

'Alcopops' tax fails to cut binge drinking in young people

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A study of hospital admissions in one of Australia's favourite holiday destinations has shown no reduction in alcohol-related harm since the tax increase on alcopops.

Dr Steve Kisely from the School of [Population Health](#) (SPH) and School of Medicine at The University of Queensland (UQ) found almost one-third of people aged 15-29 years in emergency departments had an alcohol-related injury or illness, compared to about a quarter for other age groups.

Hospital records and data from the Queensland Trauma Registry were used to compare the incidence of 15-29 year olds with alcohol-related harm – including [alcohol poisoning](#) and injuries from falls, fights and [traffic accidents](#) – between 2006 and 2009.

Dr Kisely said they found no significant decrease in young people presenting with alcohol-related harm after tax was increased by 70 per cent on pre-mixed alcoholic drinks, commonly known as alcopops.

"Several factors may explain the results," Dr Kisely said.

"Given the strong evidence of the effectiveness of taxation on overall [alcohol consumption](#), one interpretation could be that price influences average consumption of all drinks but not risky consumption on a single occasion.

"Another explanation could be that raising the price of just one type of drink may not reduce binge drinking.

"Young people may be merely switching to cheaper, and potentially, more potent, alcoholic drinks."

The latest study expands on an earlier project that focused specifically on the Gold Coast.

This study had shown that other efforts to reduce binge drinking on the coast, including increased policing and holding official drug-free and alcohol-free events, were also ineffective.

"This again suggests the need for a more comprehensive approach to [binge drinking](#) among young people," Dr Kisely said.

He said this approach may include volumetric tax on all alcoholic drinks, incentives to encourage mid-strength and low-strength beer, restrictions on the availability of drinks with a high alcohol content, more effective regulation of advertising and increasing the legal drinking age.

"Considering the attention the Gold Coast receives as a centre of risky drinking for young people, our results are important and point to the need to look more broadly at the alcopops legislation and other initiatives to reduce alcohol-related harm."

Provided by University of Queensland

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