

Alcohol's financial toll on women—even when they don't drink

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Many women are bearing a financial cost for alcohol consumption, even when they don't drink, according to new research led by La Trobe University's Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR).

Based on a survey of 17,670 men and 20,947 [women](#) from 15 countries, the findings show that women in Australia are twice as likely as men to experience financial harm from a partner, family member or loved one.

Lead researcher Dr. Anne-Marie Laslett said these financial burdens can be extensive.

"Alcohol-related spending is not limited to the purchase of alcohol. Valuable financial income can be spent replacing items broken during periods of intoxication, repaying debts or loans, as well as out-of-pocket medical costs for the drinker's own—or their family members' – injuries," Dr. Laslett said.

The study shows that women from nine countries—Australia, Sweden, the United States, New Zealand, Brazil, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam

and India—were at significantly greater risk than men of financial harm from someone else's drinking habits.

"Women drink less than men, and less problematically, but experience more harm from the people they are close to. We know that women experience more [intimate partner violence](#) than men, and this study shows how women are inequitably financially affected as well," Dr. Laslett said.

"Although our findings varied by country, we found that [younger women](#) in [high income countries](#) like Australia; women with limited access to education; women from rural areas and women who identified as moderate and risky drinkers were more likely to suffer financial harm from a partner or family member's drinking habits."

The prevalence of financial harm from others' drinking affected more than 20 percent of participants in Sri Lanka and India, three percent in Australia, and less than one percent in Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark.

"For Australians, three percent translates to more than 600,000 people according to our current population," Dr. Laslett said.

"The findings confirm the global scale of this problem is greater in lower and [middle income countries](#). We know families in these countries often have less disposable income and fewer social services available to provide support. They also show that these financial burdens are most commonly the outcome of a male partner's drinking habits.

"The findings suggest that a reduction in [alcohol consumption](#) could have a positive impact on household finances, which would particularly benefit women."

More information: Anne-Marie Laslett et al. Cross-sectional surveys of financial harm associated with others' drinking in 15 countries: Unequal effects on women?, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2020).

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