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Quitting alcohol may improve mental well-being, health-related quality of life

Quitting alcohol may improve health-related quality of life for women, especially their mental well-being, according to a study from Hong Kong published in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

“More evidence suggests caution in recommending moderate drinking as part of a healthy diet,” says Dr. Michael Ni, School of Public Health and The State Key Laboratory of Brain and Cognitive Science, University of Hong Kong (HKU).

The study carried out by Dr. Xiaoxin Yao, Dr. Michael Ni, Dr. Herbert Pang and colleagues at HKU included 10 386 people from the FAMILY Cohort in Hong Kong who were nondrinkers or moderate drinkers (14 drinks or less per week for men and 7 drinks or less per week for women) between 2009 and 2013. The researchers compared their findings with data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, a representative survey of 31 079 people conducted by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in the United States.

The mean age of participants in the FAMILY Cohort was 49 years and 56% were women. About 64% of men were nondrinkers (abstainers and former drinkers) and almost 88% of women were nondrinkers. Men and women who were lifetime abstainers had the highest level of mental well-being at the start of the study (baseline). For women who were moderate drinkers and quit drinking, quitting was linked to a favourable change in mental well-being in both Chinese and American study populations. These results were apparent after adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics, body mass index, smoking status, and other factors.

“Global alcohol consumption is expected to continue to increase unless effective strategies are employed,” says Dr. Ni. “Our findings suggest caution in recommendations that moderate drinking could improve health-related quality of life. Instead, quitting drinking may be associated with a more favourable change in mental well-being, approaching the level of lifetime abstainers.”

“*Change in moderate alcohol consumption and quality of life: evidence from 2 population-based cohorts*” is published July 8, 2019.

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Research: <http://www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.181583>

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