

Editorial: Binge drinking during COVID, situational norms on alcohol consumption, alcohol purchasing and marketing – studies from middle-income and high-income countries

Welcome to Volume 14, Issue 1 of the International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research (IJADR).

During late 2025 and early 2026 we sadly lost two remarkable members of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research (KBS). This issue includes a series of tributes introduced by Kim Bloomfield and Kathryn Graham (Bloomfield et al., 2026) to acknowledge Sharon and Richard Wilsnack and their long legacy as pioneering, inspiring, beloved and important alcohol researchers. In August last year we also lost our dear colleague, Kirsten Stenius, whose tributes were published in *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* (Hellman et al., 2025) and the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* (Babor, 2025).

But first in this issue, we include empirical papers. These are from authors based in the United States of America (Dada et al. 2026), Australia (Room et al., 2026), Vietnam (Nguyen Thi Thu et al., 2026) and Thailand (Thaikla & Wichaidit, 2026). We are pleased once again to be able to publish papers from different countries and regions of the world. This series of papers all discuss somewhat different dimensions of the alcohol issue. Three of the papers describe studies using large datasets from nationwide surveys. They address a range of questions about alcohol consumption and contexts, such as, among others, what proportions of adult drinkers of alcohol engaged in binge drinking before and during COVID-19 in the United States? How do adults in Australia characterise the acceptability of different drinking situations? What factors are associated with alcohol purchasing behaviour among adults in Vietnam? and what is the nature of online marketing activities that exist in the Thai language? The studies are described in a little more detail below.

Dada and colleagues (2026) used data from the Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) to determine binge drinking prevalence rates among adults with a prior history of alcohol use in the United States before and after declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that rates of binge drinking (approximately 40%) were not significantly different just before and during the early months of COVID. However, binge drinking frequency in the past thirty days was higher after, as compared to before, the declaration of the pandemic. Rates of binge drinking also were higher among individuals who belonged to gender and sexual minority groups, Hispanics, former and current smokers, those with symptoms of anxiety and depression,

and those opposed to anti-alcohol messages. The authors point to health disparities that were particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic as potentially contributory to the higher binge drinking prevalence rates among Hispanic people and members of gender and sexual minority groups.

In many societies around the world drinking alcohol is integral to conviviality. This is the main focus of the paper by Room and his colleagues (2026) in this issue. The study uses GENACIS data from Australia on situational norms for drinking which asked participants to evaluate the acceptability of drinking alcohol in eleven different situations. Factor analysis revealed three distinct dimensions reflecting people's views that drinking situations can be primarily convivial, can have elements of conviviality but require caution to be exercised, and can be non-convivial. Examples of these three situations include, respectively, "Out at a bar/pub having drinks with friends"; "For adults attending a young child's birthday party at someone else's home"; and "For a couple of co-workers out for lunch (on a workday)". People's views regarding alcohol situational norms varied as a function of various demographic and alcohol consumption factors. It is interesting, and perhaps not surprising, that those who were more likely to endorse drinking in situations requiring caution were men, people of higher income, and self-employed. These seem to comprise groups who are usually more protected from the consequences or harms of drinking. The authors discuss the importance of policies that discourage drinking in situations that require the exercising of caution.

In their introduction to their paper, Nguyen Thi Thu and colleagues (2026) note that Vietnam has higher and more rapidly increasing rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related mortality than many other countries in the Western Pacific region. They also note that the highest rates of alcohol consumption occur in lower-income regions of the country. Using data from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS), this study examines alcohol purchasing and expenditure by adults across Vietnam. The survey included just over 9,000 households, comprising about 35,000 individuals. The authors used the Heckman selection model. They found that alcohol purchasing was most likely among households that were male-headed, larger sized, within the richest quintiles and those in the Red River Delta (a lower income) region of Vietnam. The authors recommend various targeted policy and intervention

strategies. Among them are interventions to address norms associating alcohol with positive attributes such as success; interventions incentivising those involved in informal alcohol production to move to “formalisation” of their activities; interventions addressing the supply of alcohol, including high alcohol outlet density; advertising restrictions; minimisation of alcohol consumption during cultural events; and increasing excise taxes.

The final paper is by Thaikla and Wichaidit (2026) and was presented at the KBS conference in 2024. Alcohol marketing is a growing concern for many governments internationally, with research focusing on the frequency of exposure to such marketing and how it affects different sections of the population (Purves & Critchlow, 2024). Thailand is a country that has already acted to restrict such practices by outlawing marketing promotions and banning alcohol advertisements or marketing activities that display logos, trademarks, and images of alcoholic beverages. This paper by Thaikla and Wichaidit aims to describe online alcohol marketing activities that are in the Thai language. The methods used in this paper are also of huge interest to many, as they used an artificial intelligence platform to collect alcohol marketing content from the internet, and so were able to automatically search and filter content that violated control and regulatory measures. They found that the most common violation of alcohol control laws was using alcohol brand trademarks or symbols in online content, and content that commonly focused on creating product awareness. The uncontrolled expansion of the online alcoholic beverage market poses significant public health risks, particularly among young people (Noel et al., 2020), but methods such as these do provide an opportunity to better monitor this activity and hold alcohol actors to account. *Guest Editor: Jack G. Martin*

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