

# Alcohol Transitions: Past, Present and Post- Pandemic

A BSA Alcohol Studies Group Half-Day Virtual Workshop

17<sup>th</sup> September 2020. 10.45am - 2 pm

## **Draft programme:**

10.45 – Welcome and introductions

11.00 – Presentation 1; followed by paper discussion

**The Use of Drinking as a Collective Representation of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Ireland - Presenter: Dr John O'Brien, Sociology, Waterford Institute of Technology**

11.35 – comfort/tea break

11.40 – Presentation 2; followed by paper discussion

**“I want my alcohol to be consumed outside the home, which is difficult now”: Understanding drinking transitions and altered drinking spaces since the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK - Presenters: Dr Emily Nicholls, Sociology, University of Portsmouth and Dr Dominic Conroy, Psychology, University of East London**

12.15 – lunch break

12.45 – Presentation 3; followed by paper discussion

**Changes in patterns of alcohol consumption during COVID-19 lockdown and how this impacted on people with and without mental health conditions – Presenter: Dr Emma L Davies, Psychology, Oxford Brookes University**

13:20 - Informal network event

14.00 - Event ends

## **Presentation Abstracts**

### **The Use of Drinking as a Collective Representation of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Ireland**

**Presenter: Dr John O'Brien, Sociology, Waterford Institute of Technology**

This paper represents a preliminary analysis of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on drinking culture in the Republic of Ireland. Drinking establishments and the social form of sociability involving alcohol consumption have found themselves at the centre of both the practical task of controlling the reproduction rate of the Covid-19 virus, while also acting in a Durkheimian sense, as a 'collective representation' through which society has visualised itself in the period of the pandemic. Alcohol has long been the symbol through which political and social crisis has been understood. The political mismanagement that contributed to the 2008 financial crisis was exemplified by the Prime Ministers hungover radio interview in the midst of the economy's downward spiral, while Maria Bailey's insurance claim linked to the notorious swing and a bottle in each hand marked the beginning of the end of the last administration. It was the sight of packed pubs, very symbolically of Molly Malone's (who of course died of a fever) in Temple Bar (a collective symbol of the tourist economy, globalisation and generally welcome but hard to control flows of capital and people) that led to the forceable closure of large sections of the economy, and most notably the alcohol-linked hospitality sector on March 15th, before the major tourist event of St. Patrick's Day; another symbol of globalisation, tourism and mass-sociability. As pubs and nightclubs face continued forced closures, the plight of publicans, and pubs as hubs of local communities has also become a major discourse. Thus, the paper will focus on how pubs and drinking have acted as vehicles for thinking through demands for changes in habitual self-control, boundary maintenance, and collective identity in the midst of the current crisis.

### **"I want my alcohol to be consumed outside the home, which is difficult now": Understanding drinking transitions and altered drinking spaces since the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK**

**Presenters: Dr Emily Nicholls, Sociology, University of Portsmouth and Dr Dominic Conroy, Psychology, University of East London**

Emerging statistics on drinking practices since the UK entered 'lockdown' in March 2020 paint a somewhat mixed picture. For example, 47% of pre-lockdown once-a-week drinkers claim to now be drinking less or to have stopped completely, but 18% of pre-lockdown daily drinkers appear to be consuming more than before (Alcohol Change UK, 2020). A nuanced understanding of how and why people's drinking practices might be changing during the pandemic is required. In this paper, we draw on emerging data concerning 'drinking in lockdown' to explore experiences of home-based drinking and varied types of drinking changes and transitions. Our data suggests that, for some, lockdown may have prompted reduced drinking (or even alcohol abstinence) while, for others, this period has been characterised by more frequent or heavier consumption. In particular, our data has underscored the role of space and place in shaping drinking experiences during lockdown, and has brought fresh perspective to how 'home drinking' and online drinking spaces (e.g. 'the virtual pub') as under-researched phenomena may (re)shape drinking experiences. A striking feature of our data seems to be how some individuals have approached lockdown-mandated time away from the pub as a reason to 'get healthy', while others have drunk alcohol more frequently as a result of greater opportunities to do so while at home. Finally, we consider participants' emerging reflections on what their 'post-pandemic' longer-term drinking practices might look like as lockdown restrictions are eased and the reconfigured nature of traditional drinking spaces (e.g. the pub) becomes clearer.

## **Changes in patterns of alcohol consumption during COVID-19 lockdown and how this impacted on people with and without mental health conditions**

**Presenter: Dr Emma L Davies, Psychology, Oxford Brookes University**

Authors of study: Emma L Davies, Gail Gilchrist, Cheneal Puljevic, Ahnjili Zhuparris, Larissa J Maier, Jason A Ferris, Monica J. Barratt, Adam R Winstock

**Background:** The Global Drug Survey (GDS) Special Edition on COVID-19 was developed in April 2020 to understand the impact of the pandemic on peoples' lives, with a focus on the use of alcohol and other drugs, mental health, and relationships.

**Methods:** In this anonymous online survey, respondents were asked whether their drinking behaviours had changed compared to February 2020, why this was, and what impacts any changes had on their physical health, mental health, relationships, finances, work/study performance, and enjoyment of drinking. This analysis included only respondents who reported drinking alcohol in the last 12 months and in countries with >500 respondents, leaving N=55,015 (Mdn age = 32; 51.9% male; 24.6% with a current mental health condition – MHC).

**Results:** 29.6% reduced drinking (28.6% with MHC and 29.9% without) and 38.4% increased drinking (42.2% with MHC /35.3% without). Reasons for increasing drinking were having more time, boredom and stress. 33% of people with MHC said increasing drinking made their mental health worse (9% said better) and 41.4% said it made their physical health worse (5.9% said better), compared to 16.9% and 29.5% respectively for people without. For those who reduced drinking, 20.5% of those with a MHC said their mental health was better, compared to 13.8% without.

**Discussion:** Ways in which people could be supported to monitor and reduce their consumption during uncertain times are discussed with an emphasis on the risk that increased drinking poses for those with pre-existing MHC.