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Why beer harms science

By Roger Highfield, Science Editor

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Beer is bad for science, according to a pioneering study of the effects of alcohol on creativity in research.

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Although scientists spend much time agonising over how to measure scientific productivity and revealing what influences it, none of them have looked into the effects of social life.

One of the most frequent social activities in the world is drinking alcohol - around two billion are thought to partake - and Dr Tomas Grim, who is a behavioural ecologist at Palacky University, Czech Republic, decided to investigate, reporting the discovery that it harms science in the prestigious ecological journal *Oikos*.

In Europe, most alcohol is consumed as beer, according to the World Health Organisation. "Based on well known negative effects of alcohol consumption on cognitive performance, I predicted negative correlations between beer consumption and several measures of scientific performance," Dr Grim says.

Like his fellow ecologists, who tend to focus on a single species in a single population, to eliminate non alcohol related confounding factors, he focused on one particularly impressive country of beer swillers.

Using a survey of the publications since 1980 of avian ecologists from the Czech Republic, which has the highest per capita beer consumption rate in the world (157 litres each year, or 176 pints), he discovered "that increasing per capita beer consumption is associated with lower numbers of papers, total citations, and citations per paper (a surrogate measure of paper quality)."



A glass and bottle of Czech beer Pilsner Urquell

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He has confidence in the findings because nine in every 10 avian ecologists he approached were happy to provide data. Whether the one in 10 who declined to take part were too busy drinking in the local pub is not known.

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In addition Dr Grim found the same predicted trends in comparison of two separate geographic areas within the Czech Republic that are also known to differ in beer consumption rates.

"These correlations are consistent with the possibility that leisure time social activities might influence the quality and quantity of scientific work and may be potential sources of publication and citation biases."

He tells The Daily Telegraph that he has received encouraging reactions from 30 scientists around the world. "One of the letters sums nicely what actually was my main aim: "I find your study fascinating because it is so rare to see anyone willing to analyse what probably has the greatest impact on research results: ourselves and our own behaviour as researchers. I hope to see more studies like this in the future."

Dr Grim calls on his peers to extend his pioneering work on the Czech Republic to other alcohol drinking nations.

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