

Assessing international alcohol and internet use patterns during COVID-19 isolation: Highlighting stress-compulsivity relationships

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Introduction

- ❖ Control of the COVID-19 pandemic was mediated by extended self-isolation periods; potentially inducing stress in individuals
- ❖ Stress can lead to the development of problematic behaviours tied to addiction & compulsive mechanisms
- ❖ These stress-compulsivity relationships are hypothesised to be moderated by:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Psychiatric symptomatology
 - Personality traits
 - Previous experience & expectancies

Aim

- ❖ To assess how the COVID-19 pandemic affected **alcohol consumption** & internet use, specifically, **online gaming** & **pornography viewing**, in the general population

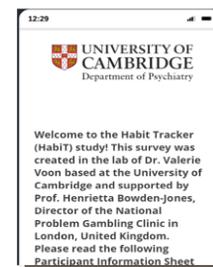


Method

★ **Habit Tracker (HabiT):** an online, international survey ★

- ❖ **Survey completion:** 8-10 minutes
- ❖ **Primary outcome measures:**
 - Changes in weekly units or hours
 - Changes in severity
 - Current overall severity
- ❖ **COVID-19-related stress:** 10 stress factors related to:
 - COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., "Has anyone you know become ill from COVID-19?")
 - Isolation measures (e.g., "Are you isolated alone?")
- ❖ **Psychiatric & personality factors:**
 - Depression & anxiety (HADS)
 - Impulsivity (SUPPS-P)
 - Extroversion & neuroticism (TIPI)

HabiT was created using Qualtrics survey-building platform and could be completed on either a computer or smartphone device.



qualtrics^{XM}



HabiT was advertised by several news agencies, including The Telegraph, News Wise, & BBC Cambridgeshire.

Results

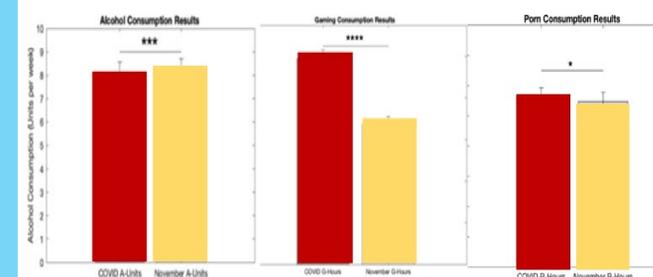
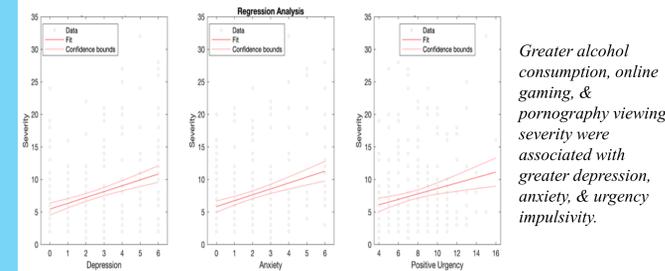
- ❖ **Subjects:** 1,364 accurately completed; (18-92 years)
- ❖ **Percent increased:** 36% alcohol consumption, 63% online gaming, & 44% pornography viewing



- ❖ **UK residents**
- ❖ **Older individuals (25+ years)**
- ❖ **Parents**
- ❖ **Essential workers**
- ❖ **Those with a personal relationship with someone severely ill from COVID-19**



- ❖ **Males**
- ❖ **Younger individuals (18-25 years)**
- ❖ **Low frequency social interactions**
- ❖ **Poor-quality relationships with isolation partner(s)**



In the overall HabiT sample, individuals decreased their weekly units of alcohol consumed, & increased weekly hours of online gaming & pornography viewing.



Conclusion

- ❖ **Overall:**
 - Increased alcohol use was associated with pandemic stressors, while increased online gaming & pornography viewing was linked to stress characteristic of isolation measures
- ❖ **Our findings:**
 - Underscore the theoretical mechanism of compulsive behaviours driven by stress
 - Help to identify those at greater risk for problematic alcohol & internet use during isolation from COVID-19

Acknowledgements

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