

Smoking declined, but adverse alcohol use increased during the UK's coronavirus lockdown

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Smoking declined, but adverse alcohol use generally increased during the UK's coronavirus lockdown, according to new research.

The study, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* and led by the University of Glasgow's Institute of Health and Wellbeing, found the proportion of people [drinking](#) four or more times per week increased, as did [binge drinking](#).

Researchers suggest effective measures are required to mitigate adverse impacts on health during lockdowns designed to combat the virus.

The study, based on data from over 27,000 individuals, also found that psychological distress markedly increased during the first month of [lockdown](#), with women and [younger people](#) particularly adversely affected.

Binge drinking increased from 10.8% in 2017-19 to 16.2% during lockdown, as did the proportion of people reporting drinking four or more times a week (13.7% to 22.0%).

Differences by age group and gender were apparent, with binge drinking remaining stable in the youngest age group, but increasing in those aged 25 and over; and increased more among women, white ethnic groups and those with degree-level education.

However, the proportion of people reporting drinking five or more drinks during a typical day when drinking decreased from 13.6% to 5.6% during the pandemic lockdown, most evidently seen in the youngest age group, which could reflect the change in what a "typical" drinking day now means for people.

Meanwhile, current cigarette smoking also decreased during lockdown—again, most apparently in the younger [age groups](#) and among men.

The study found psychological distress increased over time from 19.4%

in 2017-19 to 30.6% during the lockdown in April 2020. The increase in psychological distress was most pronounced among people aged under 45 years; and among women, where it increased from 23.0% to 36.8%. Asian minority ethnic groups also experienced a large increase in psychological [distress](#), from 18.7% to 34.9% over the same period.

Dr. Claire Niedzwiedz, from the University's Institute of Health and Wellbeing, said: "Understanding the health impacts of lockdown is important, as further periods of physical distancing are likely to be necessary in many countries for some time, especially as the risk of further waves of infection remains.

"These impacts may disproportionately affect specific population subgroups, with concerns that young people, women and disadvantaged groups may be at greater risk. The increases in [psychological distress](#) and alcohol use in the UK highlight the need to consider how the potential health harms associated with lockdown measures can be mitigated, especially for those who are most at risk."

The UK Household Longitudinal Study is a nationally representative longitudinal household panel study, based on a sample of UK households. All adults (aged 16+ years) in chosen households are invited to participate. Following the pandemic's onset, additional data was collected via online survey.

The paper, "Mental health and [health](#) behaviors before and during the initial phase of the COVID-19 lockdown: Longitudinal analyses of the UK Household Longitudinal Study," is published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

More information: Claire L Niedzwiedz et al. Mental health and health behaviors before and during the initial phase of the COVID-19 lockdown: longitudinal analyses of the UK Household Longitudinal

Study, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/jech-2020-215060](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2020-215060)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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