

Liver disease responsible for most alcohol-related illness and deaths

23 April 2009

Liver disease is the most prevalent cause of alcohol-related deaths, followed by car accidents and cancer, according to new research conducted in Portugal and presented today at EASL 2009, the Annual Meeting of the European Association for the Study of Liver in Copenhagen, Denmark. The study also showed that alcohol-related diseases account for 1.25% of the health expenditure in Portugal.

The study, aimed at assessing the burden of diseases attributable to alcohol consumption, showed that 3.8% of all deaths in Portugal are related to alcohol consumption and account for a death toll of 4,054 people every year. Within these, most people are killed by [liver disease](#) (28.3%, representing 1,147 individuals), followed by car accidents (26.2%, representing 1,062 individuals) and by different types of cancers associated with alcohol consumption 21%, representing 851 individuals).

According to the study, the burden of alcohol-related diseases in Portugal is 5.0%, which is higher than the global statistic estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO) of about 3.2%. This is the first study designed to estimate the burden of disease attributable to alcohol consumption, specifically in Portugal.

Professor Helena Cortez-Pinto, Unidade de de Nutrição e Metabolismo, Instituto de Medicina Molecular, Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de Lisboa, who led the study, said: "The results of the study confirm that alcohol is an important health risk factor that is particularly related to liver disease in Portugal. By quantifying the significant impact alcohol has on the nation's health, we highlight the need for effective strategies to promote lifestyle changes and moderate alcohol consumption to reduce death rates, the incidence of liver disease and related costs to the healthcare system."

In this study, researchers estimated the burden and cost of diseases attributable to alcohol drinking based on the demographic and health statistics available for 2005. The results indicate that €14.1 million is attributable to alcohol-related chronic disease admissions (liver diseases, cancer, etc.) and €82.2 million to acute alcohol-related conditions (traffic accidents and external causes), resulting in a total amount of €96.3 million. Furthermore, ambulatory costs of alcohol-related diseases were estimated as €93 million, totaling €189.2 million direct costs attributable to alcohol, which represent 0.13% of the Portuguese Gross Domestic Product and 1.25% of total national health expenditures.

The study population included all individuals from the mainland, aged 15 or over, and [alcohol consumption](#) was estimated using the data from the Portuguese National Health Survey of 2005. The results differed according to gender, with 5.6% of deaths occurring in men and representing 6.2% of the disease burden, while 3.6% of deaths occurring in women and represented 1.8% of the disease burden.

Source: European Association for the Study of the Liver

APA citation: Liver disease responsible for most alcohol-related illness and deaths (2009, April 23) retrieved 18 September 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-04-liver-disease-responsible-alcohol-related-illness.html>

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