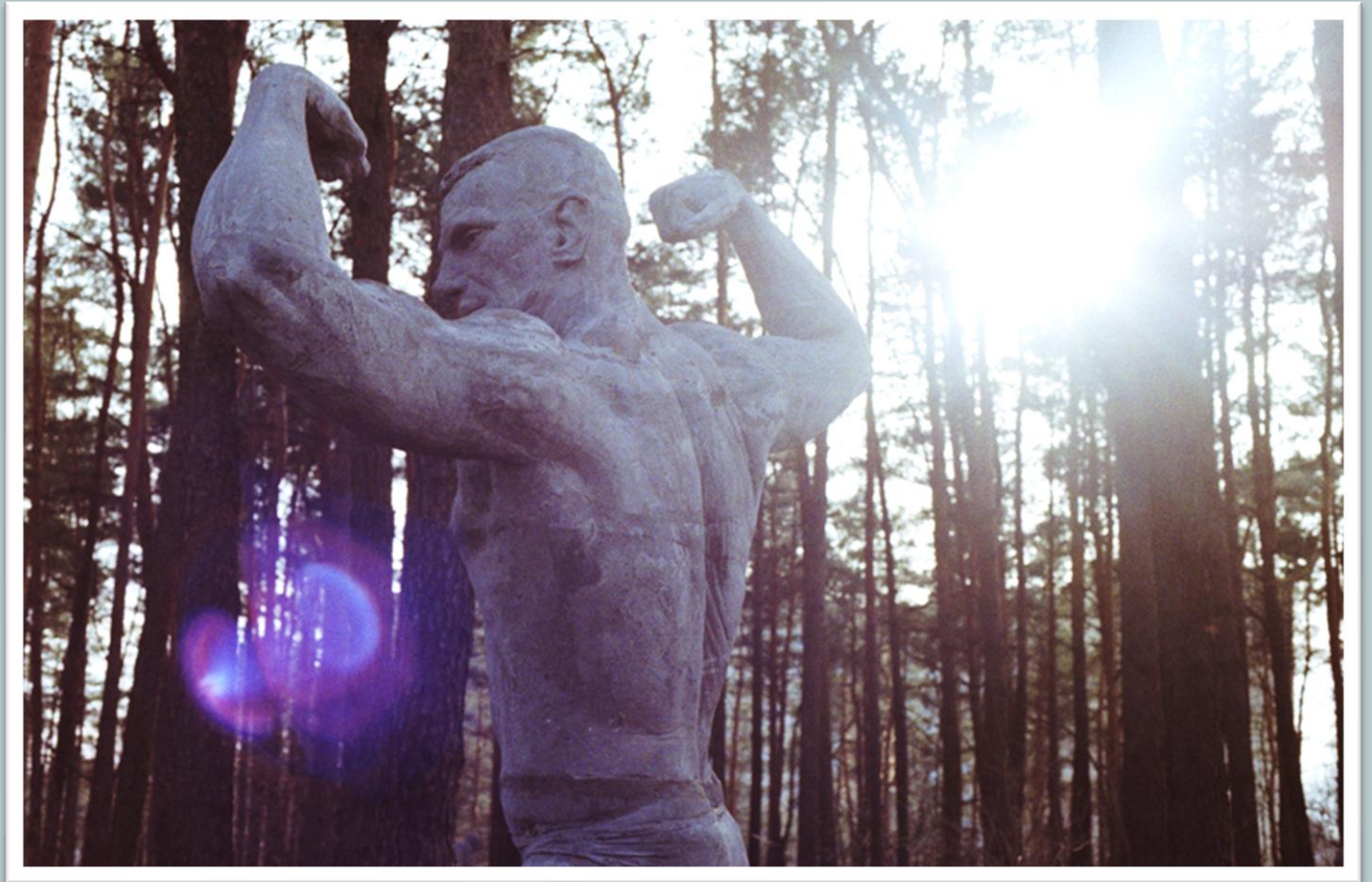
1. Drinking culture
2. Psychosocial stress
3. Critical life events
4. Health and injuries
5. Loneliness and childlessness

1. Drinking Culture

- Middle-aged men has internalised **harmful soviet drinking culture** during their early life.
- Early start, **tolerance** to heavy alcohol use in family, workplace, and society.
- Understanding alcohol as a necessary attribute for every **'real man'**.

1. Drinking Culture

- *If there is a celebration, it means there is a party. You should have **vodka** on the table. Especially if it is a big party (Augustas, 32).*
- *I was waiting for a Friday and **drinking at workplace** already. Taxi was driving us home [after work]. <...> Alcohol on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (Vadim, 39).*

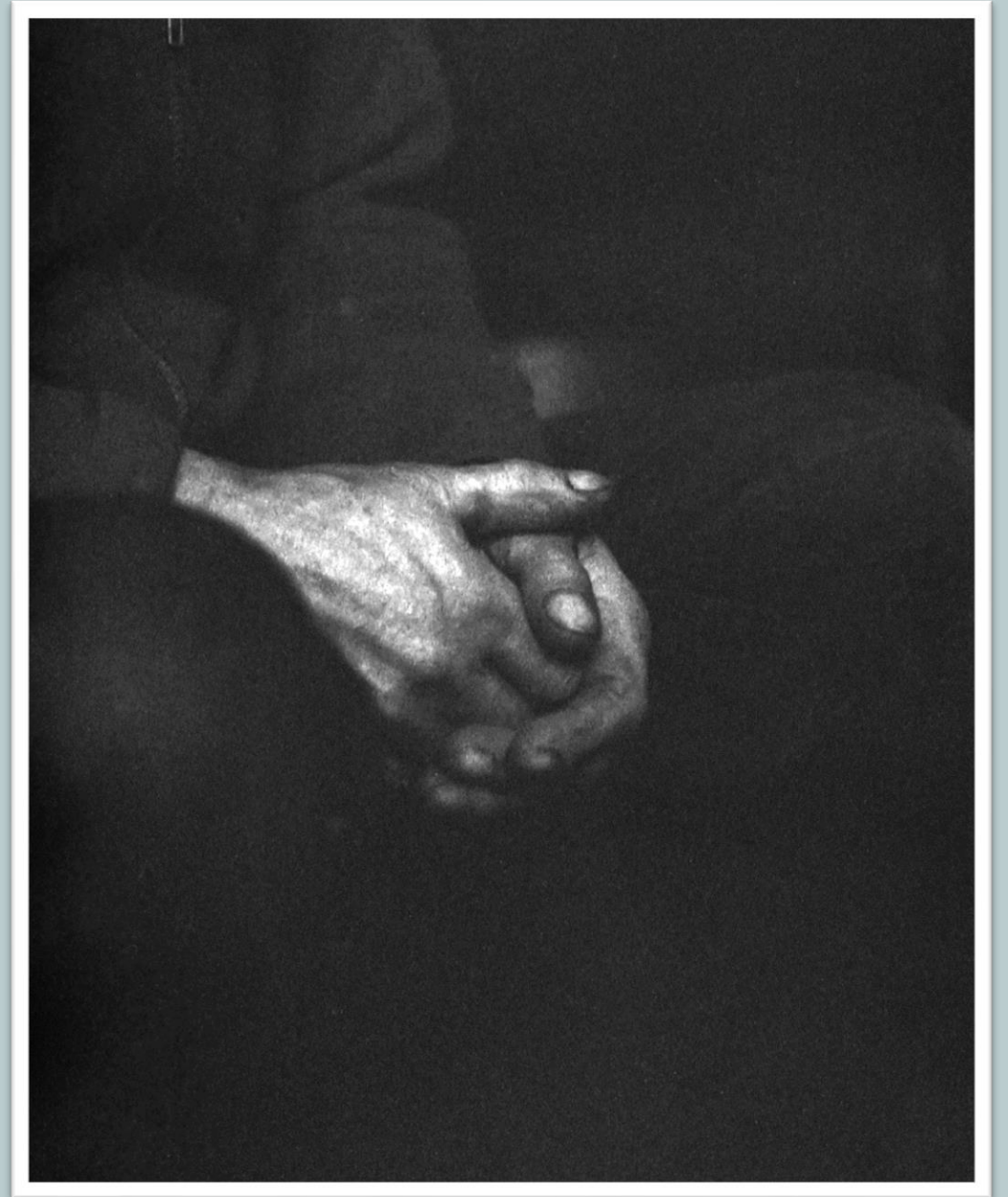


2. Psychosocial Stress

- During the first years of the post-Soviet period Lithuania has faced serious economic and **social challenges** which had negative effect to working-age males health.
- Men were suffering psychosocial stress and **negative emotions**, such as indifference, desperation, and fear.
- They felt **shame** about their socioeconomic status, loss of property, ruined families, abandoned children, and unfulfilled expectations.

2. Psychosocial Stress

- *There was another situation, when I found my uncle and cousin... [**they both hung out themselves**]. It was really hard to stand it. However, I can handle the difficulties (Vincas, 49).*
- *I had everything when I didn't drink. And when I started again and **I don't have anything** (Rapolas, 44).*



3. Critical Life Events

- Critical life events, such as divorce, death of a loved one, job or home loss, crime were important factors who led to internalize **health-damaging practices**.
- In some cases alcohol was a **key factor** which led critical event to happen. While in other cases some critical life events turned men to heavily alcohol use.

3. Critical Life Events

- *I was left by family. I had two families and **both broke up because of alcohol**. One was in Lithuania before going abroad, so I ruined everything (Kazys, 44).*
- *The worst thing was when I got these scars. I was probably fifteen years old. We were at the disco and I was **beaten that I have had to be death** (Jurgis, 47).*

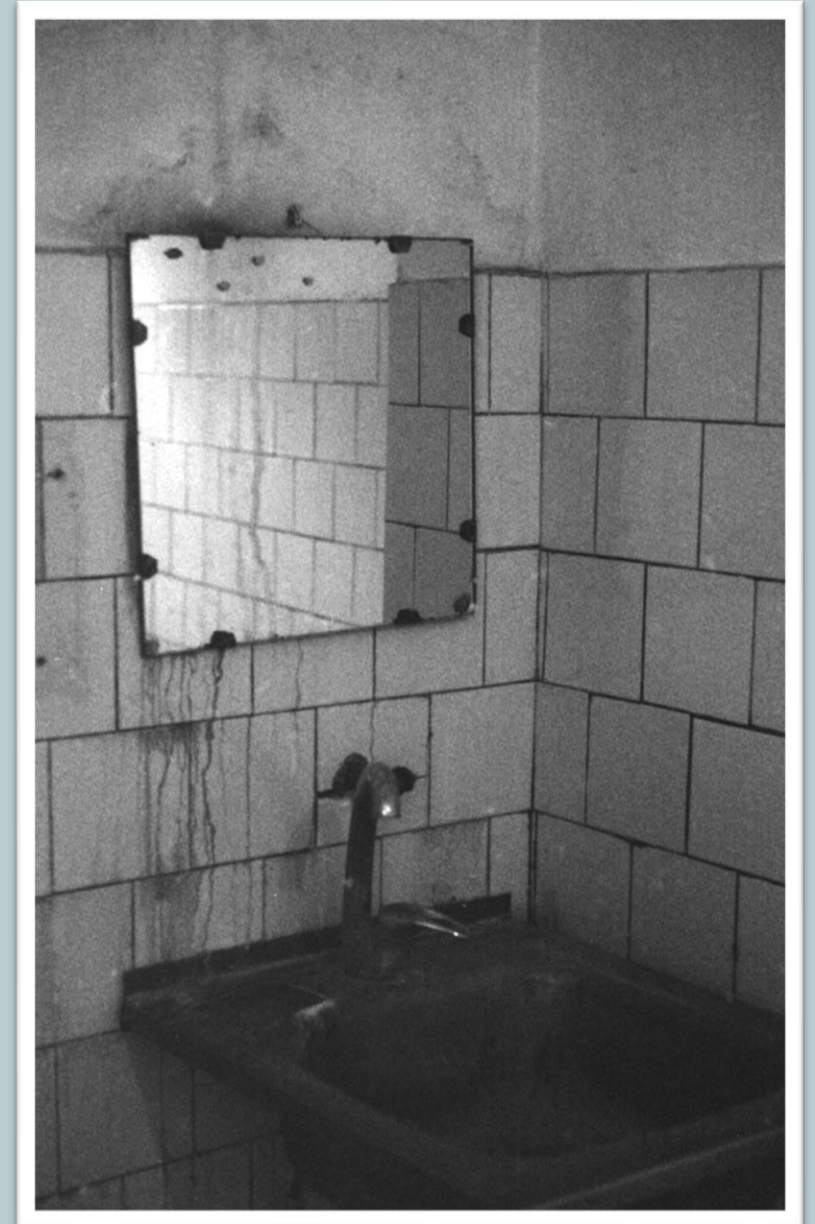


4. Health and Injuries

- ‘**Repair beer**’ during a hangover were common practice among informants. This health damaging practice became a part of Lithuanian drinking culture.
- Middle-aged men reported lots of **health problems** related to alcohol use. Narratives revealed that alcohol abuse was also related to **injuries** and external causes of death.

4. Health and Injuries

- *There were a lot of injuries. I won't even count those injuries. I was broken, beaten, cut and stitched; and there is a buzz in my ears. My mental health is **totally damaged by alcohol** (Kazys 44).*
- *Constantly. In some periods [I was having a 'repair beer'] **every day**. There were moments when I felt a hangover for two days without drinking (Giedrius, 34).*



5. Loneliness and Childlessness

- Men suffered from **loneliness**, guilt over lost families and abandoned children.
- Men expressed a sense of **sadness** that grows over time as they age. This illustrates a gradual realization of the diminishing chances of having children due to biological limitations or socioeconomic conditions.

5. Loneliness and Childlessness

- *There was never a moment that I didn't want a child. But such thoughts come when you think that **my train has already left**. <...>The more years go by, the sadder it gets. Well, those chances are going away (Rimantas, 51)*
- *Well, I thought about having a family when I was about 27. But my bad habits, **alcoholism** in a sense, also made those relationships very bad (Jūras, 51).*



Conclusions

Factors that are crucial for the internalisation and reproduction of health-damaging behaviours:

1. Drinking culture
2. Psychosocial stress
3. Critical life events
4. Health and injuries
5. Loneliness and childlessness

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Thank you!

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