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The Effects of COVID-19 Social Isolation on Binge-Drinking Behaviors in College Students

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Background

- Binge-Drinking is consuming five or more (males) and four or more drinks (females) within a short period of time (Fillamore and Jude, 2011)
- 25% of young adults engage in binges once a month (Center for Disease Control).
- Young adults tend to engage in risk-taking coping behaviors to cope with loneliness (Courtney & Polish, 2009; Copeland et al, 2018).
- People use virtual resources significantly more due to COVID-19 (Meldrum and Clark 2015).
- Social isolation increases when people use virtual technology to communicate (Meldrum & Clark, 2015).
- Major lifestyle changes may result in stress which leads people to engage in coping behaviors like drinking alcohol (Rehm et al, 2020).
- Alcohol sales during COVID-19 have increased drastically (Rehm et al, 2020).
- People are drinking nearly 2-3 more drinks than their previous habits during the pandemic (Lechner et al, 2020).
- In the pandemic, people drink alone, not socially (Dumas et al, 2020).

Research Question

- Does social isolation stemming from the COVID-19 associate with an increase in binge-drinking behaviors in college students?
- Predicted a strong negative correlation

Methods

Participants

- 40 total participants (seven males, 31 females, one Non-Binary, one did not specify)
- Participants’ ages ranged from 18-24 (M = 20.34, SD = 1.55)
- 8 participants were excluded from final data analysis due to incomplete surveys or no drinking habits

Procedure

- Participants completed a 10-minute survey on SurveyMonkey
- Participants answered questions on:
  - Drinking habits before pandemic (March/early April)
  - Drinking habits during pandemic
  - Drinking habits in the past year
  - Alcohol misuse questionnaires
  - Number of social contacts
  - Demographic Information

Materials

- Participants took the survey through SurveyMonkey

Drinking Habits

- Participants were first asked six sub-questions about drinking habits before and during the COVID-19 quarantine
  - Rated via Likert Scale (Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree)
- Participants took the AUDIT-C questionnaire in its entirety (Figure 1)
- Participants took the CAGE-4 questionnaire in its entirety

Demographic and Close Associates

- Participants were asked about their age, gender identity, and race
- Participants recorded the number of close associates they have

Results

- The strength of the relationship was very weak
- No significant correlation present, r(1, 32) = .264, p = .131.
- There was an insignificant, weak positive trend.

Discussion

- No significant correlation between social contacts and binge-drinking
- The sample size was low (40 participants) and does not contain enough power (85 participants needed)
- 37.8% of the participants felt guilty about their drinking alcohol specifically during the pandemic
- More power is needed to ensure these results are not inaccurate
- Wording needs to be needed to ensure self-reported numbers are accurate

Conclusions

- Further research is needed to make generalizable conclusions
- There is no relationship between binge-drinking and social isolation
- People have felt stress and guilt about their habits during the pandemic

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References