

Alcohol consumption among men drops during pandemic, but problem drinking rises

January 24 2022



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Alcohol consumption during the coronavirus pandemic declined among men, while it remained steady among women, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

Researchers found that [alcohol-related problems](#) increased during the [pandemic](#), by 49% for women and 69% for men, but the reasons for the problems remain unclear.

The study, which has examined alcohol use at three periods during the pandemic among a representative sample of Americans aged 30 to 80, found that [alcohol consumption](#) among men has declined by 20% on average during the pandemic. Among women, there was not a statistically significant change over time.

The findings are published online by the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

"Both men and women report increases in [negative consequences](#) from their drinking as the pandemic goes on," said Joan Tucker, lead author of the study and a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "For men, this finding is particularly striking in that the increase in alcohol-related problems during the pandemic was occurring even as there was a steady decline in the amount they were drinking."

Researchers say it may be the case that men cut back on their alcohol use over time because they experienced negative consequences from drinking. Another possibility is that men perceived their drinking to be more problematic over time, as their responsibilities for domestic tasks such as caregiving and other concerns such as job security increased during the pandemic.

Many studies have raised concerns about an increase in alcohol consumption among Americans during the coronavirus pandemic. An earlier RAND survey found that among women there was a pronounced increase in frequency of drinking days and binge drinking days from pre-pandemic to early-pandemic.

The new study extends that work by examining trajectories of alcohol use and related problems over a 9-month period during the pandemic among those who initially reported any past year alcohol use.

The study surveyed 1,118 people who are participants in the RAND American Life Panel, a nationally representative internet panel. Participants were surveyed about their alcohol consumption three times—during May to July 2020, October to November 2020 and during March 2021.

Overall, men's alcohol use has tended to be higher than women's during the pandemic; however, alcohol use decreased steadily for men over the 9-month period, whereas it remained fairly stable for women. By the third assessment during the pandemic, men and women were similar in their average number of drinks per day.

The study found that feelings of loneliness and motivations for using alcohol during the pandemic may play a role in alcohol consumption patterns. For example, feeling lonelier early in the pandemic was associated with an initial higher level of alcohol problems for women and a less-steep decline in alcohol use over time for men.

For both men and [women](#), stronger coping and social motives for drinking early in the pandemic were associated with an initial higher level of alcohol use, and stronger coping motives was associated with an initial higher level of [alcohol](#) problems. But neither predicted how people's drinking behavior changed during the pandemic.

Researchers say the study points to the importance of examining multiple indicators of [alcohol use](#) to understand the full impact of the pandemic on drinking behavior among U.S. adults, as well as a need for more fine-grained analysis to understand the interplay of these [drinking](#) indicators.

Other authors of the study are Anthony Rodriguez and Michael S. Pollard of RAND, and Harold D. Green Jr. of the Indiana University School of Public Health.

More information: Joan S. Tucker et al, Trajectories of alcohol use and problems during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of social stressors and drinking motives for men and women, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2022.109285](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2022.109285)

Provided by RAND Corporation

Citation: Alcohol consumption among men drops during pandemic, but problem drinking rises (2022, January 24) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-alcohol-consumption-men-pandemic-problem.html>

<p>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.</p>
--