

Moira Plant.

Interview abstract.

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Moira Plant began her work on alcohol in 1972 as ward sister at the Unit for the Treatment of Alcoholism ( now the Ritson Unit) in Edinburgh. She had completed a year long course in Group Dynamics and Psychotherapeutic Techniques . While in the Unit, she became aware of how female patients were often treated differently and became interested in why the women were treated more harshly than the men. In group work, the mens' problems were always the main focus and the women put themselves in second place. This was the culture of the time but meant that the women were not getting the quality of treatment they deserved. The first article she published, on how women were blamed for their husbands' drinking, was misrepresented in the media as saying wives were driving their husbands to drink. This was far from her message and provided an early lesson in problems with media coverage of alcohol.

Moira met her husband Martin Plant in 1975 when he was working in the MRC Unit for Epidemiological Studies in Psychiatry in Edinburgh and after the birth of their daughter Emma in 1978, she began a PhD on drinking in pregnancy. She had read some US work on alcohol's effect on the foetus but could find nothing in the UK. A well known alcohol specialist in fact discouraged her from pursuing this field. She has now been working on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) for about 35 years as part of an international network of researchers and clinicians.

Martin and she were members of the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA). Some members such as Robin Room, Klaus Makela , Ole-Jurgen Skog and Martin decided that the alcohol epidemiology section should meet separately. This became the Alcohol Epidemiology Group, now the Kettil Bruun Society , named after the leading Finnish researcher.

Moira became co-director of an international alcohol and health research group in Edinburgh with Martin. In the 1980s when Edinburgh was the 'AIDS capital of Europe' they did research on the sex

industry and violence and intimidation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

Martin led the UK arm of the European School Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD). His biannual conferences, held first at Pitlochry in Scotland and then in Kendal in the Lake District provided a valuable introduction to the field for young researchers.

Through the Alcohol Epidemiology Group she met many women working in the field, and they set up the International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol (IRGGA) which developed from the early 1990's. This group led to a number of research initiatives-from the European Union BIOMED studies headed up by Kim Bloomfield to international work culminating in the Gender and Alcohol International Study (GENACIS), headed by Sharon Wilsnack and for which Moira was UK lead. These groups were among the first to analyse data by gender instead of analysing both genders together which had been the pattern before. They also included some questions on the positive aspects of respondents' alcohol use. They analysed data by life stage rather than chronological age to take account of differences between high low and middle income countries.

Moira is concerned about the way in which ethics committees have become more restrictive and hence sensitive or disadvantaged groups do not have their voices heard. On a positive note, good people now come into the field and stay there as there is more of a career path in alcohol research.