

Research shows a link between alcoholism and memory

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A University of Sussex leading expert on the psychological effects of drinking told an audience at the BA Festival of Science this week that the effect alcohol has on memory could contribute to alcoholism.

Professor Dora Duka, an experimental psychologist, said that her studies show alcohol facilitates memories for emotional events experienced before intoxication (mostly positive) and impairs memories for emotional events experienced after intoxication (often negative). This can lead drinkers to believe in the positive effects of alcohol rather than see its drawbacks.

"The effects of alcohol on mood are known contributors to its use and abuse," she said. "It is less known how its effects on memory and inhibitory control add to alcohol being an addictive drug. Alcohol effects on memory may be a factor in the development of alcoholism."

Professor Duka gave her presentation at the festival, held this year at the University of Liverpool, alongside other academic experts in the field of alcohol addiction.

Professor Duka's recent research at Sussex has also shown that alcohol damages our emotional judgment. Social heavy drinkers who binge drink show inability to withhold an inappropriate response when sober. She said: "They also are worse in planning than their counterparts that do not binge drink. These findings are seen more in females. Although male binge drinkers are usually found to drink more alcohol overall than female binge drinkers, their binge scores are lower. Presumably this reflects a lower tolerance of females, so that female drinkers, although they consume less, may become drunk more often when drinking."

She added: "Alcohol's acute effects on inhibitory control can lead to binge drinking. More

importantly, binge drinking induces impairments that are not seen in non-binge drinking even if the amounts of alcohol drunk per week are the same."

Professor Duka now intends to examine the effect of binge drinking on learning about rewards and punishment. Such research will give information about possible changes in emotional sensitivity in binge drinkers. This project is part of a larger body of research funded by the Medical Research Council.

Provided by University of Sussex

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