

Alcohol taxes protective against binge drinking, study shows

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Higher alcohol taxes strongly protect against binge drinking, according to a new study by Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) researchers.

The study, published in the journal *Addiction*, found that a one-percent increase in alcohol beverage prices from taxes was associated with a 1.4 percent decrease in the proportion of adults who binge drink. Most previous studies have examined the effect of taxes on average consumption, while the effect of taxes on high-level drinking has been controversial.

"This is really significant for [public health](#)," said lead author Ziming Xuan, assistant professor of community health sciences at BUSPH, explaining that binge drinking causes more than half of nearly 90,000 alcohol-attributable deaths in the U.S. each year, and accounts for three-quarters of the \$224 billion in annual economic costs.

The study shows that as combined [alcohol taxes](#) rise, binge drinking rates fall. Taxes accounted for approximately 20 percent of the difference in binge drinking prevalence rates across U.S. states.

The state with the highest beer combined taxes - Tennessee—had the lowest binge drinking rate (6.6 percent) in 2010, while states with low alcohol taxes, such as Montana, Wisconsin and Delaware, had relatively high binge drinking rates.

Binge drinking was defined as consuming five or more drinks for men, or four or more drinks for women, per occasion. The percentage of adults who reported binge drinking in U.S. states was based on data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System surveys from 2000-2010.

The study also found that a new measure that combines both volume-based and value-based taxes on alcohol was associated with a stronger preventive effect on binge drinking and produced more precise statistical results, compared to the conventional use of only volume-based excise taxes. Using the comprehensive measure, taxes had about twice the impact on [binge drinking](#), compared to using only excise taxes.

Xuan and co-author Dr. Timothy Naimi, associate professor of the BU Schools of Medicine and Public Health and senior author of the study, said many previous U.S. studies might be underestimating the effect of higher taxes on reducing alcohol consumption. They said their study demonstrates a key vulnerability of volume-based taxes: their erosion over time due to inflation. Such taxes are levied as a fixed dollar amount per unit volume, rather than as a percentage of price.

"This study emphasizes the importance of assessing multiple co-existing tax types—and possibly tax structure—for characterizing the relationship between tax and related outcomes, evaluating the effects of tax policy interventions, and for planning tax policy interventions," the researchers said.

More information: *Addiction*,
onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/add.12818/full

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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