

Too Scientific; Didn't Understand!

Let me explain!

In what social situations do we want to drink alcohol?

What & why?

We often **drink alcohol in social situations**, but how much of that is influenced by the people around us? This study looked at how different **social settings** and **peer influence** (what others are doing or saying) can influence someone's **willingness to drink**. This can help us to better understand **when and why** people drink alcohol. When we know this, we can better target **situations and people** that might be at risk to develop problems with their alcohol use.



How?

Over **500 people** (ages 16–60) were shown **different social scenarios** - where everyone is drinking alcohol (SAD), where people are drinking non-alcoholic drinks (SNAD), or where no one is drinking anything (SND). First, people were **asked whether they would like to use alcohol in this situation**. Second, they saw whether '**peers**' indicated wanting to drink alcohol in that situation. Third, after a break, people rated their willingness to drink alcohol **again** for each of the social situations. We also measured **how often people use alcohol** in daily life.

What did we find?

When were people most willing to drink alcohol?

People were most willing to drink alcohol in social settings where others drink alcohol (SAD), and least willing in the social situation with no drinks at all (SND).

When did people change their willingness to drink alcohol?

After people saw that their peers were more willing to drink alcohol they increased their willingness to drink alcohol. Interestingly, this also works the other way around: if peers indicate they are less willing to drink alcohol, people reduce their personal willingness to drink alcohol as well! This was the case in all social settings we presented.

Is this the same for everyone?

No! Of course, there are a lot of individual differences, but there are also some groups that might be more affected by peer influence than others.

- **Younger people** appear to change more in response to peer feedback! This was especially the case in situations where 'drinking norms' might be unclear: the situation where non-alcohol drinks were presented (SNAD). Adolescents might rely more on peers in these situations than older adults do.
- **People who drink more alcohol** in daily life are more likely to join their peers in drinking more when alcohol was already present in the social situation (SAD). This result could mean that people who follow their peers' drinking behavior in social drinking situations are at risk for using a lot of alcohol.
- **People who drink less alcohol** in daily life were more likely to join their peers when they indicated that they did not want to drink alcohol in situations where no one was drinking to begin with (SND). This result could mean that following your peers' drinking behavior in cases where alcohol use is not the norm is a characteristic that protects some people from drinking too much alcohol.

Important!

The people around us **matter a lot!** Also when we decide **to drink or not to drink** alcohol. Peer influence can work both ways: it can **increase or decrease your drinking**. It is important to realize there are a lot of **individual differences** in how we respond to our peers!

Health care professionals can use this to provide **accurate information about drinking in social settings** and to inform **prevention** of problematic drinking.

