

Visibility and impact of the sober curiosity phenomenon in the bars of the South Karelia region

LAB University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management
2023
Anu Kiiski

Abstract

Author(s) Anu Kiiski	Publication type Thesis, UAS Number of pages 41 pages + 2 appendices	Completion year 2023
Title of the thesis Visibility and impact of the sober curiosity phenomenon in the bars of the South Karelia region		
Degree, Field of Study Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management		
Abstract <p>Sober curious is a phenomenon that refers to an increased interest in avoiding or consuming less alcohol. The sober curious phenomenon can be considered a backlash against the traditional drinking and party culture, where the use of alcohol often plays a large role. The phenomenon's popularity is due to people's increased interest in nurturing their own health and well-being. The communal nature of the phenomenon, the change in alcohol trends, and the COVID-19 pandemic can also be considered as a part of the reason for the growing popularity of the sober curious phenomenon.</p> <p>In this thesis, the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in the South Karelia region, its effects on the work of bar workers in the region and preparation for the possible popularity of the phenomenon was investigated.</p> <p>The empirical data used in the study was collected with using semi-structured, individual interviews targeted at experts in the field. The interview material was interpreted using the method of qualitative content analysis.</p> <p>In the study, based on interviews with nine experts, it was found that there are indications of the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in the South Karelia region. Visibility was most obvious in bars that were located near accommodation services or in the central area of Lappeenranta. The employees had noticed the increased demand for non-alcoholic drinks both in normal purchasing situations and also in event orders. At workplaces, the phenomenon had been responded to by improving the selection, quality of the products and readiness to prepare of non-alcoholic mocktails. The employees considered the sober curious phenomenon a positive thing and believed in the growth of the phenomenon. However, they were still cautious about preparing for the phenomenon, especially when it came to financial investments.</p>		
Keywords Sober curious, sobriety, sober curiosity, South Karelia		

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Appendix 1. Interview framework – English version

Appendix 2. Interview framework – Finnish version

1 Introduction

This thesis is about "Visibility and impact of the sober curiosity phenomenon in the bars of the South Karelia region" and it deals with the sober curious phenomenon and its possible visibility in the South Karelia region, as well as the possible actions and plans of the bars in the region to respond to this new trend.

This topic was chosen, because sober curious term is relevant, as it has become a popular topic in social media discussion and also traditional media publishing's. The topic has also not been studied yet that much, at least not in scientific research studies. So, the novelty of the topic works as an inspiration. The knowledge concerning alcohol harms is also high due to earlier profession as a registered nurse and the personal preference of conducting qualitative research, fits to this topic.

In this thesis the research focus is on the possible visibility of the phenomenon in South Karelia area and how has the increased growth of non-alcoholic drinks been possibly responded to. An other point of interest in the research is to give an answer to what possible processes the staff may have planned to do in the future if the popularity of the phenomenon grows.

This thesis can serve as a prevalence mapper of the sober curious phenomenon and increase awareness of the subject. The research provides valuable information on how the needs of the sober-curious people have been taken into notice in the area of Southern Karelia region.

1.1 Background

Sober curious is a new concept. It has been trending especially on social media in a big way, e.g., in the anonymous chat application Jodel and Instagram and also in traditional media. The subject has been discussed extensively recently, e.g., with numerous newspaper articles, radio podcasts and television current affairs programs. The topic in question was chosen as the subject of the thesis, because the phenomenon is new, trending and not that much researched information can be found yet, in which case the researcher can also act as one of the creators of the research base.

The sober curious phenomenon has been explained to be a permanent state when you drink less often, but you are more aware of your motives behind drinking and strive to change your relationship with alcohol to a more positive one (Gooch 2021, 25). This means that to be sober curious, you do not have to detain from alcohol use entirely, but to question

why you drink. However, most of sober curious people do detain entirely from alcohol usage.

In Finnish Jodel channels @darravapaa (2023b) and @anonyymitalkoholistit (2023) provide support for people wanting to cut back their alcohol use. In Instagram social media countless user accounts provide events for alcohol-free support, events and much more. Most visible accounts in are community pages like @sobergirlsociety (2023), @darravapaa (2023a), @soberfurious.klubi (2023) and influencer accounts as @sobermimmi (2023) and @holiton_helmi (2023).

Several books related to the topic have been published in the recent years. The most prominent of these are Ruby Warrington's (2018) book *Sober Curious*, which is considered a foundational work for the emergence of the sober curious phenomenon, especially because the term sober curious was first named and described in this book. Another important book concerning sober curiosity is the *Sober Girl Society Handbook* by Millie Gooch (2021). This book works out as handbook for people who have given up drinking and are identifying themselves as sober curious. A book written in this style is also Annie Grace's (2020) book *This Naked Mind*.

In Finland, books have been written about the sober curious phenomenon, e.g., Katri Ylinen (2022), whose book *Aamu ilman darraa* contains thoughts about stopping alcohol consumption and describes the author's own story of breaking away from alcohol. The author has also written a handbook for sober curious people with Laura Wathén (2023) with the title *Darravapaa käsikirja*.

In 2022, Hanna Tikander shook the Finnish media with Wilma Ruohisto (2022) by writing the book *Selvin päin – Erään bilettäjäen tarina* by telling about the prevalence of party drugs in the nightlife of the capital region of Finland. The book is Tikander's autobiographical dive into the years full of drugs and growing into a drug-free life. The book also addressed the sober curious phenomenon, although the author does not identify herself as sober curious, but completely sober from all intoxicants – as an absolutist.

Especially in Finland, the sober curious phenomenon has not been studied yet, probably due to the novelty of the phenomenon. Few Finnish studies on the subject have been carried out on the recent years in different branches of sciences and levels of education. Tankanen (2022) has researched on her Master's thesis how the Sober Girl Society builds alcohol-freeness and what are the motives behind the action. Pylvänäinen (2023) has researched in his Master's thesis about the sober curious phenomenon as a therapeutic practice and a challenger to alcohol normativity. His research examined the sober curious trend as a social phenomenon and how it is structured in literature and media material. Mäkinen

(2022) studied in his Bachelor's thesis how the sober curious phenomenon can be seen in Alko Oy's operations now and in the future and how Alko Oy should respond to the growing trend. A current study by Mäenpää (2023) studies in her Bachelor's thesis the visibility and prevalence of the sober curious phenomena in the area of Jyväskylä.

A few foreign studies on the sober curious phenomenon were found. There is research done on finding socially acceptable ways to reduce alcohol consumption for heavy drinking Australian women. The study investigated how the sober curious trend could affect the normalization of drinking amongst Australian women and their willingness to reduce alcohol consumption. The study revealed that the social class of the respondents affected the health outcomes. It also revealed that it created difficulties and caused inequality for people belonging to the lowest social class in the opportunities to reduce alcohol use and the health risks caused by its use. (Lunnay et al. 2022, 1-15.) Thach & et al. (2022, 233-235) studied the behaviour of American wine consumers and developed demographics from these user patterns. The study focused on wine drinkers who had reduced their drinking of alcoholic wines. Some of the Americans had reduced their wine consumption and researchers assume that the sober curious phenomenon is an influential factor in the matter.

Although there are already some studies on the subject and one study has already been published concerning the visibility and prevalence of the phenomenon, the topic has not yet been studied enough in Finland. This is why it is believed that this thesis will answer to a need and a small part of Finland's surface area will be mapped by this topic.

1.2 Objectives

The focus of the research is to study the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in a precisely defined area and to study the processes created by the bars and their staff on how the possible demand has been met at the moment. The thesis will also give an answer to what possible processes the staff may have planned to do in the future as the popularity of the phenomenon grows.

The research objectives of this study are:

- To study the sober curious phenomenon's appearance in the region of South Karelia.
- To find out if the sober curious phenomenon has had an effect in the daily work of the bar staff at the moment and if the bar staff/organization has any future plans to react to the phenomenon.

These objectives were chosen, because the phenomenon's appearance and its effect in the bar work has not been studied enough in Finland and there are some references that this phenomenon might have some foothold in South-Eastern part of Finland. However, although these are the main objectives of my thesis, other goals were set for my work as well.

Other thesis goals are:

- To share information of the phenomenon and make it more known.
- Provide valuable information on how the needs of the sober curious people have been taken into notice in the area of South Karelia region.
- The research can be used as a scope of potential interest towards non-alcoholic beverages. This can help and work as a tool of measurement for current and future businesses planning on working in the beverage- and event planning industry.
- This thesis will also work as a learning experience and memory refresher for myself on how to conduct research.

1.3 Research method

Research method chosen for this thesis is qualitative research. Qualitative research method is explained by Juuti and Puusa (2020) as research trying to make sense of a phenomenon from the viewpoint of the researched respondents.

When people are being asked questions, they respond with their own experiences or give their own thoughts of the matter asked. These kinds of answers are not well measurable and do not therefore fit well to a quantitative research method. Qualitative research method was chosen because it fits well this kind of study, where the interest is in collecting experiences of a phenomena.

Among the many methods of qualitative research, content analysis was selected for this study. As explained by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2017), content analysis is a basic analysis method that is not guided by any theory or epistemology. The reasoning logic used in the research is inductive because there is no ready material or theory on which to base the research. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2017) define content analysis as the analysis of written, heard and seen content.

1.4 Scope of the research

The data acquisition method used in the study was an expert interview. The interviewees were interviewed as individual interviews. Interviewed individuals worked as bartenders and bar managers bars in the South Karelia area. The bars chosen to study have to work as a

main activity within the scope of serving alcohol. Restaurants, kiosks, cafes etc. that have an alcohol serving license, but serving alcohol is not the main thing, were not included in this research. It was chosen to study this research group, since this group of respondents most likely have a view of the phenomenon's appearance and can provide information on how it shows in their daily work and whether it has had an impact on the work or ways of working.

South Karelia as a region was chosen because the appearance of the sober curious phenomenon, has not been studied yet in the area. Setting the South Karelia region as the target of the study and partly also as a limiting factor was felt to be more reasonable than, for example setting capital region as the target, because the phenomenon is known to be already visible there.

In this thesis, there will not be a certain case company, or an organization involved. Therefore, a research permit is not needed. All the interviewed respondents were informed where the information collected is being used, why it is being collected, how the information is processed and how their anonymity is being dealt with.

1.5 Delimitations of the research

There are some limitations to the research. The delimitations of the research are that the research is limited by the research method, area limitation, the type of research environment and the respondents job description.

Advantages of qualitative research is that you get the opportunity to modify your research questions as needed and explore the problem in more depth. Disadvantages of qualitative research are its long-lasting implementation time, its research method difficulty, and the fact that it is difficult to demonstrate the validity of things with the research method. (Brunt et al. 2017, 143.) With qualitative research method, it is difficult to prove whether the collected information is valid and statistically significant, because the qualitative research method examines a much smaller group of people compared to what is needed to conduct quantitative research. The research method's data collection and the complexity of the analysis phase are also limits by time related issues.

The area of the research is set to be the South Karelia area. This area was chosen because, a region had no earlier information about the sober curious phenomenon's possible visibility. The type of research environment is limited to bars, the research environment does not include food restaurants, kiosks or, for example, hotel lobby bars with alcohol license rights.

Aho et al. (2009, 47-51) describes a few different types of bars in his book. These types of bars can be classified according to service or business idea. A nightclub can be, for example, any restaurant, where there is the possibility of dancing and extended permits have been applied for. Trendy drinks and champagne are served as drinks, and the restaurant has invested in a dance floor, colored lights, and sound equipment. Beer restaurants, on the other hand, can be of very different types, depending on which country's beer culture is adapted in the restaurant. Beer restaurants are focused on making it easy for people to make social contacts. Sports bar is a sports-themed bar, where sports entertainment is offered to watch along with drinking. Cocktail lounge as bar type often has live music, such as a DJ playing, and drinks offered there are high-quality.

Preferably the bars should be ones where young people go, because the sober curious phenomenon is especially popular amongst generation Z and millennials. Also, the job description of the respondents being interviewed, is limited. The interviewed people need to be specialists in their field of work. As explained by Hyvärinen et al. (2017, 216) a specialist is a person who acquires special information of the researched topic, that is only acquired by this certain person or by very few. Bartenders and bar managers were chosen to be the individuals to be interviewed. They must work in the field of serving alcoholic beverages and preferably it would be good for them to have experience in the field before the phenomenon arrived in Finland.

With these limitations, it is believed to find people to interview who are most likely involved in planning the bar's offerings and have possibly experienced the trend landing in Finland. However, if these limitations affect the number of responses negatively, they must be re-considered.

1.6 Research questions

In research questions the main interest is in the changes in consumer buying habits caused by the sober curious phenomenon. Another interest is pointing out the ways that companies have responded to the needs of this consumer group or are planning to respond to them.

The research questions chosen for this study are the following:

- Are there indications of the emergence of the sober curious phenomenon in the South Karelia region?
- If the sober curious phenomenon has been seen in the behaviour of the customer base, how has it been seen in practice?

- Has the prevalence of the sober curious phenomenon caused any kind of actions at the workplace, and if so, what kind of actions has it caused?
- Does the bar staff/organization have any future plans to react to the phenomenon?

2 Sober curiosity

Sober curious term is based on Ruby Warrington's (2018) book *Sober Curious*. This book was the one to define the mindful-drinking movement and launch the sober curious phenomenon.

The book describes sober curious as:

Questioning everything about your relationship with alcohol – including the way that we, as a society, view and consume it (Warrington 2018).

As stated by Gooch (2021, 25) the term description of sober curiosity has become confused in people's understanding. Some people have understood the term to mean that you have to be a full-time non-drinker, and some to just question their relationship with alcohol. However, Gooch herself describes sober curiosity as a person's permanent state, where the person can drink on some occasions, but has a healthier relationship with alcohol and is more aware of the motivations behind drinking it. The idea of a healthy approach to alcohol use is the core of the term sober curious and distinguishes it from absolutism, sobriety and, for example, straight edge culture.

A phenomenon is described by The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (2023b) as fact or circumstance that is being the object of observation, and which is influenced by a number of factors in its background. Also, temporary movements, events and for example fashion trends can be counted as phenomena.

The word phenomenon is often mixed by the word trend. The word trend is explained by the European Foresight Platform (2023) as a tendency to a change or a prevailing direction. A phenomenon, however, is something that is already a trend and has been a trend for some time. Past time turns a trend into a phenomenon. A megatrend, on the other hand in accordance with The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (2023a), is a trend that is showing at a global level or in a larger scale and stated by the European Foresight Platform (2023) tends to affect the future over the next ten to fifteen years.

2.1 Reasons for the emergence of the sober curious phenomenon

People are even more future-oriented, because of things like climate change and the prevailing threat of war. In addition, the global corona pandemic stopped the world for a while and at the same time woke people up to make new choices in their lives. The general interest in well-being and healthier lifestyles is therefore on the rise for a reason.

A good example of the well-being trend visibility linked to alcohol usage is that the Finnish Government owned alcohol retailer Alko (2023) trend review 2023 has included non-alcoholic and low-alcohol drinks as one of its trends. The trend emphasizes the rise in popularity of non-alcoholic beverages, mental and physical health, and Alko's responsible mental health promotion program. In the summer of 2022, Alko (2022) also opened its first alcohol-free Alko. It was a kiosk on wheels that toured Finnish cities in honour of Alko's 90th anniversary. The purpose of the kiosk was to develop a more responsible alcohol culture, respond to rising customer needs and renew Alko's image as a company.

According to The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (2023a) megatrend of growing well-being challenges, there is no return to the old normal everyday life. The corona pandemic and political decisions have shaped the health care system in such a way that access to treatment is even more difficult, e.g., due to the adequacy of nursing staff. Because of this, people strive to make changes in their lives through different choices and have to take even more responsibility in their health-related choices by being more aware. People's physical health has indeed improved, but mental health problems have increased.

The use of alcohol is often linked to the emergence of mental health problems. As described in the Duodecim Terveyskirjasto (2022) alcohol weakens mental health in many ways; alcohol users are more often diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders; the risk of suicide is also increased among alcohol users.

Alcohol itself may also trigger a condition similar to depression. Depression caused by alcohol is a condition which symptoms seem like a mental illness. However, it is not treatable with anti-depressant drugs and resolves itself within a few weeks when the person stops drinking. (Arramies & Hakkarainen 2013, 38.) In sober curious circles the improvement to this condition is called the pink clouding phenomenon. As mentioned in Malmberg's (2022) article, abstaining from alcohol can cause a positive phenomenon called clouding or pink cloud. The phenomenon is a feeling of well-being that appears after a couple of weeks or months of not drinking.

People dare to seek help for health problems at an ever-lower threshold, and that has certainly been one of the reasons why the sober curious phenomenon has become so popular, especially among young people. The right kind of help should just be available for them. Several sources state that young people, for example, do not perceive traditional Alcoholic Anonymous activities as their own. As stated in the Darravapaana podcast produced for Yle Areena (2021) and Katri Ylinen's (2022, 84-97) book *Aamu ilman darraa*, the image of the Alcoholics Anonymous society is that things have to be on really bad hold before help can be acquired. However, this assumption is wrong and there are no such restrictions in the

Alcoholics Anonymous society, and everyone is welcome there who feels that alcohol is a problem. An Yle-article written by Mari Kahila (2018) describes the Alcoholics Anonymous society's concern for young people, when the average age of members in the provinces is already approaching retirement age. There has therefore been a need for the sober curious phenomenon, when young people do not feel that the outdated channels for seeking help are their own. From the point of view of Lantz (2022) sober curious attracts people, because it is a new way of approaching sobriety via positivity. It focuses on what positive effects giving up alcohol brings to a person's life.

In addition to mental problems, it must also be remembered that excessive use of alcohol may also cause social, spiritual, and physical symptoms. As explained by Arramies and Hakkarainen (2013, 37-40) social symptoms can be, for example, abnormal relationships with close people, financial difficulties, divorces, and problems at work caused by drinking alcohol. Spiritual symptoms include selling the soul to the drug, moral decay, the crumbling of the world of values, self-accusations and living through the bottle. The physical dangers of alcohol are certainly familiar to everyone, and in addition to the development of various diseases, they also include accidents, poisonings, and cosmetic and other damage affecting the appearance.

Safety issues can also be one of the reasons why people are even more interested in not drinking. At the beginning of 2022, there was plenty of anonymous discussion on the social media platform Jodel channel @huonoapalvelua (2022) about drug cases in bars in the Helsinki city area. Also, Helsingin Sanomat article written by Welling (2022a) told about the harassment of women in the bar environment and how alcoholic drinks are not supposed to be let unsupervised due to numerous cases of intoxication. Due to this disturbing phenomenon, the founding members of the Darravapaa (2023) community and podcast Laura Wathén and Katri Ylinen, started organizing Sober Furious nightclub clubs, where they aim for a safer space and party to the fullest.

The attitudes towards sobriety are also transforming. In Aarnio's (2023, 16) article food culture professor Taru Lindblom states that the attitudes related to abstinence from alcohol use have changed, and refusing from alcohol offering is not interpreted as meaning that a person is either a sober alcoholic or pregnant. Being sober is not as strict decision as used to be before.

Today, there are also many kinds of applications for monitoring alcohol consumption. Tracking the functions of the human body is also popular with the help of mobile devices, smart watches and rings and other devices. Future indications of the rise of the transhumanism

trend are also in the air, as indicated by The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (2023a). Trans-humanism aims to overcome the limitations of humanity with the help of technology and may in the future affect, for example, human aging by liberating it. Smart devices are already collecting a large number of data from people, which according to this trend will be used to advantage by optimizing life choices together with smart drugs and body modification.

2.2 Sober curiosity as a phenomenon

As stated earlier in this thesis, the sober curious phenomenon has been seen a lot in the media on different media platforms. The popularity of the sober curious phenomenon is mainly due to its visibility on social media. The most famous of the international sober curious communities is the Sober Girl Society (2023) founded by Millie Cooch and this community has spawned smaller communities around the world.

The sober curious phenomenon also has its own social media influencers. In Finland, the most well-known sober curious media influencers are Katri Ylinen and Laura Wathén of the Darravapaa (2023) community, but also smaller players such as Sober Mimmi (2023) and the community she founded have appeared alongside them.

Communities also organize their own events. Darravapaa (2023) community is, for example, responsible for the Sober Furious event series, where popular individual alcohol-free party nights are organized in bars and venues around Finland. For example, this autumn the community organised an alcohol-free DJ event at the National Museum located in Helsinki. In addition to the events, the Darravapaa community has organized at least alcohol-free friend searches, Instagram Lives, speaking engagements and commercial collaborations with various operators. In the summer of 2023, for example, the Darravapaa community collaborated with Hartwall by promoting its low & no alcohol bar choice festival kiosk on social media. Sober Mimmi (2023) community also organizes Sober Euphoria party events as well as physical sports events such as twerk workshops and beach parties.

Finnish student unions have also woken up to follow the lead of foreign student union trend in sober events. Based on Parikka's (2021) article and 200 respondent survey published in Helsingin Sanomat, students have become fed up with the huge role alcohol acts in student events.

The equipment level of the bars in the field of non-alcoholic drinks has also improved, due to the popularity of the trend. In the article by Aholuoto (2023, 23), employees of bars in the center of the Helsinki area have been interviewed about the drink trends of summer 2023. The employees' answers show the increased demand for non-alcoholic drinks and the popularity of low-alcohol drinks.

Creating an alcohol-free drink menu has a much bigger role than before. Countless number of bars, for example, have now created mocktail versions from their cocktails. In the Sober Furious- club event, the bar counter has for example been replaced with various non-alcoholic options. The selection of mocktails is also extensive and they have been designed for the event. (Welling 2022b.)

In grocery stores the growing consumption of alcohol-free beverages has also been noted and selection of alcohol-free products have grown. As reported by an article by Karppi (2023), non-alcoholic drinks are selling so well that the large Finnish brewing company Hartwall has started to remove alcohol from beer and has considerably increased its range of non-alcoholic products. Hartwall has conducted its own research on the subject and according to it, almost half of Finns have reduced their drinking or do not drink alcohol at all. Among the customer groups, especially young adults were well represented as consumers of alcohol-free products. The same article also informs about the investment of another Finnish brewery, Sinebrychoff, in the production of non-alcoholic beer. Sinebrychoff (2023) has increased the selection of its non-alcoholic beverages considerably in the last few years and invested in production equipment to be able to produce non-alcoholic beers of its own brands from start to finish in Finland. This is a big change for the company, because only fifteen years ago the brewery had only two non-alcoholic products in its selection.

2.3 Beverage consumption in Finland

According to February 2023 preliminary population figure by the Statistics Finland (2022) Finland's population was 5 550 066 people. The populations alcohol usage has been studied by Jääskeläinen and Virtanen (2022) per each of the 19 provinces the land has been divided to.

In the Jääskeläinen and Virtanen (2022) THL alcohol beverage consumption report 2021 it is stated that the whole consumption of alcoholic beverages was decreased by 3 percent during the years 2020 and 2021. The overall consumption for every person turned 15-year-old of age, was 9 litres of one hundred percentage alcohol. Of this consumption 83 percent was bought from the government owned Alko- stores. Passenger imports and online purchases decreased by 21%. The sales of alcoholic beverages decreased in grocery stores only 0,7 percent. Statistics show this kind of information, because this statistics information was collected during the corona pandemic, which means that some restrictions on restaurant operations and traveling abroad affect these statistics. During this time period the alcohol tax percentage was also increased by 5 per cent.

Government owned Alko- store's sales of alcohol products also tell information of alcohol consumption. As stated in Yle news article written by Pantsu (2023), sales of Alko have almost returned to the level of the normal year before the corona virus. Compared to the corona years, sales have decreased because restaurant sales and travel courier imports have taken away some of Alko's customers. In 2022, Alko's sales were 80.3 million litres.

When looking at sales figures for non-alcoholic beverages, not all information is public. However, some indications of an increase in sales of non-alcoholic products can be found.

Sinebrychoff's (2023) own press release states that the growth of Sinebrychoff's non-alcoholic beer has tripled in the last five years and that the market for non-alcoholic products has increased more than twentyfold in the last fifteen to ten years.

Kespro's sales data shows that there has been a 108% increase in non-alcoholic beers in 2022 compared to the year before the corona pandemic in 2019. There was also a 52% increase in mixers and a 29% increase in waters. (Kesko 2022.)

In S-group stores alcohol-free beverages including beers, long drinks, ciders, and wines have grown to 3% of all alcohol beverages according to an article published by Yle. This is a huge increasement to the amount of 1,5 % four years ago in 2019. (Karppi 2023.)

The percentage of alcoholic beverages is a secondary issue for Finnish consumers today as mentioned in Aarnio's (2023, 15-16) article. Beverage departments in food stores have expanded since 2018 and the change is due to the alcohol law of 2018, which enabled grocery stores to sell drinks with a maximum of 5.5 percent. This change has also increased the selection of non-alcoholic beers.

In 2023, the Finnish government will change alcohol taxation that the taxation of wine and other fermented beverages will be increased by 8.3 percent and the value of fortified wines will rise to 12.7 percent. The tax on beers containing more than 3.5% alcohol by volume will be reduced by 4.9%. The taxation of soft drinks increases depending on the sugar content. (Virtanen et al. 2023). This change in taxation may further increase the popularity of low-sugar and lighter alcohol products in the near future.

2.4 Beverage consumption in South Karelia area

South Karelia as an area consists of two cities and seven municipalities. The cities of Southern Karelia area are Lappeenranta and Imatra and the municipalities are Lemi, Taipalsaari, Parikkala, Ruokolahti, Luumäki, Rautjärvi and Savitaipale. As stated in the Statistics Finland (2023) population statistics Lappeenranta city's population is 72 634 people and Imatra city has population of 25 655. Of the seven municipalities, biggest population of people can be

found in Ruokolahti with population of 4 913 people and smallest preliminary population is in Lemi with 2 917 people.

THL alcohol beverage consumption report 2021 states, that the amount of alcohol usage in litres of 100 per cent alcohol per every 15 year of age turned person in South Karelia area, was average of 9,4 litres. This means that the people of South Karelia drink more than the country's median amount, which is 9 litres. Most of the alcohol measured in 100% alcohol per inhabitant turned 15 years was consumed in Imatra (12,6 litres), Savitaipale (12,3 litres) and Parikkala (12,3 litres) and least in Taipalsaari (4,0 litres). (Jääskeläinen & Virtanen 2022.)

The Finnish population can be divided into two parts according to morbidity and mortality. In the south, there is a healthier side, where alcohol habits are moderate, people live more communally and stay healthier. In the north and east, on the other hand, there is an unhealthier side, where people have more alcohol problems, mental health problems and where people are more likely to fall ill with national diseases. There is a 2–3-year difference in human mortality between these regions. The most important reasons for the differences in these areas are socio-economic factors, lifestyles, and heredity. (Hahto 2023, 15-16). Based on Hahto's article South-Karelia belongs to the unhealthier side of the partition.

There has been an Ota Kantaa - substance abuse survey in 2021 conducted by Eksote (2021). Eksote was a former medical service provider, which was responsible for wellbeing services county of South Karelia. In this survey there were 408 participants, from whom half were residents of Lappeenranta city, one fourth residents of Imatra city and rest residents from the seven municipalities. Survey responses tell that visibility of underage alcohol usage has decreased but is still somewhat visible. Visible alcohol usage had made one third of the respondents scared for their own safety and most of these respondents would hope for bans for alcohol usage in public areas or certain places. Most people concerned of their own safety were from Imatra city. Two thirds of the respondents were concerned of alcohol usage of their own close relatives, most of them from Imatra area. The survey also studied on what level healthcare workers had asked about alcohol usage during customer appointments. More than half of the respondents had been asked about their alcohol usage.

2.5 Signs of emerging sobriety trend in South Karelia area

In the scope of non-alcohol consumption in the South Karelia region, the sober curious phenomenon has appeared to some extent, for example in interviews of people who do not drink and news coverage of alcohol-free student events.

As mentioned by Klemi (2023) newspaper article there is much more alcohol-free events available in university events. Alcohol-free students are also better noticed in other events, where the majority of students do drink. Alcohol-free events held in Lappeenranta area consist of movie nights, game events, Mättö- food event and party event Sober Mayhem.

There is one traditional sober event held in Lappeenranta, that has been ongoing in a yearly basis. This event is called Kaamospuhallus, and it has been organized in Lappeenranta since year 1999. The event is completely drug-free, and it is intended for the youth of the area. The event has been on pause for a few years due to the corona virus, but now in 2023 the event is being organized again. (Nokso-Koivisto 2023.)

There are also other indications of the increase in the trend of not drinking alcohol in the area. In the summer of 2023, non-alcoholic wines were also available for tasting at an event called Wolkoffin viinikarkelot, this event was a local wine tasting event (Hulkkonen 2023). The local newspaper releases also tell a story of the rise of the sober curious movement in the area. The article by Jalarvo (2022) mentions the sober curious phenomenon. In this article, two young people from Imatra talk about the sober curious phenomenon and consider the reasons for its increased popularity. According to them, young people are more interested than before in a lifestyle that emphasizes well-being and are interested in the wellness and fitness world. Bar nights and spending money on alcohol are no longer of interest to young people. The article also discusses the growth of non-alcoholic drinks and how people want lower-calorie and healthier drinks than before. The article also mentions the improvement in the quality of non-alcoholic products.

A recent article by Tossavainen (2023, 20-21) states that Christmas parties organized by workplaces, which are generally held in Finland as a celebration infused by massive amounts of alcohol, are facing a change. The representatives of the South Karelian companies interviewed in the article, announce that drinking alcohol is no longer considered a very essential part of celebrating workplace Christmas party, but rather a gathering to spend time together with the coworkers. South Karelian companies want to pay more attention to employees who do not drink alcohol. The also article states that many companies in the area have changed free serving of alcohol to drink tickets to limit alcohol consumption, so that people do not drink excessively.

New alcohol-free products are also being created and innovated in the area of South Karelia. For example, alcohol-free tonic water has been made from Lappeenranta area's drinking water. As reported by Nokso-Koivisto (2021) article, Arctic Blue Beverages has made its tonic water with the Lappeenranta company Kaskein marja.

3 Research implementation

The empirical data of the research was gathered via semi-structured interview. As explained by Hyvärinen et al. (2017, 20-21) semi-structured interview is an interview format that is not based on fixed answer options but guides the interview topics. This means that in order to be able to make some kind of conclusions about the answers of the interview, the structure of the interview should be such that it gives the desired type of answers. Based on Hyvärinen et al. (2017, 20-21) even the unstructured interviews have at least some topic or topics named that are being handled. Therefore, in practice not any study can be completely unstructured.

Ready-made sample questions were made under the research themes, which then were used as a basis for the interview. These questions are included in the Appendix 1. Interview framework – English version. Due to conducting the interviews in Finnish, a Finnish translation of this same interview framework was included, it can be found from Appendix 2. Interview framework – Finnish version. The course of the interview steered which of the questions were asked. However, the interview included certain questions asked from all interviewees in order to get answers to the research questions.

The interviews also contained background questions so that the interview material could differentiate the answers from each other and in some cases help to better understand the answers of the interviewee, for example the stated amount of work experience in years was essential information for the study, because respondents with lesser amount of experience might not have seen changes in customer habits in the same way as respondents with longer working experience and the answer therefore affects the consideration of visibility of the phenomenon. Things that were asked as background questions were the following: age, gender, work experience in the field (in years) and duration of work experience in that workplace (in years). These background questions were partly also addressed quantitatively, for example when finding out the respondents' average amount of work experience in the field.

The goal of the interview was to get an overall picture of how the phenomenon under study is visible currently in the work and working environment of the interviewed respondents and what kind of changes it has brought in the working processes if the phenomenon has been visible and has had an impact on the work. The interviewees were also asked about possible future prospects related to the phenomenon and how to possibly prepare for the phenomenon in the future.

The interviews were conducted between June and August 2023. Permission to interview was asked from the persons on duty at the time, and at the same time they were told for what purpose the interviews would be collected and how the information collected in the interviews would be processed in the study. Interview permission was requested from twelve different bars staff workers in total. A negative answer to interview permission was received from three bar staff workers. Two of them from Imatra and one from Lappeenranta. Total amount of interviews successfully done was nine interviews. Seven of the interviews were done in Lappeenranta area, one in Imatra and one in Luumäki. The bars of those who agreed to the interview were mostly pubs, but one sports bar, a few local pubs, and bars popular with young people were also represented. One of the interview locations was a bar connected to the accommodation service, which served as a nightclub on weekends.

An interview is an invitation to talk about pre-chosen topic, it provides researchers with data that they are interested in and helps them to create new considerations of the surrounding psychological and social world. (Josselson 2013, 9.) Interview as data collecting method was chosen, because interview can bring more deeper knowledge of the researched topic and provides an easy way to ask clarifying questions if needed.

After transcribing, the interviews were turned into 38 pages of cleanly written interview material. The data provided by the interviews was analysed by qualitative content analysis method. Content analysis is described by Braun and Clarke (2022, 293) as an analysis method that focuses on text-based meaning and pattern identification. Content analysis is similar method to thematic analysis method, and it shares some similar steps. However, content analysis patterns can be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively, thematic analysis method can be only analysed qualitatively. (Braun & Clarke 2022, 286.)

After transcribing the material, the material was divided as answers to the questions. After this work phase, the content was divided into segments, where one text entity corresponded to one theme entirety. These text segments were coded and reduced to one or a few descriptive words. Based on these descriptive words, groups were created that described a larger whole. Descriptive umbrella terms were lastly invented for these groups.

After processing the interviews, solutions were sought from the materials. The things that were especially looked for in the material were things Yin (2008) suggests finding from the material, which are: similarities, differences, explanations for the phenomenon, typical narratives, and the logic of the operation (Kananen. 2017, 148). Based on these findings, interpretations of the material were made.

Finally, based on the answer material of the questions, answers were looked for to the research questions using the research question as a filter, so that the so-called "useless information" could be filtered out and only the essence of the matter kept.

4 Research results

4.1 Background information

In the interview, the interviewees were asked a few background questions, with the aim of distinguishing the answers from each other and partly also to better understand the answers of the interviewee. Things that were asked as the background questions can be found from Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. The interview participants were selected based on who happened to be at work at the time of asking permission to interview.

The age of the respondents varied between twenty-one and forty years. The average age of the interviewees was 27.3 years. All interviewees were female. The interviewees had between two and twenty-one years of work experience in the field. The average work experience in the field among the interviewees was 5.8 years. Respondents had been in their current workplace from one month to six years. The average work experience in the current workplace was two years.

4.2 Clarification of the term and the general visibility of the phenomenon

The answers about the recognizability of the term sober curious phenomenon were divided among the interviewees. The interviewees either knew the term, did not know the term, or had heard the term, but the explanation of the term had remained unclear. Out of all the nine respondents, three knew what the term sober curious phenomenon means. Two of the respondents had heard about the sober curious phenomenon before through the media and social media but could not explain the term in more detail. However, one person who was unfamiliar with the term was able to guess the explanation of the term almost correctly. Four interviewees had not heard of the term at all.

The understanding of the term was ensured among all the interviewees with an explanation of the term in connection with each interview, to make sure that the same issue was discussed with each interviewee. After the term was explained, each interviewee accepted the term explanation.

Five of the nine respondents were already familiar with the sober curious phenomenon before the interviewer contacted them, and one person had heard the term before. This suggests that the phenomenon may have been heard of but referring to the answers to the previous question "Do you know what the sober curious phenomenon means?", its verbal explanation was unclear or too difficult to explain to some respondents. The answers also support the notion that the sober curious phenomenon is not yet very well known in the South Karelia region, because three respondents were not familiar with the term before.

When asked about the visibility of the phenomenon in the South Karelia region, two of the interviewees admitted that the phenomenon is somewhat visible in the South Karelia region. Three respondents to the interview believed the phenomenon was well visible in the area. Only two respondents believed the phenomenon does not appear in the South Karelia region at all. The two respondents also stated that the visibility of the phenomenon is greater elsewhere, mentioning the areas like Kotka and the capital region of Finland. One of the respondents living in Imatra, on the other hand, suspected that the phenomenon is more visible in the central area of Lappeenranta, and one person could not answer the question because she had not thought about it before. It was noteworthy in the answers that the bars, which were located near the accommodation services, all answered that the phenomenon is visible in the South Karelia region.

The interviewees also gave reasons why the phenomenon is visible or not visible in the South Karelia region. As mentioned by the interviewees, the reasons why the phenomenon is not seen in the South Karelia region were the bar's clientele, the alcoholic drinking culture of students, or the remote location. Reported by the interviewees, the visibility of the phenomenon was influenced by the general change in drinking culture, the proximity to the centre of Lappeenranta and customers from other cities.

The visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in the South Karelia region varied a lot among the respondents. However, most respondents said that the phenomenon was visible or somewhat visible. Especially the bars, which were in the closeness of accommodation services, answered that there was visibility. This can be explained due to the variation of customer material from areas where the phenomenon is more visible.

Two of the interviewees said that the phenomenon has had no effect on their own alcohol use, nor on the alcohol use of their close friends. However, three interviewees said that they had noticed a change in their close circle of people. The interviewees said that their friends had cut back on drinking, held no-drinking challenges, and went to bars to hang out sober. One interviewee's husband was completely sober, and one person said that the phenomenon affected her own alcohol consumption in a way that she has not drunk alcohol for over a year. One person had thought about her own alcohol consumption without being aware of the phenomenon. Many respondents also mentioned that the phenomenon is visible in the bar's clientele.

The sober curious phenomenon had been encountered in traditional media publications, such as magazine articles in local newspapers, as well as in social media, mostly on Instagram. The content production material of the Darravapaa community on Instagram was, for example, familiar to a few interviewees.

The visibility of the phenomenon was therefore, according to the interviewed stories, very visible in the private lives of individuals, in one way or another. The majority had also come across the phenomenon in traditional media and social media.

4.3 Visibility of the phenomenon in the workplace

When asked about the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon at the interviewee's workplace, the answers were following; either the phenomenon was not visible, it was slightly visible, or it was visible. Three interviewees said that they had not noticed the visibility of the phenomenon at all. Four answered that the phenomenon was visible, and two respondents thought the phenomenon was just slightly visible.

Visibility was described as increased demand and increased requests to organize alcohol-free private events. The answers showed that the number of alcohol-free products has increased in variety and the quality of the products has improved, which is why more of them are being sold today. Bars connected to accommodation services all reported an increase in demand, while most bars further from the centre of larger cities did not recognize the phenomenon as visible, often referring to their customer base consisting of regular customers.

Most of the respondents to the interview recognized the phenomenon as visible. Visibility was increased by the proximity of the city centre and the proximity of accommodation services. The remote location reduced the visibility of the phenomenon based on the answers.

The reasons affecting the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon at the workplace were asked with a separate question. This is because not all people opened their answer automatically and therefore the answer to the reasons related to the visibility of the phenomenon, would then have remained unanswered.

As explained by the interviewees, the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in the workplace was increased by the enlarged demand for alcohol-free products and more visible marketing of the products. The improvement in the quality and selection of non-alcoholic products also increased the visibility at work.

The visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in the workplace, was reduced by the issues already covered in the previous question, i.e., the location and the clientele consisting of regular customers. The interviewees did not give any other reasons that contributed to the decrease of the phenomenon at the workplace.

The interviewees had seen a change in customers' purchasing behaviour related to the sale of non-alcoholic products. Only three respondents stated that there has been no visible

change in customers' purchasing behaviour. These bars were located further away, not close to city centres and accommodation services. Most respondents reported an increase in the purchase of non-alcoholic products. People asked for more non-alcoholic drinks and the selection of available beverages is asked more often. Among the non-alcoholic drinks, customers were especially interested in beers. Mocktails are also being asked more and people are asking for non-alcoholic versions of certain alcoholic drinks. Customers have also been surprised how many alcoholic drinks can easily be converted to non-alcoholic versions.

When the interviewees were asked whether customers are asking for non-alcoholic options more often than before, a clear majority of positive answers were received. Only one respondent said that he had not noticed a change in demand. Some of the interviewees also opened up the issue in more detail, i.e., told what customers usually ask for non-alcoholic alternatives. As reported to those interviewed, people are asking for more mocktails and non-alcoholic drinks, beers, ciders, and long drinks. Mentioned by one interviewee, in addition to other non-alcoholic drinks, students also ask for non-alcoholic shots. Customers generally also wish for more choices in non-alcoholic drinks.

When asked what effect the sober curious phenomenon has had on the sale of non-alcoholic beverages, a few interviewees answered that sales of non-alcoholic beverages have increased by a few percent. One respondent said that there was no effect on sales, and one said that she was unable to evaluate because she had worked for such a short time in the workplace in question.

The interviewees were asked if the workplaces have participated in alcohol-free events, organized by some other party. Four workplaces had not participated in the organization of alcohol-free events in any way, and three bars had participated in an alcohol-free event organized by an external party. Some of the respondents could not answer because they had only worked for a short time in the workplace in question. One bar staff worker said that the bar had participated in Willimiehen Vipellys- event, where in addition to alcoholic drinks, non-alcoholic options were also available. Another respondent said that the events at their bar were all-age events for young people, where mocktails and lemonades were served. The third respondent, on the other hand, said that they had organized events where there was a separate non-alcoholic side in addition to the serving area. The interviewees also brought up other things like that they had a happy hour offer, where a non-alcoholic product was included, and that they had sometimes been asked by private customers to organize events where there was no alcohol served.

Based on the interviews, not a single bar had organized alcohol-free events of their own. The interviewees justified the matter in the way that the events organized in bars are based precisely on increasing the sale of alcohol and that because of this, it is not possible to organize all kinds of events, because the total costs of the events must also be covered.

4.4 Response to the phenomenon

As indicated by the interviewees, the phenomenon has had effect in the workplace. The majority said that the selection of non-alcoholic products had increased and that the bar was better prepared to make mocktails. In the Image 1 and Image 2 there are two examples of mocktails offered by the bars. In three places, it was said that campaign products often include a non-alcoholic option. Example of campaign product can be seen in Image 3. Image 4 and Image 5 show advertisement of non-alcoholic beverages available. In two bars interviewees told they have a separate mocktail list for non-alcoholic mocktails.



Image 1. Irma yksisarvinen- mocktail (Photo: Anu Kiiski)



Image 2. Pulina- mocktail (Photo: Anu Kiiski)



Image 3. Non-alcoholic campaign beverage option (Photo: Anu Kiiski)



Image 4. Non-alcoholic beverage advertisement (Photo: Anu Kiiski)



Image 5. Non-alcoholic beverage advertisement (Photo: Anu Kiiski)

As reported by the interviewees, the seven bars did not have a separate mocktail list. Only two bars could find this (Image 6 and Image 7). However, many interviewees said that they make mocktails upon request and that most alcoholic drinks can easily be converted to non-alcoholic ones. One place said that it is possible to make all of the drinks on their bar list in a non-alcoholic version as well. There was also a non-alcoholic option on the drink list of one bar (Image 8).

Vodka, Blue Curacao, Sitruunamehu, Sprite				
Keltainen		8		23
Vodka, Peach Likööri, Jaffa, Sitruunamehu				
VIINIT				
	12 cl	16 cl	24 cl	plo
Talon Punaviini	5,70	7,60	11,40	36
Talon Valkoviini	5,70	7,60	11,40	36
Kings of Prohibition Shiraz	7,20	9,60	14,40	45
Miss Schmitt Riesling	7,40	9,80	14,60	45,90
Talon Roseviini	5,70	7,60	11,40	36
	Lasi			plo
Talon Kuohuviini	5,50			36
Kuohuviini Piccolo				9
MOCKTAILS				
Bonehill	5			
Lime, Karpalomehu, Ginger Ale			Rock Lake	5
Salpalinja	5		Mansikkasiirappi, Appelsiinimehu, Sprite	
Mango Siirappi, Ginger Ale, Sitruunamehu				

Image 6. Mocktail-list (Photo: Anu Kiiski)

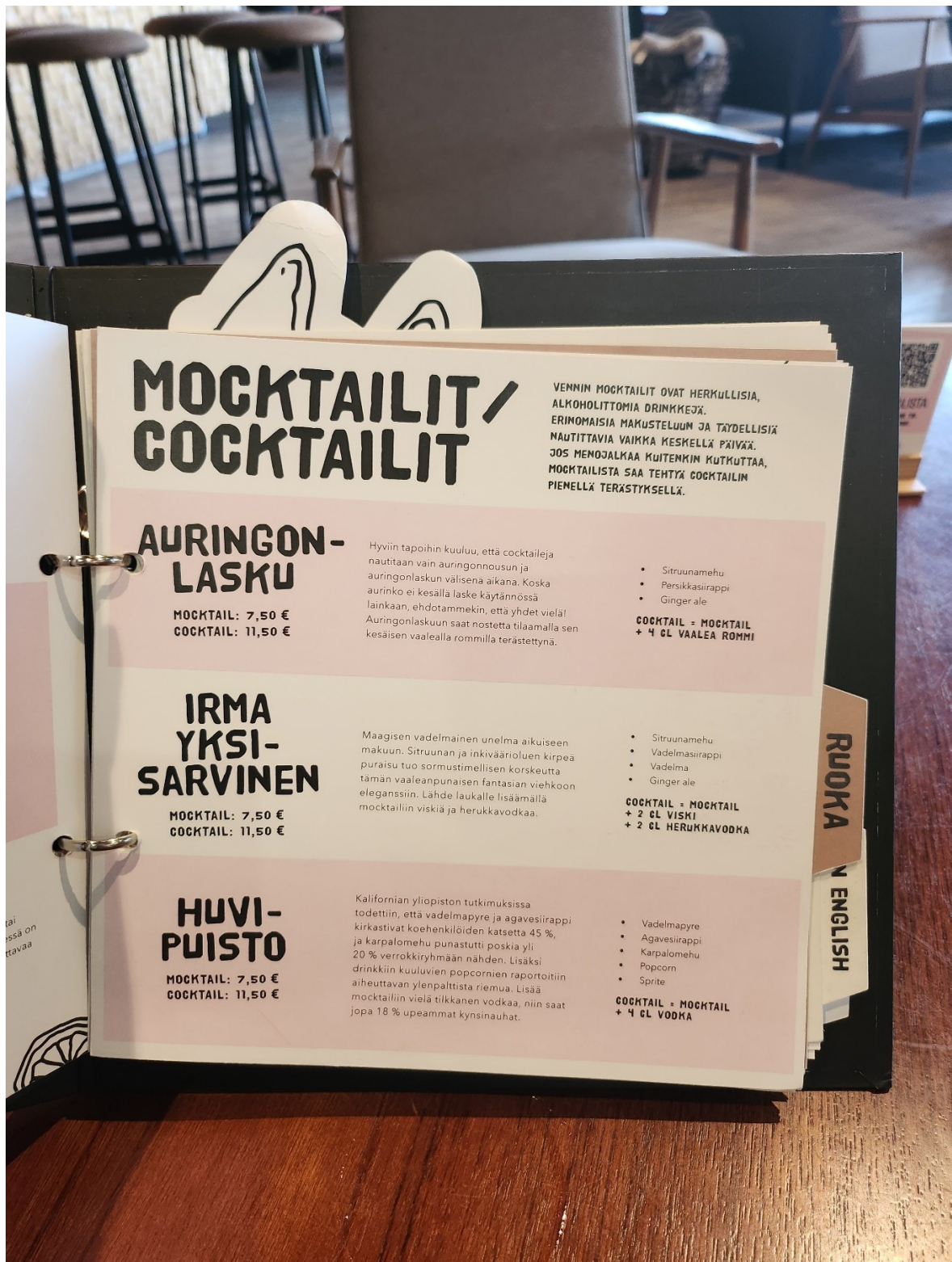


Image 7. Drinks that can be ordered alcoholic or non-alcoholic (Photo: Anu Kiiski)



Image 8. Drink menu with an mocktail option (Photo: Anu Kiiski)

The answers did not reveal the reasons why the bars did not have a separate mocktail and non-alcoholic beverage lists. However, one respondent told in the interview that her employer was against getting new non-alcoholic beverages, even though the employee herself would have been eager to develop and expand the selection. In several places, there was no separate list for alcoholic drinks either, but they were made upon request. Perhaps for

the same reason, many bars did not feel necessary to prepare a separate mocktail or non-alcoholic beverage list.

The interviewees were also asked whether they have any other sales material related to non-alcoholic beverages, i.e., material that, for example, suppliers have delivered to them. There was not much such sales material according to the interviewees. One of the interviewees suggested the bar's Red bull- energy drink advertisements as such sales material, which were basically energy drink using recipes for alcoholic drinks. Couple of others stated that they had seen a Hartwall flyer related to making mocktails somewhere. Other respondents said that there is no sales material. One of the respondents said that they don't have much sales materials because the restaurant is part of a chain and that they only have their own sales materials.

The interviewees were also asked on how the well-being trend closely related to the sober curious phenomenon has been visible in the interviewees' workplaces. Many answers were received to this question and only two of the respondents said that the trend is not visible. These places, where the trend was not visible, were located further away from the centre of Lappeenranta. One respondent also said that the drinking culture in general has changed so that nowadays people dare to be more open-minded as well, compared to the 1990s, when, for example, even a car driver would usually take a small beer when he didn't dare to sit in a company without an alcoholic drink. Nowadays this kind of behaviour is not so common.

As indicated by the interviewees, the well-being trend was reflected in the fact that people are increasingly asking for lighter, low-calorie, and sugar-free options. Based on the answers, the specially fortified and flavoured carbonated hard seltzers and the wine-based spritz extended with mineral water, were popular with people and were often requested. Soda-based cocktails were also popular.

4.5 The future outlook of the sober curious phenomenon in the bar industry

According to the interviewees, the future prospects of the sober curious phenomenon in the bar industry were seen as somewhat promising. The interviewees believed that sobriety will be viewed with less prejudice in the future and that people are already very health-oriented and will start to pay more and more attention to their health in the future.

Only a few interviewees believed that change would not happen, at least not in the near future. They justified the matter by saying that, like alcohol, it is not possible to develop a pull-in product from non-alcoholic products and lure people to come to the bar for example

with price reductions. One respondent was doubtful if this kind of change of turning to be more sober would happen in the customer base of the bar she worked in.

When asked if it would be worth investing in the phenomenon and preparing for it in the future, most of the interviewees answered yes. The answer was reasoned for example that it is felt embarrassing if the customer is not offered a choice. It was also feared that if the bars do not follow trends and offer customers the products they want, then customers will move elsewhere to where they can get these products.

Only one of the interviewees told that she would not start preparing for the phenomenon, at least not financially, but would rather remain prepared. The interviewee would rather invest in the quality of the products, and not reduce the value of the non-alcoholic product to the customer.

When asked how to prepare for the phenomenon, many found the question difficult to answer. Knowledge of one's own customer base was thought to be as an important indicator in making changes. The interviewees would develop new mocktails, start promoting alcohol-free options, follow trends, invest in pre-mixed drinks, the variety of the selection, quality and try to offer something that other bars don't have. One respondent told that she would not prepare for the phenomenon in any way.

The interviewees were also asked if they experienced the sober curious phenomenon as a positive or negative thing. Most of the respondents saw the phenomenon as a positive and even desirable direction of change. Two respondents again felt that there are two sides to the matter. These respondents thought of the phenomenon as otherwise positive, but as a bad thing from the point of view of the bar's sales.

The demand for alcohol-free events was also mapped using the opinions of the interviewees. Most of the interviewees believed that there is a demand for alcohol-free events because, for example, there is a student town in South Karelia, Lappeenranta. However, although some reported that there might be more demand for events in the future, the persons could not say how popular such events would be.

The interviewees, who were of the opinion that there is no demand for events, justified their answer with the size of South Karelia and with the fact that the bar has to make a profit in some way and that it is very difficult to make a profit with alcohol-free events.

4.6 Summary of the results

The answer to the question that are there indications of the emergence of the sober curious phenomenon in the South Karelia region, obtained by interviewing the following answers:

More than half of the respondents had heard of the sober curious phenomenon before. However, no verbal explanation could be given for the phenomenon. This is most probably due to the novelty of the term, the difficulty of the explanation or the terms complexity.

Most of the respondents answered that the sober curious phenomenon is visible or somewhat visible in the South Karelia region. In connection with accommodation services, the visibility was higher than in bars, where there were no accommodation services nearby. The proximity of the location of the student apartments had no effect on the visibility of the phenomenon based on this study, even though there has been plenty of news in the public about students' abstinence from alcohol.

The visibility of the sober curious phenomenon was very visible in the private lives of the interviewed persons and in the lives of their close people. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, it was said that visibility in the media for the phenomenon is somewhat in traditional media and even more in social media.

For the research question if the sober curious phenomenon has been seen in the behaviour of the customer base and how has it been seen in practice, the following conclusions were made:

Most of the people who responded to the interview felt that the phenomenon was visible or slightly visible. The visibility of the phenomenon was seen as increased requests from customers for alcohol-free products in normal purchasing situations, such as when planning events. The selection was also requested even more and, according to the interviewees, the advertising of non-alcoholic products was more visible.

The visibility varied between the bars so that the phenomenon was more visible in the vicinity of city centres and accommodation services, and in bars with a more remote location and an established clientele, the visibility of the phenomenon was less. In student residential areas, the visibility was also not high, based on the answers of the bars in that area.

None of the places interviewed organized alcohol-free events on behalf of the bar itself, because in all places the effort was to make the bar's income through the sale of alcoholic beverages. Alcohol-free or partially alcohol-free events organized by other operators were taken part in a few places.

From these selections it can be concluded that people are interested in alcohol-free products and certainly also in the sober curious phenomenon. This visibility is especially clear in places where people move a great deal around, such as in the larger centres of the region, as well as in places where the turnover and mobility of people is high due to the proximity of accommodation services. It was also surprising that even though there was

news about students not drinking alcohol and the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon in this group of people, the visibility of the phenomenon was not visible in the bars that were located near the student dormitory areas.

Considering the response to the sober curious phenomenon, one of my research questions was that has the prevalence of the sober curious phenomenon caused any kind of actions at the workplace, and if so, what kind of actions has it caused? For this question the following conclusions from the interviews could be made:

The sober curious phenomenon had an effect in almost all workplaces where the interviews were held. The phenomenon was particularly visible in the increased demand for non-alcoholic products, but also in the fact that the bars had already started to prepare for this demand. Alcohol-free products had been purchased for the bars and their selection had increased according to the interviewees. The readiness to make mocktails was also at a good level.

Only two bars had a separate mocktail list, but often a separate list was not considered necessary for mocktails, but the drinks were made by request, because most of the time people asked for non-alcoholic versions of alcoholic drinks.

Other sales material, such as advertisements of beverage companies, was hardly seen in the bars, unless the material was the bar's own. None of these ads were shown in the bars.

The well-being trend related to the sober curious phenomenon was very visible in bars. The interviewees said that people ask for light, low-calorie and sugar-free options. Soda-based drinks were popular in drinks, as were hard seltzers and spritzes.

The future prospects of the bar industry were also mapped in relation to the sober curious phenomenon. The following responses were received to the research question, do the bar staff/organization have any future plans to react to the phenomenon:

The future prospects of the sober curious phenomenon were seen as promising in the bar industry. Most of the interviewees felt that people are increasingly interested in their well-being and health and therefore saw the phenomenon growing. Those who did not believe in the growth of the phenomenon felt that it is difficult to make money with alcohol-free products and that the drinking habits of the clientele hardly change over time.

The interviewees felt that it is worth investing in the sober curious phenomenon. It was felt that if you do not follow new trends and offer customers products and service they want, customers will go to where you can get these products and services. The lack of selection

was also perceived as a shameful thing. Only one interviewee was of the opinion that he would not invest on the phenomenon, at least not financially.

The interviewees invested in the phenomenon by developing new mocktails, start promoting alcohol-free options, follow trends, invest in pre-mixed drinks, invest in the variety of the selection, quality and try to offer something that other bars do not have. One interviewee did not feel that investing in the phenomenon was necessary.

Almost all interviewees felt the sober curious phenomenon to be a positive phenomenon in the bar industry. The phenomenon was perceived as positive, because it was felt that it was good to have changes in the drinking culture and that it is good that people take care of their health. Only two interviewees felt that there are both good and bad sides to the matter. The downsides were related to making sales, because they felt that the sales of non-alcoholic drinks are not as big as alcoholic drinks.

5 Conclusions

The purpose of the thesis is to find out whether the sober curious phenomenon has visibility in the South Karelia region and how the phenomenon is reflected in the daily work of employees, for example in the behaviour of customers. The purpose was also to find out how the sober curious phenomenon has concretely affected work and how the workplace has responded to the phenomenon. The future prospects of the phenomenon were also clarified and possible means of preparation for the growth of the phenomenon.

As planned, comprehensive responses were received to all research questions, and it is hoped that these responses will help current and future businesses planning on working in the beverage-and event planning industry. The thesis can therefore be used, as originally planned, as a prevalence mapper for the spread of the phenomenon in the South Karelia region and a tool of measurement towards the interest to non-alcoholic beverages and alcohol-free events and business opportunities. The thesis also shares information about the sober curious phenomenon, which is still a relatively new phenomenon and not yet that well known.

The validity of the research is strong because the questions asked in the interviews gave answers to exactly the characteristics of the phenomenon, that were intended to be measured. The research is also easily repeatable, so it measures the desired phenomenon well. The reliability of the research is therefore at a good level. However, the reliability would have been increased even higher by a repeat measurement of the study, which was not possible in terms of time in this study.

The thesis process itself was challenging, because most of the research was done alongside work and time management sometimes became an issue. Also living on another city, brought its own problems, when travel had to be planned on the schedule.

The interview participants were selected based on by who happened to be at work at the time of asking the permission to interview. Because of this, interviewees could not be selected according to, for example, age, work experience or gender. Getting as many different people as possible into the study would have increased the variability in the interview responses. Getting older respondents to be interviewed, for example, would have given more experience brought by age and insight into the emergence of the phenomenon over a longer period of time. Because of this, some of the interviews were a bit narrow because the people could not answer all the questions, because there was little work experience either in the bar in question or in the field in general, measured in years. However, if the respondents to

the interview had been screened and selected more precisely, its authenticity would have suffered.

The number of interviews could have been higher, but some of the planned places chosen for interview refused to be interviewed. Due to this, some of the cities in South Karelia were also left out of the study. However, the research material collected started to repeat itself even with this number of interviewees, i.e., the saturation point was met in the research, so the research can be considered reliable at least on some level. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2017), the size of the thesis material should not be considered the most important criterion of the thesis, and according to Eskola and Suoranta (2015) the size of the material is not necessarily the determining factor, but the durability and depth of the interpretations made in the research.

Right at the end of the thesis process, a very similar type of thesis had been done and published elsewhere in Finland. This was personally discouraging because it dealt with the same themes as my own research and being the first to publish a thesis on this kind of topic was my personal aim. Luckily, the thesis had no effect on doing my own research, because it was noticed such late in the process. However, the fact that a similar topic of research had been published shows how popular the sober curious phenomenon has recently become and how it interests people.

Further research topics for the study could be the customer's point of view on the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon and what kind of non-alcoholic products customers would prefer in the bar menu, as well as what kind of non-alcoholic events customers would prefer in the South Karelia region. Organizing a non-alcoholic pop-up event could also be the subject of a practice-based thesis.

The effect of time on the topic of the thesis must also be considered. Now, the sober curious phenomenon is a brand-new phenomenon that is just arriving in the South Karelia region. In the future, the thesis interview could be renewed and could examine how the visibility of the sober curious phenomenon has changed and how the equipment of experts and their work and attitude towards the phenomenon has changed with the possible growth of the phenomenon. In the future, a similar study could also be conducted in another limited area elsewhere in Finland or abroad.

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Appendix 1. Interview framework - English version

Visibility and impact of the sober curious phenomenon in the South Karelia region – Interview framework

(English version)

Bolded questions are the questions that will be asked from every respondent. The use of theme related example questions or improvised ones depend on how the discussion develops during the interview.

1. Background questions

Questions that help the researcher identify the respondents from each other

- **Age?**
- **Sex?**
- **Work experience in the field (years)?**
- **Work experience in the current workplace (years)?**

2. Interview related themes and in-depth questions

Questions related to the clarification of the term and the general visibility of the phenomenon

- **Do you know what the sober curious phenomenon means?**
 - **If the answer is “no” -> the interviewer explains the term to the interviewee**
 - **If the answer is “yes” -> ask for clarification on how the respondent understands the term. Subtly correct if, for example, respondent has misunderstood the term**
- **Do you think the phenomenon is visible in the South Karelia region?**

Theme related example questions:

- Have you heard about this phenomenon before I contacted you, or was the term completely new to you?
- Have you noticed an increase in the visibility of the phenomenon, for example, in the media or in your own close circle?

Questions related to the visibility of the phenomenon in the workplace

- **Has such a phenomenon been observed in your workplace?**
- **How has this phenomenon been reflected in your work?**

Theme related example questions:

- Have you noticed any changes in people's purchasing behavior at work?
- Do customers ask for non-alcoholic alternatives more often than before?
- Has the visibility of the phenomenon been radical in terms of sales?
- Have you been involved in non-alcoholic events, such as Sober Mayhem event?
- Do you organize or have you ever organized alcohol-free events?

Questions related to the response to the phenomenon

- **Has this phenomenon had any impact on your workplace?**
- **Do you have a separate non-alcoholic drink or mocktail list for customers at your workplace?**
 - **If so, ask if you can take a picture of the list.**
- **Do you have any other sales material related to non-alcoholic beverages?**
 - **If so, ask if you can take a picture of the sales material.**

Theme related example questions:

- Has the well-being trend closely related to the sober curious phenomenon been visible in your workplace?

Future-oriented questions

- **Do you believe that this phenomenon will be seen even more in the bar industry in the future?**
- **Do you believe that it is worth investing in this phenomenon and preparing for it in the future?**
- **How do you think we should prepare for this phenomenon?**

Theme related example questions:

- Do you think the sober curious phenomenon is positive or negative for the bar industry?
- Do you believe that there would be more demand for alcohol-free events in the South Karelia region?

3. Other

Ask if the bar has statistics/information to share regarding the sale of non-alcoholic beverages (e.g., share of non-alcoholic beverages in total sales)

Appendix 1. Interview framework - Finnish version

Sober curious ilmiön näkyvyys ja vaikutus Etelä-Karjalan alueella – haastattelurunko

(Finnish version)

Lihavoidut kysymykset ovat kysymyksiä, jotka esitän jokaiselle haastateltavalle. Teemoihin liittyvien esimerkkikysymysten tai improvisoitujen kysymysten käyttö riippuu siitä, miten keskustelu kehittyy haastattelun aikana.

1. Taustakysymykset:

Kysymyksiä, jotka auttavat tutkijaa erottamaan haastateltavat henkilöt toisistaan

- **Ikä**
- **Sukupuoli**
- **Työkokemus alalta (vuosia)?**
- **Työkokemus nykyisestä työpaikasta (vuosia)?**

2. Keskustelun teemoihin syventävät kysymykset

Termin selvennykseen ja ilmiön yleiseen näkyvyyteen liittyvät kysymykset

- **Tiedätkö mitä sober curious ilmiö tarkoittaa?**
 - **Jos, haastateltava ei tiedä-> haastattelija selittää haastateltavalle termin**
 - **Jos tietää -> kysy tarkennusta miten käsittää termin, korjaa hienovaraisesti jos esimerkiksi ymmärtänyt termin väärin**
- **Onko ilmiö mielestänne ollut näkyvä Etelä-Karjalan alueella?**

Aihepiiriin liittyviä esimerkkikysymyksiä:

- Oletteko kuulleet tästä ilmiöstä ennen yhteydenottoani, vai oliko termi teille aivan uusi?
- Oletteko huomanneet ilmiön näkyvyyden lisääntymisen esimerkiksi mediassa tai omassa lähipiirissänne?

Ilmiön näkyvyyden työpaikalla liittyvät kysymykset

- **Onko kuvatuista ilmiöistä ollut huomattavissa työpaikallanne?**
- **Millä tavalla ilmiö on näkynyt työssänne?**

Muita aihepiiriin liittyviä esimerkkikysymyksiä:

- Oletteko huomanneet muutoksia ihmisten ostokäyttäytymisessä työssänne?
- Pyytävätkö asiakkaat alkoholittomia vaihtoehtoja useammin kuin ennen?
- Onko ilmiön näkyvyys ollut miten radikaalia myynnin kannalta?
- Oletteko olleet mukana muiden tahojen järjestämässä alkoholittomissa tapahtumissa, kuten esimerkiksi Sober Mayhem tapahtumassa?
- Järjestättekö itse tai oletteko koskaan järjestäneet alkoholittomia tapahtumia?

Ilmiöön reagointiin liittyvät kysymykset

- **Onko ilmiöllä ollut minkäänlaista vaikutusta työpaikallanne?**
- **Onko teillä työpaikallanne laadittu erillistä alkoholittonta juoma- tai mocktail-listaa asiakkailleen?**
 - **Jos lista löytyy, kysy saako ottaa listasta kuvan.**
- **Löytyykö teiltä mahdollisesti alkoholittomiin juomiin liittyvää muuta myyntimateriaalia?**
 - **Jos löytyy, kysy saako ottaa myyntimateriaalista kuvan.**

Aihepiiriin liittyviä esimerkkikysymyksiä:

- Onko sober curious ilmiöön läheisesti liittyvä hyvinvointi- trendi ollut näkyvissä työpaikallanne?

Tulevaisuusorientoituneet kysymykset

- **Uskotteko, että ilmiö tulee näkymään baarialalla entistä enemmän tulevaisuudessa?**
- **Uskotteko, että ilmiöön kannattaa satsata ja varautua tulevaisuudessa?**
- **Millä tavoin ilmiöön tulisi mielestänne varautua?**

Aihepiiriin liittyviä esimerkkikysymyksiä:

- Onko sober curious ilmiö mielestänne positiivinen vai negatiivinen asia baarialalle?
- Uskotteko, että alkoholittomilla tapahtumilla olisi enemmän kysyntää Etelä-Karjalan alueella?

3. Muuta

Kysy, onko baarilla tilastoja/tietoa jakaa alkoholittomien juomien myyntiin liittyen (esimerkiksi. alkoholittomien juomien osuus kokonaismyynnistä)