



2021

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

DURING COVID-19

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

UJA-Federation of New York is grateful to the many individuals who gave their time and expertise to ensure the success of the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study.

We would like to thank the Impact and Performance Assessment Department. Annette Jacoby, Ph.D.; Emily Sigalow, Ph.D.; Yuanfei Li, Ph.D.; and Tori Leiber contributed to the design and implementation of the research, and, together with Michael Nestor and Renee Berkowitz, analyzed the results and wrote this report. Special thanks to Annette Jacoby, study director, who oversaw this study and ensured that it was of the highest quality.

The members of the New York Jewish Community Study Committee provided oversight for this study, approving the selection of vendors and providing valuable feedback on the survey instrument. We especially want to thank Jodi J. Schwartz, chair of the committee, for her leadership.

We would like to thank our colleagues in the Community Planning and Agency Resources Division for their contributions to this study. Thank you for providing ideas and feedback on the survey instrument, study design, and this report.

We acknowledge SSRS Research Director Eran Ben-Porath, Ph.D., for overseeing the survey design and implementation, as well as members of the SSRS team and their technical advisors, including Cameron McPhee, Margie Engle-Bauer, Sam Skipworth, and Pearl Beck. We particularly want to thank technical advisor Ira Sheskin, Ph.D., of the University of Miami for his thoughtful consultation throughout the course of the project, including questionnaire review and reviewing weighting outcomes to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

Finally, we would like to thank Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, Ph.D.; Michelle Shain, Ph.D.; and Sabrina Townsend for their input and advice on the survey instrument.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has produced widespread social stresses such as isolation from friends and/or family, food and housing insecurity, loss of employment, and fear of illness, all of which have consequences for the mental health and well-being of New Yorkers. Research has found that a particular consequence of the stress from the Covid-19 pandemic is an increase in alcohol and substance abuse disorders.¹ Many New Yorkers lost access to traditional counseling and support services as

in-person programs were forced to close or change to a virtual format. Opportunities for intervention for substance abuse were also limited by people's having to stay at home for an extended period of time with little to no outside contact. As part of the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study, we asked questions about this critical topic area and analyzed patterns of alcohol and substance abuse by geography and key demographics.

The report focuses on three main areas:

1 Overall Substance Abuse

2 Change in Drinking and Drug Use During Pandemic

3 Help-Seeking Behavior

Study Methodology and Defining Jewish Households

The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study collected information from a **representative sample of 4,400 New York area adults** who are Jewish or living in a household with one or more Jewish adults to learn more about the ways the coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives and livelihoods of the Jewish community. The broad coverage area included the **five New York City boroughs, as well as Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties**. To learn more about the methodology, you can read our [brief](#) or [detailed methodology report](#).

This study aims to understand the impact of Covid-19 on **all members of the Jewish community**, across all — and regardless of — levels of observance, religious belief, and belonging to Jewish communal organizations.

This study relies on an **expansive definition of who is a Jew** by considering anyone who identifies as a Jew or lives with a self-identified Jew as a member of the Jewish community. For the purposes of this study, a Jewish adult is defined as someone aged 18 and over who self-identifies as Jewish or partially Jewish, either religiously, ethnically, culturally, or because of family background. This study counts those respondents who identify religiously with both Judaism and another religion, such as Christianity or Buddhism, as Jewish respondents. A household is defined as a Jewish household if it includes one or more Jewish adults ages 18 and over. To learn more about this, please visit our report ["Who counts as Jewish in the survey."](#)

KEY FINDINGS

1 Ten percent of adults in Jewish households indicate they have a substance abuse problem

2 Substance abuse disproportionately affects younger adults in the Jewish community

Adults under age 35 are more than five times as likely to indicate that they have a substance abuse problem than adults aged 65 and over.

3 The LGBTQ population faces a high rate of substance abuse problems

LGBTQ New Yorkers in this survey are three times more likely than those who do not identify as LGBTQ to indicate a substance abuse problem.

4 The pandemic has exacerbated substance abuse problems

Almost three-quarters of people who indicate a substance abuse problem report that their drinking and drug use has increased during the pandemic.

5 New Yorkers are not seeking help

Almost nine in ten New Yorkers in Jewish households who indicate they have a substance abuse problem have not sought professional help.

How We Measured Substance Abuse

This study utilizes the **CAGE-AID (Adapted to Include Drugs) Substance Abuse Screening tool²** to screen for alcohol and drug abuse.

This screening tool is not used to diagnose a disorder but rather to give an indication that a problem may exist. The CAGE-AID questions include:

1. In the past year, have you ever felt the need to **C**ut down on your drinking or drug use? (yes/no)
2. In the past year, have people **A**nnoyed you by criticizing your drinking or drug use? (yes/no)

3. In the past year, have you ever felt **G**uilty about your drinking or drug use? (yes/no)
4. In the past year, have you ever felt you needed a drink or needed drugs first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover (**E**ye-opener)? (yes/no)

Item responses on the CAGE-AID questions are scored 0 for “no” and 1 for “yes,” with a higher aggregate score being an indication of a substance abuse problem. In line with most research, a total score of 2 or greater is considered a positive screen in this study.

OVERALL SUBSTANCE ABUSE



Regional Differences

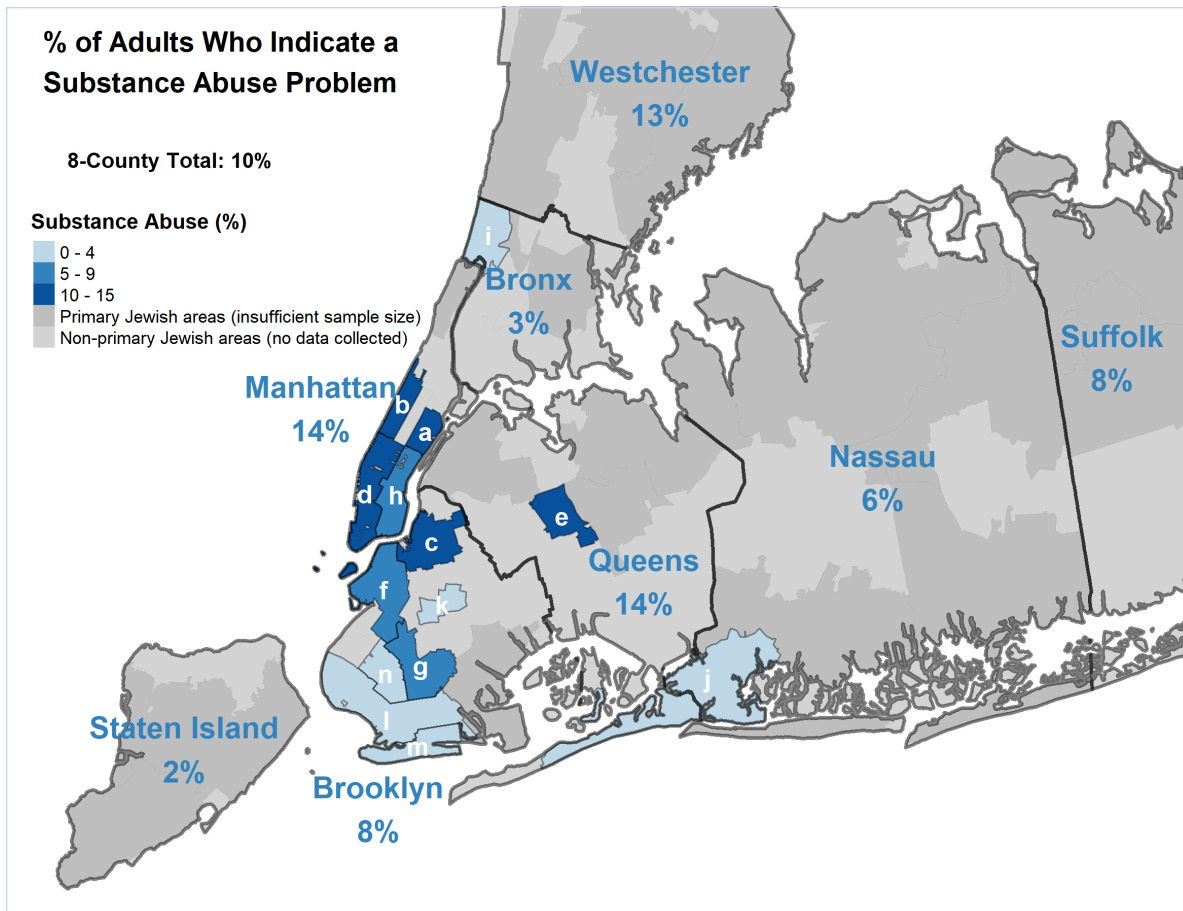
Compared to the other counties, **Manhattan (14%), Queens (14%), and Westchester (13%)** have particularly high rates of adults in Jewish households indicating substance abuse problems. Staten Island and the Bronx have comparatively low rates.

Across the eight-county area, substance abuse runs high, with **one in ten** adults in Jewish households indicating a substance abuse problem. The Bronx and Staten Island have comparatively low rates.

The neighborhoods reporting rates **above 10%** are all located in New York City. In particular, rates are high on the **Upper East and Upper West Sides, where one in seven** respondents indicates struggling with substance abuse.

Past research suggests a connection between wealth and substance abuse, so the high rates of substance abuse in these two affluent New York neighborhoods could reflect this trend.³ The survey finds low rates of substance abuse in Bensonhurst, Coney Island, and in Crown Heights and Borough Park, all of which are areas with a high concentration of Orthodox Jews. The stigma associated with addiction and substance abuse in the Orthodox community could potentially contribute to respondents' not indicating problems associated with drinking or drugs in this survey.⁴

SECTION 1: OVERALL SUBSTANCE ABUSE

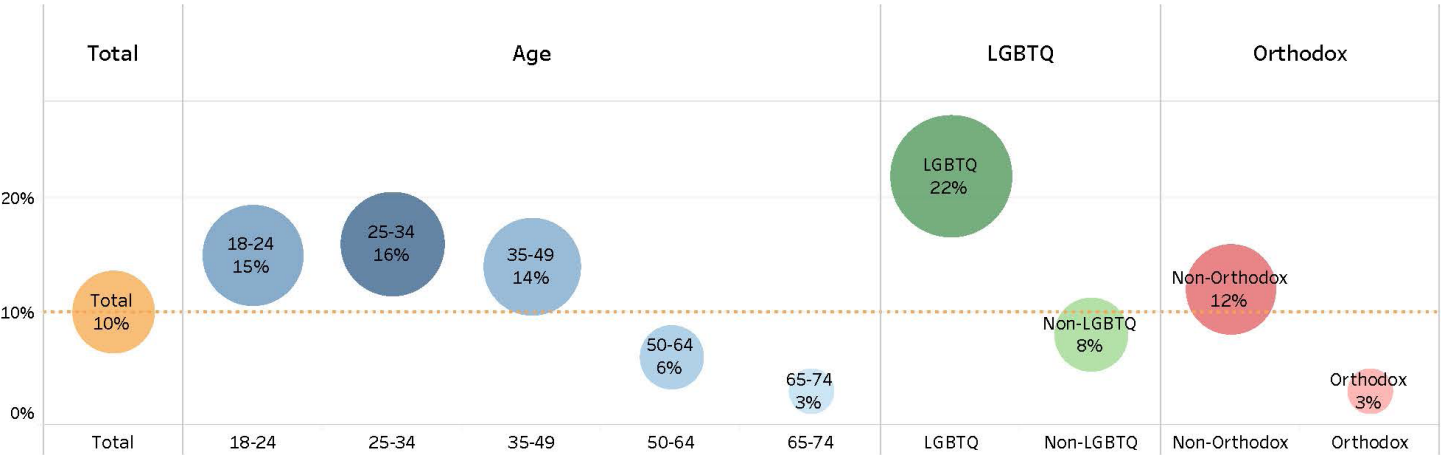


Neighborhood Identifier	Neighborhood Name	Percent
a	Upper East Side	15%
b	Upper West Side	14%
c	Williamsburg	13%
d	Lower Manhattan West	11%
e	Forest Hills/Rego Park/Kew Gardens Area	11%
f	Brownstone Brooklyn	9%
g	Flatbush/Midwood/Kensington	7%
h	Lower Manhattan East	5%
i	Riverdale/Kingsbridge	4%
j	The Rockaways/Five Towns	3%
k	Crown Heights	2%
l	Bensonhurst/Gravesend/Bay Ridge/Kings Bay/Madison	1%
m	Coney Island/Brighton Beach/Sheepshead Bay	1%
n	Borough Park	0%

Social and Demographic Patterns

Two important groups of adults in Jewish households are particularly at risk for substance abuse problems: **young adults** and **people who identify as LGBTQ**.

FIGURE 1. % of Adults in Jewish Households with Potential Substance Abuse Problem



Adults under age 35 are more than **five times as likely** to indicate that they have a substance abuse problem than adults aged 65 and over. **Adults who identify as LGBTQ** are **almost three times more likely** to indicate a substance abuse problem than the non-LGBTQ population. The lack of social support for this community, social discrimination and homophobia, and anxiety and depression exacerbated by the pandemic might all contribute to these high rates within the LGBTQ community.

Compared to the overall community, Orthodox Jews report relatively low rates of substance abuse problems. Only **3% of Orthodox respondents** indicate problems with substance abuse. Again, the stigma associated with addiction and substance abuse in the Orthodox community could potentially contribute to respondents' not indicating problems associated with drinking or drugs in this survey. There is no meaningful patterning by gender; the same percentage of men and women (**10%**) indicate substance abuse problems.

CHANGE IN DRINKING AND DRUG USE DURING PANDEMIC

Among respondents who currently indicate a problem with substance abuse, **almost three-quarters** say their drinking or drug use increased during the pandemic.

When viewed regionally (Figure 2), the survey found that, during the pandemic, substance abuse increased more in **New York City counties (73%)** than in **suburban counties (67%)**. **Queens (82%)** and **the Bronx (81%)** both have had particularly high rates of increase in substance abuse since the start of the pandemic. These findings suggest that drinking and drug abuse increased more in the city where people had to quarantine and lock down in small, confined spaces than in suburban areas with more living and outdoor space.

Substance abuse problems increased during the pandemic dramatically for three groups: adults aged 35-64, adults with children, and adults who cannot make ends meet or are struggling to make ends meet.

Four in five respondents **aged 35-64** who indicate a substance abuse problem also report an increase in their use of alcohol or drugs since the beginning of the pandemic. Similarly, **80% of people** who **cannot make ends meet or are struggling to make ends meet** say their substance abuse worsened during the pandemic. Nearly **90% of adults with children** report worsening substance abuse problems during the pandemic compared to **two-thirds** of households without children.

FIGURE 2. Respondents Who Report Worsening of Substance Abuse during Pandemic by Region

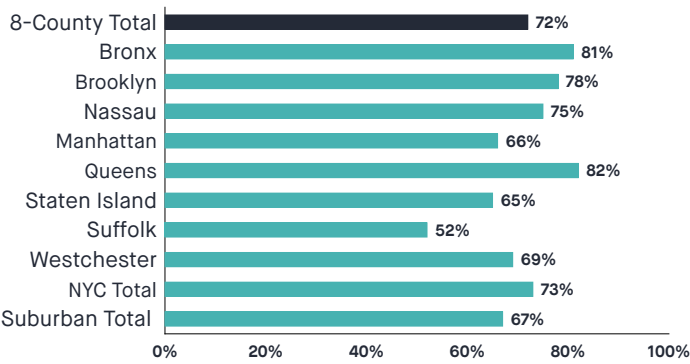


FIGURE 3. Respondents with Substance Abuse Problems Who Report Increased Drinking and/or Drug Use during Pandemic

Age	
18-24	70%
25-34	64%
35-49	80%
50-64	80%
65-74	56%
75+	20%
Presence of Child	
No	66%
Yes	88%
Financial Situation	
Well off	67%
Cannot make ends meet or just making ends meet	80%

HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

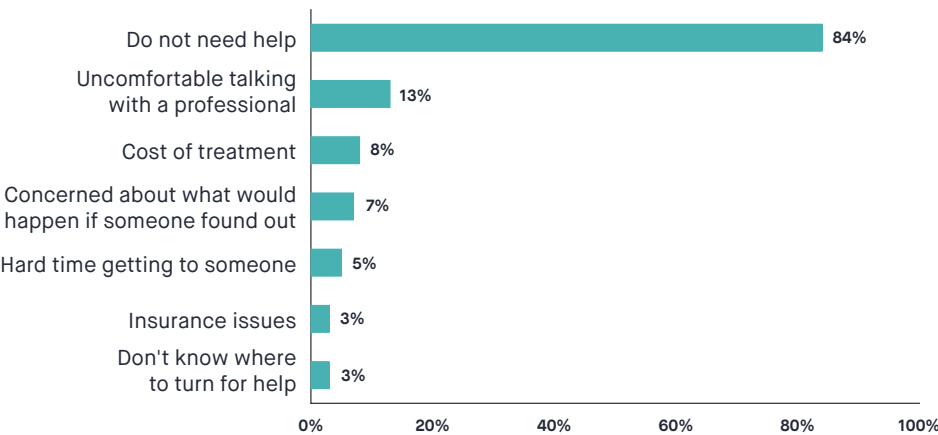
Overall, 86% of adults who indicate problems with substance abuse did not seek, and are not planning to seek, professional help.

Overall, a higher percentage of adults living in New York City (88%) did not or will not seek help for their problems with substance abuse compared to 81% of respondents living in suburban counties.

Among those respondents who indicate problems with substance abuse, the most frequently cited reason for not seeking help is not perceiving a need for it (84%).

The second most common reason is a discomfort discussing problems with a professional (13%). Of the small group of respondents who did seek help, the majority (82%) have seen or plan to see a private counselor or therapist.

FIGURE 4. Reasons respondents did not seek and are not planning to seek help with substance abuse problem



NOTES

1. The Nielsen Company. Rebalancing the 'COVID-19 Effect' on alcohol sales. Published May 7, 2020. Accessed August 27, 2020. <https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/analysis/2020/rebalancing-the-covid-19-effect-on-alcohol-sales/>. Pollard, Michael S., Joan S. Tucker, and Harold D. Green. "Changes in adult alcohol use and consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the US." *JAMA network open* 3, no. 9 (2020): e2022942-e2022942. Sun, Yan, Yangyang Li, Yanping Bao, Shiqiu Meng, Yankun Sun, Gunter Schumann, Thomas Kosten, John Strang, Lin Lu, and Jie Shi. "Brief report: increased addictive internet and substance use behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic in China." *The American journal on addictions* 29, no. 4 (2020): 268-270.
2. https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/johns_hopkins_healthcare/downloads/all_plans/CAGE%20Substance%20Screening%20Tool.pdf
3. In a study published in 2012 in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, researchers from the University of Michigan found that higher-income young adults between the ages of 18 and 23 have significantly higher chances of drinking and smoking marijuana than low-income young adults. The researchers also found that the wealthiest young adults were more likely to use these substances than any other income group. Patrick, M. E., Wightman, P., Schoeni, R. F., & Schulenberg, J. E. "Socioeconomic status and substance use among young adults: a comparison across constructs and drugs." *Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs*, 2012; 73(5), 772-782. <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2012.73.772>; See also Luthar, Suniya S, and Shawn J Latendresse. "Children of the Affluent: Challenges to Well-Being." *Current directions in psychological science*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, February 1, 2005. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1948879/>.
4. Baroff, Paula. "Is the Jewish Stigma around Addiction Holding Us Back?" *Atlanta Jewish Times*, December 6, 2019. <https://www.atlantajewishtimes.com/is-the-jewish-stigma-around-addiction-holding-us-back/>; Ziri, Danielle. "'It's a Myth That Orthodox Jews Don't Get Addicted': The Opioid Epidemic in an Insular Community." *Haaretz.com*. Haaretz, November 25, 2019. <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-these-ny-orthodox-jews-are-fighting-the-stigma-of-opioid-addiction-in-the-community-1.8159506>; Itzhak, George, and Dennis Romero. "Battling Addiction in Orthodox Jewish Community Means Breaking through Silence." *NBCNews.com*. NBCUniversal News Group, October 22, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/battling-addiction-orthodox-jewish-community-means-breaking-through-silence-n922566>.