



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# Att åldras med långvariga alkoholproblem

Hur medelålders och äldre kvinnor och  
män begripliggör sitt drickande, sig  
själva och sina liv

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## Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för  
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**Title**

Ageing with long-term alcohol problems. How middle-aged and elderly women and men make sense of their drinking, themselves and their lives

**Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to describe and analyze how late middle-aged and elderly women and men make sense of what it means to age with long-term drinking problems.

I have conducted life story-inspired interviews with six women and 13 men who have alcohol problems which have been ongoing for at least 20 years. The analysis of the data has been inspired by thematic narrative analysis. For doing the analysis, I have used theories about meaning making and life stories, as well as theories about how people give meaning to their alcohol use. The interview person's experiences of their present everyday life are connected to their pasts as well as to their expectations for the future. The interview persons make sense of themselves and their lives in relation to metanarratives that provides them with predefined ways to understand their social reality.

The interview persons everyday lives can be seen in the light of their past, there the long-term drinking problems have resulted in severe consequences for their social networks, their physical and mental health as well as their financial situations. The alcohol use was often seen as both a solution to, and a cause of, their problems. Considering that most of the interview persons were suffering from severe health problems, several of them did not expect to live much longer. This, together with the fact that they were becoming older, evoked existential questions about how they wanted to spend their remaining time. In order to avoid an alcohol related death, several interview persons had started to question their alcohol use and a few had made actual attempts to overcome their drinking problems. Others had no hope of changing their life situations or cutting down their alcohol use.

The interview persons are living in a time characterized by metanarratives about active and successful ageing. Research show, however, that drinking problems among late middle-aged and elderly people are increasing. People aging with long-term drinking problems are often overlooked when it comes to getting access to treatment programs for problematic alcohol use, and they seldom fit into organized activities for elderly people. Social interventions are, however, important for making the everyday lives less difficult for people ageing with long-term drinking problems and to provide added support to those who wish to change their drinking habits.

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Alcohol problems, ageing, life course, life stories, sense making

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