



# Association between Negatively Impacted Wellbeing and Alcohol Consumption during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

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Uncertainty about the future, fear of losing a loved one, and countless lockdowns and social distancing restrictions have created great stress for almost everyone during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the wellbeing of individuals has been negatively impacted. Maintaining stable wellbeing is important as is an avoidance of excessive alcohol use, as both factors can potentially harm individual health and lead to death. However, an increase in alcohol purchases and alcohol consumption has been noted globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this article explores the possible connections between affected wellbeing and alcohol usage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Introduction

The life patterns of almost everyone around the globe have been significantly impacted and changed during the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, governments around the world announced lockdowns and restrictions on social gatherings to protect citizen health [1]. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released a

report in 2020 stating that about 25% of Canadians aged 35 to 54 years old drank more at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly because of stress, boredom, and irregular schedules [2]. Spending habits, specifically linked to online alcohol purchases, dramatically increased starting in 2019, by a significant 262% in the United States, and the World Health Organization cautioned global citizens regarding the negative consequences of increased alcohol use [1]. Alcohol consumption is a serious problem as it results in about 3 million deaths yearly worldwide and is closely linked to numerous factors, especially the wellbeing of an individual [3].

Wellbeing is based on positive psychological experiences and, thus, is closely related to social connections and support, physical behaviours, and positive emotions [4]. An increase in loneliness and social isolation has been noted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which negatively affected the wellbeing of individuals [5]. Continuous battles against COVID-19 have put enormous stress on social, economic and healthcare systems, as well as on an individual's stress levels. Numerous people have lost a loved one due to COVID-19 and have lived with the fear that such a tragedy might reoccur. Such experiences and the uncertainty caused by the pandemic create great stress and anxiety [6]. Additionally, poor sleep quality has been reported globally with an increase in sleep disturbances, along with a concomitant dependence on sleep medication [7]. These factors could potentially trigger alcohol consumption, so a closer investigation is needed.

### **Social Isolation and Alcohol Consumption**

Social isolation occurs when there is a lack of social contact with others, especially among those who live alone or have few connections via digital social networks. The COVID-19 pandemic created great social isolation, on a global scale, due to the uncertainty of life, the death of a loved one, job losses, a feeling of loneliness, and financial difficulty [8, 9]. Social isolation and loneliness are closely related, as social isolation can lead to loneliness and vice versa [10]. Both threaten mental health and can increase the risk of mortality while decreasing cognitive functioning [5]. Loneliness is often associated with feelings of shame, sadness, and emptiness and also leads to a further disconnect with others, along with negative thoughts. One of the strong predictors of suicide, hopelessness, and anxiety is social isolation and loneliness [8]. As the number of hours spent at home increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, a greater number of incidences of binge drinking were noted, especially for people isolated at home [11]. However, studies are inconclusive as some suggest a weak correlation between loneliness and/or social isolation and alcohol consumption, while others point to a direct link. A history of mental illness and the inability to manage depression and stress lead to an increase in alcohol use [11, 12, 13].

### **Sleep Quality and Alcohol Consumption**

A sufficient amount of sleep is important as sleep serves numerous functions. These include waking cognition, such as the ability to sustain attention, be alert and vigilant, and think clearly. Sleep also helps to regulate emotions. When sleep drops to six and half hours or less, the chance of developing a number of disorders increases. When an individual is sleep-deprived, he tends to be more socially and emotionally sensitive and exhibits negative emotional responses [14]. Numerous people around the globe have struggled with inferior sleep quality during the

COVID-19 pandemic, while the decline in sleep quality has become significantly correlated with negative thoughts. Changes in work and social related schedules may have disturbed this sleep quality. The negative mood created during the COVID-19 pandemic led to lower sleep quality, and the resulting emotional distress consisted of depression, tension, and anger [15]. Sleep disturbance increases the use of sleep medication and an individual's dependence on such aids. When sleep duration changes, this can also increase alcohol consumption [7]. This is because people drink alcohol to help them sleep, as alcohol intake offers quicker and lengthier sleep [13]. However, although alcohol can put an individual to sleep more easily, in the long term, alcohol can result in sleep disorders as it interrupts the sleep cycle and the functioning of the respiratory system. Although alcohol intake initially starts to improve sleep quality, it can later lower sleep quality and duration, causing daytime sleepiness and insomnia [16].

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that COVID-19 has not only harmed individual physical health, but also wellbeing, which eventually can lead to the increased use of alcohol. Alcohol is a dangerous substance that requires greater cautionary warnings for consumption. Therefore, it is critical to implement some possible measures to protect people around the globe, as all human beings are potentially at risk. Public awareness campaigns are a great way to highlight all the possible consequences that people could potentially face because of negatively impacted wellbeing, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of only emphasizing ways to prevent infection from COVID-19, governments and the media should also look into other potential dangers for those whose life patterns have significantly changed and have suffered great emotional distress. Providing sufficient support to such individuals and offering easy accessibility to helpful information is key as this will offer individuals important knowledge and coping strategies. Such supports should include both psychoeducational and psychosocial support [13].

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