

Role of Positive and Negative Urgency and Social Context on Problematic Alcohol Use Behaviors

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Social context influences drinking behaviors; in particular, problematic alcohol use among adolescents and young adults is more frequent in those who drink in more social contexts or who drink for social reasons. Moreover, although positive and negative urgency (i.e., the tendency to act rashly in response to extreme positive or negative emotional states, respectively) also relate to problematic alcohol use, it is unclear whether these impulsivity traits affect problematic alcohol use through social context. As such, the current study examined how positive and negative urgency influence problematic alcohol consumption through the social context of drinking. Participants ($n = 348$, $n = 70$ men; Mean age = 20 ($SD = 4.5$); 78.2% Caucasian) were recruited from the Introduction to Psychology course from IUPUI and received course credit for the completion of an online survey. A series of correlation and mediation analyses were conducted. Problematic alcohol use was significantly related to positive urgency ($r = 0.33$, $p < .001$) and negative urgency ($r = 0.29$, $p < .001$). Although contextual drinking factors did not mediate the relationship between urgency and problematic alcohol use, the relationship between urgency and problematic alcohol use was significantly mediated by the endorsement of social drinking motives (e.g., I drink in order to be more social) (indirect effect of positive urgency $b = 1.85$, indirect effect of negative urgency $b = 2.02$). Even though social drinking context was not a significant mediator, likely due to very few people reporting drinking in isolation in the current sample, the endorsement of drinking for social reasons might partially explain how urgency influences problematic alcohol use. In this way, intervening on social drinking motives might mitigate the effects of urgency on problematic alcohol use, particularly among college students at risk for alcohol use problems.

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