

Alcohol taxes have clear effect on drinking

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With many local and national governments currently debating proposals to raise alcohol taxes, a timely new study published online today in the February edition of *Addiction* journal finds that the more alcoholic beverages cost, the less likely people are to drink. And when they do drink, they drink less. After analyzing 112 studies spanning nearly four decades, researchers documented a concrete association between the amount of alcohol people drink and its cost.

"Results from over 100 separate studies reporting over 1000 distinct statistical estimates are remarkably consistent, and show without doubt that alcohol taxes and prices affect drinking," said Alexander C. Wagenaar, Ph.D., a professor of epidemiology and health policy research at the University of Florida College of Medicine, and the senior author of the study. "When prices go down, people drink more, and when prices go up, people drink less."

The consistency of the association between cost and consumption indicates that using taxes to raise prices on alcohol could be among the most effective deterrents to drinking that researchers have discovered, beating things like law enforcement, media campaigns or school programmes, said Wagenaar.

The study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, also determined that tax or price increases affect the broad population of drinkers, including heavy drinkers as well as light drinkers, including teens as well as adults.

Many studies have analysed how tax or price increases affect people's drinking habits, but the new study is the first to examine all of these findings as a whole, using a statistical procedure called meta-analysis. This technique allows researchers to draw conclusions that are not limited to specific policy changes or a single state or country, said Wagenaar.

To obtain their findings, the researchers scoured through decades of studies examining links between price and alcohol use. The studies were all reported in English, but not limited to any single country. The data resulting from these reports were compiled and analyzed to glean more precise answers than can be obtained from just one study, Wagenaar noted.

In a commentary in the same issue of *Addiction*, Frank Chaloupka, PhD, Professor of Economics at the University of Illinois at Chicago, describes the research as a "true tour de force," and adds, "these findings provide a strong rationale for using increases in alcoholic beverage taxes to promote public health by reducing drinking."

Source: Wiley

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