

# Alcohol Misuse: Stories from the Early Industrialism in Sweden

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## Abstract

In the present investigation, misuse of alcohol during the early industrialization in Sweden from the 1870s and onward has been front and center. New ways of living emerged among male workers. Alcohol received a prominent role. A main objective here is to find and analyze stories from self experienced situations where alcohol misuse was widely common and excessive. I want to get an insider perspective from those misusing to the stories told by those being around them. It was commonly considered that certain working class individuals were the ones being misusers. During the late 1800s, it was easy to get your hands on large quantities of cheap alcohol in stores, illicit liquor shops, taverns and from mobile pushers. Adverse effects of drinking in the new industrial communities could be both violence towards individuals around and ruining of the economy of the workers' families. Workers' associations, sobriety associations and the wives of workers became active counterbalancing factors against excessive alcohol drinking.

## Keywords

Early Industrialization, Illicit Liquor Shops, Insider Perspective, Ruining of Family Economy, Self Experienced Stories, Wives of Workers

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Objectives

In an in 2021 published investigation, I studied opinions on alcohol use in rural areas in Sweden during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gustavsson, 2021, <http://stromstadakademi.se/AAS/AAS-56.pdf>). Three different opinions are presented. The main part of the investigation refers to stories about moderation and about total abstinence having its base in sobriety movements and free church movements. The third alternative, being labelled misuse, excessive drinking, drun-

kenness or lavish use is only mentioned in stories told by moderate drinkers or by those being totally abstinent.

A main objective in this investigation is to find and analyze stories from self experienced situations where alcohol misuse was widely common and excessive. I want to get an additional insider perspective from those misusing to the stories told by those being around them. In particular, focus is on various working class and handicraft communities during the time of emerging industrialism in Sweden from the 1870s and onward. New industries were established in mill areas such as mining, iron extraction, glass manufacturing, sawmills, stonemasonry etc. Railroads and highway infrastructure were heavily expanded and in this context the mobile navvies had a prominent role.

Those being around the ones misusing were individuals in general telling about those others misusing, or authority officials having both opinions on the misuse and trying to prosecute it. Belonging to this group were provincial doctors, ministers and police officers in the cities. Also emerging popular movements from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and on, such as working class movements, sobriety movements and free church movements—contributed to the persecution of misuse.

The present investigation is mainly focused on cities and industrial areas. By people around them, it was commonly considered that certain working class individuals were the ones being misusers. This was the case for example with stonecutters, navvies and brick layers. Up to the 1880s, aquavit constituted close to 90 per cent of the alcohol consumed.

## 1.2. Materials

Self experienced stories from settings with alcohol addiction and workers' notes from the time of the emergence of industrialism have been an invaluable source. Guided by the Ethnologist Mats Rehnberg these notes were collected by the Nordic Museum in Stockholm over the years 1945-1959. Rehnberg sent out a thirteen item list to the story tellers. The Ethnologist Bo G. Nilsson investigated the collection and the historical source value of these memories. They were published as books over the years 1947-1961. The quantitatively largest piece of materials was from the investigation of Navvies that had 224 participants (Nilsson, 1996). Parts of this collected material were published unedited. I have worked through all of the published material and found many self experienced stories about alcohol misuse, but also how sobriety movements and workers' unions counteracted this misuse. Then there was a struggle of war between misuse and the opposite opinion of total abstinence from alcohol. The ideal concerning moderate use was almost never mentioned in these workers' notes.

The stories are from rail road constructions, iron mining, engineering industries, glass factories, mining, stone cutting, construction work, forestry, sawmills as well as from the life of farm laborers (Sw. Statäre) in rural areas. These were mainly places for male workers. Therefore most worker stories are written by men and very few by workers' wives or daughters.

Worker story tellers were born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were retired when

writing down their memories in the 1940s and 1950s. The stories were about events and experiences going way back in time during the early phase of their working life.

To be able to study the view of those being around on alcohol misuse, I have been using folkloristic notes in Lund, Gothenburg and Uppsala. The view and actions from authorities have been studied by reading records being kept. Provincial doctors had to submit records on a yearly basis since 1755. The Swedish yearly records from provincial doctors covering the years 1835-1900 are published digitally in a database on medical history at the University of Linköping, <https://ep.liu.se/databaser.aspx>.

Every sixth year, ministers submitted so called service notes (ämbetsberättelser) to the diocese bishop. There you can find records on the current situation in the parishes. Important information can also be found in the records from bishop visitations. All this material is kept at the Regional Archives in Gothenburg, abbreviated GLA.

The police in the cities and the rural country constables have also kept records on their activities and the actions against felons that were taken. It was often about drunken individuals that they had to arrest and book at the police station. The printed publication *Police Memories (Polisminnen)* from 1953 provides ample insight into the daily life of police officers and their problem when arresting intoxicated individuals.

## **2. Popular Opinions on Misuse in Rural Areas before the Era of Industrialism**

### **2.1. Taking a Clear Distance from Those Engaging in Excessive Drinking on a Regular Basis**

The principle of moderation in rural areas in pre-industrial time meant taking a clear distance from and having a negative attitude towards those crossing the lines for what was acceptable drinking on a regular basis. It was about those not being able to distinguish between workdays and holidays and were drinking too much on workdays. When a man was drinking too much on workdays this usually lead to personal economic problems and that was considered humiliating by people around. Some folklore records describe how disdainfully those around looked at those farmers that, in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, were drinking so much that they were not able to keep their house and land. It had to be sold and their wives and children were facing a tough future. This negative attitude is clearly expressed in stories told by children and grandchildren of these farmers.

The sawmill worker Theodor Nilsson, who was born in 1864 in Själevad, Ångermanland, published in 1892 a small booklet for his own money. He is telling about hard times as he, as a five year old, in 1869 was auctioned out at a public auction. This happened because of insolvency due to his dad drinking too much. This also lead to that his dad had to leave his farm that he was owning. The family became homeless with no financial support. In the booklet preface, Nilsson

writes that he is hoping that his story will “be helpful for families having fathers living under the horrible influence of intoxicants” (Nilsson, 1892).

One category of professionals particularly known for misuse was the boatswains along the coasts of Sweden. The system with boatswains was in place from 1682 up to 1901, when national service was introduced in Sweden (Modig, 2017). The boatswains were given a croft and additional buildings, land for cultivation and land for livestock. The boatswains worked on navy ships doing sailing drills in peace times. Their main station was in Karlskrona in southern Sweden. It was when travelling back and forth from Karlskrona that they became infamous for drinking. Farmers would give them a ride to the boat taking them to Karlskrona.

To those farmers giving the boatswains a ride this was not always a pleasant experience. One storyteller, from Kville parish in Bohuslän and born in 1866, occasionally gave a boatswain in Fjällbacka a ride. “This was not a pleasant ride because he was always drunk. Those boatswains always got very drunk”. It was also reported that a terrible accident was said to have happened when “a small boy running the ride was knocked off the wagon and got run over and killed” (IFGH 5791 p. 35).

## 2.2. Folk Belief on Curing Misuse

That misuse was perceived as a problem as long as there was plenty of alcohol available for a low price. It is obvious among other things because of the fact that in the world of folklore information can be found a contempt for those considered to be drinking too much but also for those helping others to drink too much. These were for example individuals running illegal aquavit sales at illicit liquor shops. In Tensta, Uppland there were rumors about “brännvins-Lena”, a woman selling aquavit. According to folk belief, she was punished after her death by becoming a ghost, an unblest spirit without peace.

Folk medicine has suggested cures for excessive use of alcohol. One proposed way was to have the addicted person drink aquavit that had first been poured into the mouth of a dead person. Aquavit that had been in the mouth of a dead person was called “corpse aquavit” and was considered a “sure-fire remedy for drunkards” according to an informant from Korsberga, Västergötland (ULMA, 1991: p. 59). There was an idea that dead people, or animals like dogs or snakes, had magic powers that could be used to stop excessive use of aquavit. There was a symbolic kind of similarity magic. The misuse was expected to disappear in a similar way that a dead person disappeared from the living and no longer existed.

## 2.3. Conciliatory Attitude towards Excessive Use under Special Circumstances

Being someone transporting the corpses was not a very popular task when cholera epidemics were raging in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gustavsson, 2020). The task had to be made attractive, since the risk of getting infected was clear and present.

When looking for people doing this task, free access to aquavit was real helpful. Aquavit was considered to protect against infection. Many folklore records un-animously tell about corpse transporters always being drunk, often loud and singing when hauling several dead persons on the same wagon. This often happened at night. Those transporting corpses could be the last ones dying in a cholera outbreak. One informant from Skepplanda, Västergötland and born in 1850, had the following story that he heard from his father: “The one hauling the corpses to the graveyard—on a simple wagon—was drinking and always drunk. He escaped infection until in the fall when he died just as the cholera epidemic ended” (IFGH 3387 p. 20).

A conciliatory attitude towards excessive alcohol use can also be seen when survivors, according to several folklore records, were placing aquavit in the coffin of persons known to be misusing. One informant from Osby, Skåne told the following in 1926: “There was a general belief that life after death went on in pretty much the same way as during the living time on earth. Therefore it was common to place a ‘halvstop’ (a 0.6 liter can) of aquavit in a drinker’s coffin for refreshment” (LUF M 464 p. 72).

### 3. Public Officials Prosecuting Those Drinking

#### 3.1. Provincial Doctors on Misuse

The annual records from the provincial doctors are an invaluable source of information about physicians’ view on and treatment of the misuse of alcohol. I have reviewed all physicians’ records from the islands Orust and Tjörn in Bohuslän in western Sweden during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gustavsson, 2017a). There you can find recurrent reports on local alcohol and other drinking habits among farmers and fishermen in the coastal areas. Doctors were mostly critical to the existence of excessive use of alcohol, as they believed it was causing mental disturbances but also physical symptoms such as heart and stomach problems.

Niklas Olof Gammelín (1815-1867) was a provincial doctor in the years 1853-1863 (Figure 1). In 1853 and 1854 he draw attention to the regional differences between the parishes on Orust. Most of the drinking was going on in the Torp parish where there was a steam-distillery in a place called Assmunneröd. There a woman called “Brännvinsbritta” (aquavit-Britta) (1808-1897) was running the business (Figure 2). In the coastal place Nösund five businesses were established when rural stores business became legal in Sweden from 1846 and on (Ejdestam, 1943). Gammelín was very critical to these stores and wrote: “All damage to the peasantry caused by the now legal stores cannot be described in words. Almost all of these stores can be considered privileged illicit liquor shops where the farmer can exchange his grain for aquavit”. The result is that “the salesman becomes rich and the farmer dirt poor”. The tough drinking of aquavit among men and coffee among women is causing diseases. In his report from 1855, Gammelín was happy about the royal regulation prohibiting household alcohol distilling and establishing rules on how to sell and serve aquavit. On Orust, only Assmunneröd



**Figure 1.** Provincial doctor Niklas Olof Gammelin (1815-1867). Photo Carl Curman, Lysekil around 1860. According to Larsson, 2015.



**Figure 2.** "Brännvinsbritta" (1809-1897). Photo-private collection.

and Nösund got a license for serving. Closeness to the places serving supposedly encouraged the extent of the use of aquavit.

In 1857, Gammelín stated that there had been a decrease in drunkenness and that this in turn had contributed to an improvement in the economy for the population. In 1860, he revisited his criticism towards rural stores, in particular referring to the three stores in Nösund also selling aquavit in addition to the steam-distillery in Assmunneröd. “In this district, the rural stores thus contribute in many ways to the bankruptcy of the farmer”. The economic consequences were important for the provincial doctor to stress, and not just the health consequences, from excessive aquavit drinking.

The criticism against rural stores selling aquavit continued also after Gammelín had left Orust. Provincial doctor Herman Theodor Nyström (1825-1890) working on Orust and Tjörn in 1866-1868 (Figure 3), wrote in 1867 that on Assmunneröd and Nösund “the drinking is flourishing”. In 1869 he stated that there were 32 rural stores in the district and that they “seem to be these islands’ worst plague”.

Johan Walfrid Pihl (1833-1902) was a provincial doctor on Orust and Tjörn from 1875 to 1879 (Figure 4). In 1878 he stated that in Långelanda parish in the eastern part of Orust there were illicit liquor shops that he had in vain tried to get rid of but with no success.

The medical doctor Johan Magnus Rhodin (1857-1928), working on Orust in 1891-1904 (Figure 5), wrote that the use of beer had increased. Beer was sold at most rural stores and in some guest houses. Guest houses were only supposed to serve beer to travellers, but Rhodin stated both in 1892 and 1900 that this beverage likely “is served also to others than those being real travellers”.

Orust’s neighboring island Tjörn got its first provincial doctor in 1892, John Emil von Wachenfelt (1861-1931) (Figure 6). In 1898 he stated that in three of



**Figure 3.** Provincial doctor Herman Theodor Nyström (1825-1890).



**Figure 4.** Provincial doctor Johan Walfrid Pihl (1833-1902).



**Figure 5.** Provincial doctor Johan Magnus Rhodin (1857-1928).

the guest houses beer was sold for travellers “however, besides there was no serving of alcoholic beverages”. Due to this, he happily stated in his report in 1900 that “drinking on a daily basis is fairly rare and illnesses caused by alcohol misuse also accordingly are rare”. In addition, he noted that Good Templar Associations had been established lately in many of the larger fishing villages, and those “most likely have done a lot of good”.

### **3.2. Ministers on Misuse**

Many old time ministers shared the common folk belief opinion about moderation when using alcohol. But some of these ministers were also known to tackle



misuse. The minister Laurents Olof August Simson working in the fishing village Kåringön, Bohuslän in 1849-1900 (Figure 7), is said to have encouraged women on the island to check on things in the harbor so that the male fishermen didn't bring alcohol on board when going out fishing. Those caught doing this got reprimands after words from the minister (Gustavsson, 2017b: p. 21). The medical doctor Gustaf Assaf Sjödahl, in his medical report for West Orust, pointed to the fact that on Kåringön "aquavit and other liquors are largely banned". This is due



Figure 6. Provincial doctor John Emil von Wachenfelt (1861-1931).

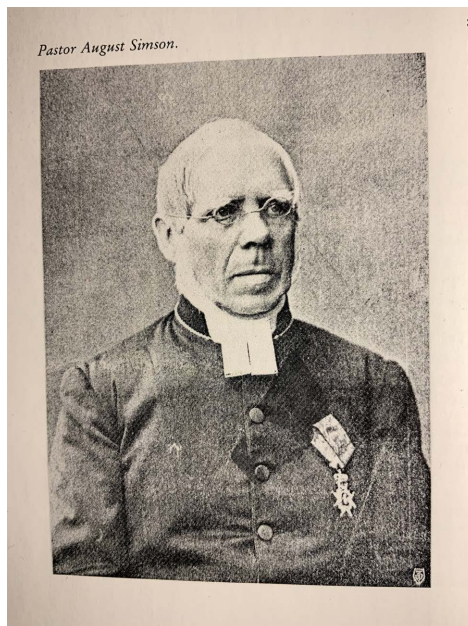


Figure 7. The Minister Laurents Olof August Simson wearing the Vasa Decoration on his chest. Photo from private collection.

to the active work by Minister Simson against the use of alcohol among the fishermen.

Sobriety promoting ministers also experienced opposition from the environment. About the minister Daniel Wannberg in Tegneby parish 1878-1904, an informant stated that “a couple of men were standing in a place drinking aquavit from a bottle. The minister saw this when passing by and said: ‘here they are hanging out drinking this oil of hell’. And one of the men replied: ‘oh, you shut up, because I have paid myself for my oil’” (LUKA 1: 082487).

### 3.3. Policing in the Cities

In the cities the police was serving, while sheriffs (Swedish landsfiskal from 1918) assisted by local officers were in charge of law and order in the rural areas. Thus, the book *Polisminnen* (Police Memories) from 1953 is referring to the situation in the cities and also to some additional cases when police officers were ordered to help out with interventions in rural areas.

There was difference between working class and the middle-class in the cities in the sense that the working class could drink more openly. At least excessive use of alcohol was bad for the reputation in the middle-class community.

There they have been primarily eager to protect their reputation in order to retain a social dominance and distance. Behind the scenes, however, life could be different. There was a double standard that was tolerated in the inner circles. Working class citizens, on the other hand, were not worried to show themselves drunk staggering in the streets on weekends. In a story from the town of Luleå in northern Sweden it was stated: “At all events there was supposed to be an excess of aquavit available ... It was not unusual that men came staggering in the streets, especially on weekends. No one really bothered at that time, it was just the way it was” (ULMA 15 621 p. 9).

Some categories of professions among workers and craftsmen were infamous for drinking more than others. This was not least true for brick layers and navvies and sailors. The problem, according to people around, was that they were drinking too much.

The historian Lennart Johansson has shown that aquavit drinking, as well as later also beer consumption, during the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, got increasingly more concentrated to the cities. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the city population increased at a rapid pace due to people moving in to work in the growing industries in the cities. Being drunk was a typical city felony increasing significantly at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among registered crimes in Gothenburg at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the felony of being drunk dominated. In 1889, 3123 men and 66 women were fined for being drunk. Those getting fined were primarily working men, factory workers or brick layers (Frykman, 1990: p. 93). Drunk felonies represented 62% of the crimes in Gothenburg in the year 1900. Being drunk was also the most common felony among women in this city (Johansson, 2008: p. 109).

Police officers in the cities were the ones facing the daily drunkenness when they were supposed to apprehend those that had been drinking too much. These individuals could disturb general order and annoying persons they met in the streets. Intoxicated persons could also disturb religious gatherings or meetings in the sobriety lodges. There was an increased number of cases with intoxicated individuals during the 1890s. The police officers had to stand up to the intoxicated individuals in terms of physical strength (**Figure 8**), since these individuals often resisted when about to be brought into custody to sober up. This was often done in a wagon called “fyllekärran” (**Figure 9**). In Stockholm such a wagon was used in 189 incidents in 1903 to transport drunk individuals to the city police station (Johansson, 2008: p. 110). On August 9<sup>th</sup> 1890, lumber worker Bengt Olof Petersson was arrested for being drunk on the coast square in Gothenburg “at which point he was acting up badly kicking and lashing out to those around in a way that made it necessary to tie him down to a heavy duty vehicle”. He was later released at 8:30 pm the same evening (Bergman, 1990: p. 138).

Drunkards could also go on being violent when in police custody. This was for example the case with iron worker Carl Billgren that on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1873 was arrested for being drunk at Stigbergsliden in Gothenburg “and because in custody he was so violent that he had to be handcuffed. He also broke the handcuffs.” He was released the same day at ten pm (Bergman, 1990: p. 136).

Police officers stepping in when people were drunk was not only the case in the streets and squares but also in many cases in homes where severe abuse could happen to both wife and children. In addition, these men ruined the household economy. There were several cases where wives reported their husbands to the police because of severe abuse due to excessive drinking. On April



**Figure 8.** Police apprehending a drunken individual getting wrestled down in Stockholm at the turn of the century 1900. Photo Axel Malmström. Stadsmuseum, Stockholm.



**Figure 9.** Police officers trying to get a resisting drunk person into the “fyllekärra/wagon for drunks” in Norrköping 1912. Photo Polismuseet, Stockholm.

14<sup>th</sup> 1890, police officer Engström in Gothenburg filed the following report:

The wife Eva Charlotta Johansson living in house number 16 on Vegagatan has today asked for her husband the docker Anton Petter Johansson to be arrested and legally charged because of his drinking and unruly way of living and being violent at home towards his wife and children, breaking their common belongings and just this afternoon kicked out the door to their apartment. He had also pulled his wife by her clothes down the stairs from the first floor and out into the backyard where he knocked her down kicking and slapping her around, and he also often stated that he was going to kill her (Bergman, 1990: p. 178).

Also some drunk women were arrested. During the 1890s the number of such females were just 5-10 per month. Some of them were prostitutes or economically bankrupt widows leading a nomadic type of life (Bergman, 1990: p. 173). Also intoxicated women could resist when taken away in the “fyllekärren”. A police officer in Gävle born in 1890 tells about one incident when “fyllekärren” was to be unloaded at the court-house, “an intoxicated younger female” had undressed to be naked. “We therefore had to close the wagon door quickly and get a blanket that we could wrap around ‘Eva’ before carrying her into the police station” (Rehnberg, 1953: p. 111).

## 4. Public Officials Drinking Too Much

### 4.1. Medical Doctors Drinking

When provincial doctors started being established working in rural areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were seen as persons with power by the rural population. As

stated before, these doctors, in their yearly reports, often expressed a critical view on excessive drinking and its negative effects on health and economy. If a doctor himself was engaging in excessive drinking this was getting talked about in folklore story telling tradition. This could in turn decrease the distance between the doctors and the rural population. This also shows that the way the doctors were leading their lives had a bearing on whether they would be successful in building public trust. A clear example was the physician Emil Olsson (1842-1914) who was working as a provincial doctor on Orust and Tjörn in 1879-1893 (Figure 10). He was said to be very outspoken and known for his “ranting behavior”. Olsson could be right out rude to those visiting him. The class difference between the dignitary physician and the country people was this way clearly underscored. According to the folklore story tradition, he had a high alcohol consumption, and this was also obvious when he was out on medical assignments. A male informant born in 1872 reported that Olsson once visited a man, at the farm called Näverkärr in Röra parish, who was sick with pneumonia “and he was drunk as always”. He wrote a prescription that the pharmacist in Kårehogen felt was a little off. And so to the person getting the medication the pharmacist said: “just giv’im half of the prescribed dose!” The next day when the doctor woke up from his “drunkenness”, he realized that he had probably made a mistake in his prescription. He went back to the patient’s home and immediately asked: “is the old man alive?” and “did he take the medication as prescribed by me?” He got an affirmative answer to both questions and went: “that’s a fuckin’ tough old man” (IFGH 5352 p. 1). So what did Emil Olsson himself report from Orust on alcohol use in his yearly medical reports 1879-1893? There is no information on excessive drinking or health consequences thereof. On the other hand, Olsson states in 1884 that the Order of Good Templars is not “likely to get established



**Figure 10.** The provincial doctor Emil Olsson (1842-1914).

here on the islands”. Here moderation prevails and the population is in general sober. “This doesn’t prevent the country people to take a dram or two, though, or a so called ‘halva’ = aquavit in the coffee. But that is about it”. This sounds like a good description of the principle of moderation.

#### **4.2. Ministers Drinking**

Just as provincial doctors, the ministers were authorities in the parishes and were supposed to be moral role models. Some ministers have, according to several folklore records, been drinking more alcohol than co tolerant as long as the minister was able to carry out his work duties. Ministers that were drinking alcohol in excess were said, in some records, to have improved their preaching skills and performing church service. One minister working in Holm parish, Dalsland 1896-1906 was drinking a lot, but the farmers were not able to get him into a drunken stupor despite some of them trying. If they could get the minister into a drunken stupor, it seemed that this could contribute to diminish the social distance between him and the farmers. The minister in Holm was believed to drink “speaking water/talvatten” before his sermons. It was seen to have had a positive influence on his behavior when on duty and it was respected. He “had taken a sufficient amount of speaking water, and was preaching so as to make the old ladies weep. When he had taken speaking water, he was immensely good both at singing and preaching”, a female informant born in 1864 stated (IFGH 5261 p. 36). Maybe consuming alcohol before carrying out his duties strengthened his self confidence and reduced the nervousness when standing in front of a large audience. It might also have given him inspiration when writing his sermons. It could be worth considering the minister’s psychological situation and social pressure in front of the whole congregation. The alcohol could have been considered both as a stimulant and an antianxiety drug. I have not found any records where ministers themselves have talked about alcohol dependence. Such records are only found among outsiders telling their stories and passing comments. The ministers had at the same time to find a balance in front of the parishioners about their consumption of alcohol. Because it was considered despicable if the minister was so intoxicated that he fell to the ground when on duty. One informant born in 1865 told about a minister, working in in the parish Älvsbacka, Värmland 1871-1904, that he “was often drunk and sometimes he fell from the pulpit. Then Pettersson (the parish clerk) had to take over the sermon. There was no real order in the church during this minister’s time” (IFGH 3400 p. 28).

#### **4.3. Police Officers Drinking**

Police officers were instructed to be good role models not having drunk alcohol when arresting drunk individuals which was one of the most important tasks they had when on duty. The Ethnologist Kjell Bergman, in his thesis in ethnology 1990, found in records from police officers in Gothenburg that quite a few policemen and to some extent police officers were drinking alcohol. They were

strongly ordered to stop doing this and in some cases they were fired. Out of 119 policemen patrolling the streets, 34 were punished for a total of 49 drinking violations (Bergman, 1990: p. 114). A police officer born in 1854 was over the time 1889-1893 warned about being drunk on duty five times and was suspended twice for two weeks. On May 30<sup>th</sup> 1893 he was “told that the next time he relapses he will be fired”. He passed away on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1899. A police officer born in 1875 and hired in 1898 lost six days of salary on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1899 “because he had visited a sobriety diner and been drinking beer when on duty”. On June 1<sup>st</sup> 1899 he left his position voluntarily (Bergman, 1990: p. 124).

One reason for drinking alcohol when on duty was obviously that the policemen could be the target of being offered alcohol when out patrolling. One policeman working in Gothenburg around the turn of the century 1900 recalls:

Back in the days, a policeman was maybe more exposed to too many temptations, especially the younger policemen. Thus for example innkeepers and others wanted to invite them for a drink which usually meant some type of alcohol. This was mostly a friendly gesture, but sometimes there could be other reasons behind. Many good policemen in various ages got in trouble and were disciplined or got fired because of this (Rehnberg, 1953: p. 24).

## 5. Intoxicated Employers or Supervisors

It wasn't just authorities like doctors, ministers and policemen that could be misusing alcohol. There were also employers and supervisors that were drinking too much. They could both be a role model but also cause dissatisfaction and distancing among the employees. As a man born in 1878 in Stockholm was looking for different types of work he experienced many problems with drunk and annoying employers. In particular this was the case with a fisherman from Mälare in the archipelago of Stockholm.

The fisherman was more or less drunk on a daily basis and was rude and demanding at work, just barking and hollering. He was not happy with anything I did and sometimes, when drunk, he threatened to beat me up. It didn't matter how much I tried to do my best. After a week I gave it up (Rehnberg, 1959: p. 234).

This informant also had similar negative employer experiences when he later got employed as a coachman and storage worker in a combined whole sale and retail business selling hardware in the village of Leksand. “My employer was a veritable boozier and when drunk he was nagging and complaining that I didn't do my job well enough”. After three months, I had a violent dispute with this employer “ending with me immediately leaving the place” (Rehnberg, 1959: p. 238).

## 6. Addicts Facing Restraining Measures against Drinking

### 6.1. Workers Unions

The emerging labor and trade union movement was, starting at the end of the

19<sup>th</sup> century, running a noticeable battle against the workers' previous alcohol drinking habits advocating conscientiousness instead. The well-behaved worker became an ideal and did not go to the bar after work (Johansson, 2008, Lindqvist, 1987, Ambjörnsson, 2001). A construction worker in the coastal town of Ystad in southern Sweden, born in 1866 reported in 1957 that there was a lot of drinking in the harbor during his first years of work. "They were real boozers all of them". Thus he, and some other members of the transport workers' union, started a campaign against excessive drinking. This was an immediate success. "When I quit work in 1899, all of them were sober at work. We simply forced them to stay away from drinking and those who did not comply got fired" (LUF M 14128 p. 9). Labor unions could be fairly harsh against pushers and illicit liquor shops. One miner's girl born in 1890 in the settlers' community Malmberget in northern Sweden reported about the memories from her childhood:

The Labor Association decided at a meeting, in 1901 I think, that they would clean out the area with the pusher houses. They thought this thing with the booze was going too far. And so, one day the workers went up to this area and started to carefully carry the pushers' belongings outside. Then they tore down the shacks one by one. I was there and watched it. Kids are always around. In particular I remember one of the pushers, pretending to be sick, but he was carried outside with his bed and all and was put down carefully on the ground. He immediately turned well, stood up in his shirt only and started beating around himself and the workers cheered for him.

The informant reported that after that the sobriety situation got a whole lot better. Some of the pushers left the place and others went looking for work (Rehnberg, 1960: p. 231). One stonecutter in Blekinge born in 1870 reported that stonecutters started unions for the first time in 1897 and he joined this union. He remembers that the union often called for an extraordinary meeting and chastised those workers that were drinking too much. "They improved on their behavior and in the end stonecutters became a respected profession, being trusted wherever they went" (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 40). Also among the dock workers in Gothenburg, the union tried to stop misuse with different kinds of punishments. In 1886 it was decided that someone that had been intoxicated at the dockside should "the first time be suspended from work for three days and the second time for four days, and the third time for five days" (Björklund, 1984: p. 39).

## 6.2. Sobriety Movements Fighting Misuse

The bars and guest houses were, to the non-drinkers, a symbol for encouraging people to drink. Therefore it was necessary to mark a distance. There were different ways to express one's disapproval. "When the old innkeeper in Bälaryd, Villstad parish in Småland passed away, The Good templars in the parish were flagging at full mast when the mourners passed by for the funeral", an informant



born in 1878 reported (LUF M 13 676 p. 27).

In other cases the non-drinkers took physical action against intoxicated individuals showing their aversion and to make the intoxicated person change his way of living. It was also necessary to act against pushers and those selling alcohol to prevent access to alcohol. In Ragunda, Jämtland, members of the sobriety lodge Ljungblomman were upset when seeing one load of liquor after the other coming into the county. When the pushers were drunk and no guards were around, the non-drinkers drilled holes in two very large boxes with aquavit and beer. They crushed the bottles. "Bottle after bottle was crushed causing terrible bangs ... And so the boxes got empty! Victory was achieved!" After this incident, all illicit liquor shops disappeared according to the informant (Rehnberg, 1951: p. 42).

Quite a few workers tell in their reports about joining sobriety movements when they were young and then staying sober throughout their lives. Around 25% of the stonecutters in Bohuslän were in 1909 members of some sobriety association (Persson, 1984: p. 324). One stonecutter in Blekinge and born in 1876 had a father, also being a stonecutter, who was a boozier. In 1907 the son helped starting a sobriety lodge called Verdandi, where he thereafter was active. When his own children started growing up he "concluded that my kids were not going to see me as a booze wreck" (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 44). A navy born in 1877 in Småland and who had been working as a railroad worker since 1898, reported on how sobriety lodges could change a navy's life. "They got something that could capture their interest ... Many of the most crazy ones became the most devoted members". In the town of Uddevalla where navvies stayed for long times, two Verdandi lodges were formed "which mostly was done by the navvies" (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 137).

Then again sobriety lodges could themselves be having problems with and getting disturbed by misusing individuals. From a glass factory in the Älgult parish in Småland, a glass blower, born in 1876 and a member of the lodge, reported:

There were many drinking themselves to death back then. A lot of fighting and homicide happened due to alcohol use. In addition those that were drinking lost all their money and so because of that there were hardly any food and clothing in the home. And so it was sinful to drink alcohol OK. The sobriety movement was working under tough conditions in the beginning. I myself was a non-drinker so I know how things were. Those wanting to keep the excessive drinking crushed our place and started fights with us. We were very unpopular (LUF M 12424 p. 7).

Being intoxicated in or outside the place for the sobriety movement's activities was a way for the boozers to show that they did not agree with the views held by the lodge.

In 1916 Sweden passed a law about addressing the problem with alcoholics. A sobriety council should be in place in every town and municipality. Up until

1925 the Board for Poverty Relief worked as sobriety council. After that, a stand-alone sobriety council was introduced and was in use up until 1970. After that, the social welfare board in the municipalities took over the tasks from the sobriety councils. The sobriety councils were supposed to “prevent drunkenness and misuse” (Björkman, 2003; Johansson, 2008: p. 179). Those being “prone to drinking” were supposed to be guided towards a “sober and proper life style” and be prompted to join a sobriety association. Sobriety lodges ended up getting involved in the work of the sobriety councils.

### 6.3. Married Women’s Opposition against Misuse among Men

In addition to workers’ unions and sobriety lodges, women have been a restraining force against excessive alcohol use. This was clearly noticeable within stonecutter communities. Single stonecutters were likely to drink large quantities of alcohol, but when they got married the situation changed. They often got stationary as opposed to an earlier life moving around between stonemasonries. They got responsible for a family and with that came increased economic and social obligations. The woman in stonecutter families has been instrumental in making sure that there was a sober life. A man born in 1897 in the stonecutter village of Hälle in Bohuslän reported that “there was a significant revolution taking place at home in my early childhood. My dad became a strict non-drinker, likely through my mother, because she hated alcohol the way it was used at the time” (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 120). The women had to make sure that their men did not lose the money on booze on payday. A man working at a train station in Skåne and born in 1877 reported that a wife on those occasions was “meeting up with the man at the train station to prevent him from going to a hotel drinking and gambling more or less losing the well needed salary” (Rehnberg, 1952: p. 20).

Women could also be running an active battle against illicit liquor shops. A miner in Västmanland born in 1880 reported: “One thing that my grandmother hated was aquavit. There were people around the iron works running illicit liquor shops and handling stolen goods” (Rehnberg, 1952: p. 102).

The women were not always successful in their battle against misuse. A miner in Västmanland, born in 1895, reported that a beer brewery was established in a mining village. This led to many miners neglecting their work. Some ended up in the slammer and some ended up being total wrecks due to their craving for beer. Women in the sobriety movement tried to stop this by admonitions and information to the miners. They were often met by “rudeness and mocking epithets, though, and their attempts went were ignored” (Rehnberg, 1960: p. 87).

## 7. Disastrous Consequences from Misuse

### 7.1. Fighting

One aspect of excessive drinking were the fights that for example could occur at the inns that were legally allowed to sell aquavit. Stories about fighting specifically refer to the mobile navvies and stonecutters. The police could have severe

problems with intoxicated and violent navvies. One policeman in the town of Uppsala told about violence occurring in 1907 when 50 - 60 navvies were supposed to drain some bog land in Bälinge parish one Swedish mile outside Uppsala. Intoxicated as they were, they got into arguments with the farmers in the area and the farmers were therefore afraid to go outside unless there were policemen around guarding the place. The informant and three other policemen in Uppsala were dispatched to Bälinge. When farmers wanted to go to Uppsala, they were afraid of doing so unless they were accompanied by a policeman. They worried about being attacked and beaten up if they met the navvies. Also the store keeper in Bälinge was assaulted. The policeman ended his story by telling that “people in Bälinge still were afraid of the navvies and when they were intoxicated they still behaved in a rude and violent way particularly towards the merchant where they purchased their food”. By order from the country fiscal in the district of Bälinge, two policemen from Uppsala had to stay in this workplace in Bälinge for two months (Rehnberg, 1953: p. 188).

Also in the navvies’ own reports fighting when drinking has been mentioned. These were not just between navvies and other people, but also between different groups in the navy community. One navy born in 1880 told about the problems occurring in the workers’ shacks in conjunction with a railroad construction in Norrland, when workers arrived from different parts of the country and the alcohol abolished behavioral inhibitions. The informant tells in detail about a memory regarding an incident occurring one year in a bunkhouse the day before Christmas “and the tasting of the liquors brought home had started”. In the evening a violent fight broke out between on one side navvies from the province of Småland in southern Sweden and on the other side Finnish people and some navvies from northern Sweden. The bunkhouse was totally destroyed. “The windows were smashed and had to be replaced by boards. All loose items, and also for that matter the stationary ones, were destroyed or damaged”. The railroad sheriff was called to the place, but he could not do anything about the disaster (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 290).

Although the navvies were known for their alcohol related fights, such fights were also common in other mobile groups of workers such as stonecutters, dockworkers and sailors. One stonecutter in Blekinge born in 1876 reported that there was a lot of drinking and fighting in the beginning when he was working, “but they were of the kind that even if they got beat up severely, it was never reported to the authorities. Instead they went for payback at a suitable time” (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 39). A policeman in Gävle born in 1890 once experienced an incident when he had to arrest “4 intoxicated sailors beating up every person that came close” (Rehnberg, 1953: p. 116).

## **7.2. Using up the Salary on Booze**

When the industrialization started on a large scale in Sweden from the 1870s and on, paydays became a temptation to use up a large part of the salary on excessive

alcohol consumption. This in turn damaged the personal economy in particular when workers and craftsmen had families to take care of. In the town of Malmö brick layers had their payday every second Saturday. The salary could often be paid out at a bar where workers gathered after work. One informant reported that “after payday living was flying high as long as there was still money left, after that they were living on credit” (LUF M 8195 p. 4). There are several stories about how the family suffered under such circumstances. One woman born in 1871 in Gunnarskog, Värmland reported in 1951 about her conditions at home with thirteen siblings and a boozier craftsman dad who was a woodcutter. “I remember us many times sitting a whole day without any food. Sometimes there could be both two and three days passing without us getting anything other than a hard piece of bread, because dad was using up his salary on booze”. The mother sometimes took her backpack and went begging. When the father went to Norrland to work in the woods, he did not send any money home. “It all went to buying aquavit. The day he left, there was not even a piece of firewood left in the house” (IFGH 5622 p. 26).

## **8. Risk Factors Contributing to Misuse**

### **8.1. Easy access to Cheap Alcohol**

#### **8.1.1. Stores**

Following the fact that distilling alcohol in the homes was prohibited in 1855 (Johansson, 2008), selling of alcohol was carried out in stores, bars and hosteries. It was possible to buy unlimited amounts of alcohol and it was cheap. This caused excessive use, impaired health and economy in many households. Workers’ memories often point out that alcohol was inexpensive and that workers could collect money and together buy big barrels that were then distributed. Often large amounts were consumed over a short time period. The misuse was a fact.

A sawmill worker born in 1868 reported that “large loads of beer from the breweries carried in by horses were coming from the city and unloaded in the stores where you could go and pick it up. Just getting outside the store they could then go ahead and drink as many bottles as they liked” (Rehnberg, 1948: p. 166). Free alcohol purchasing ended with the ration book system in 1919 and that system lasted until 1955 (Johansson, 2008). This rationing system made it harder and more expensive to find and buy aquavit and beer. Every person eligible to buy got a personal register (motbok) where all purchases were written down. With the newly established system, stores with exclusive right to sell alcoholic beverages had a monopoly on all selling of alcoholic beverages. There was also an age limit at 21 years of age established at system companies and 18 years in bars. Alcoholic beverages were not to be given to someone “visibly drunk from alcoholic beverages” (Johansson, 2008: p. 157).

#### **8.1.2. Illicit Liquor Shops**

Except for in the stores, alcohol could also be purchased illegally at illicit liquor shops. Governors’ five year reports talk about illicit liquor shops as one of the

big ethical problems at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Conditions were at their worst in Norrland. Several illicit liquor shops were run by single women and were based on widespread poverty. Women were a large part of those getting sentenced for running of illegal speakeasies (Johansson, 2008: p. 101). A policeman in the small town of Hässleholm in southern Sweden and born in 1877 reported that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a bar in almost every second house. At the 10 pm closing time, the guests were so drunk that they had to crawl outside. The informant reported that “it was particularly bad this way between the years 1905-1908, but that thereafter most of the bars were closed down” (Rehnberg, 1953: p. 62).

### **8.1.3. Mobile Pushers**

In the new industrial workers’ communities pushers were also travelling around selling illegal alcohol. This was particularly common around payday. Pushers could face tough opposition if they used fraudulent measures against the workers or if those got too drunk. This was especially true for navvies. A navy boss from Norrland born in 1877, himself being a boozier until he got sober in 1902, reported:

One Saturday evening in 1911 there was a pusher coming from Tåsjö (Ångermanland in northern Sweden—Author’s note). He had been in Ulriksfors to get aquavit. How much he had sold in the bunkhouses along the way no one really knows, but he still had 20 liters left when he arrived at the big bunkhouse by the rock cave. Smålands-Nisse was there with a team of 12 men, laying down water pipes, and they purchased aquavit from the pusher for 3 Swedish crowns/liter. But when they started being drunk, the pusher started blending water into the liters and more of that than the navvies accepted. They simply beat the pusher up and took the rest of his aquavit and then put him in his sleigh and got the horse running off (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 226).

Also in the mining communities conflicts could occur with pushers taking economical advantage of the workers. One miner working at the Gällivare mining field up until 1903, reported about liquor pushers doing good business at miners’ monthly payday. This led to drinking activities that could not be handled well by the unaided village sheriff. After a while the miners took matters into their own hands and “tore down all pusher shacks. Their shacks were turned into piles of junk with a number of broken bottles and so the pushers had to leave for another market” (Rehnberg, 1960: p. 205).

## **8.2. Mobile Working**

One thing that affected the drinking was that workers were mobile. This was particularly true when they were not married or had their family with them to the mobile work places. Conditions were different if the worker was stationary, married and lived together with his family. This was for example the case with

workers at ironworks, sawmills, glass factories and workshops. They were primarily drinking on weekends and holidays. Based on that information, you can understand the many stories about excessive drinking among mobile workers. It was about navvies building railways but also woodcutters, brick layers and stonecutters. These new professions popping up during the early days of industrialization were primarily living collectively in shacks and bunkhouses. There could be a constant moving around to new shacks and bunkhouses. One navy wife born in 1854 complained about the living conditions for married workers: “Bunkhouses were raised for working teams but nothing for the families” (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 104).

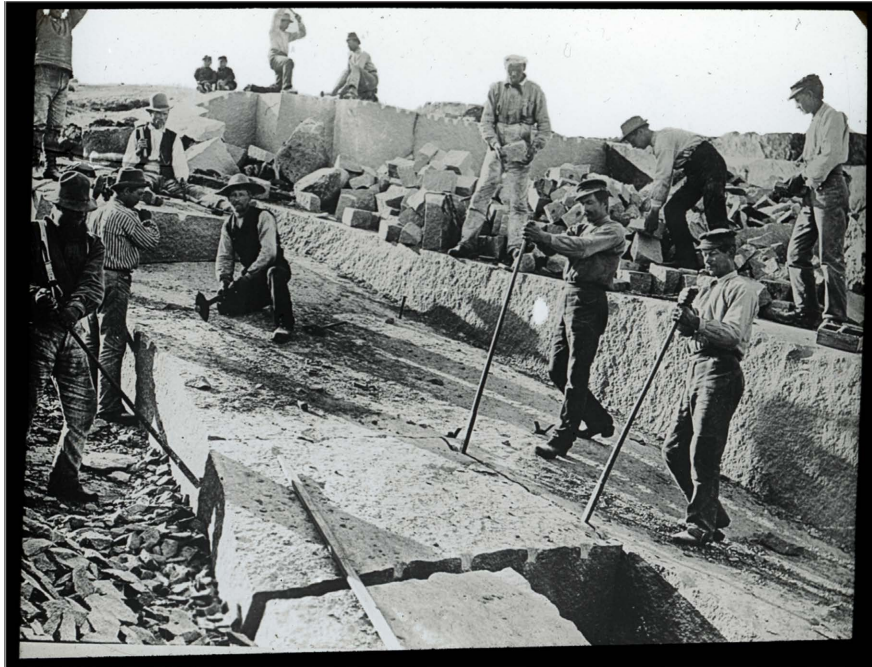
As a result of these living conditions, many navvies did not bring their families along when they got married. One navy born in 1878 reported that almost all navvies were single in the beginning, but over time more and more of them got married. He himself got married in 1909 and got a home of his own. He never had his family with him “but my wife stayed at home running a bakery and a coffee shop” (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 155). Another navy born in 1878 stated that many navvies. Individuals being from the south of Sweden were exceptions as they kept their families back home and sent the salary home to them. They were seasonal workers and typically went back home in the fall and were therefore called “sommarfåglar/summer birds” (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 199). Construction workers including brick layers in the cities were also mainly seasonal workers coming from rural areas during summer (Rehnberg, 1950: p. 84, 240).

Stonecutters came in large numbers to the northern parts of Bohuslän in western Sweden from Blekinge in southern Sweden during the 1880s-1890s (Persson, 1984). A significant number of stone quarries were opened and the export flourished up until the first world war (Figure 11). Several stonecutters went after some time on to quarries on the Norwegian side of the border in Østfold. The mobility within this profession was significant, at least until the man had settled down and started a family on either side of the country border.

### 8.3. Training Youngsters to Fetch Aquavit and Later to Start Drinking Themselves

One factor contributing to the maintenance of the drinking habits between generations was that youngsters early on were introduced to this habit. One stone cutter’s son in Blekinge and born in 1876 was already at the age of seven asked by the stonecutters in Elleholm to go to an inn in Hästaryd and buy them a can of aquavit. The innkeeper thought the boy was too young to buy, though, and asked who was having the aquavit. The boy’s answer was: “Well, the stonecutters in Elleholm are the ones having it, I said, and then he did not dare other than letting me have it, and I was also happy because I got 25 öre for doing the job” (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 37).

Children could also be allowed to drink alcohol and also got intoxicated. A man born in 1872 and working at Kosta glass factory in Småland in the 1880s, experienced that as an eleven year old boy. Another glass factory worker born in



**Figure 11.** Stone cutters in Bohuslän 1900-1930. Photo Bohuslän museum, Uddevalla. <https://digitaltmuseum.se/011014499505/medfoljande-text-stenbrott-i-bohuslan/media?slide=0>.

1894 remembered a six year old boy who was “reeling drunk on a Christmas evening .... Everybody used alcoholic liquors then, even the youngest” (Glasbruksminnen, 1944: p. 4).

More common, however, it seemed that the alcohol drinking debut happened in the teens. This could lead to a drunken stupor already the first time. A man born in 1873, that had been working at seventeen different sawmills during his life, reported about what happened to him in a sawmill community right after his confirmation:

In order for me to, according to my buddies opinion, become a real man, I should, like them, be able to both drink aquavit and eat snuff. As the aquavit at that time was 1,50 Swedish crowns per can, there was plenty of that in the shack, and in the art of consuming I was a fairly good student, and so within a short amount of time I was catching up with my buddies drinking and eating snuff (Rehnberg, 1948: p. 27).

#### **8.4. Introductory Ritual (Inkilning) at a New Work Place as an Expression of Collectivism**

Primarily in the construction industry there was an introductory rite of passage where a new worker, being a carpenter, brick layer, tin-smith, or unskilled laborer, should become part of the working team and not getting punished. It was about this person buying the other workers in the team aquavit. One construction worker born in 1877 reported in 1946 in detail about an introductory rite of passage he had experienced. Someone being a new worker at the workplace was

supposed to buy all the other co-workers aquavit. “If he didn’t, a big wooden-wedge was cut and hung up in the ceiling, where this person was sitting eating his meal, using a string. The wedge was left hanging there until the person provided the aquavit. It did not matter if he was a non-drinker or not. As soon as the aquavit was provided, the wedge was removed, and he was thereafter considered a good co-worker, regardless of how he performed his work”. “Luckily” this introductory rite of passage had mostly disappeared from the construction places later during the informant’s time as a worker (Rehnberg, 1950: p. 57).

### 8.5. Social Pressure to Drink

A social pressure to drink also existed in other types of workplaces where there was no introductory rite of passage. You could not deviate from the norm without getting any form of physical or social penalty. Regarding alcohol there was a collective approach that no single worker could deviate from. A navy from Blekinge born in 1875, had at some point been drinking too much and subsequently had thrown up all over his bed in the bunkhouse. After that he did not want to drink any more, but the peers got “mad saying if you don’t drink we are going to pour a bucket of water over you. Then I didn’t want to be any worse than them and so it started all over again, like on the previous day. And so we went on for ten days until we ran out of money” (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 114). One forest worker born in 1871 had earlier been drinking a lot and even been running a beer tavern in Jämtland. When he stopped doing that in 1903, he again started working in the forest and “you were drawn into drinking as soon as you got recognized in a working team ... It was not easy saying no to a glass, you got accused of being a coward and a sissy if you didn’t drink” (Rehnberg, 1950: p. 137). A stonemason from Skåne born in 1887 stated: “You were not a real stonemason if you didn’t take the drams” (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 231). A sawmill worker born in 1868 reported that “someone not wanting to be part of the team was a poor creature, actually an idiot, it was said” (Rehnberg, 1948: p. 166). One reason for the collective feature of the use of alcohol obviously had to do with the living conditions where a large number of workers lived together in temporary bunkhouses and shacks. The overcrowdedness was a characteristic feature according to the workers’ memories. Under such circumstances it was not easy for a single worker to deviate from what was the standard routine in the shack or bunkhouse.

### 8.6. Drinking at Work

Some workers were drinking a whole lot more than was expected from social pressure. At times they were not able to work and sometimes got fired because they were unable to do their job. This was not the norm, though. Those drinking only as much as expected by the social norm, were able to do their job when sober. It was not according to social norm to be drunk all the time. A navy born in 1869 reported about when he was working in Östergötland.



There had been a good atmosphere in the work team, but in the second year at this place “some crazy guys” joined the team. I had one buddy, that I had been taking care of many times and warned him about being too drunk, but it did not help. He was not totally able to work, we took care of him and he was our cook (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 93).

Such boozers could also be found among stonecutters. A stone cutter from Småland born in 1889 was telling about memories from the time when he was seventeen years old.

“The buddies were cheerful and nice but they used, snuff, tobacco and booze”. At the same time there were also individuals that had cycles of heavy drinking, and could be away drinking for two weeks and then coming back to the workplace as sad wrecks and their families living in total poverty. One in particular was completely impossible. He was a good grinder, but when he got a stone that needed to be worked on right away, he went to the bar and stayed away for two weeks. And so the boss had to do the grinding himself (Rehnberg, 1973: p. 151).

### **8.7. Collecting Money to Buy Aquavit**

Part of the collective and loyal approach included that workers shared the purchased alcohol. They often collected money in advance for a joint purchase. Also those not very interested in drinking alcohol still participated in this activity so as to not be regarded as deviators.

When the ordered aquavit arrived to the workers’ communities, the drinking was excessive until all the booze was gone. One railroad navvy born in 1865 told about the conditions in the 1880s: “And so we were partying around a couple of days, as long as anyone of us had some money still left, because loyalty was important among us navvies. Everything was shared when partying, and then we had to go to the pawnshop to change our new clothing to less nice ones, and get some crowns in exchange so that we could continue partying still a couple of days until we were totally broke” (Rehnberg, 1949: p. 40). One worker at the Lindefors glass factory in Småland told about similar conditions in the glass factory community. At holidays, specially at Christmas time, the workers collected money “to buy an ‘anchor/ankare’ of aquavit from the town of Kristianstad holding around 10 - 12 or 50 liters, then those that had been buying, and that were still sober from the time the ‘anchor’ arrived until it was empty, were easily counted” (Glasbruksminnen, 1944: p. 4).

### **8.8. Employers Buying Aquavit for Work Related Parties**

Also employers, who themselves were not misusing, often offered alcohol at work related parties that they were arranging. This could for example be at the Swedish Midsummer holidays in glass factories and ironworks. To the contrary, no such information is available regarding this kind of tradition among mobile

worker communities like navvies, stonemasons and forest workers. A glass factory worker from Småland born in 1889 started working at the Lindefors glass factory when he was nine years old (Figure 12). Every year at Midsummer the factory management invited all workers to a large party. “Food and drinks were available to such an extent that it sometimes ended up in real drinking orgies”. Also at Christmas the master invited his team home for coffee and aquavit. This could, according to the informant, mean “the first time getting familiar with alcoholic liquors” to “many young boys” (Glasbruksminnen, 1944: p. 100). A man born in 1877 started working at an iron working place in Gästrikland before turning thirteen. Right before Midsummer large barrels of beer arrived that every family got a certain amount of.

The beer was strong and good, available in large amounts and it was not long until its effects, together with the effects from previously consumed beer and aquavit, became obvious ... At least one big fight to watch was expected by us small boys, and we were rarely if ever deprived of this spectacle that we found terribly exciting” (Rehnberg, 1952: p. 60). In the construction sector, the head constructor in many cases offered beer at roofing parties to the workers. These parties could, according to an informant born in 1878, be very alcohol excessive during the 1890s in Stockholm (Rehnberg, 1950: p. 87).

### 8.9. Holiday Related Special Temptations

In the present study of worker’s communities, excessive Saturday- and Sunday drinking has been prominent considering the fact that the mobile workers lived together in shacks and bunkhouses also during weekends. Weekend drinking often hampered the ability to work on Mondays. Navvies could take a day off on Mondays due to being unable to work that day. At the Idesjö glass factory in Småland the workers purchased large amounts of booze on Saturdays from



**Figure 12.** Personnel at the Lindefors glass factory in 1889. Photo Kulturparken/Småland/Småland museum.

<https://digitaltmuseum.se/021016675606/grupportratt-personalen-pa-lindefors-glasbruk-som-var-i-drift-1876-1933/media?slide=0>

mobile beer taverns coming to the area. They purchased “25 - 50 ‘halvor’ .... and they were not economical with these ‘halvor’ and so they did not even last over the Sunday. They were drinking as long as there was anything left of these ‘halvor’, making them end up being very drunk”. “Many were hung over on Mondays because of the Saturday- and Sunday party” (*Glasbruksminnen*, 1944: p. 66). One sheriff at the Rishöjdsberget mine in Västmanland and born in 1892, reported that “there was no weekend or Sunday passing without someone being drunk and messing up”. He held the opinion that the isolated location of the mine may have contributed to the workers feeling free and unrestrained because “it was far away from law, country constable and sheriff” (*Rehnberg*, 1960: p. 133).

Among the yearly holidays, excessive drinking was most common at Midsummer (**Figure 13**) but also during Christmas and to some extent at Pentecost. At Midsummer drinking was in some cases related to the fact that the employer in the stationary milling communities was offering large amounts of food and drinks. Alcohol was front and center. According to a glass factory worker born



**Figure 13.** Navvies celebrating Midsummer in Dalarna with a whole lot of alcohol at the turn of the century 1900. Photo Nordiska Museet, Stockholm.

in 1898 this could at the Lindefors glass factory in Småland “result in veritable drinking orgies” (Glasbruksminnen, 1944: p. 100). Similar activities are also reported from ironworks. One lancashire smith born in 1870 told that all smiths got five cans of home-brewn beer and other workers two cans at Midsummer. The beer was brewn around Easter and kept in an ice-cellar until Midsummer’s Eve (Rehnberg, 1952: p. 145). At ironworks in Gästrikland there was “at least one big fight” due to this beer offering at Midsummer (Rehnberg, 1952: p. 66).

### 8.10. Changes towards Decrease in Misuse

Some informants reported that they, during their long active time working, have been experiencing a decrease in drinking in the last decades before writing down their memories in the 1940s and 1950s (Glasbruksminnen, 1944: p. 75). One informant, employed at the Kosta glass factory in Småland, but also at other glass factories, stated that alcohol misuse was fairly common early on when he was working. In particular he pointed to the fact that the aquavit was cheap. “A day worker was almost able to buy himself a can of aquavit for his daily amount of income, which is hardly possible now.” He further stated: “Someone having seen and being aware of the degree of drinking among youngsters going on 60-70 years ago at the glass factories, cannot miss the change for the better that has occurred just in the last 20-25 years ... The reeling and hollering glass blowing youngster will soon be just a story” (Glasbruksminnen, 1944: p. 75). A construction worker born in 1877 writing down his memories in 1946, also stated a change for the better regarding alcohol use at workplaces. This was for example the case with beer parties following roofing. “Nowadays things are more moderate, there are still cases where food and alcohol are offered but not to the extent it was earlier. Now it is about money, 5 or 10 Swedish crowns”. The introductory ritual of passage (inkilning) was also largely gone from construction work places as was the beer drinking (Rehnberg, 1950: p. 50).

Following the introduction of the ration book system for alcohol (motbok) in 1919, access to alcohol was regulated. Both restrictions and registrations of alcohol purchase were established. The Historian Lennart Johansson writes the following: “the 1917 year regulation of the selling of alcohol beverages is one of the most radical reforms in the Swedish alcohol legislation and became the foundation for the increasingly more restrictive alcohol policy during the Inter-war Years and the view on the use of alcohol beverages” (Johansson, 2008: p. 165).

## 9. Conclusion

In the present investigation, misuse of alcohol during the early industrialization in Sweden has been front and center. A new type of society was about to be established, and this required large human efforts and new worker categories. New ways of living emerged among male workers. Alcohol received a prominent role. Misuse was prosecuted by authorities in the form of medical doctors, ministers

and policemen.

Adverse effects of drinking in the new industrial communities could be both violence towards individuals around and ruining of the economy, which in particular affected the workers' families. Workers' associations, sobriety associations and the wives of workers became active counterbalancing factors against excessive alcohol drinking. Forming a family could sometimes have a positive effect on the extent of alcohol consumption compared with the time when the workers were single and also moving around a lot. Tough fighting with boozers was common. This was not the least experienced by policemen when having to arrest heavily intoxicated individuals. Also among the policemen themselves, as among some doctors and ministers, there could be misuse although they were expected to be moral role models.

Excessive drinking was promoted by several factors in the surrounding society. During the late 1800s, it was easy to get your hands on large quantities of cheap alcohol in rural stores, illicit liquor shops, taverns and from mobile pushers. In addition, employers were offering significant amounts of alcohol at times of celebration such as Midsummer and Christmas. A change was first established when access to alcohol became strictly regulated by the introduction of the ration book system in 1919. After that, the earlier excessive drinking decreased according to several reports in the workers' memories that have been an important source for the present investigation.

Except for the easy access to large amounts of alcohol during the early phase of industrialization, excessive drinking was also promoted by socialization rituals in the new working communities that were experienced also by kids and youngsters. Even children, that early on started working in the here studied communities, could get intoxicated. To get accepted into the fellowship at a new work place, you also had to start by buying your fellow workers large amounts of alcohol. If not, the new worker was subjected to significant sanctions. The system of collecting money in advance contributed to the regular ordering of large quantities of alcohol which was thereafter consumed at a rapid pace when the order had arrived. Rationing of available alcohol was unthinkable until the introduction of the ration book system was introduced in 1919.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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