Alcohol during the pandemic: Steady for women, down for men

A new RAND study found that alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic declined among men, while it remained steady among women. In general, alcohol-related problems increased during the pandemic, by 49% for women and 69% for men, but the reasons for the problems remain unclear. The findings were published online last week by the journal Drug and Alcohol Dependence. “Both men and women report increases in negative consequences from their drinking as the pandemic goes on,” said Joan Tucker, lead author of the study and a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. “For men, this finding is particularly striking in that the increase in alcohol-related problems during the pandemic was occurring even as there was a steady decline in the amount they were drinking.” An earlier RAND survey found that among women there was a pronounced increase in frequency of drinking days and binge drinking days from pre-pandemic to early pandemic. This study surveyed 1,118 people in the RAND American Life Panel about their alcohol consumption during three time periods — May to July 2020, October to November 2020 and during March 2021. The study found that feelings of loneliness and motivations for using alcohol during the pandemic may play a role in alcohol consumption patterns. For both men and women, stronger coping and social motives for drinking early in the pandemic were associated with an initial higher level of alcohol use, and stronger coping motives were associated with an initial higher level of alcohol problems.