

15th May 2024

Levels of low mental wellbeing vastly different to those reported pre-Pandemic according to national alcohol charity Drinkaware.

This Mental Health Awareness Week, [Drinkaware](#), the national charity working to reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland, published a research paper that provides an outline of specific findings relating to adults' mental health and wellbeing that was identified in the latest *Drinkaware Barometer*.

Key findings include:

- Low mental wellbeing among adults has increased from 11% (2018) to 34% (2023)
- With 56% of adults citing that they have consumed alcohol for 'coping'¹ reasons in the past 30 days

The newly published research paper, *The Interplay between Alcohol and Adults' Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland: An Overview of Findings from the 2023 Barometer*, outlines the risks associated with harmful alcohol consumption and mental well-being. Long-term trends show mental wellbeing plummeted when COVID-19 hit in 2020, with over 1 in 3 (37%) adults reporting low mental wellbeing at that time. This compares with just 11% in 2018. The mental well-being scale then stabilised since the dramatic shift that occurred albeit at very poor levels' (35% in 2021 and 30% in 2022). However, prevalence of low mental well-being has again increased in 2023 to 34% of adults*.

The mental well-being research highlights the intrinsic link between harmful alcohol consumption and low mental well-being with 39% of adults who reported binge drinking as having low mental well-being**. Research shows that 44% of adults who reported increased consumption in the past 12 months also had a low mental well-being score.

¹ Revised Short Form (DMQ-R SF) was used in the Barometer. It consists of 12 motivations for drinking and a five-point response scale. The individual's responses are used to determine the extent to which they drink for social reasons, enhancement reasons, conformity, or coping reasons. A revised version of this measure was included in the survey to enable responses to be analysed according to the different motivations. To reflect the unique 'Lockdown' circumstances, the presented motivations were previously updated for the purposes of the Barometer in both 2020 and again in 2021 (with additional added) to ascertain the key drivers and reasons for adults' drinking in the context of COVID-19 (for example, additional coping options - 'to help manage social distancing/isolation', 'to help with sleep', 'to help with boredom/isn't much to do'). The motivations were revised slightly in 2022 and again in 2023 to reflect the post-pandemic context.

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As the national charity offering practical advice and tips to encourage and embed healthier behaviour, [Drinkaware](#) is raising awareness this Mental Health Awareness Week, about the harmful impacts of alcohol mis-use on mental health. Drinkaware CEO Dearbhla O'Brien said:

"During Mental Health Awareness Week, [Drinkaware](#) is encouraging people to prioritise their mental well-being by understanding the negative effects excessive alcohol can have on mental health. While we recognise and welcome an increase in the number of people choosing not to drink, it is clear from our data that the impact of Covid-19 is still evident when it comes to adults and their mental health. With 56% of adults citing that they drink for coping reasons, Drinkaware wants to highlight that those prone to anxiety and low mood should be vigilant when it comes to alcohol consumption. Alcohol is an anxiolytic which means that it may help reduce feelings of anxiety or depression at the time of consumption, but once the effects have worn off, it can increase the feelings of anxiety or depression both short and long-term."

Ms. O'Brien welcomes trends which show mental well-being forming a key part of the momentum for a healthier relationship with alcohol that is gathering pace among Irish adults.

"Drinkaware's research findings also point towards more positive trends between alcohol and mental well-being with 31% citing mental health as a motivation to reducing alcohol intake, and 41% citing small positive changes already made to their alcohol consumption habits in the past 30 days. We are also seeing peaks in positive intentions amongst the younger adult age group of 18–24-year-olds wanting to drink less (54%) and 57% already have made small positive changes. We at Drinkaware are encouraging adults to follow our tips below to help improve mental health and well-being, starting from today. At Drinkaware, our mission is to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland and we are here to support the public with information, advice, and tips to empower people with healthier coping strategies that don't involve excessive alcohol consumption. Visit www.drinkaware.ie and equip yourself with vital facts, information and supports available."

Tips to improve your mental well-being:

- **Get Active:** Regular exercise can improve your mental and physical health
- **Take up a new hobby:** Doing something you enjoy is a healthy coping mechanism during challenging periods.
- **Connect:** Try to re-connect with friends and family, this can nourish your mental and emotional health.
- **Take notice:** Meditating or practising yoga can give you the space to acknowledge and understand your feelings
- **Random acts of kindness:** Do something nice for a loved one, or for a stranger. Doing good for others does good for your own mental health.
- **Keep Learning:** Learning a new skill or acquiring new interesting information on a subject matter, is great for mental well being.

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- Also become familiar with the [HSE low-risk](#) weekly guidelines to help create healthier engagements with alcohol

Reducing alcohol to improve your mental well-being:

- Track how much alcohol you drink and understand your motivations/triggers.
- Try an alcohol-free month and keep a note of how you are feeling overall.
- Plan activities that do not involve alcohol.
- Alternate every drink with a glass of water or a non-alcoholic beverage.
- Let yourself finish the drink before pouring another.
- Try being [sober curious](#)
- Ask yourself, 'do I really want this drink?'
- Stay out of rounds.

Ends.

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Notes to the editor:

About Drinkaware: Drinkaware is the national charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland. It is governed by an independent board and regulated by the Charities Regulator. Registered Charity Number: 20204601

[The Drinkaware Barometer](#) 2023 is a national population-based survey of 1,000 adults aged 18+ conducted by Ipsos B&A in July/August 2023. It included a series of internationally recognised modules on alcohol consumption and mental health.

References

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** The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009) tool with 7 items was used to allow for analysis of any difference in response patterns according to mental wellbeing.