

## **“We were all stuffed.” Working mother’s alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 lockdowns: A qualitative analysis.**

MAREE PATSOURAS<sup>1</sup>, GABRIEL CALUZZI<sup>1</sup>, CASSANDRA WRIGHT<sup>1,2</sup>, EMMANUEL KUNTSCHE<sup>1</sup>, SANDRA KUNTSCHE<sup>1</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, <sup>2</sup>Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory, Australia,*

Presenter’s email: [m.patsouras@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:m.patsouras@latrobe.edu.au)

**Introduction / Issues:** Working mothers combine dual roles of parenting and employment, and often take on the ‘double shift’ of responsibilities. They remain an under-studied population, despite increased alcohol consumption among midlife women. This study aimed to examine working mothers’ daily strains, and the impact of these stressors on alcohol consumption.

**Method / Approach:** Twenty working mothers (M = 43.4, SD = 4.52) participated in semi-structured interviews in the first half of 2022. We invited participants to talk about themselves and their families, their jobs and their routines, and their alcohol consumption. Participants reflected on their alcohol use during COVID-19 lockdowns and their experiences balancing employment and parenting. Transcripts were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach.

**Key findings:** Almost all working mothers described increases in the frequency of weekly alcohol consumption during lockdowns. For example, many participants recounted increasing consumption from 1-4 days per week to 5-7 days. Working mothers experienced lockdowns as isolating and stressful, and felt overwhelmed managing employment and parenting. Additional responsibilities, such as home-schooling when schools were closed, and increased household chores, primarily fell to the mothers. Home-schooling in particular restricted leisure or ‘me-time,’ and increased their desire to drink. Many participants described feeling reliant on alcohol and were reluctant to take a night off drinking, emphasizing that they looked forward to their end-of-the-day drink.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Working mothers described feeling overburdened during COVID-19 lockdowns. They used alcohol to cope with increased stress and as a reward for hard work.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Prevention strategies focusing on mother’s alcohol use should consider stress related to unequal distribution of household labour and care as an important contextual factor. This may include greater individual and societal awareness of the association between maternal alcohol use and stress, and greater equity in the share of duties.

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