

ALCOHOL PURCHASING AND CONSUMPTION DURING COVID:19

FIRST RESULTS: SUMMARY FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

This study examined changes in alcohol consumption associated with the COVID-19 lockdown measures in NSW and whether or not changes in consumption were sustained. By evaluating the link between changes in alcohol policy, alcohol purchasing and consumption, we aim to use this information to inform future alcohol policy.

This first report draws on data about peoples drinking before lockdown (February), during lockdown (end March to middle of May) and post-full lockdown as restrictions started to ease (mid-May to end of June). Data were gathered using two surveys, in-depth interviews and an analysis of policy changes.

RESULTS

CHANGES IN DRINKING UNDER LOCKDOWN

There is not one story to emerge from our findings. Instead we found three groups: those who significantly increased their alcohol consumption during lockdown, those who significantly decreased their alcohol consumption and those who largely stayed the same.

29% decreased their alcohol consumption



36% consumed the same before and during lockdown



36% increased their alcohol consumption



	Average SD/week before lockdown	Average SD/week during lockdown	Difference
Decreased consumption group	22.6	9.6	- 13
Increased consumption group	17.6	31.6	+ 14
Remained the same group	9.6	9.6	0

- Those who decreased their drinking did so on average by about 13 standard drinks (SD) per week (approx. 8 schooners of full strength beer*)
- Those who increased their drinking did so on average by 14 standard drinks per week (8.8 schooners of beer)
- Those who did not increase their drinking continued to consume on average 10 standard drinks per week (or 6.3 schooners of beer)

*Where 1 schooner is 425ml and full strength beer contains 4.8% alcohol

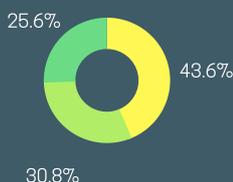
FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED INCREASES OR DECREASES IN DRINKING

Age: Gen Zs (aged 18 to 24 years) were more likely than any other age group to decrease their drinking during lockdown

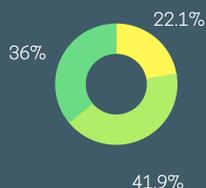


Changes in drinking consumption by age:

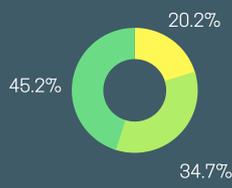
Gen Z (18-24 years)



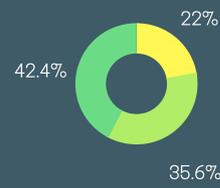
Millennials (25-39 years)



Gen X (40-55 years)



Boomers (56 - 74 years)



■ Decreased consumption ■ Increased consumption ■ Stayed the same

Closure of licensed venues had an impact – but only for some

Those who decreased their drinking were more likely to drink at licensed venues prior to the COVID-19 lockdown. For younger people (especially the Gen Z 18-24 year olds), the lack of licensed venues was strongly associated with decreased alcohol consumption.

Gender



Gender made no difference. Men and women were equally likely to decrease or to increase their drinking

Amount consumed before lockdown



Those who had higher levels of drinking before lockdown were more likely to increase OR decrease their alcohol consumption rather than stay the same

Household composition



People who lived in a sharehouse were more likely to either increase OR decrease their alcohol consumption rather than stay the same

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE LOCKDOWN STARTED TO LIFT?

From mid-May 2020 there was some easing of social distancing measures, with cafes, pubs and restaurants allowed to seat small numbers of people. Overall, once lockdown started to lift in NSW:

Those who had increased their consumption started drinking less



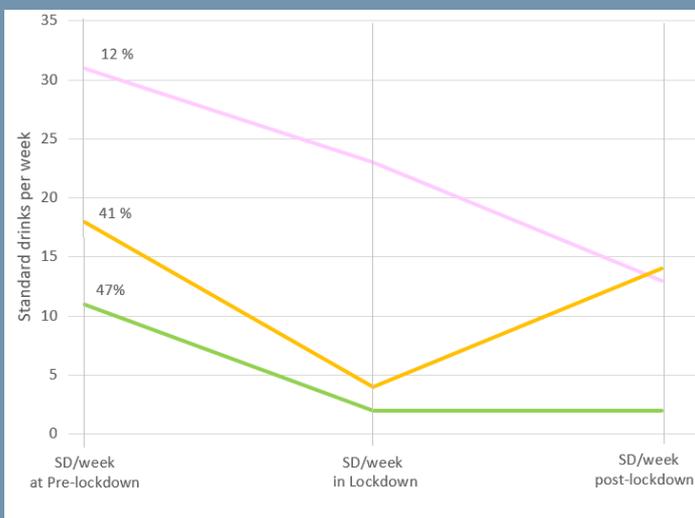
Those who had decreased their consumption increased it again slightly



HOWEVER... THIS IS NOT THE COMPLETE STORY

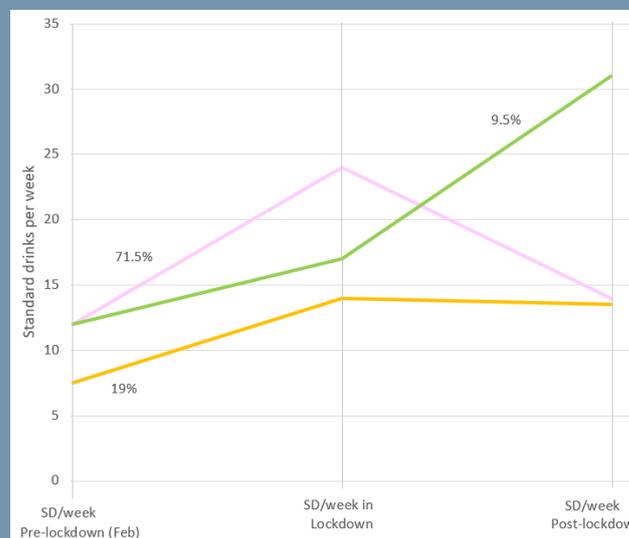
Within the decrease group:

- 12% Decreased drinking during lockdown then decreased further after lockdown ended
- 41% Decreased drinking during lockdown then increased once lockdown finished although not to quite the same levels as before lockdown
- 47% Decreased drinking during lockdown then maintained this lower rate of drinking



Within the increase group:

- 71.5% Increased drinking during lockdown but decreased their drinking again to pre-lockdown levels after lockdown ended
- 9.5% Increased drinking during lockdown then continued to increase their drinking after lockdown ended
- 19% Increased their drinking during lockdown and maintained this new level of drinking once lockdown ended



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These initial findings indicate:

- Many people (2/3) demonstrated self-care, resilience and agency under lockdown by decreasing or maintaining their pre-lockdown drinking levels
- Any future policies concerned with reducing excess alcohol consumption may benefit from being targeted rather than universal: there was no one pattern of change in alcohol consumption under lockdown
- Further research focused on home drinking seems warranted

WHAT NEXT?

DPMP will be back in contact to undertake further research later in the year looking at how drinking has further changed over time, if at all.

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Full report: <https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/sprc/research/drug-policy-modelling-program/monographs>