Changes in alcohol use and psychological distress among women using an online alcohol support platform

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Introduction: Digital alcohol interventions offer a scalable, low-barrier pathway for women unlikely to seek formal treatment, yet how alcohol use and psychological distress change during early platform use remains poorly understood. This study examined alcohol use severity and psychological distress across 24-weeks, and the role of readiness to change, among women using an Australian online alcohol support platform.

Methods: Women (N=3035 at baseline) who registered with the online platform Daybreak and completed assessments at baseline, 4-weeks or 24-weeks were included. The AUDIT-C, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) and Readiness-to-change measures were used. Linear mixed models were estimated across three timepoints (baseline, 4-weeks and 24-weeks), adjusting for age and remoteness.

Results: Mean AUDIT-C scores declined from 8.17 (baseline) to 2.97 at 4-weeks, with 54.4% of 4-week completers moving to a lower risk category, before rising to 3.95 at 24-weeks, remaining below baseline. Mean K10 scores declined from 24.20 at baseline to 17.30 at 4-weeks, before rising to 19.65 at 24-weeks, also remaining below baseline. Women not yet ready to change showed higher baseline severity on both outcomes and smaller improvements over time.

Conclusions: Women engaging with Daybreak demonstrated meaningful reductions in alcohol-related risk, with over half moving to a lower risk category at 4-weeks. While some return toward higher risk consumption was observed at 24-weeks, scores remained well below baseline. Psychological distress followed a similar but smaller pattern of early reduction. Findings highlight the potential value of tailoring digital support to users' readiness to change from the point of registration.

Implications: These findings have relevance for the design and resourcing of digital alcohol support tools, particularly for women who face barriers to formal treatment. Early engagement appears to represent a window of opportunity, where timely and tailored support could help consolidate initial reductions in alcohol-related risk and improvements in mental health.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: LR and TD declare no conflicts of interest. KV and NL are employees of Hello Sunday Morning, the organisation that operates the Daybreak platform from which study data were drawn. Analysis was conducted independently by the University of Wollongong research team.