

Alcohol consumption and STIs, COVID-19 and alcohol marketing

Editorial

This year our Guest Editors, led by Prof Monica Swahn, have been working hard on the IJADR Special Issue, “Alcohol Prevention Research and Policy Development in Lower- and Middle-Income countries (LMIC): Facilitating Partnerships, Capacity and Impact”. So far we have received a number of papers, and have extended the deadline until August 31st 2023 to allow other contributors to finalise their submissions (<https://ijadr.org/index.php/ijadr/special-issue>). We are grateful to FORUT and Movendi International for supporting the forthcoming Special Issue.

We are excited to be gathering in Johannesburg, South Africa for the 48th Annual Alcohol Epidemiology Symposium of the Kettil Bruun Society (KBS) from 5-9 June 2023. If you are presenting at the conference, please consider submitting your KBS articles for publication in our regular issues or else in the upcoming Special Issue of IJADR where your research aligns with its content.

In this issue we cover papers on the impact of alcohol consumption on STI infection globally, the effects of COVID-19 on drinking across Europe, COVID-19's effect on drinking, smoking and stress in Singaporean students, and the links between alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption in Thailand. Both the papers by Killian and colleagues (2023) and Kristman-Valente and colleagues (2023), were focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, with the former seeking to utilise pre-planned studies to analyse the unexpected effects of COVID-19, and the latter seeking to study stresses arising from COVID-19 and assess whether these stresses were related to behaviour changes.

Llamosas-Falcón and colleagues (2023) conducted a systematic review of studies examining the effect of alcohol consumption on a range of STIs, excluding HIV. The review included studies using cohort and case control designs, and biologically-ascertained STI infection results. Most studies found significant associations between alcohol consumption (particularly heavy episodic drinking) and STI infection. The review also discussed studies showing increasing STI incidents following increasing per capita consumption, as well as studies which have shown decreasing rates of STIs following increased alcohol prices or taxation. This research was also seen to provide evidence of the potential causal effect of alcohol consumption on STIs. Llamosas-Falcón et al.'s study is a welcome addition to the literature given that the preponderance of studies on alcohol's effects on STIs focus on HIV infection, to the exclusion of many other STIs.

In a study of 54,245 people undertaken in 2021, across a COVID-19 affected Europe, Killian and colleagues (2023) analysed European data collected in 33 countries. They found that men and women of high socio-economic status (SES), compared to those of low and mid SES status, were more likely to report using alcohol in the previous 12 months. However, risky single occasion drinking monthly or more often, was more prevalent among men who reported currently drinking in the low and mid-SES compared to the high-SES group. SES differences in risky drinking were not observed among women, but women who drank more on average daily, were of high SES. High-SES women, compared to their low and mid-SES counterparts, were more likely to change their drinking patterns during COVID-19, whereas men did not report such changes.

The study by Kristman-Valente and colleagues (2023) set out specifically to study whether and how stresses arising during the COVID-19 pandemic were linked to changes in smoking and drinking behaviours among university students in Singapore. These researchers found that COVID-19 Social Restriction Stress was associated with an *increased* likelihood, whereas COVID-19 Health Concern Stress was associated with a *decreased* likelihood, of smoking and heavy drinking. They did not find evidence of an association between COVID-19 stress related to Resource Constraints and Future Uncertainties, and young adults' substance use. University students who were more concerned about social restrictions and related isolation and loneliness were at elevated risk of increasing their substance use.

Using data from the Thailand arm of the International Alcohol Control (IAC) study, Jindarattanaporn and colleagues (2023) examined the cross-sectional association between exposure to alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption among a sample of adults aged 15-65 years. High levels of exposure to alcohol advertisements were reported despite restrictions on advertising in Thailand. Younger people were generally more likely than older people to report exposure to alcohol marketing. Exposure to alcohol advertisement was associated with being positively disposed to, or “liking”, alcohol advertisements. Furthermore, liking of alcohol advertisements was associated with current, regular and heavy episodic drinking. The authors argue for the need for further restrictions on alcohol advertising and marketing in Thailand, particular in terms of social media and digital marketing and advertising.

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