

CLUB  
SODA



CLUB SODA RESEARCH REPORT

# HOW HAVE THE DRINKING HABITS OF CLUB SODA MEMBERS CHANGED IN LOCKDOWN?

JUNE 2020



# SUMMARY

---

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in lockdowns and other protective measures around the world. These events can be expected to have major impacts on people's drinking habits as well. We wanted to find out how members of Club Soda, an alcohol misuse peer support community, have changed their alcohol use during the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns. This report summarises the findings from an online survey of Club Soda members in April and May 2020. The majority of the 507 respondents were from the UK. The main findings are that:

- 57% of the respondents who drink alcohol are drinking more than before the pandemic
- 25% are now drinking less than before or not at all.

The results therefore support the conclusion from other surveys that people's alcohol use is

polarising: the heaviest drinkers are drinking even more, whereas moderate drinkers are drinking less. This increase in the most problematic drinking is likely to lead to worse health and wellbeing for these individuals in future, as well as an increasing need for support and treatment services.

**This report was written by Dr Jussi Tolvi. For further details on the survey you can contact him via email [jussi@joinclubsoda.com](mailto:jussi@joinclubsoda.com). For press and media enquiries, please contact Laura Willoughby, email [laura@joinclubsoda.com](mailto:laura@joinclubsoda.com), phone +44 7968 708703.**

# CONTENTS

---

1. INTRODUCTION .....	4
2. SURVEY DESIGN AND RESPONSES .....	7
3. SURVEY FINDINGS - DRINKING ....	10
4. SURVEY FINDINGS - WELLBEING AND SUPPORT .....	13
5. SOBER WEEKENDER .....	16
6. DISCUSSION .....	19

# 1. INTRODUCTION

---

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in lockdowns and other protective measures being implemented in countries around the world, including all of the UK and several locations in the US. These are significant events, and can be expected to have major impacts on people's drinking habits as well. One factor is that in many countries all bars and restaurants are closed, so more drinking is now taking place at home. This also means that current alcohol sales figures [1] are not comparable to the past, and are not a reliable guide to consumption levels (also due to stockpiling and other reasons).

There have already been some surveys on changes in alcohol consumption. Early in the UK lockdown (which began on 23rd March) a YouGov survey [2] found 24% of UK adults

[1] <https://spirits.eu/media/spiritsnews/76/425>

[2] <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/food/articles-reports/2020/04/08/how-are-british-drinking-habits-shifting-under-loc>

saying they were drinking less than normally, and 17% saying they were drinking more.

Alcohol Change UK conducted a survey of 2,000 UK adults [3] (between 8th and 14th April, a few weeks into lockdown), which found that a third had reduced how often they drink or had stopped drinking completely; but on the other hand a fifth had started drinking more frequently. In terms of consumption, approximately half said they are drinking about the same amount, but 15% are drinking more in lockdown.

These findings already point to the fact that our drinking habits may be becoming more polarised - those who tend to drink little drink even less, whereas those who drink more are drinking even more. If this is the case, problematic alcohol use may be increasing.

Club Soda is a mindful drinking movement [4]. Its members wish to either reduce their alcohol

[3] <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2020/covid19-drinking-during-lockdown-headline-findings>

[4] <https://joinclubsoda.com/>

use or abstain completely, or to maintain their abstinence or controlled drinking. Club Soda does not currently collect data for the alcohol use of its members, but anecdotally and from past online collected AUDIT test results we know that the severity of our members alcohol use issues varies from occasional binge drinking to daily drinking.

The existing survey evidence on the changing drinking habits in lockdown has, until now, been for the whole UK adult population. We wanted to add to this emerging evidence base by surveying how the drinking habits and general wellbeing of people with current or past alcohol issues - Club Soda members - has been impacted by the pandemic and the consequent lockdowns. Our survey was not restricted to the UK only, although we expected the majority of responses to come from UK residents, as approximately two thirds of Club Soda members live in the UK.

## 2. SURVEY DESIGN AND RESPONSES

---

The survey consisted of eight questions. The first three were demographic and background questions:

1. Where do you live?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you currently in lockdown or isolating due to Covid-19?

The next two questions were about drinking habits and identity:

4. Drinking identity
5. Drinking compared to a few weeks ago

The final three questions were on mental health and general wellbeing, and support needs:

6. Are you experiencing any [mental health issues]?



7. Are you experiencing any unusual positive feelings/emotions?

8. What help or support would you like to have at this time?

The survey was conducted online. Recruitment was through Club Soda Facebook groups and email list. There were no rewards or prizes for responding. No personal details in addition to those already mentioned was collected, and we have no way of identifying any of the respondents.

Responses were submitted from 10th April to 2nd May 2020. The majority of the responses, 81%, were submitted from 18th to 20th April, prompted by an email sent to the Club Soda mailing list on the 18th. In total, 507 people filled in the survey.

The location of the respondents is heavily biased to the UK and North America: 77% said they live in the UK, 15% in the United States and Canada, 3% in Australia and New Zealand, and 6% somewhere else.

The age profile is older than the UK or US population overall: 2% are aged 18 to 29 years old, 42% aged 30 to 49, and 56% aged 50 years and over.

As for the lockdown status, 71% respondents were in lockdown and not working outside of their home at the time of filling in the survey, 21% were in lockdown but working outside of their home, 7% were not in lockdown, and 1% were isolating with Covid-19 symptoms.

# 3. SURVEY FINDINGS - DRINKING

Table 1 shows the responses to the first, multiple choice, survey question, “Which of the following best describes you today?” The respondents could only select one option.

Table 1: Drinking identity	% of responses
“Alcohol-free / sober / in recovery”	41%
“Drinking but want to drink less”	31%
“Drinking but want to stop”	15%
“Mindful / moderate drinker”	13%
“Drinking and not planning to change”	1%

Of the respondents, at least 46% are therefore actively attempting to reduce their drinking, and in addition at least some of the “Mindful / moderate drinkers” will also be.

The second, also multiple choice, survey question was on recent changes in alcohol use: “Compared to a few weeks ago, are you now drinking...”. There were 302 responses to this question, which was not asked of the

respondents who had said they were not drinking in the first question. The results are in Table 2.

<b>Table 2: Changes in drinking</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
-----	-----
“A little more than before”	30%
“A lot more than before”	27%
“About the same”	18%
“A little less than before”	12%
“Much less than before”	10%
“Not at all”	4%

Of the respondents still drinking, 57% say they are now drinking more than before the pandemic, whereas 25% are drinking less than before or not at all. It seems then that Club Soda members are on average drinking more in lockdown.

There were no major differences in this finding by the demographic or identity categories, but some small differences can be seen. First, the mindful/moderate drinkers are drinking less than before: 47% of them say they are drinking less, and only 23% are drinking more.

Second, of the “still drinking but want to quit/cut down” group, 20% are drinking less, but 66% are drinking more. And third, the 30 to 49 year-olds are somewhat more likely to be drinking more than other age groups (68% vs 51% for the over-50s).

# 4. SURVEY FINDINGS - WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

The question on mental health was also a multiple choice question, but in this question the respondents were able to select several options to the prompt: “Are you experiencing any of the following at the moment”. 458 of the respondents (91%) answered this question. Table 3 below shows the answers as a percentage of all respondents selecting each mental health issue.

**Table 1: Mental health issues experienced % of reporting**

-----	
Anxiety	52%
Stress	41%
Cravings for alcohol	40%
Sleep problems (insomnia or other issues)	40%
Loneliness	30%
Depression	26%
Eating problems (overeating, bulimia, anorexia etc)	24%
Relationship problems	13%

**Table 1: [Continued]**

% of reporting

---

Suicidal thoughts or feelings	3%
Drug abuse (not alcohol)	1%
Self-harm	1%

Anxiety was the most commonly reported issue, mentioned by more than half of all respondents. Stress, alcohol cravings and sleep problems were noted by four in ten respondents, and loneliness and depression by more than one in four.

On a positive note, 9% of the respondents didn't report feeling any of these or other negatives in their life at the moment.

The last two survey questions responses were freeform text replies. We conducted a simple thematic analysis of the responses to the questions "What about good things: Are you experiencing any unusual positive feelings/emotions (for example are you feeling more relaxed, productive, or content than usual)?" and "What help or support would you

like to have at this time (in your own words)?”. The first of these was answered by 393 people (78% - a few “none” etc answers were deleted). The second was answered by 347 people (69% - a few “none” etc answers were again deleted).

The themes often seen in the answers to the first question on positives included feelings of relaxation (mentioned by over 20% of the respondents to this question), increased productivity at work or at home (15%), better connections with family and friends (12%). Other frequent comments included mentions of exercise and spending (more) time in nature or in the garden.

The second question responses were more varied. A large number of respondents (approximately one in five) would like to have some unspecified help and support in reducing their alcohol use. Smaller numbers mentioned peer or community support, real-world one to one support, motivation and encouragement, reading stories of others who have reduced their drinking, daily prompts, and professional therapy or counselling.



## 5. SOBER WEEKENDER

---

Partly in response to the survey findings, Club Soda organised a “Sober Weekender” online event from Friday 1st May to Monday 4th May. The event was free to take part, and included daily email prompts, website content on reducing alcohol use and life skills, online meetings and webinars, an onboarding survey on Friday, and a follow-up survey.

Just over a thousand people signed up for the event (1,023), and 549 of them (54%) completed the onboarding survey at least partly. There is an unknown amount of overlap between the respondents to this survey and the main survey already discussed. We feel that the responses to the onboarding add to our understanding of Covid-19 drinking habits, and we will therefore briefly report on the second survey findings here as well.

The participants of this event were mostly people wanting to reduce their drinking. When asked for their plans beyond the weekend, 46% said they want to quit drinking altogether, 38% said they want to

moderate, 7% weren't sure. The remaining 8% planned to keep to their current drinking level. Presumably these respondents were already alcohol-free; the percentage is very close to the 7% who answered "I don't ever drink" to the question about changes during lockdown (see below). In other words therefore, 92% of the respondents to this survey were motivated to reduce their alcohol use, and must therefore consider it at least in some way problematic.

Table 4 on the next page shows the answers to the question "Compared to the time before lockdown, are you drinking more or less alcohol than you normally would?" Nearly everyone (533 people or 97%) answered this question.

The figures point in the same direction as those in our main survey. Half the respondents (50%) say they are drinking more in lockdown, 28% say they are drinking less or not at all, and 21% have not changed (this includes the 7% who were already abstinent).

**Table 4: Changes in drinking -  
Sober Weekender**

**% of responses**

---

“A bit more”	29%
“Much more”	21%
“About the same as normal”	14%
“Not at all”	13%
“Much less”	8%
“N/A I don't' ever drink alcohol”	7%
“A bit less”	7%

## 6. DISCUSSION

---

The weakness of the two surveys covered in this report is that the samples are relatively small and self-selected. But the strength of the findings is that they cover a specific part of the population - those who are at least concerned about their alcohol use and are actively trying to reduce it. Many of these people will already have been drinking much more than the recommended guidelines before the lockdown, and are potentially at risk of even more hazardous drinking at this time.

Our findings point in the same direction as the UK population level surveys quoted in the introduction, that alcohol consumption during lockdown is becoming more polarised. Those already drinking the most before lockdown are drinking even more, whereas the moderate drinkers are reducing their alcohol use in some way. We assume that the moderate drinkers already have some tools in place for successfully managing their drinking habits.

The findings have obvious consequences for current and future alcohol harm. They also suggest that those who would like to reduce their drinking but haven't, have not developed the skills to do so and would benefit from support in developing the strategies to moderate or quit their drinking.



# CLUB SODA

THE MINDFUL DRINKING MOVEMENT

---

**CREATING A WORLD WHERE NOBODY HAS TO  
FEEL OUT OF PLACE IF THEY'RE NOT DRINKING**

Club Soda is the Mindful Drinking Movement. We want to make mindful drinking widely accepted so that everyone feels confident to change their drinking habits if they want to. Society can make this easier by making sure that people who aren't drinking alcohol are just as comfortable as drinkers who are, especially in social spaces where alcohol is served.

[joinclubsoda.com](https://joinclubsoda.com)

[clubsodaguide.com](https://clubsodaguide.com)

[mindfuldrinkingfestival.com](https://mindfuldrinkingfestival.com)

[@joinclubsoda](https://twitter.com/joinclubsoda)   [@clubsodaguide](https://twitter.com/clubsodaguide)

[laura@joinclubsoda.com](mailto:laura@joinclubsoda.com)