Not all home drinking is equal: A latent class analysis of drinking patterns and alcohol consumption levels following initial COVID-19 restrictions in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom

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Introduction: Initial COVID-19 restrictions forced changes in the contexts (e.g., with who and where) within which individuals consumed alcohol. We aimed to explore different profiles of drinking contexts during initial COVID-19 restrictions and their association with alcohol consumption.

Method: We used latent class analysis (LCA) to explore subgroups of drinking contexts among 4,891 respondents of the Global Drug Survey from the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia who reported drinking alcohol in the month prior to data collection (3 May- 21 June 2020). Ten binary LCA indicator variables were generated from a survey question about last month alcohol settings. Negative binomial regression was used to explore the association between the latent classes and respondents' total number of drinks consumed in the last 30 days (i.e., alcohol consumption).

Results: The LCA found six distinct classes of individuals who reported drinking in the following contexts: Household (36.0%); Alone (32.3%); Alone & household (17.9%); Gatherings & household (9.5%); Party (3.2%), and Everywhere (1.1%), with the last group associated with the highest probability of increased alcohol consumption during this time. Male respondents and those aged 35 or older were most likely to report increased alcohol consumption.

Discussions and Conclusions: Our findings suggest that drinking contexts, sex, and age influenced alcohol consumption during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings highlight a need for improved policy targeting risky drinking in home settings. Further research should explore whether COVID-19-induced shifts in alcohol use persist as restrictions are progressively lifted.