

NEWS RELEASES

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Male and female drinking patterns becoming more alike in the US

In the United States, and throughout the world, men drink more alcohol than women. But a recent analysis by scientists at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), part of the National Institutes of Health, indicates that longstanding differences between men and women in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms might be narrowing in the United States.

Researchers led by Aaron White, Ph.D., NIAAA's senior scientific advisor to the director, examined data from yearly national surveys conducted between 2002 and 2012.

"We found that over that period of time, differences in measures such as current drinking, number of drinking days per month, reaching criteria for an alcohol use disorder, and driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year, all narrowed for females and males," says Dr. White. "Males still consume more alcohol, but the differences between men and women are diminishing." A report of the study by Dr. White and his colleagues is online in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

"This study confirms what other recent reports have suggested about changing patterns of alcohol use by men and women in the U.S.," notes NIAAA Director George F. Koob, Ph.D. Dr. Koob adds that the evidence of increasing alcohol use by females is particularly concerning given that women are at greater risk than men of a variety of alcohol-related health effects, including liver inflammation, cardiovascular disease, neurotoxicity and cancer.

Dr. White and his colleagues found that the percentage of people who drank alcohol in the previous 30 days increased for females from 44.9 percent to 48.3 percent, but decreased for males from 57.4 percent to 56.1 percent between 2002 and 2012. Over that time, the average number of drinking days in the past month also increased for females, from 6.8 to 7.3 days, but decreased slightly for males, from 9.9 to 9.5 days.

Binge drinking by 18 to 25 year olds in college did not change during the decade under study. But among 18 to 25 year olds not in college, there was a significant increase in binge drinking among females and a significant decrease among males, effectively narrowing the gender gap in binge drinking in this age group.

Dr. White notes that there was only one measure, for any age group, for which the male-female drinking difference actually became greater during the study period.

"The prevalence of combining alcohol with marijuana during the last drinking occasion among 18 to 25 year old male drinkers increased from 15 percent to 19 percent," he says, "while the prevalence of combining alcohol with marijuana during the last drinking occasion among 18 to 25 year old female drinkers remained steady at about 10 percent."

The authors say reasons for the converging patterns of alcohol use are unclear and do not appear to be easily explained by recent trends in employment, pregnancy, or marital status, as their analyses controlled for these variables.

Dr. White and his colleagues suggest that additional studies are needed to identify the psychosocial and environmental contributors to these changes and to assess their implications for prevention and treatment efforts.

About the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA): The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), part of the National Institutes of Health, is the primary U.S. agency for conducting and supporting research on the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of alcohol abuse, alcoholism, and alcohol problems. NIAAA funds the National Consortium on Alcohol and Neurodevelopment in Adolescence (NCANDA) to determine the effects of problematic alcohol use on the developing adolescent brain and examine brain characteristics that predict alcohol use disorder. NIAAA also disseminates research findings to general, professional, and academic audiences. Additional alcohol research information and publications are available at www.niaaa.nih.gov.

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Reference

White A, Castle IJ, Chen CM, Shirley M, Roach D, Hingson R. Converging Patterns of Alcohol Use and Related Outcomes Among Females and Males in the United States, 2002 to 2012. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res*. 2015 Sep;39(9):1712-26

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