

Researcher studies COVID-19's far-reaching impacts on college students

July 8 2020



Nicole Ryerson, assistant professor of psychology at Penn State Lehigh Valley.
Credit: Nicole Ryerson

Nicole Ryerson's research normally focuses on the behavioral, psychological and physiological links of alcohol use in college students. Her curiosity was piqued when she saw reports of alcohol sales spiking

in Pennsylvania during the height of COVID-19 in April.

"These higher alcohol sales made me wonder, what portion of that is attributable to [college students](#), how much is their intake changing, is this reflecting a daily consumption increase? We know people weren't going out to bars or restaurants at this time, so is the purchasing increase just there because they are replacing their in-house dining alcohol consumption?" said Ryerson, assistant professor of psychology at Penn State Lehigh Valley,

With this, she began to explore the impact of COVID-19 on alcohol use in college students.

"College students have that really unique academic aspect in their lives, that goes beyond what other adults are experiencing with COVID-19 in terms of the financial impacts, [social impacts](#), etc." Ryerson said.

She sent out an [online survey](#) to Penn State Lehigh Valley students through the [student](#) listserv. Eleven percent of students replied, which Ryerson considered a success given nothing was provided as an incentive to return the survey.

"The research fell in line with what someone would anticipate. It confirmed suspicions that students are being hit pretty hard, seeing impacts on their ability to earn money, to get resources, staying in contact socially, and academics are being impacted. All of those factors are related to psychological health. So it's concerning when someone is impacted in all these areas. Their psychological health is in decline. And it's hard for students to express that either because they don't recognize it themselves or they may come from a [cultural background](#) that doesn't accept these things," Ryerson said.

Students who reported that they experienced a decline in [psychological](#)

[health](#) are also more likely to report they have experienced an increase in alcohol consumption due to COVID-19. The other alcohol intake questions regarding if sales spiked because restaurants were closed remain unknown for now, but Ryerson is looking into it further to find out.

Ryerson found behaviors related to declines in health may serve as warning signs to faculty and staff who observe students regularly.

"I want us to be on the lookout for students who may talk about increase in alcohol consumption or who mention they are struggling to stay on a schedule or having trouble sleeping as these can be warning signs. If we hear these things, I hope we reach out to them and make sure they are doing ok," said Ryerson.

Where to go from here?

Ryerson looked at not only behaviors related to decline, but she did some analysis of behaviors that resist decline.

"I think we should encourage students to do these positive behaviors which include: spending more time on [leisure activities](#), more time with family and friends, and increasing their time management skills," Ryerson said. "This could be an opportunity for us to come together as a community to support each other and remind each other of these positive practices."

Beyond looking more into the [alcohol](#) consumption related to COVID-19, Ryerson is exploring its political impact as well with a future collaborator. They will study the intersection of psychological impacts of feeling threatened by COVID-19 and political opinions on how the government has responded to COVID-19.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Researcher studies COVID-19's far-reaching impacts on college students (2020, July 8)
retrieved 17 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-covid-far-reaching-impacts-college-students.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.