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Spaniards cut back on drink, took more sedatives during pandemic, says study

Spaniards cut back on alcohol and almost halved their binge-drinking during the pandemic as the lockdown shuttered bars and nightclubs, a survey by Spain's Observatory for Drugs and Addiction found yesterday.

At the same time, the consumption of unprescribed sedatives increased and internet use jumped, as people spent more of their leisure time browsing, and more youngsters turned to online gambling, the survey showed.

Spain began its first stringent lockdown in March last year, as the first wave of infections swept across the country and much of Europe.

"The limiting of nightlife and leisure environments almost certainly contributed to the great de-

crease in the abusive use of alcohol by youngsters," Health Minister Carolina Darias said after the figures were released.

Around 9.7% of the respondents said they engaged in binge-drinking, down from 17.2% before the lockdown. A similar decrease was seen among younger people.

Almost 22% of the survey of 9,000 people across Spain said they had cut back on drinking, against 3.3% who said they had increased. The rest were largely unchanged.

The proportion of people saying they consumed sedatives not prescribed by a doctor grew to 3.1% from 1.9% before the pandemic. There was an even sharper rise among women and girls in the Observatory's survey - 4%, up from 2.3%.

The study did not spell out the reasons. "Some say our country is over-medicated ... and though the majority are prescribed, the illegitimate use of sedatives among women has increased," Joan Villalbi, who leads Spain's National Drug Plan, told a news conference.

The time spent browsing the internet for leisure - rather than work or education - increased by an average of an hour daily. More than two in five people said their personal use of internet had grown since the pandemic struck.

There was also a worrying rise in 15-24 year-olds' betting online, Villalbi said.

But cannabis use fell across the board, he added, as border closures made cannabis harder to find and more expensive, dissuading some casual users.

Cheers to Brendan Cole on Majorca

● Former *Strictly Come Dancing* star comes out in support of local bars and restaurants.



Brendan Cole on the Borne in Palma this week.

PHOTO:INSTAGRAM.

Palma.—Local bar and restaurant owners will be raising a glass to former *Strictly Come Dancing* star Brendan Cole who has a home on Majorca.

He said in a post on his Instagram page: "Beautiful day in #Mallorca. Lovely to finally be able to support bars and restaurants devastated by ridiculous and unfair closures."

Many local bars and restaurants are facing finan-

cial ruin at the moment because of the Covid restrictions. From yesterday they were unable to open their interiors and numbers are restricted on terraces.

His comments have been slammed by some in Britain who accused him of being 'selfish' for 'bragging' about enjoying his time abroad while many were still enduring touch lockdown restrictions in Britain.

British teenager found safe and well in Palma: Inside