

Mothers' alcohol use changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, finds study

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Mothers drank alcohol less frequently as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, according to a small study of Ohio women, but another result was more concerning to researchers.

Findings showed that the number of drinks per day increased for moms later in the pandemic, raising concerns that [mothers](#) may have been more likely to binge when they did drink.

"The COVID-19 pandemic was especially stressful for parents, as they juggled working from home and taking care of their children," said Bridget Freisthler, co-author of the study and professor of social work at The Ohio State University.

"Our study gives a glimpse on how some mothers used alcohol to cope as the pandemic went on."

Freisthler conducted the study with Jennifer Price Wolf, associate professor of social work at San Jose State University. Their study was published recently in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

The researchers recruited 266 mothers in central Ohio for a study on parenting during April-May 2020 when Ohio was under stay-at-home orders for the pandemic. Participants, who all had children between 2 and 12 years of age, were recruited via [social media](#) and word-of-mouth, so it was not a random sample.

Most of the sample consisted of white, well-educated and married women.

The mothers participated in three waves of the study: the first in spring 2020 and again at about the same time in 2021 and 2022.

Overall, 77.8% of the mothers reported alcohol use over all three waves of the study.

This study doesn't have data from before COVID-19, but previous work showed that alcohol use increased among women after the start of the

pandemic.

In addition, other research finds that drinking among women has been increasing over the last two decades, especially among [white women](#) and the highly educated, Freisthler said.

Results of this new study showed that, among women who used alcohol, participants drank on an average of 9.2 days of the previous 28 days at the start of the stay-at-home orders in 2022.

Drinking frequency dropped to 6.95 days in 2021 and stayed about the same in 2022.

Total drinking volume also decreased from 2020 to the final two years of the study.

However, the average number of drinks per day increased from 1.47 in 2020 to 1.65 in 2021 and stayed steady at 1.61 in 2022.

"We did not expect to see the number of drinks per day to go up over the course of the pandemic, even as they drank less frequently," Freisthler said.

The study can't say why the changes in alcohol use occurred over the course of the pandemic.

But Freisthler said the results are troubling, particularly considering the trends of increased drinking among women even before the pandemic began.

"We had [alcohol use](#) already going up, and then we have this [pandemic](#) that added enforced confinement and [social isolation](#) to the already difficult job of parenting," she said.

"It's not surprising that some mothers may have used [alcohol](#) to help them cope, but we know that binge [drinking](#) especially can have bad effects on parenting."

More information: Bridget Freisthler et al, Longitudinal Changes in Self-Reported Alcohol Consumption by Mothers' During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Alcohol and Alcoholism* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/alcalc/agac064](https://doi.org/10.1093/alcalc/agac064)

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