Examining the Interplay of Distress, Loneliness, and Alcohol Consumption Among Employed Women

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Introduction: The rate of alcohol use among women is on the rise, women report using alcohol to cope with stress. Loneliness and mental health issues are also increasingly common worldwide. Research on the interplay of these factors on women from the general population is scarce. Studying employed women is crucial due to their distinct mental health challenges, such as juggling home duties, caregiving, and workplace gender bias. The study focuses on how distress, loneliness, and alcohol use interconnected for Australian working women.

Methods: Wave 21 data of 3828 employed Australian women from the Household Income Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) study was used. The role of loneliness and alcohol consumption (number of standard drinks per occasion) on psychological distress was examined using regression analysis, as well as the moderating role of loneliness on this relationship.

Results: A significant positive relationship between loneliness and distress ($F(5,3820)=322.24$, $p=.001$), and between alcohol consumption and distress ($F(5,3820)=1297.35$, $p<.001$) was found. Loneliness was a significant moderator of the relationship between alcohol consumption and distress ($b=.19$, $p=.001$). The relationship was strongest when loneliness was high ($b=.83$, $p<.001$) compared to when moderate ($b=.26$, $p=.02$). The relationship was no longer significant at low levels of loneliness.

Discussions and Conclusions: The link between Australian working women's psychological distress, alcohol intake, and loneliness is clear. Notably, this connection intensifies with increased loneliness. This highlights the need to address loneliness and alcohol use together to enhance the mental health of working women.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Establishing social support and/or mentoring groups both within and outside the workplace can help employed women discuss stress, loneliness, and their relationship with alcohol, as well as foster social connections. It is crucial to increase awareness of how loneliness affects mental health and alcohol use. Guidelines on alcohol consumption need to be reviewed and updated to highlight the dangers of using alcohol to manage psychological distress. Additionally, more research is necessary to understand the relationship between loneliness, mental health, and alcohol use across different groups of women, which will guide future policy and intervention development.

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