

Alcohol makes you momentarily happier but not more satisfied

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Research suggests people are momentarily happier when drinking alcohol—but that over longer periods, drinking more does not make them more satisfied with life.

The research, led by a social policy expert at the University of Kent, also found that people who developed [drinking problems](#) were less satisfied with life.

Although the effect of alcohol on happiness is often discussed during debates about [alcohol policy](#) and regulation, it has rarely been the subject of serious academic study. Instead, governments have simply used the economist assumption that everyone always acts rationally and in their best interests—even when they are drunk or addicted to alcohol.

The study considered how people's happiness and [drinking](#) change alongside each other over a period of time. The authors, Dr Ben Baumberg Geiger of the University's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, and Dr George MacKerron of the University of Sussex, made use of both an iPhone-based app and a traditional cohort study to generate the findings.

The results suggested that, after making allowances for other factors such as illness that can effect wellbeing, there was no connection between people's drinking and their happiness over a period of time. The exception to this was in situations where alcohol became a problem, leading to reduced feelings of wellbeing.

Both studies took into account other possible explanations for the relationship between alcohol and happiness, although the authors concede that being absolutely sure that alcohol is causing momentary happiness is difficult. They also acknowledge that those involved in the studies are not representative of the whole population. The first study involved iPhone users, who tend to be young and wealthy, while the second study looks only at 30-42 year olds.

But the study does offer at least some robust evidence when policymakers previously had nothing but 'pub talk' to rely on, say the paper's authors. They hope the research will help policymakers properly take [happiness](#) into account when doing cost-benefit analyses of [alcohol](#) regulation—and therefore make better, more transparent decisions about which policies will benefit the population and which won't.

More information: The research, entitled Can alcohol make you happy? A subjective wellbeing approach, was partly funded by the UK Medical Research Council (MRC) and Economic and Social Research Council. It is published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine*. Full study available here: authors.elsevier.com/a/1Spel-CmUa4qW

Provided by University of Kent

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