

Drinking in Europe declined on average in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic

Peer reviewed: Yes

Type of study: Survey

Subject of study: People

Funding: None.

A survey carried out in 21 European countries during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic found significant decreases in average alcohol consumption in every country except Ireland and the UK. The study is published today in the scientific journal *Addiction*.

General results: On average, alcohol consumption was reported to have decreased in almost all countries. The only exceptions were Ireland, where decreases and increases evened each other out, and the United Kingdom, where an increase in overall alcohol consumption was reported. Most of the reduction was driven by decreases in the number of heavy episodic (or binge) drinking episodes.

The survey: The European Alcohol and COVID-19 Survey (<https://www.covid19-and-alcohol.eu/>) gathered data from almost 32,000 alcohol users across Europe from late April to late July 2020. Respondents were asked about whether (1) their frequency of drinking occasions, (2) quantity of alcohol consumed per occasion, or (3) frequency of heavy episodic drinking, had changed during the past month. They also reported their pre-pandemic past-year alcohol consumption, their pre-pandemic monthly net household income and whether they had experienced financial difficulties or other pandemic-related distress.

The role of distress: One in five respondents reported substantial or high levels of financial distress related to the pandemic, and more than half reported distress due to changes in their everyday life. Those who reported distress were less likely to decrease their drinking than those who reported no distress.

The role of income: Respondents with high incomes reported the largest reductions in alcohol consumption; however, for these respondents, changes in alcohol consumption seemed to depend on their experiences of financial distress: respondents with high income and no financial distress were the group most likely to report reductions in their alcohol use, while high income respondents who experienced financial distress tended to report less reduction in consumption. In contrast, changes in drinking among respondents with low incomes appeared to be independent of financial distress.

Results per country: The number of participants per country ranged between 349 in Albania to 15,686 in Norway. As indicated, the summary score, which expressed the average change in alcohol consumption, was negative in all but two countries (Ireland and UK), pointing to decreased overall consumption in all the other countries at this stage of the pandemic. The largest average decreases were found in Albania, Finland, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, and Spain.

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For editors:

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