

Identifying factors associated with increased drinking during lockdown

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Researchers at the University of Liverpool, led by Dr. Abi Rose, have published a new study which showed that increased drinking during the first COVID-19 lockdown was associated with drinking to cope.

It is well-established that alcohol can be used to cope with [negative experiences](#) and mood. COVID-19 has had a range of negative effects on people's physical and [mental health](#), with health issues, caring responsibilities, finances, bereavement and other impacts creating significant levels of stress. It is therefore possible that [drinking](#) may be used as a way to cope during the pandemic.

International and UK data suggests that lockdown has impacted [alcohol consumption](#). In the UK, alcohol purchasing increased in the weeks prior to lockdown one, suggesting stockpiling behavior. Previous surveys have shown that 26-48% of respondents reported drinking more during lockdown, with similar numbers reporting drinking less. These studies have also shown that people are drinking more frequently and that some groups of people may be more likely to increase their alcohol use during lockdown.

This UK-based [online survey](#) measured alcohol use before and during lockdown, as well as a range of factors that may affect drinking behavior (including mood, motives for drinking, intentions to drink), and respondent characteristics (e.g., gender).

The 539 people who completed the first survey in April 2020 were contacted every fortnight with a subsequent survey to measure drinking behavior during the first Government-mandated lockdown.

People who reported greater coping motives for drinking alcohol and higher levels of anxiety were more likely to show increased drinking behavior during lockdown, as were those who reported drinking alone. People who drank more prior to lockdown were also more likely to increase their alcohol use during lockdown and men were more likely to increase their drinking compared to women.

By identifying the factors associated with increased alcohol use, the

researchers are hoping to help the development of future targeted prevention and intervention strategies to reduce alcohol harm.

Patricia Irizar, Ph.D. student at the University of Liverpool, says that "alcohol-related deaths have risen by 16% during the past year. Our study showed that individuals who were already drinking at hazardous levels before the pandemic, and those who use alcohol as a coping mechanism, were more likely to increase their consumption during [lockdown](#). This is worrying as it indicates that there may be an increasing population who are at risk of serious alcohol harm."

Dr. Abi Rose, senior lecturer at the University of Liverpool, stated that "we know that drinking to cope can be linked with higher drinking levels and increased risk of experiencing alcohol harm. When we face a stressful situation, which effects such a large number of people, like COVID-19, we need to be prepared for the impact on alcohol use. Hazardous drinking has huge negative effects, both directly on the drinker's health and well-being but also on others, such as children. So we need to develop effective prevention strategies, and we need to be much better at early identification of hazardous drinking and in providing appropriate support."

This study measured a range of factors linked with [alcohol](#) use, to determine who may be more likely to increase their consumption during Government-mandated lockdowns. The researchers also accounted for factors associated with not completing the follow-up surveys (being female, younger age, and heavier drinking). However, the findings are limited because the sample was not representative of typical drinkers in the UK, as a much greater proportion of the sample met criteria for harmful [alcohol use](#) than is observed in the general population.

More information: Patricia Irizar et al, Longitudinal associations with alcohol consumption during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Associations

with mood, drinking motives, context of drinking, and mental health, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108913](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108913)

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