Case Control Study

Alcohol intake is associated with a decreased risk of developing primary biliary cholangitis

Janine Adele French, Paul Gow, Steven Simpson-Yap, Kate Collins, Justin Ng, Peter W Angus, Ingrid A F van der Mei

Abstract

BACKGROUND

Primary biliary cholangitis (PBC) is a chronic progressive liver disease of unknown aetiology characterised by immune-mediated destruction of small and medium-sized intrahepatic bile ducts. There are few well-established risk factors and epidemiological studies are needed to further evaluate the pathogenesis of the disease.

AIM

To evaluate the relationship between alcohol intake, smoking and marijuana use with PBC development.

METHODS

We conducted a prevalent case control study of 200 cases and 200 age (within a five year age band) and sex-matched controls, identified from the Victorian PBC prevalence study. We assessed lifetime alcohol intake and smoking behaviour (both tobacco and marijuana) prior to PBC onset and used conditional logistic regression for analyses.

RESULTS

Alcohol intake consistently showed a dose-dependent inverse association with case status, and this was most substantial for 21-30 years and 31-40 years (\(P_{trend} < 0.001\)). Smoking was associated with PBC, with a stronger association with a longer duration of smoking \([e.g., \text{adjusted OR } 2.27 (95\% CI: 1.12-4.62)}\) for those...
who had smoked for 20-35 years]. There was no association between marijuana use and PBC.

**CONCLUSION**

Alcohol appears to have an inverse relationship with PBC. Smoking has been confirmed as an environmental risk factor for PBC. There was no association between marijuana use and PBC.

**Key Words:** Primary biliary cholangitis; Autoimmune liver disease; Epidemiology; Alcohol

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**Core Tip:** Given the paucity of knowledge regarding the aetiology of this disease and that there are likely to be other environmental and lifestyle factors yet to be identified that are related to disease development, we designed this study to address the association of primary biliary cholangitis and lifestyle factors. We have identified, from a case control study, that alcohol intake is associated with a decreased risk of developing primary biliary cholangitis. This is a significant finding in a disease for which very little is known regarding its aetiology.

**INTRODUCTION**

Primary biliary cholangitis (PBC) is a chronic progressive liver disease of unknown aetiology characterised by immune-mediated destruction of small and medium-sized intrahepatic bile ducts. It predominantly affects women in the fourth or fifth decade of life. The aetiology of PBC remains largely unknown but is thought to involve a complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors. Genetic factors are considered to play a role in disease onset due to higher concordance rates in monozygotic than dizygotic twins[1], and population studies that have shown higher incidence in first degree relatives of those with PBC[2]. Recurrent urinary tract infections[2-5] and smoking[2,3,5,6] have been the only risk factors that have been found to be consistently associated with disease development. However, these environmental factors combined appear insufficient to explain the pathogenesis, and it is likely that other environmental factors play a role in disease onset.

In this population-based case-control study, we examined whether alcohol intake, smoking tobacco and marijuana use were associated with the development of PBC.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Participants**

**Cases:** Cases were diagnosed with either definite or probable PBC. Definite PBC was defined as the presence of liver histology compatible with PBC, cholestatic liver function tests (elevation of serum alkaline phosphatase), and an anti-mitochondrial antibody titre of at least 1:40. Probable PBC was defined as patients fulfilling two of these three diagnostic criteria.

All gastroenterologists in the Australian state of Victoria were sent letters notifying them of the study and inviting them to ask their patients to participate. In addition, cases identified from the Victorian PBC prevalence study[7] were invited to participate (response rate 91%, 160/176). In total, 205 cases were recruited for this study, of which 200 were included in the final analysis. Three cases were excluded as they were not living in Victoria at the time of the study. Two cases were excluded as their histology revealed features of PBC/autoimmune hepatitis overlap syndrome.

Controls: Age and sex-matched controls were recruited from the electoral roll (12%) and via an advertisement in Victorian newspapers and community-based websites (88%). The latter was utilised because the electoral role alone was unsuccessful in obtaining the required number of controls. Potential participants from the electoral roll were sent a letter of invitation and a consent form. Participants who responded to advertisements were sent a copy of the consent form prior to the appointment being made. Subjects were screened via telephone for a history of any liver disease, and seven potential
participants were excluded for this reason. Two hundred controls were recruited for this study. Controls were matched 1:1 to the cases based on sex and age (within a 5-year age band) and linked by their grouping identification number for statistical analysis. French JA and Ng J conducted all interviews and measurements between 01 January 2015 and 31 October 2017.

**Measures of alcohol intake**

Pre-onset alcohol behaviours were queried by questionnaire, including frequency of alcohol intake per week (didn’t drink at all, < 1 d/wk, 1-2 days per week, 3-4 days per week, 5-7 days per week) as well as an average number of drinks per session (didn’t drink, 1-2 drinks, 3-4 drinks, ≥ 5 drinks) over the age periods 16-20 years, 21-30 years and 31-40 years. The frequency and average number of drinks were combined by using the mid-point value of each category and multiplying the two values to estimate average number of drinks consumed per week; these were categorised as 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, and > 20 drinks/wk. A standard drink was defined as 10 g of alcohol content. Cases who had been diagnosed during the defined age periods, as well as their linked controls, were not included in the analysis of that specific age period or age periods that followed.

**Measures of smoking and marijuana use**

History of smoking (never smoked, ex-smoker), age of commencement, quantity of cigarettes smoked, smoking duration, and periods of non-smoking were queried by questionnaire prior to PBC diagnosis. Controls were given the age of PBC diagnosis of their matched case. History of marijuana use (never used, ex-user and current user) and frequency of marijuana use was also queried.

**Other measures**

Participants had their height and weight measured, and their body mass index (BMI) calculated. The questionnaire also included country of birth, self-reported ethnicity, level of education completed, history of urinary tract infection (if yes, number of urinary tract infections and at what age), past surgical history, other medical comorbidities and personal, and family history of liver disease and autoimmune diseases.

**Statistical analysis**

Differences in categorical characteristics between cases and controls were evaluated by Chi-square test, while differences in continuous variables between cases and controls were evaluated by t-test. The associations of alcohol intake with case status were evaluated by conditional logistic regression, estimating an odds ratio (OR). Adjusted models were adjusted for country of residence, education, vitamin D supplement use, and smoking status. Further adjustment for current alcohol intake was undertaken to assess whether pre-onset alcohol associations were independent of subsequent alcohol behaviour, as these can be correlated. Tests for interactions were undertaken by including a product term of the predictor and interaction term. All analyses were done using STATA/SE 15.0 (StataCorp, College Park, TX, United States).

**RESULTS**

There was a female to male ratio of 10.8:1 and the mean age was 63.6 years for cases and 61.5 years for controls (Table 1). Average BMI was in the overweight range for both groups. As would be expected given matching, there were no significant differences between cases and controls in either age or sex. As is typical for control groups, controls had a higher proportion with a higher educational level (P < 0.001), and they were more likely to be Australian-born (P < 0.001). Therefore, models were adjusted for educational level and whether the participant was born in Australia. There was no difference in ethnicity between cases and controls (Table 1). The mean time from PBC diagnosis to time of study was 12.6 years.

**Alcohol Intake**

Alcohol intake, both frequency per week and average number of drinks per session, was significantly lower amongst cases throughout their life course. Alcohol intake consistently showed a dose-dependent inverse association with case status, which was strongest for the 21-30 age group and 31-40 age group (Pmin < 0.001) (Table 2). PBC cases were also more likely to be non-drinkers (age group 21-30 years: OR 5.05 (95%CI: 2.53-10.09), age group 31-40 years: OR 3.64 (95%CI: 1.34-9.90), persisting on adjustment. The inverse associations between alcohol intake and case status remained upon adjustment for alcohol intake at the time of questionnaire, demonstrating that pre-onset alcohol intake is independently associated with PBC development. For patients with PBC and cirrhosis at the time of the analysis, the pre-PBC alcohol intake in each 10-year band for both total drinks per week and drinks per session did not impact Child-Pugh score at the time of analysis (Supplementary Tables 1 and 2).
Table 1 Cohort characteristics of cases and controls

|                           | Controls (n = 200) | Cases (n = 200) | Test for difference |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Age, yr [mean (SD; range)]| 61.5 (11.6; 29.1-95.1) | 63.6 (11.6; 28.1-94.3) | P = 0.073 |
| Sex                       |                    |                |                     |
| Male                      | 18 (9.0)           | 17 (8.5)       |                     |
| Female                    | 182 (91.0)         | 183 (91.5)     | P = 0.86            |
| Country of birth          |                    |                |                     |
| Australia                 | 157 (78.5)         | 122 (61.0)     |                     |
| Overseas                  | 43 (21.5)          | 78 (39.0)      | P < 0.001           |
| Self-reported ethnicity   |                    |                |                     |
| Caucasian                 | 180 (90.0)         | 175 (87.5)     |                     |
| Asian                     | 11 (5.5)           | 14 (7.0)       |                     |
| Other                     | 3 (1.5)            | 4 (2.0)        |                     |
| Mixed race                | 1 (0.5)            | 0 (0)          |                     |
| Unspecified               | 5 (2.5)            | 7 (3.5)        | P = 0.75            |
| Education completed       |                    |                |                     |
| Up to some secondary      | 3 (1.5)            | 18 (9.0)       |                     |
| Yr 10/11                  | 33 (16.5)          | 56 (28.0)      |                     |
| Yr 12                     | 21 (10.5)          | 26 (13.0)      |                     |
| TAFE/Trade                | 32 (16.0)          | 43 (21.5)      |                     |
| University                | 111 (55.5)         | 57 (28.5)      | P < 0.001           |
| Family history of PBC?    |                    |                |                     |
| No                        | 200 (100.0)        | 194 (97.0)     |                     |
| Yes                       | 0 (0)              | 6 (3.0)        |                     |
| BMI (kg/m^2) mean         | 26.8               | 27.1           | P = 0.49            |

Results presented as n (%) unless otherwise specified. Differences in categorical terms between cases and controls assessed by Chi-square test. Differences in continuous terms between cases and controls assessed by *t*-test. Results in boldface denote statistical significance. Results in italics are *P* values. BMI: Body mass index; PBC: Primary biliary cholangitis; TAFE: Technical and Further Education.

**Tobacco/marijuana**

In the unadjusted analysis, smoking was significantly more common among cases, but the effect size reduced after adjustment [aOR1.42 (95%CI: 0.88-2.30)] (Table 3). The association was stronger for those who smoked for longer [aOR 2.27 (95%CI: 1.12-4.62) for those who had smoked for 20-35 years] [aOR 1.90 (95%CI: 0.68-5.30) for those who had smoked > 35 years].

In contrast to tobacco, there was no association with marijuana use and cases status, and this remained after adjustment for birthplace and educational level, as well as further adjustment for tobacco smoking. Small numbers precluded effective examination of the associations of the duration of marijuana use or the age of marijuana debut.

**DISCUSSION**

PBC is an increasingly common[7] potentially life-threatening cholestatic liver disease with a poorly defined aetiology. We identified a modest association with PBC for past smoking with an aOR of 1.42 (95%CI: 0.88-2.30), which did not quite reach significance. Our effect size is close to the pooled OR of 1.67 (95%CI: 1.4-1.92) identified in a meta-analysis of five case-control studies examining the association with PBC and smoking[8]. Importantly, our associations were stronger for those who smoked for longer [e.g., aOR 2.27 (95%CI: 1.12- 4.62) for those who had been smoking for 20-35 years]. This was also the case in a study in the United Kingdom, where an OR of 3.5 (95%CI: 1.9-6.3) was found for those who smoked for 20 years or more[6]. A more robust way of assessing dose-response would be to measure the
Table 2 Odds ratios for primary biliary cholangitis and alcohol intake (frequency per week, drinks per session, drinker per week) for different age spans

| Age Span | Controls, n (%) | Cases, n (%) | Frequency per week | Adjusted | Further adjusted for current alcohol consumption |
|----------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 16-20 yr |                |              |                    |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 70 (35.5)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | < 1 d per week      |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 68 (34.5)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 1 d per week      |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 56 (28.4)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Trend               |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.015           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.022           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.088           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Drinks per session  |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 68 (35.4)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 1-2 drinks          |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 67 (34.9)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 3 drinks          |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 57 (29.7)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Trend               |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.010           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.023           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.055           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Drinks per week     |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 68 (35.4)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 1-5 drinks per week |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 87 (45.3)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 6 drinks per week |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 37 (19.3)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Trend               |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.014           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.065           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.26            |          |                                               |
| 21-30 yr |                |              |                      |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Frequency per week  |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 19 (9.9)            |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | < 1 day per week    |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 65 (33.9)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 2 days per week   |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 69 (35.9)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 3 days per week   |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 39 (20.3)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Trend               |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Drinks per session  |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 18 (9.6)            |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 1-2 drinks          |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 102 (54.6)          |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 3 drinks          |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 67 (35.8)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Trend               |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.003           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Drinks per week     |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 18 (9.6)            |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 1-5 drinks per week |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 98 (52.4)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 6-10 drinks per week|          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 47 (25.1)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | ≥ 11 drinks per week|          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 24 (12.8)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Trend               |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P < 0.001           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | P = 0.001           |          |                                               |
| 31-40 yr |                |              |                      |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Frequency per week  |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | Didn't drink        |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 14 (9.2)            |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | < 1 day per week    |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 49 (32.2)           |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 1-2 days per week   |          |                                               |
|          |                |              | 53 (34.9)           |          |                                               |

Note: The table provides odds ratios for primary biliary cholangitis and alcohol intake for different age spans, considering frequency per week, drinks per session, and drinker per week. The table includes univariable and adjusted odds ratios, with further adjustments for current alcohol consumption.
| History of smoking | Cases | Controls | P-value | P-value | P-value |
|--------------------|-------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Didn't drink | 13 (8.8) | 46 (31.1) | 3.65 (1.34, 9.91) | 3.51 (1.13, 10.93) | 3.00 (0.95, 9.54) |
| 1-5 drinks per week | 78 (53.1) | 72 (48.7) | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] |
| 6-10 drinks per week | 38 (25.9) | 18 (12.2) | 0.57 (0.15, 0.89) | 0.38 (0.14, 1.01) | 0.39 (0.15, 1.03) |
| ≥ 11 drinks per week | 18 (12.2) | 12 (8.1) | 0.51 (0.19, 1.38) | 0.48 (0.16, 1.40) | 0.66 (0.20, 2.15) |

Associations with case status assessed by conditional logistic regression, grouped on the linkage identifier for matched cases and controls.

1Adjusted models adjusted for whether participant was born in Australia, education completed, and whether participant had ever smoked.

2Cases (and their linked controls) who had been diagnosed prior to each age span were excluded from analysis, including 1 case/control pair for 16-20 yr, 8 case/control pairs for 21-30 yr, and 47 case/control pairs for 31-40 yr.

PBC: Primary biliary cholangitis.

French JA et al. Alcohol and primary biliary cirrhosis

Alcohol is thought to protect against autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis[9,10], SLE[11, 12], autoimmune thyroid disease[13], and Type I diabetes mellitus[14]. It has been suggested that moderate alcohol intake may have a protective effect on the immune system, compared with alcohol abuse or abstinence, and this may explain the protective effect on subsequent autoimmune disease development[13,15]. The mechanism as to how moderate alcohol prevents subsequent autoimmune disease development remains unclear. Potential mechanisms to explain the beneficial effects of...
Table 3: Odds ratios for the association between tobacco and marijuana intake and primary biliary cholangitis development

|                              | Controls (n = 200), n (%) | Cases (n = 200), n (%) | Univariable | Adjusted\(^1\) | Adjusted\(^2\) |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| **Ever smoked tobacco prior to PBC diagnosis** |                           |                        |             |                 |                 |
| No                           | 116 (58.0)                | 89 (44.5)              | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] |                 |
| Yes                          | 84 (42.0)                 | 111 (55.5)             | 1.73 (1.15, 2.59) | 1.42 (0.88, 2.30) |                 |
| **Age started smoking tobacco** |                           |                        |             |                 |                 |
| Never smoker                 | 115 (57.8)                | 88 (44.2)              | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] |                 |
| 10-15                        | 19 (9.6)                  | 24 (12.1)              | 1.66 (0.79, 3.47) | 1.16 (0.49, 2.74) |                 |
| > 15-17                      | 30 (15.1)                 | 35 (17.6)              | 1.59 (0.87, 2.91) | 1.15 (0.57, 2.31) |                 |
| > 17-19                      | 19 (9.6)                  | 26 (13.1)              | 1.66 (0.87, 3.16) | 1.72 (0.79, 3.73) |                 |
| > 19-38                      | 16 (8.0)                  | 26 (13.1)              | 2.23 (1.10, 4.53) | 2.16 (0.97, 4.83) |                 |
| Trend                        |                           |                        | P = 0.008 | P = 0.015 |                 |
| **Years smoking tobacco prior to PBC diagnosis** |                           |                        |             |                 |                 |
| Never smoker                 | 115 (57.8)                | 88 (44.2)              | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] |                 |
| 0-10                         | 28 (14.1)                 | 23 (11.6)              | 1.15 (0.63, 2.09) | 1.07 (0.54, 2.13) |                 |
| > 10-20                      | 26 (13.1)                 | 32 (16.1)              | 1.63 (0.89, 3.00) | 1.18 (0.58, 2.38) |                 |
| > 20-35                      | 22 (11.1)                 | 41 (20.6)              | 2.46 (1.33, 4.55) | 2.27 (1.12, 4.62) |                 |
| > 35-59.9                    | 8 (4.0)                   | 15 (7.5)               | 2.47 (1.01, 6.06) | 1.90 (0.68, 5.30) |                 |
| Trend                        |                           |                        | P = 0.001 | P = 0.018 |                 |
| **Ever smoked marijuana prior to PBC diagnosis** |                           |                        |             |                 |                 |
| No                           | 184 (92.0)                | 179 (89.5)             | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] |                 |
| Yes                          | 16 (8.0)                  | 21 (10.5)              | 1.36 (0.68, 2.71) | 1.45 (0.66, 3.20) |                 |
| **Marijuana smoking status (constrained to starting smoking marijuana prior to PBC diagnosis)** |                           |                        |             |                 |                 |
| Never smoker                 | 184 (92.0)                | 179 (89.5)             | 1.00 [Reference] | 1.00 [Reference] |                 |
| Ex-smoker                    | 16 (8.0)                  | 19 (9.5)               | 1.21 (0.60, 2.46) | 1.23 (0.55, 2.79) |                 |
| Current smoker               | 0 (0)                     | 2 (1.0)                | -            | -               |                 |

Associations with case status assessed by conditional logistic regression, grouped on the linkage identifier for matched cases and controls.

\(^1\)Adjusted models adjusted for whether participant was born in Australia and education completed.

\(^2\)Adjusted models adjusted for whether participant was born in Australia, education completed, and whether participant had ever smoked tobacco.

PBC: Primary biliary cholangitis.

Moderate alcohol intake on the immune system function are: loss of natural killer cell activity[16], changes in immunoglobulin levels[17] and alterations in T helper 1 (Th1) and Th2 mediated immunity[18]. Thus, there is the possibility that alcohol could also be protective for PBC.

This study has several strengths. The demographic characteristics of our case cohort were similar to other published PBC cohorts in Europe[19], and the United States[2], and the participation rate of the cases was high (91%). Therefore, it is likely that our cohort is representative of other PBC populations worldwide. Our control group was matched on age (within a five-year band), and sex and was obtained from the same geographical location as cases. A limitation of our study is the selection of controls – only 12% were recruited from the electoral roll, our intended source of recruitment for all controls, but this was not possible due to this limited response to invitation. Another potential limitation of our study is possible measurement error due to respondents summarising their frequency and quantity of alcohol intake over 10 year age intervals (except for the four-year interval of 16-20 years old). It is also possible that fatigue, a symptom in up to 80% of PBC patients[20], was significant enough prior to diagnosis to reduce or even prevent alcohol intake in PBC cases.
CONCLUSION

Overall, we did not find that alcohol intake was a risk factor for PBC. Instead, we found that it was inversely associated, which raises the possibility that alcohol intake may be associated with a reduced risk of PBC, an important finding for a disease with few established risk factors. Due to the limitations of this study, this association requires replication in other PBC studies, preferably in cohort studies where the exposure is measured prior to disease onset.

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

Research background
Primary biliary cholangitis (PBC) is a chronic progressive liver disease of unknown aetiology characterised by immune-mediated destruction of small and medium-sized intrahepatic bile ducts. There are few well-established risk factors and epidemiological studies are needed to further evaluate the pathogenesis of the disease.

Research motivation
Reciprocal urinary tract infections and smoking have been the only risk factors that have been found to be consistently associated with PBC development. However, these environmental factors combined appear insufficient to explain the pathogenesis, and it is likely that other environmental factors play a role in disease onset.

Research objectives
To analyze environmental factors such as smoking, marijuana and alcohol use, and the role they play in PBC development.

Research methods
A prevalent case control study of 200 cases and 200 age (within a five year age band) and sex-matched controls, identified from the Victorian PBC prevalence study. The associations of alcohol intake with case status were evaluated by conditional logistic regression, estimating an odds ratio.

Research results
For PBC development alcohol intake consistently showed a dose-dependent inverse association with case status, and this was most substantial for 21-30 years and 31-40 years. Smoking was associated with PBC, with a stronger association with a longer duration of smoking while there was no association between marijuana use and PBC.

Research conclusions
Our study found that alcohol intake may be associated with a reduced risk of PBC, an important finding for a disease with few established risk factors.

Research perspectives
The association of alcohol and risk reduction of PBC requires replication in other PBC studies, preferably in cohort studies where the exposure is measured prior to disease onset.

FOOTNOTES

Author contributions: French JA, Gow P, Angus PW and van der Mei IAF conducted the research design; French JA conducted the data acquisition; French JA, Simpson-Yap S and van der Mei IAF conducted the data interpretation and all authors were involved with the manuscript preparation; French JA, Simpson-Yap S, Ng J, van der Mei IAF, Angus PW and Gow P approved the final submitted draft; Collins K assisted with submission; Nil other authors/institutions other than those listed were involved with this study; all authors have approved the final version of this manuscript, including the authorship list.

Institutional review board statement: Ethical clearance was obtained from the Austin Hospital’s Health Research and Ethics Committee (HREC 2013/04859) and it complies with acceptable international standards.

Informed consent statement: All study participants provided informed written consent prior to study enrollment.

Conflict-of-interest statement: Dr. French reports grants from Orphan Australia, grants from Austin Medical Research Foundation, during the conduct of the study.
Alcohol and primary biliary cirrhosis

French JA et al.

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