

# ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE AMONG OLDER ADULTS: SITUATIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Older adults who engage in alcohol use and heavy drinking are more likely to use cannabis for medical or recreational purposes. Heavy drinking is also associated with other substance use.
- Our findings also suggest that older adults who are physically healthy and socially active are more likely to engage in alcohol use and heavy drinking. Those who are not working or volunteering or experiencing anxiety and depression were more likely to report more frequent cannabis and THC use.

## OBJECTIVES

- To examine relationships between alcohol use, heavy drinking and other substance use among older adults.
- To examine relationships between situational and individual characteristics and alcohol use, heavy drinking, and cannabis use among older adults.

## METHODS

### PROCEDURES

- 750 older adults in California participated in a baseline survey in 2024. Address-based sampling and social media used for recruitment.

### Survey Measures

- Alcohol and other substance use.** Past-30-day alcohol use FQ. Any past-30-day heavy drinking. Past-3-month cannabis and THC use frequency. Weekly THC use. Any past-30-day alcohol-cannabis co-use. Past-3-month pain medication use, stimulant use, sedative use, cocaine use.

- Health indicators.** Subjective general health. Physical limitations/ability. Bodily pain. Anxiety/depression symptoms.

- Social activity.** Social isolation. Past-month frequency of family/friend visits, socializing at others' homes, going to bars/restaurants, going to sporting events/concerts, going to outdoor settings.

- Alcohol-related beliefs.** Positive and negative alcohol expectancies.

- Sociodemographic characteristics.** Age, gender, ethnicity, race, marital status, living situation, employment status.

### DATA ANALYSIS

- Bivariate analyses assessed relationships between past-month alcohol use and heavy drinking and other substance use behaviors.
- Linear and logistic regression analyses assessed relationships between situational and individual characteristics and alcohol and cannabis use frequency, past-month heavy drinking, weekly THC use, and past-month alcohol-cannabis co-use. Analyses controlled for all sociodemographic characteristics, and alcohol expectancies in models for alcohol use and heavy drinking.
- Sociodemographic characteristics not associated with any substance use behaviors and alcohol expectancies are excluded from results in tables.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

- Analysis results indicate that older adults who engage in alcohol use and heavy drinking are more likely to engage in cannabis use for medical or recreational purposes. Heavy drinking was also associated with other types of substance use in bivariate analyses. Results of regression analyses suggest that older adults who are physically and mentally healthy and socially active engage in alcohol use more frequently. However, it also appears that older adults experiencing more bodily pain engage in alcohol use more frequently, while those experiencing anxiety/depression symptoms are more likely to use THC frequently.

**Table 1. Sample characteristics**

Variable	Mean (SD) or percent
Age, years	69.3 (6.8)
60-69	57.5
70-79	34.2
80-99	8.3
Female	56.1
Hispanic	11.5
Multi-racial	4.0
AIAN	0.4
NHPI	0.8
Asian	6.1
Black	5.7
White	74.8
Other	6.1

**Table 2. Alcohol and other substance use**

Other substance use past 3 months	Alcohol use past month		Heavy drinking past month	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Cigarettes/vaping	6.0	5.8	5.5	9.9
Cannabis	15.5	28.5**	20.2	40.8**
CBD only	6.7	8.9	7.5	10.6
THC only	6.6	13.7**	8.8	23.2**
Delta-8 THC	0.0	2.0**	0.8	3.1
CBD and THC	10.6	17.2*	12.7	25.0**
Medicinal purposes	11.3	16.3*	12.8	23.5**
Recreational purposes	7.5	15.9**	9.4	33.3**
Pain medication	15.4	15.9	14.6	25.4*
Stimulant	3.8	5.0	3.7	11.3**
Sedative	8.2	7.7	7.9	8.5
Cocaine	0.8	2.9*	1.5	5.6*
Non-prescription drug(s)	0.5	1.3	0.4	5.6**

**Table 3. Results of linear regression analysis**

Variable	Alcohol use past 30 days	Cannabis use past 3 months	THC use past 3 months
70+ years old	.03 (.05)	-.06 (.02)**	-.05 (.02)**
Female	-.09 (.05)	-.02 (.02)	-.04 (.02)*
Married	-.11 (.10)	-.01 (.04)	-.04 (.03)
Widowed	-.25 (.10)*	-.01 (.04)	-.03 (.03)
Living alone	.13 (.08)	-.03 (.03)	-.01 (.03)
Not employed or volunteering	.05 (.07)	.07 (.03)**	.06 (.02)*
Subjective general health	.00 (.04)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.01)
Bodily pain	.05 (.02)*	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Physical ability	.22 (.06)**	-.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Anxiety/depression symptoms	.03 (.04)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.01)*
Social isolation	-.10 (.05)*	-.01 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
Pain medication use	.04 (.03)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Stimulant use	.07 (.05)	.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)
Sedative use	-.02 (.03)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
THC use	.28 (.12)*		
Alcohol use		.06 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**
Smoking/vaping	.23 (.10)*	.04 (.04)	.04 (.03)
Family/friend visits	.02 (.01)**	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Socializing at others' homes	.01 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Bar/restaurant outings	.03 (.01)**	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Sporting event/concert outings	-.02 (.04)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Outings at outdoor settings	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.00)*	.01 (.00)*

† p = .05, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

**Table 4. Results of logistic regression analysis**

Variable	Heavy drinking past 30 days	THC use weekly	Alcohol-MJ co-use past 30 days
70+ years old	0.63 (0.32, 1.24)	0.38 (0.19, 0.73)**	0.52 (0.30, 0.89)*
Female	1.09 (0.59, 2.03)	0.54 (0.30, 0.98)*	0.82 (0.51, 1.35)
Married	1.29 (0.39, 4.30)	0.72 (0.23, 2.24)	0.38 (0.16, 0.93)*
Widowed	0.57 (0.18, 1.82)	0.55 (0.13, 2.38)	0.39 (0.13, 1.12)
Living alone	4.32 (1.38, 13.50)*	0.90 (0.35, 2.31)	0.68 (0.31, 1.47)
Not employed, volunteering	0.76 (0.36, 1.60)	3.10 (1.26, 7.66)**	1.30 (0.68, 2.49)
Subjective general health	0.52 (0.31, 0.86)*	0.98 (0.60, 1.62)	0.95 (0.62, 1.44)
Bodily pain	1.09 (0.81, 1.49)	1.05 (0.78, 1.41)	1.21 (0.95, 1.53)
Physical ability	1.75 (0.86, 3.59)	0.83 (0.43, 1.61)	1.82 (0.99, 3.34)†
Anxiety/depression symptoms	1.33 (0.87, 2.04)	1.64 (1.09, 2.47)*	1.13 (0.79, 1.61)
Social isolation	0.56 (0.31, 1.04)	0.48 (0.26, 0.88)*	0.77 (0.47, 1.25)
Pain medication use	1.33 (0.99, 1.78)	1.14 (0.85, 1.51)	1.23 (0.96, 1.56)
Stimulant use	1.43 (0.90, 2.28)	1.00 (0.63, 1.61)	1.24 (0.86, 1.79)
Sedative use	0.76 (0.48, 1.21)	1.09 (0.79, 1.50)	0.90 (0.65, 1.24)
THC use	2.16 (0.69, 6.78)		
Alcohol use		1.67 (1.11, 2.52)	
Smoking/vaping	1.24 (0.41, 3.75)	1.58 (0.57, 4.36)	1.75 (0.74, 4.15)
Family/friend visits	1.04 (0.97, 1.12)	1.02 (0.93, 1.11)	1.06 (0.99, 1.12)
Socializing at others' homes	1.11 (1.02, 1.21)*	1.05 (0.95, 1.16)	1.05 (0.97, 1.14)
Bar/restaurant outings	1.03 (0.95, 1.11)	0.94 (0.85, 1.04)	1.02 (0.95, 1.09)
Sporting event/concert outings	1.18 (0.81, 1.71)	1.11 (0.70, 1.76)	0.82 (0.51, 1.29)
Outings at outdoor settings	1.01 (0.94, 1.08)	1.07 (0.99, 1.14)	1.01 (0.95, 1.08)