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NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Estonia

The Estonian government plans to propose a ban on the takeaway sale, including home delivery, of alcoholic beverages in bars and restaurants during the night. The ban would apply from 10 pm until 10 am, when the sale of alcohol is prohibited in stores as well.

Slovakia

Slovakia’s Parliament has passed a proposal raising the legal drinking age to 18 for the purchase and on-trade consumption of alcohol. Also, under the new law, minors up to the age of 15 will also not be allowed to enter premises that sell alcohol after 9 pm, unless they are accompanied by their parents or other legal representatives. Parents can receive a fine of up to EUR 33 (USD 43.65) for the violation of this law.

Ireland

According to a survey undertaken by the College of Surgeons of Ireland (RCSI), 28% of the adult population consumed six or more alcoholic drinks at least once a week in 2007, down from 45% in 2002, while the proportion of people drinking more than the recommended weekly limit was down from 13% in 2002 to 8% in 2007. The average number of alcoholic drinks consumed in a week, fell from 11 in 1998 to 9 in 2002 and 7 in 2007.

Denmark

The Danish Government’s Prevention Commission has proposed a ban on alcohol adverts in the Danish media to promote public health in Denmark.

UK

UK beer sales dropped by 8.2% in the first quarter of 2009, compared to the same quarter in 2008, according to the latest UK Quarterly Beer Barometer, published by the British Beer & Pub Association (BBPA).

The UK Quarterly Beer Barometer, the comprehensive guide to beer trends in Britain, shows that on a daily basis 1.7 million fewer pints were drunk every day from January to March, than in the same period in 2008. Compared with the first quarter ten years ago, 326 million fewer pints were sold across the country – a decline of 3.6 million pints a day.

Off-trade sales (supermarkets and off licences), were also down 11.0%, falling for the third consecutive quarter. Tax income from duty in January and February was down £17 million on the same period in 2008, despite an 18% tax increase during the period.

Germany

The German government’s drug and addiction report 2009 shows that the number of youths that drink, smoke and consume illegal drugs decreased. Only 15% smoked cigarettes on a regular basis in 2008 compared to 28% in 2001. The number of young people getting drunk once a month is also declining (20.4% in 2008), 5% lower than in 2007. However, the figures also revealed that more young people are being hospitalised due to excessive drinking. More than 23,000 children and youths aged between 10 and 20 were hospitalised due to alcoholic poisoning in 2007, a rise of 143% since 2000. Per capita consumption in Germany amounts to ten litres of pure alcohol annually.
Long-term wine consumption is related to cardiovascular mortality and life expectancy independently of moderate alcohol intake

The authors state that light to moderate alcohol intake lowers the risk of cardiovascular mortality, but whether this protective effect can be attributed to a specific type of beverage remains unclear. Moreover, little is known about the effects of long-term alcohol intake on life expectancy.

The impact of long-term alcohol intake and type of alcoholic beverages consumed on cardiovascular mortality and life expectancy at age 50 was investigated in the Zutphen Study, a cohort of 1,373 men born between 1900 and 1920 and examined repeatedly between 1960 and 2000. Hazard ratios (HRs) for total alcohol intake and alcohol from wine, beer, and spirits were obtained from time-dependent Cox regression models. Life expectancy at age 50 was calculated from areas under survival curves.

Results showed that long-term light alcohol intake, that is ≤ 20 g/day, compared with no alcohol, was strongly and inversely associated with cerebrovascular (HR 0.43, 95% CI 0.26 to 0.70), total cardiovascular (HR 0.70, 95% CI 0.55 – 0.89), and all-cause mortality (HR 0.75, 0.63 – 0.91). Independent of total alcohol intake, long-term wine consumption of, on average, less than half a glass per day was strongly and inversely associated with coronary heart disease (HR 0.61, 95% CI 0.41 – 0.89), total cardiovascular (HR 0.68, 95% CI 0.53 – 0.86), and all-cause mortality (HR 0.73, 95% CI 0.62-0.87). These results could not be explained by differences in socio-economic status. Life expectancy was about 5 years longer in men who consumed wine compared with those who did not use alcoholic beverages. The authors conclude that long-term light alcohol intake lowered cardiovascular and all-cause mortality risk and increased life expectancy. Light wine consumption was associated with 5 years longer life expectancy; however more studies are needed to verify this result.

R Curtis Ellison comments: While this is not an especially large study, it represents the long-term follow up of a cohort of men having repeated assessments of alcohol intake; adjustments for previous drinking were made for subjects not drinking at a given examination. The study followed the subjects until a mean survival age of 77 years, until death for 1,130 of the 1,373 participants. Adjustments were made for smoking, co-morbidities, and socioeconomic status. Data on the pattern of drinking (regular versus binge) were not available.

The frequency of alcohol use increased over time and the average amount increased until 1985, then decreased. The largest proportion of the alcohol in this cohort came from spirits, but the proportion coming from wine increased and that from beer decreased in later years. With repeated assessments over time (up to 40 years of follow up), the long-term intake was estimated as the cumulative average intake; the average intake of alcohol for this cohort was slightly over one typical drink/day.

The most interesting conclusions of this study are that alcohol intake in moderation (< 20 g/day or about 1 _  typical US drinks/day) was associated with 25-30% lower risk of both cardiovascular disease mortality and total mortality. These findings support those from most recent prospective studies. For deaths from coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, all cardiovascular diseases, and all-cause mortality, life-time consumption of wine was associated with lower mortality risks than those associated with the consumption of beer or spirits.

The authors also evaluated the relation between alcohol consumption and survival after age 50. As shown in the figure from the paper below, wine use was associated with greater survival than beer or spirit use, with the no alcohol use group showing the lowest survival.

Wine consumption has been shown in many cultures to be associated with other moderate lifestyle factors, and to be more common among subjects in upper
Genetics can mediate vulnerability to alcohol's effects during pregnancy

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to teratogenesis, the development of embryonic defects. The estimated incidence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), referring to a wide array of alcohol-exposure effects, is approximately on1% of live births in the US. Yet not all women who drink during pregnancy give birth to children with observable deficits. A mouse study has found that genetics may help to explain alcohol-related susceptibility and resistance.

Chris Downing, a research associate at the University of Colorado and corresponding author for the study stated that many factors have been shown to play a role in the development of FASD, including the amount, timing and pattern of maternal alcohol consumption, maternal age and parity, maternal ethnicity and socioeconomic status, cultural factors, maternal smoking and other drug abuse, and maternal diet/nutrition. In addition, studies with humans and mice have shown that both maternal and fetal genotypes – in conjunction with the environment – play a role in susceptibility and resistance to the detrimental effects of in utero alcohol exposure.

According to Downing “Using mice, we can control for all of these confounding variables. Within an inbred strain, all mice are virtually genetically identical, greater than 99.9%. When one looks at more than one inbred strain of mice, and all mice are housed and treated the same, differences between strains are taken as evidence of a genetic effect.”

Downing and his colleagues looked at alcohol teratogenesis in five inbred strains of mice: Inbred Short-Sleep (ISS), C57BL/6J (B6), C3H/1bg (C3H), A/1bg (A), and 129S6/5EvTac (129). Pregnant mice were given either 5.8 g/kg alcohol or maltose-dextrin on day nine (roughly equivalent to days 8-31 of human gestation) of pregnancy. They were subsequently sacrificed on day 18, and their fetuses examined for gross morphological malformations.

The B6 mice that were exposed to alcohol in utero had fetal weight deficits, as well as digit, kidney, brain ventricle and vertebral malformation. In contrast, 19 mice showed no teratogenesis, while the remaining three strains showed varying degrees of teratogenesis.

Downing concludes that “certain strains were sensitive to some effects of prenatal alcohol and resistant to others. The fact that inbred strains differed showed that genetics plays a role.”

Downing added that these findings can be extrapolated to humans, because genetic effects on prenatal alcohol phenotypes in mice have been demonstrated, and the mouse and human genomes are remarkably similar, it suggests genetics plays a role in humans as well. He recommends that researchers need to begin to systematically investigate genetic factors mediating susceptibility and resistance to the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure.

Source: Results will be published in the July issue of Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research and are currently available at Early View.

Long-term wine consumption is related to cardiovascular mortality and life expectancy independently of moderate alcohol intake (cont’d)

Socio-economic classes. In the present study, where subjects were classified into four classes (manual workers, non-manual workers, small business owners, or professionals), wine intake increased over time for all groups, and similar associations between wine and mortality were seen for all classes.

The authors state that the greater inverse association between wine and mortality being seen in all socioeconomic classes suggests to them that the association cannot be explained by confounding by socioeconomic status. While residual confounding by other lifestyle factors (especially pattern of drinking) is still a possibility, we believe that part of the more favourable outcome for wine drinkers in this study may well be associated with the polyphenols and other substances that are present in larger amounts in wine than in other alcoholic beverages.

Wine may guard against lymphoma relapse

Patients with non-Hodgkin lymphoma who drank wine before their diagnosis appeared to have a reduced risk of relapse according to an epidemiology study presented at the American Association for Cancer Research 100th Annual Meeting 2009.

The researchers looked at more than 500 women with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and found that, overall, those who drank wine before their diagnosis had a 76% five-year survival rate, compared with 68% for those who didn’t drink wine. The five-year, disease-free survival rate was 70% for wine drinkers and 65% for non-wine drinkers.

Further analysis by the Yale School of Public Health team revealed that patients who drank wine for at least 5 years before their diagnosis had a 25% to 35% reduced risk of relapse, secondary cancer or death.

The strongest link between wine consumption and improved outcomes was among patients with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma. Overall, they had a 40% to 50% reduced risk of relapse, secondary cancer or death, while those who drank wine for 25 years or more had about a 60% reduced risk.

Drinking beer or liquor had no beneficial effect. According to the researchers, the findings need to be replicated before any public health recommendations are made, but the study offers further evidence that moderate consumption of wine has health benefits.

First author and doctoral candidate Xuesong Han commented that “this conclusion is controversial, because excessive drinking has a negative social and health impact, and it is difficult to define what is moderate and what is excessive. However, we are continually seeing a link between wine and positive outcomes in many cancers.”

The research was presented at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) annual meeting, in Denver. For more information, visit http://www.aacr.org

Moderate drinkers mortality 28% lower than teetotallers

The lower mortality of people drinking moderately compared with teetotallers appears partly explained by factors other than drinking. But even after adjustment for a large number of factors indicate the death of people who drink 1 glass of alcoholic drink per day is still 28% lower than total abstainers.

An American study of 12,519 people aged 55 and older investigated the relationship between moderate alcohol consumption and reduced risk of death after adjustment for a large number of other factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), smoking and body weight, functional limitations the elderly (eg mobility and daily activities) and psychological and social factors (eg depression and the importance of religion). They followed the research of 00 to 004. At the end of this 4-year follow-up period, 1338 people of the total research had died (10.7%).

After adjustment for demographic factors (age, ethnic background, etc.) the study found that people who daily consume 1 glass of alcoholic drink (beer, wine or spirits) had a 50% lower mortality than total abstainers. The researchers found, as in many previous studies, a U-shaped relationship between alcohol consumption and death, people who drink 1 glass of alcoholic drink per day the risk of death was lowest (7%). Non-drinkers had a mortality of 14% and those three glasses or more per day had a death rate of 12%.

After adjustment for traditional risk factors such as smoking and overweight and health status had moderate drinkers have a 43% lower mortality. When the results were adjusted for non-traditional risk factors such as socioeconomic status, functional limitations and psychological and social factors showed that the mortality is still 28% lower than non-drinkers.

The researchers conclude that the link between alcohol consumption and mortality after adjustment for a large number of factors is a U-shaped relation and that moderate drinkers a significantly lower risk of death than teetotallers.

In order to determine with certainty whether this is really a causal relationship between moderate alcohol consumption and reduction in mortality is a long-term randomised study should be conducted.

Some medical inpatients may benefit from brief intervention

Studies of alcohol brief intervention for medical inpatients have mixed results. Research by Richard Saitz and colleagues explored potential moderators of the effectiveness of brief intervention for unhealthy alcohol use among medical inpatients.

The authors analysed a randomized controlled trial of brief motivational counseling among 341 urban-hospital medical inpatients (99 women) with unhealthy alcohol use. Self-reported main outcomes were receipt of alcohol treatment by 3 months in subjects with dependence and change in the mean number of drinks per day 3 and 12 months after enrollment in all subjects.

Among subjects with dependence, the effect of brief intervention on receipt of alcohol treatment differed significantly by gender and age (p = .02 for each interaction). In stratified analyses, brief intervention was associated with receipt of alcohol treatment in women (adjusted odds ratio [AOR] = 3.9, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.2-12.7), and younger (<44 years) subjects (AOR = 3.6, 95% CI: 1.3-10.1). Among subjects with nondependent, unhealthy alcohol use, brief intervention was significantly associated with fewer drinks per day and better physical health-related quality of life at 3 months. However, among those with dependence, intervention was associated with worse physical health-related quality of life and more hospital use, and no changes in drinking. In adjusted analyses among those with and without dependence, brief intervention was not associated with mental health-related quality of life, alcohol problems, or readiness to change. Effects of brief intervention on consumption outcomes were not consistently moderated by demographic characteristics, comorbidity/health, or readiness to change.

The authors conclude that medical inpatients with unhealthy alcohol use, particularly women, younger adults, and patients without dependence may benefit from brief intervention. Few factors that were expected to moderate brief intervention effects did so. Additional research should assess which medical inpatients, if any, can benefit from brief intervention.


One to two drinks daily may lower risk of cognitive decline in older adults

Research by Dr. Kaycee Sink, an assistant professor of medicine in geriatrics at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine, in Winston-Salem and colleagues, suggests that moderate drinking can lower the risk of dementia in older people.

The study found that amongst cognitively normal adults, one to two alcoholic drinks a day is associated with a 37% decreased risk of dementia over six years. However, among study participants who had mild cognitive impairment at the start of the study, drinking moderately had no effect. And heavier drinking -- two or more drinks a day - nearly doubled their risk of developing dementia during the six-year follow-up.

The authors looked at 3,069 men and women, average age 79, and followed them for six years. At the study start, 2,587 were evaluated as cognitively normal; 482 had mild cognitive impairment, which can progress to dementia. The researchers asked about alcohol intake, smoking, depression, social activity and other factors, and tested the participants’ cognitive functioning at the end of the study. About 38% of the participants had one to seven drinks a week, while about 9% had eight to 14 drinks a week.

Sink concludes that "If you are cognitively normal, there is no reason you should avoid light to moderate use of alcohol, and it may be beneficial. But if you have memory problems, we would probably say any amount of alcohol may be hazardous for your cognitive functioning. If you already have some memory problems, drinking is not going to help prevent progression to dementia, and may accelerate your progression.”

Exactly why and how alcohol seems to help preserve normal cognitive functioning isn’t clear. It is thought that it may increase the release of a neurotransmitter, acetylcholine, which helps brain cells communicate with each other.

Dr. Denis Evans, Jesmer Professor of Internal Medicine at the Rush Institute for Healthy Aging at Rush University Medical Center, in Chicago comments that “the first finding in the new study -- the 37% reduction in dementia among cognitively healthy moderate drinkers -- “is a very substantial reduction and is consistent with other studies.”

In regard to the finding that those mildly impaired get no benefit or, if they drink more than moderately, increase their risk of dementia? “There may not have been enough participants to definitively find a link”, Evans said.

Sink presented her findings at the American Geriatrics Society annual meeting, in Chicago in April. For more information visit http://www.americangeriatrics.org/news/meeting/2009/
Adolescent binge drinking may compromise the brain’s white matter, necessary for information relay

Researchers know that the integrity of the brain’s white matter is compromised in adult alcoholics, but it is unclear when during the course of drinking white matter abnormalities become apparent. A study of adolescent binge drinkers has found that even relatively infrequent exposure to large doses of alcohol during youth may compromise white matter fiber coherence.

Susan F. Tapert, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego and director of Substance Abuse/Mental Illness in the VA San Diego Healthcare System states “Because the brain is still developing during adolescence, there has been concern that it may be more vulnerable to the effects of neurotoxins, such as high doses of alcohol.” Animal studies have suggested this is accurate.

Duncan Clark, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center explains “White matter” refers to brain areas that appear light in color due to being primarily lipids...White matter is composed of bundles of myelinated axons connecting grey matter areas of the brain, and has been shown to continue to develop throughout adolescence. These systematic changes in white matter organisation reflect not only maturation of interconnections but continued maturation of the brain as a whole.”

“White matter, and its integrity, are essential to the efficient relay of information within the brain,” said Tapert. “Indicators of white matter integrity are linked to performance on a range of cognitive tests, including measures of reading, copying complex figures, and speeded coding of information. Abnormalities in white matter health could relate to compromised ability to consider multiple sources of information when making decisions, and to emotional functioning.”

Tapert and her colleagues used diffusion tensor imaging – an MRI technique sensitive to the random movement of water in cells of a target tissue – to examine fractional anisotropy, a measure of directional coherence of white matter tracts, among 8 teens. Of the 8, 14 (1 males, 2 females) had and 14 (1 males, 2 females) did not have histories of binge drinking. No participants had a history of an alcohol use disorder; drinkers were matched to non-drinkers on age, gender and education.

The authors found that adolescents with histories of binge drinking episodes have lower coherence of white matter fibres, suggesting poorer white matter health, in a variety of brain regions. This was unexpected, as the drinkers did not meet criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence.”

Clarke commented that “These findings add to a growing literature indicating that adolescent alcohol involvement is associated with specific brain characteristics,...One of the advantages of this study was that the adolescents with binge drinking did not have major mental disorders. Adolescents with alcohol-use disorders often have other problems. This suggests that the observed brain characteristics may be associated with alcohol involvement specifically rather than other complications.”

Tapert concluded that drinking to the point of being drunk or experiencing hangover symptoms may be detrimental to the adolescent brain. However, long-term studies following adolescents over time are essential to clarify the extent to which alcohol causes these brain abnormalities.

Clark stated “These findings indicate that adolescents who engage in binge drinking show low levels of brain organisation,” he said. “This characteristic could be a risk factor for accelerated alcohol use or an effect of alcohol. We need to know more about how alcohol influences adolescent brain development, [given] that alcohol may disrupt brain development.”

Source: Results will be published in the July issue of Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research and are currently available at Early View.
Life is a J-shaped curve
By Harvey E. Finkel, M.D.

About 25 years ago, I was going through something of an epiphany regarding wine’s influences upon health. At the time there were two committed camps in the US. A sizable number insisted that anything containing alcohol was intrinsically evil, prohibitionists denying that any good could ever come from drinking, however moderate. (Despite ever-mounting evidence to the contrary, few have moved off their spot.) A smaller group of Panglossians hopefully saw panacea in wine, having concluded that the vine somehow extracted from the earth salubrious essences to be transmitted via its fermented fruit to the consumer. They would pontificate on what they deemed should be the state of the world. Until this period, sound evidence for either view did not exist. To my double professional embarrassment, some physicians were adherents of each of these cults.

I had remained agnostic, not much engaged. I liked wine, and it seemed obvious to me that a moderate quantity was fine, enhancing meals and conviviality, and that excess was harmful. Wine as a health enhancer had not entered my mind. Even now, I use wine to enrich life, not to medicate it. True, there was a long history of folk wisdom and some sage opinions that wine was healthful, but Hippocrates had it right in his Law, book IV: “There are in fact two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter ignorance.” Even so, one should not be totally dismissive of the thoughts and observations of one’s forebears, for they may be helpful guides. In fact, it appears that medical science is only now catching up.

Let’s take a quick peek back through the ages at a selection of thoughts on how wine might affect health. The psalmist might have been prescient about wine’s cardiac benefits when writing, “…wine that maketh glad the heart of man” (Psalms 104:15). In the Talmud is inscribed, “Wine is the foremost of all medicines; wherever wine is lacking, medicines become necessary.” A Russian proverb advises, “Drink a glass of wine after your soup, and you steal a ruble from the doctor.” Matthiolus was more comprehensive about wine:

“an excellent nutriment to refresh the body, it makes a good colour, a flourishing age, helps concoction, fortifies the stomach, takes away obstructions, provokes urine, drives out excrements, procurers sleep, clears the blood, expels wind and coldpoisons, attenuates, concocts, dissipates all thick vapours, and fuligenous humours.”

Louis Pasteur, one of the greatest of medical scientists, considered, “Wine is the most healthful and hygienic of beverages.” Even Winston Churchill reported that claret, drunk in British army messes in India, was held to be “a sovereign preventative against the prevalent cholera.” (Wine was later found effective in preventing several other gastrointestinal infections.)

On the other side, neoprohibitionists continue to cite alcohol horror stories, but these are rarely related to wine and are always due to wretched excess. The only potentially harmful component of wine is alcohol, that only when it is consumed in excess. This has been recognised for millennia. (Alarms about sulfites, lead, pesticides, and urethane were tempests in a wine glass. Criminal adulterations with antifreeze and methanol in Austria and Italy, respectively, uncovered in 1985 were isolated episodes.)

Wine is a two-edged sword. Hippocrates wrote, “Wine is wonderfully suited to human nature, assuming that it is used in appropriate doses in both sickness and health, and in accordance with a person’s individual constitution.” This remains true today. Echoed Saint Chrysostom, “Wine...is the best medicine when it has moderation to direct it.” Andrew Boorde, of Physycke Doctor, wrote in his Dyetary of Helth, “wine...moderately drunken it doth quicken a man's wits, it doth comfort the heart…. “Whether wine is a poison, a medicine or a nourishment is a matter of dosage,” said the bombastic Paracelsus, who could have been similarly characterised. Shakespeare, wisest of us all, spoke on the matter in Othello, the Moor of Venice, II,iii:

“Every inordinate cup is unblessed and the ingredient is a devil...good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used: exclaim no more against it.”

And good, familiar Abraham Lincoln explained, “It has long been recognised that the problems with alcohol relate not to the use of a bad thing, but to the abuse of a good thing.”

Acknowledging the dichotomy, some may be carried away. Recognising that the liver is the first to go from excess, but that the heart is a gainer, Shakespeare wrote
in The Merchant of Venice, I,i: “And let my liver rather heat with wine/ than my heart cool with mortifying groans.” H. P. Lovecraft sang, “Better under the table than under the ground!”

Some advised specific wines for particular ills. Traditional Chinese, for example, prescribed lizard wine (with the creature immersed) for the kidneys and lungs. I used to believe that Dr. Salvatore Lucia, a medical professor, was foolishly uncritical in his wine-specific medical advice, but when I dipped into his Wine and Your Well-Being (Popular Library, 1971) a few days ago I was amazed at how much smarter he had become.

Data derived by the scientific method in support of wine’s healthfulness reached a critical mass in the 1980s, and has grown almost exponentially since. It was then I became convinced that wine afforded us more than pleasure, that the ill-substantiated folk wisdom was right after all. (My professional embarrassment thereupon tripled as some physicians professed to continued ignorance. Often unable or unwilling to give valid answers to their patients’ questions, they would err invariably on the side of abstinence, because of ignorance, of bias, of fear their patients might drink too much, or because of fear of lawsuits.) The essence of reasonable conclusions is illustrated graphically by the now-familiar J-shaped curve, which expresses that abstinence is an adverse health risk, that moderate drinking enhances health and lengthens life, and that excessive drinking is most dangerous to health and life. I often think that life is a J-shaped curve. One’s favourite potable potion portion should be limited to allotments the body can handle, two or three glasses per day for men, one or so for non-pregnant women. Binge drinking is devilishly destructive. The mass communicative power of television brought this to wide attention when 60 Minutes aired its segment on the famous “French paradox” in November, 1991. Behold corpulent, indolent middle-aged Frenchmen, Gauloises ever dangling, sated on Normandy butter, foie gras, and Camembert and shunning vegetables, suffering fewer heart attacks than lean, exercising, nonsmoking Americans. The difference, it was concluded, was the Frenchmen’s daily dose of vin rouge.

Wine’s favourable factors are complex and incompletely resolved. Alcohol itself, thought to contribute at least half of the health benefits, lends wine body, flavour, preservation, enlivening, and propulsion of bouquet. It extracts some of the polyphenols during fermentation. It stimulates the liver to produce HDL cholesterol (the “good cholesterol”) and inhibits excessive blood clotting. The polyphenolic antioxidants, including resveratrol, possibly inhibit activation of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, clotting, inflammation, infections, diabetes, blood-vessel stiffening, and might help with cancer, obesity, blood pressure, dental caries, and mental function, especially in the elderly. They stimulate nitric oxide production, vital in arterial walls, and may increase omega-3 fatty acids. Both alcohol and the polyphenols may favourably influence other lipids. Procyanidins suppress endothelin-1, a factor “crucial in the development of coronary atherosclerosis.” Tyrosols, found in white wine, assuage the injury of a heart attack.

Cardiovascular disease, especially heart attack and stroke, is certainly reduced among moderate drinkers. Also of interest are cancer, diabetes, dementia, degenerative diseases, and aging. Resveratrol appears to lengthen life span for yeast, roundworm, fruitfly, fish, and mouse. Future research opportunities are enormous. Shall we volunteer?
AIM – Alcohol in Moderation was founded in 1991 as an independent organisation whose role is to communicate ‘The Sensible Drinking Message’ and to act as a conduit for information from the industry, its associations and relevant medical and scientific researchers, legislation, policy and campaigns.

AIM Mission Statement

- To promote the moderate and responsible consumption of alcohol
- To encourage informed and balanced debate on alcohol, health and social issues
- To communicate and publicise relevant medical and scientific research in a clear and concise format, contributed to by AIM’s Council of 20 Professors and Specialists
- To publish information via www.alcoholinmoderation.com on moderate drinking and health, social and policy issues – comprehensively indexed and fully searchable without charge
- To educate consumers on responsible drinking and related health issues via www.drinkingandyou.com and publications, based on national government guidelines
- To inform and educate those working in the beverage alcohol industry regarding the responsible production, marketing, sale and promotion of alcohol
- To distribute AIM Digest Online without charge to the media, legislators and researchers involved in alcohol issues
- To direct enquiries from the media and others towards full and accurate sources of information
- To work with organisations, companies and associations to create programmes, materials and policies that promote the responsible consumption of alcohol.

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Bootleg a threat to life and health by Christopher Jarnvall

“Smuggling, bootleg and organised crime – a highly dangerous combination,” was the topic of a seminar recently hosted by the Moderate Party in the Committee on Health and Welfare and led by MP Jan R Andersson (Moderate Party) in Sweden.

Laurie Sherwood, who works for the International Federation of Spirits Producers (IFSP) in London, an organisation which combats, among other things, counterfeiting of trademarks, was invited to speak and provided a picture of a global problem, which is steadily increasing by 5-6% a year.

Sherwood worked for the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard for thirty years before being hired by IFSP at the beginning of the 1990s to monitor and contribute to the fight against a branch of international organised crime that has developed great industrial capacity.

Because – as Jan R Andersson noted in his invitation – there are signs that organised crime may have already taken over control of the unregistered trade in alcohol in Sweden, which makes the topic highly relevant. Not least for Sweden’s legislative assembly.

Alcohol Update had a conversation with Laurie Sherwood before the seminar.

Laurie Sherwood works with a global perspective. The manufacture of counterfeit products is spread all over the world, but has a strong base in Asia, Africa and parts of South America. It often constitutes a source of financing for international terrorism. When Laurie Sherwood was a police officer, he worked a lot in Northern Ireland and discovered that Irish terrorists often financed their purchases of weapons by selling bootleg alcohol.

When it’s not about supporting international terrorism, it’s ‘only’ a matter of a global crime being committed. The alcohol production includes everything from small-scale, individual operations to full-scale industries. It is estimated that the market is growing by 5-6% a year and has a current value of 450 billion USD.

High percentages of methanol are often found in bootleg. The content can be up to 4-5%, enough to render the consumer blind. It has also proven to be difficult to detect some of the counterfeits. The smugglers often mix genuine products with the fake ones to dupe consumers.

The drawbacks for society are many. “Everyone ends up losing here,” emphasises Sherwood. “Because it’s a matter of illegal trading, the state loses revenue and the companies lose legal market share. But worst of all is that this kind of crime is increasing and that those who consume bootleg put their health and possibly lives at risk. Then the state bears the healthcare costs…”

It is estimated that around 1,000 people die each year as a result of drinking bootleg.

So what’s happening in Sweden and Scandinavia? Sherwood tells us how fake whisky has been traced to Sweden, Norway and Denmark, among other places, with the help of labels and bottles. These were products which came all the way from India, Colombia and Cameroon… “Expensive countries are especially vulnerable and it would be surprising if Sweden could avoid this.”

But at the same time we can see that smuggling also affects countries in Europe which have significantly lower alcohol prices than Sweden… So is this really just a matter of cost?

“In my opinion,” says Sherwood, “this is how it is: The higher the price of a product, the larger the market for cheap fakes. But you can’t just regulate this with tax reductions; it has to be done in combination with increased efforts by customs and police”.

So how does IFSP work to fight the trade in counterfeit alcoholic products? Laurie Sherwood gives us an example from Great Britain “When we have made inspections of restaurants and bars, it has turned out that about 10% of the places selling alcohol have counterfeit products in their selections. When we stepped up the inspections, that share dropped to 2-3%.”

But the hunt for the forgers is often not so much about the expectation of catching all those who are active at the source of the crime. That chance is, unfortunately, often very small, even if there are examples of it happening. The trade flows across borders are also incredibly difficult to follow. First and foremost it’s about disrupting the illegal market with inspections in order to try and punish some peddlers, and maybe even producers, so that the criminal gangs eventually find the price they pay to deal in bootleg too high.

Laurie Sherwood concluded: “The EU governments have identified the problem,” he says. “The laws are in place, but then maybe not as much is done to fight this kind of crime as you’d wish… It will be tough to stop this type of crime, but it’s important that the police and customs are given the opportunity and means to prioritise the problem.”

Source: ALCOHOL UPDATE, For more information Email: Christopher@restuta.se
Introduction

Recent studies, reviewed here by Dr Geoff Lowe, are emphasising the need to protect young people from exposure to alcohol advertising. A fact recognised by voluntary company codes of practice and codes for drinks sectors that stipulate that 70% of the programme viewers where alcohol is advertised should be over the legal drinking age.

The monitoring of alcohol advertising is addressed in a number of ways, particularly in relation to the protection of children and minors. There are voluntary codes developed by advertising self-regulatory organisations, social aspect organisations and individual company codes.

Many codes, such as the Portman Group code (UK), The Beer Institute and DISCUS Code (US) are reinforced with independent complaints panels, whereby the public can submit complaints concerning inappropriate advertising or marketing.

Watchdogs and regulatory frameworks, such as the EU ‘Audio visual directive’ lie above the self-regulatory codes. In some countries, such as Finland the regulations are so strict that self-regulation is not necessary. Article 15 of the EU Audio visual directive states that advertising for alcoholic beverages

- may not be aimed specifically at minors or, in particular, depict minors consuming these beverages;
- may not link the consumption of alcohol to enhanced physical performance or to driving;
- may not create the impression that the consumption of alcohol contributes towards social or sexual success;
- may not claim that alcohol has therapeutic qualities or that it is a stimulant, a sedative or a means of resolving personal conflicts;
- it shall not encourage immoderate consumption of alcohol or present abstinence or moderation in a negative light;
- may not place emphasis on high alcoholic content as being a positive quality of the beverages.

Most codes and guidelines from around the world embrace these criteria.

The aim of alcohol marketing and advertising is presumably to increase consumption of the brands advertised. So a matter of much debate is whether such alcohol advertising and media exposure might influence the drinking behaviour of under-age youngsters.

This question is best addressed through large, prospective cohort studies that examine the links between early exposure to alcohol advertising (at baseline) and subsequent consumption and misuse. In recent years many such studies have been conducted, and plenty of the most rigorous ones, meeting high standards, are available for critical evaluation in systematic reviews.

Lesley Smith and David Foxcroft (2009) reviewed seven cohort studies that followed up more than 13,000 young people (aged 10-26 years). Peter Anderson et al (2009) reviewed 13 longitudinal studies involving over 38,000 adolescents. All these studies measured exposure to advertising and promotion in a variety of ways. Follow-up periods ranged from 8 months to 8 years. They all conclude that exposure to media and commercial communications on alcohol increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to drink alcohol; and will drink more if they are already using alcohol at baseline.

For example, 11-year-olds with the highest levels of exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing were 50% more likely to be drinkers than their counterparts with low exposure (Collins et al, 2007). And amongst non-drinkers aged 11 to 15 years, those reporting high receptivity to alcohol marketing were 77% more likely to start drinking during the following year, compared with those reporting minimal receptivity (Henriksen et al, 2008).

Moreover, these results are supported by findings in cross-sectional surveys that also consistently report links between increased exposure to alcohol advertising and drinking behaviour, or advertising awareness and liking. And because they focus on mass media advertising, the impact of wider alcohol promotion and marketing may be under-estimated.

Given such firm links, we now need to know how such exposure leads to these changes, or which aspects of alcohol advertising/marketing are the effective components. And at what age do these links begin? Children are exposed to TV alcohol adverts from early in life, but do they like them? Such questions are clearly relevant to the issue of alcohol advertising and adolescent drinking.
Here in the UK, psychologists at the University of Hertford have been investigating children’s responses to TV alcohol advertising (Nash et al, 009). They showed that children as young as 7 years old like alcohol advertisements on TV – especially ones with humour, cartoon format, animals and special characters. Secondly, recent study in Australia (Winter et al, 008) found that children and under-age teenagers are currently exposed to “unacceptably high levels of alcohol advertising on television” (presumably because they are watching TV after the 9pm watershed). However, it should be emphasised, as noted in the introduction, that cartoon format, animals and special characters that could be appealing to those under the legal drinking age, are not permitted by EU, US or Australasian regulatory bodies for example.

As Smith and Foxcroft conclude, “we now have stronger empirical evidence to inform the policy debate on the impact of alcohol advertising on young people.”

This article is available from: http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-458/9/51

References:

Institute of Alcohol Studies – Drinking in Great Britain

An interesting alcohol statistic fact sheet ‘Drinking in Great Britain’ has been produced by the Institute of Alcohol Studies, confirming the trends for UK adults over the age of 16 are drinking less, exceeding the responsible drinking guidelines less, and generally reports encouraging statistics.

The report shows that drinking of wine has increased over the decade, but that beer is still the overwhelming beverage choice of men.

The average strength of beer and wine has increased minimally in a decade from 11.40% in 1994/95 to 11.85% in 2003/04 for wine and beer increased from 4.06% in 1994/95 to 4.19% in 2003/04 - the latest date that these figures were available for the report. For further information visit www.ias.org.uk/resources/factsheets/drinkinggb.pdf
Drinking in the UK - An exploration of trends by Helena Conibear, AIM Executive Director

A comprehensive analysis of recent consumption trend papers has been written by David Foxcroft and Lesley Smith on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The report presents comparative tables of trends in new and interesting ways and draws together consistent trends shown by the reports.

Trends in adult drinker status

There has been a decline in the prevalence of drinking over the last decade in Great Britain as a whole, with greater change observed in younger adults (aged 16 to 24 and 25 to 44 years).

Trends in adult drinker status

There has been a decline in the prevalence of drinking over the last decade in Great Britain as a whole, with greater change observed in younger adults (aged 16 to 24 and 5 to 44 years).

The proportion of young men aged 16 to 24 years binge drinking in England has fallen from 39% in 1998 to 30% in 2006, despite taking into consideration revised methods for unit calculation. Limited data on trends in binge drinking were available for Scotland. For Wales, there has been little change in the proportion of men and women binge drinking from 2003 to 2007. Even after taking revised methods for unit calculation into consideration in 2006, average consumption among 16 to 24-year-old men has fallen in recent years following a pronounced peak around 1998 to 2000 in England.

Revised methods for calculating a unit of alcohol have been introduced recently. These affect data recorded for Great Britain for 2006 (Goddard, 2006), Scotland for 2003 (Bromley et al., 2008) and pupils in England for 2007 (Fuller, 2008). The revised method effectively doubles the units of alcohol calculated for a glass of wine. The trends presented in this report incorporate this revised method for the most recent year, if available, and it is clearly stated when used.

Excessive consumption among 16 to 24-year-old men increased initially from 1999 to 2000, but has since fallen to a similar proportion to 1988. A similar trend was observed in women aged 16 to 24 years, though the decline occurred after 2002.

The increase in women drinking more than 6 units on one day from 8% in 1998 to 15% in 2006 is more marked than the overall increase of 1% seen for men exceeding 8 units (Fig. 3). It is worth noting that women are disproportionately affected by the change in unit calculation because of their greater representation as wine drinkers.

Figure 3 Trends in the proportion of men in Great Britain drinking more than eight units, and women drinking more than six units, on any one day in the last week, 1998 to 2006

While the overall trend in consumption in men is little different from 1998 to 2006, there is a marked difference in young men compared with older age groups (Fig. 4). In young men aged 16 to 24 years there has been a marked decrease from 39 to 30% in the proportion drinking more than eight units on at least one day in

There was some increase in the prevalence of drinking in Northern Ireland in the last two decades in both men and women, and across all adult age groups, but especially in the younger adults (aged 16 to 24 years) and 45 to 64-year-old women.
contrast to a slight increase in the older age groups. Older age groups are also disproportionately affected by the change in method used to calculate alcohol units in 2006, as they are more likely to be wine drinkers.

In women, the greatest increase is seen in the 5 to 44 and 45 to 64 year age groups and little change has occurred in younger women aged 16 to 24 years.

**Underage drinking declining**

The trends suggest that, in both girls and boys from 8 to 15 years old, there has been a recent decline in the prevalence of weekly drinking in England, Scotland and Wales. The reductions were more marked in older age groups.

The prevalence in 2006 is the same in 11 to 15-year-old girls as in boys of the same age in England; in Scotland the decline was greater in boys, such that the prevalence in 2006 is actually higher in 13 and 15-year-old girls than in boys.

While the Scottish Health Survey (SHS) showed an increase in boys and girls aged 14 and 15 years, the sample sizes were small and data is available only for 1998 and 2003. The other national surveys show declines in weekly drinking in more recent years. There has been no clear pattern overall for the proportion of 15 and 16-year-old pupils in the UK drinking 40 times or more in a lifetime or ten times or more in the last 30 days from 1998 to 2003.

In the SDD survey, the proportion of pupils who report ever having drunk a proper alcoholic drink has been
The mean alcohol units consumed by younger boys and girls aged 11 to 13 who drank in the last week continued to rise from 2000 to 2006, but then decreased sharply according to both methods of unit calculation (see Fig. 7). Interpretation of trends from 2006 to 2007 in the two older age groups is dependent on which estimate for 2007 is used. According to the original method of unit calculation, there was either little change or a marked reduction in 14 and 15-year-old boys, respectively, from 2006 to 2007.

**Conclusions**

**Gender gap closing**

The average consumption of alcohol per week for women is just 6 units by the old calculation, or rises to 9 units with the new methods, which allow a greater unit allocation for wine.

The report states however: “Our current examination of trends in drinking behaviour over the last 15 to 20 years indicates that it is the drinking behaviour of women that has increased compared with the drinking behaviour of men, at least in the UK where the gender gap in drinking at excessive and harmful levels has decreased over the period covered in this report. This can be interpreted as one expression of the historically recent emancipation of women in western society in terms of gender roles and also the increased financial security and independence of women. Factors that have been shown to be positively associated with drinking in women include affluence, educational achievement, belonging to managerial and professional groups, and living alone (Goddard, 2006; Pattenden et al., 2008). These are all factors that increasing numbers of women have achieved over succeeding generations. Also women who are unmarried, separated or divorced are more likely to drink in excess of recommended limits than women who are married or co-habiting (Goddard, 2006).

**Older age groups**

While alcohol consumption among middle and older age groups is lower than for younger age groups, in recent years there has been a small but steady increase in the amount of alcohol consumed by the middle and older age groups. The trend is consistent across different surveys and different consumption measures (GHS, SHS, CHS and HSE). This age group will also be disproportionately affected by the change in alcohol unit calculation method, as older age groups are more likely to drink wine. One possible explanation for the increase in drinking among older age groups over recent years is that we have a more affluent and active older population, with more disposable income and better health. Investigation of associations between alcohol consumption and various socio-economic and health factors were investigated in about 15,000 community-dwelling people 75 years and older in England, Wales and Scotland. Drinkers were more likely to be people with an active and sociable lifestyle, and with better self-reported health status compared with non-drinkers (Hajat et al., 2004).

UK government highlight risk of weight gain from heavy drinking

The Department of Health highlighted the calorific value of alcohol in its most recent initiative to encourage the UK public reduce its alcohol consumption.

Figures from the Department of Health show that the average wine drinker in England consumes around 2,000 calories from alcohol each month. A poll of 3,000 adults in England revealed 4% of women didn’t know that a large glass of white wine contains the same amount of calories as a packet of crisps (around 120) and 40% of men were not aware that a pint of lager has as many calories as a small sausage roll (170). 37% of drinkers say they are likely to eat more, or would ditch their normal healthy diet, when drinking more than the government’s daily recommended limits.

The government is using publicity generated from the survey to show how many people are unaware of the calorie content of alcohol. Health minister Phil Hope said: “Regularly drinking more than our recommended daily limits can have a knock-on effect on our health, including an expanding waistline.”

For more information, visit http://www.knowyourlimits.org

Al-code alcohol marking scheme

An innovative scheme to tackle the problem of underage drinking is being piloted in Wiltshire.

The Al-code scheme targets people over 18 who buy alcohol for people under the legal age, by marking products with a unique code.

The cans or bottles marked with the code can then be traced back to the point of sale. Cricklade and Purton are taking part in the pilot scheme set up by the neighbourhood police team and council. More details from http://www.alcoholmarking.co.uk.

Fixed penalties increase in UK

Government figures have revealed how fixed penalty notices (FPN) are taking pressure off the UK courts when dealing with offences connected with alcohol sales.

Home Office minister Alan Campbell reported in May that 526 people were found guilty by the courts of alcohol sales offences in England and Wales in 2007, compared to 855 the previous year. But 2007 also saw 3,664 FPNs issued, compared to 3,242 the previous year and 2,090 in 2005. Data for 2008 will be available this autumn.

Police have had the option of issuing FPNs to retailers who sell to under-18s since November 2004. FPNs are also issued to staff who sell alcohol to people who are drunk. A full list of the offences now subject to £80 and £50 fixed penalties can be found at http://www.instituteoflicensing.org/article_id/1000194/2009/01/13/

UK ‘Mandatory Code for the Sale of Alcohol’ consultation opens

In the UK, the consultation period for proposed changes to the law regarding alcohol sales has opened with the publication of ‘Safe. sensible. Social. Selling alcohol responsibly: a consultation on the new code of practice for alcohol retailers’.

The code’s stated objective is to ensure that those who sell and supply alcohol do so responsibly, in order to prevent alcohol-related crime, disorder and nuisance. The new code will contain both mandatory and optional local licensing rules and requirements.

Experiences and evidence are invited from members of the public, those who retail alcohol and represent the alcohol retail industry, licensing authorities and the police who have to enforce licensing policy, and health bodies and the third sector who have to deal with the impact of alcohol-related harm. For more information, visit http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2009-alcohol/
UK parents are leaving it too late to educate their children about alcohol

Parents are confused about when to talk to their children about alcohol, according to new research by The Drinkaware Trust (Drinkaware).

40% of parents said they would proactively teach their children about alcohol and thought the right age to do this was at around 14 and a half, but according to 16 and 17 year olds, this is 12 months later than the time young people, on average, start drinking.

According to research conducted by ICM, the average age children have their first alcoholic drink is 13 and a half years and by just over 14, hundreds of young people have been drunk for the first time. England’s Chief Medical Officer estimates that 360,000 11-15 year olds get drunk on a weekly basis.

While parents are confident they can talk to their children about alcohol, many do not have the information and advice they need. Drinkaware is encouraging parents to make sure they are well informed when they guide their children about responsible drinking. The charity has set up a series of round-table discussions with senior figures from the alcohol industry and government, health and parenting professionals and young people themselves to tackle underage drinking head on.

The research questioning 16 and 17 year olds also showed that:

- 51% listen to their parents about drinking alcohol;
- 78% drink regularly at friends’ houses;
- 44% keep alcohol at home;
- 60% see drinking as a normal part of socialising and being young;
- Almost half (49%) said they had seen their parents drunk.

Drinkaware’s CEO, Chris Sorek said: “There are strong links between drinking high levels of alcohol and youth offending, teenage pregnancy, truancy and exclusion from school, so it’s absolutely imperative that parents and young people can get all the available facts about alcohol.”

To help parents talk to their children about alcohol, Drinkaware recommends the following tips for parents:

- Be open with your children about alcohol - explain the pros and cons of drinking, without lecturing. Let them ask questions and tell them they can speak to you any time. Warn them especially about how easy it is for inexperienced drinkers to go over their limits, make a fool of themselves and compromise their safety.
- Try not to shout and lecture your children if they come home drunk. Sit them down and talk to them about it calmly at another time. Getting angry could make them more deceptive the next time they drink, and it’s better for you if you know where your child is and what they’re doing.
- Lead by example. If you often drink heavily in front of your children, they’ll think it’s ok to do the same.

Parents get the message: Kids absorb your drinking behaviour

New DrinkWise Australia research into parents’ alcohol consumption shows a significant shift in parents’ attitudes toward drinking alcohol in front of their children in response to its latest campaign, ‘KIDS ABSORB YOUR DRINKING’.

76% of parents surveyed said they are thinking more about the impact their attitude toward alcohol may have on their child’s future drinking behaviour as a direct result of national campaign and 28% of parents said they have reduced the amount of alcohol they drink in front of their children in the last 12 months, with almost half (41%) of parents surveyed indicating they are more self conscious about how they drink in front of their children.

DrinkWise CEO, Mr Chris Watters, said that the campaign had struck a chord with parents. “DrinkWise’s goal is to achieve a safer drinking culture in Australia through an evidence-based social change campaign. If we can empower and inform parents today to alter their drinking attitudes and behaviour, particularly in front of children, then we’re on our way to achieving a generational change, so that the next generation may view intoxication as socially unacceptable,” he said.

Other results found that, of the parents surveyed, 36% indicate that they have since discussed with their partner how they drink in front of their children and 29% indicate that they have discussed drinking in the presence of their children with friends or colleagues.

Parents surveyed indicated that the DrinkWise television commercial was non-threatening and reinforced the role modeling message, confronted existing patterns of behaviour, raised awareness, and was an honest appraisal of how behaviour is learnt.

17% of parents who had seen the television commercial said they had changed the way they drank alcohol in front of their children by drinking low alcohol drinks or spacing out their drinking.
A healthy parent-child relationship can have a preventive effect on the early drinking tendencies in teenagers according to a study by Emmanuel Kuntsche and colleagues of the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems.

The study emphasises the role played by parents in bringing down teenage drinking tendencies and suggests that teenagers who feel that they can share their problems with parents are less prone to early drinking, compared to those who do not share such a relationship with their parents. "Our work shows that the ‘preventive effect’ of a later drinking age is likely to be a side effect of a good parent-child relationship," Kuntsche said.

Kuntsche and colleagues surveyed 364 adolescents over a time of two years. The subjects were studied three times in this duration and it was found that those who reported an early drinking age in the first phase yielded to more drinking by the second time.

The study suggests that a healthy and frank communication between the parents and their teenage child can "trigger a spiral of healthy development during adolescence" that ultimately minimises the risk of developing alcohol related problems at an early age. Only teenagers who share a ‘high quality’ relationship with their parents are less prone to develop alcohol related problems compared to their peers. Researchers define a high-quality relationship as one where teenagers felt they could discuss their problems with their parents and they in turn respected the child’s feelings.

Previous studies in this field suggested that the age of the child is an important factor that determines whether they will eventually develop alcohol-related problems. Kuntsche emphasised that parents should remember their role is important when it comes to children’s risk of substance abuse and emphasises that being attentive to children’s needs in general may be protect them from developing drinking problems.


Healthy parent-child ties can reduce risk of excessive drinking for teenagers

Adults believe they are ‘powerless’ on underage drinking in Ireland

The research released by the Health Service Executive in Ireland found that most adults disapprove of underage drinking, but feel there is nothing they can do to stop it. In addition adults tend to underestimate their role in influencing young people. 55% of adults think there is nothing they can do to stop young people drinking, while only 20% thought that their drinking habits influenced young people. A further 20% stated that they would drink less if they thought it might discourage young people from drinking.

These findings form part of a HSE campaign aimed at delaying the age at which young people start to drink. The research conducted by Millward Brown IMS in 2008 shows that the vast majority of adults are aware that drinking before the age of 18 is a problem. A total of 92% agree it is a problem in Ireland, while 71% thought it poses a health risk. 63% didn't think it is acceptable for people to drink before age 18, however around 20% think it is alright.

Dr Joe Barry, a public health specialist with the HSE, said it was important that adults realise everyone has a role in reducing the number of young people drinking alcohol.

“While young people on the one hand may seem very independent, their attitudes and behaviours are very often modelled on adult behaviour," he said.”Adults and parents can help address the issue of underage drinking by looking at their own drinking and by listening and talking to young people about alcohol.”

On a more positive note, research indicates that many adults are prepared to engage with young people about drinking. Around 65% say they have already discussed this issue, while 63% said they would be prepared to if they felt that person was in danger. “Many parents and adults don’t know what they should do to encourage young people not to start drinking,” said Dr Barry. “It is key that parents make their feelings about underage drinking known and no matter what a teenager says, most actually do want their parents to discuss alcohol with them. Critically, they want to know the facts and they want limits set for them.”
MEAS research warns that the recession could lead to more alcohol consumption at home

One of the key findings of a research project undertaken for MEAS on the drinking culture of 18-29 year olds in Ireland, is that the economic recession could lead to higher levels of alcohol consumption by some people as “cocooning”, or home drinking, grows in popularity. The research, undertaken in February by Lansdowne Market researchers found that while many people in this age category anticipate spending less on alcohol, a growth in home drinking is likely.

The Chief Executive of MEAS, Fionnuala Sheehan warned that home drinking, however, has the potential to throw up particular problems. “When it comes to home drinking there is no set closing time, and there is no consistency in the drink measures being consumed”, she said.

Other findings from the Lansdowne research suggest that “Ireland doesn’t have a culture of regular moderate drinking – the daily glass of wine with dinner, just one or two beers”- where the 18-29 demographic is concerned. Larger amounts of alcohol, usually consumed on a couple of social gatherings, with Friday and Saturday predominating, is the prevailing pattern with this age cohort. In general, the research found that this young age group regard alcohol as facilitating social interaction, escapism, having the craic and relaxation, and being central to social life in Ireland.

Ms Sheehan added: “We need to continue to challenge the long-standing social permission we give in Ireland to excessive drinking. There is a distance to go, as the research results show, but it is important to note that relative to 2008, an additional 11% of 18-29 year olds now agree strongly that they have become much more aware of excessive drinking and how it can adversely affect others”.

Alcohol Youth Commission meets in Scotland

Scotland’s Youth Commission, an 18-member forum established to ensure the voice of young people is heard in Scotland’s national debate on tackling alcohol misuse, met to set out a programme of work for the year ahead.

At their first two-day summit in Glasgow in May, the Commissioners - aged between 14 and 22, heard presentations about Scotland’s alcohol misuse problem and visited Castlemilk Youth Centre.

Shona Robison, Minister for Public Health, said: “The Youth Commission has embarked on a very significant piece of work. Young people are directly affected by alcohol misuse - whether through their own consumption or as a result of other people’s drinking - so they must be part of the solution.

www.talkingalcohol.com launched in Russian

SABMiller RUS launched a Russian version of www.TalkingAlcohol.com. The information resource targets a wide audience of adult consumers. The site contains information about social and physiological aspects of alcohol consumption, risks connected with alcohol abuse, and opinions of independent experts in the alcohol sphere. Polish and Czech language sites were also launched recently.

Alcohol to be included in new drugs strategy for Ireland in 2010

Alcohol will be included in a new drugs strategy for Ireland next year, while the current strategy is expected to finally go to Cabinet by the end of May or early June this year.

Minister of State for Community Affairs John Curran said the delay in publishing the strategy was because there was “much interest” in the relationship between alcohol and drugs. In the autumn, “a new steering group will work to incorporate alcohol into what will be a substance misuse strategy but that will not be available until some time next year”.
Is UK medical advice on prenatal alcohol use really accurate?

Colin Gavaghan, of the School of Law at the University of Glasgow has published an article in Journal of Medical Ethics questioning the advice of UK doctors on drinking during pregnancy. He asserts that such advice is often condescending and morally uncertain, including the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer for England and the British Medical Association (BMA).

Gavaghan states that, unlike heavy drinking, when consumption is reasonable and moderate, studies still do not conclude that it can cause harm to the developing fetus. Regardless of lack of new evidence, the UK government and the BMA changed their recommendations from ‘one to two units once or twice a week’ in 2007, advising total abstinence during pregnancy. However, a year later, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), and researchers from The University of London claimed that there was no support of proof of damage, as long as women drank no more than one or two units per week. The investigation even established that the children of mothers who drank moderately during gestation had fewer behavioural and developmental problems than those whose mothers abstained entirely.

Unfortunately, when in doubt, most doctors advice abstinence, but for several reasons Dr Gavaghan argues that this simply should not be the case. He remarks that healthcare in general has changed from paternalism to choice and autonomy, a vital part of which is supplying information to allow patients to make educated decisions. When there is uncertainty in the evidence, doctors should disclose it, rather than taking the easy option and avoid trying to clarify it, he argues. “It is not reasonable to replace more accurate information with less accurate merely because it is simpler to communicate,” he writes.

According to Dr. Gavaghan time of abstinence could be rather long, since many doctors also advise women to refrain from drinking when trying to get pregnant.

“It may be thought that, at the very least, we should require some reasonably compelling ethical justification for what is, on the face of it, a straightforward sexist policy. To date, the evidence suggests that we have no such justification,” he says. He suggests that such methods might go wrong and have negative effects in the long run. “If [doctors] are seen to be exaggerating risks that recent studies have shown to be negligible, their advice on genuine risks will carry less authority.”

Source: “You can’t handle the truth: medical paternalism and prenatal alcohol use.” J Med Ethics 2009; 35: 300-303

Ireland film awards ceremony

Now in its second year, DARE2BDRINKAWARE is a competition for third-level students, sponsored by drinkaware.ie and organised by the Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA). The aim of the competition is to highlight young people’s attitudes to alcohol. Through the use of digital media, students tell their stories and inform their peers about responsible drinking. The films can be viewed at http://www.dare2bdrinkaware.com/

Gobias Productions, made up of five students from Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, won all of the judges’ categories in the student film competition, beating rival entries from colleges throughout Ireland and winning a total of €4,000 in prize money. Their film, ‘On The Cutting Room Floor’ depicts two workers in a control room within a student’s brain, editing footage from the previous night’s drinking session to ensure the student is left with only positive – though hazy – memories of his night on the town. After the workers delete scenes of drunken clumsiness and embarrassing behaviour, the student awakes in his bathroom with a limited recollection of his antics the night before.

Fionnuala Sheehan, Chief Executive of drinkaware.ie, said “We were delighted with the response to DARE2BDRINKAWARE and blown away by the quality of ‘On The Cutting Room Floor’. The 10 films on the shortlist will be screened at ‘Movies @ Dundrum’ as part of the Cinemagic Film Festival over the coming weeks, which will be a great experience for the film-makers involved. In addition, all of the films will air on City Channel over the next month, while the winning film will also be screened at the Oxegen music festival.”
Sweden’s teenagers reduce alcohol consumption

Swedish teenagers are drinking less alcohol than they were a few years ago and it has become fashionable to be sober, according to the Swedish National Institute of Public Health.

Despite more advertising and illegal smuggled liquor in Sweden, teenagers drink less today than they did seven years ago. The institute explains that parents in Sweden have “understood that children and alcohol do not go together” and that “more (teenagers) consider it hip to be sober”. This trend is reflected in new statistics from an annual survey of senior high school students in Stockholm that shows the number of pupils who have drunk alcohol in recent months has declined from 74% in 2008 to 68% in 2009. Despite the wide prevalence of smuggled alcohol in Sweden, the majority of the pupils acquired their liquor from the state monopoly retailer, Systembolaget. Usually slightly older friends buy the alcohol, or sometimes parents.

In the coming days Sweden’s 108,000 parents with children born in 1995 will receive a copy of a booklet entitled ‘The teenage phrase-book’ (Tonårsparlören) - a help guide to assist them in addressing the sensitive subject of alcohol with their pubescent offspring. The booklet was launched seven years ago and the institute claims that since then the change in attitudes among parents has been considerable. Seven years ago it was considered quite normal for parents to allow their teenage children to taste alcohol in the home but now this number is very small. Consumption has as a result decreased, the institute states.

“This is a positive development, and at same time somewhat surprising, it is not that it has become harder for teenagers to get hold of alcohol,” said Sven Andréasson at the institute.

Andréasson warned that there are signs that the decline in consumption is however levelling off, adding that it is therefore important to keep the discussion alive with the teenage phrase-book. The purpose of the booklet is to give advice on sound scientific research “that is easy to understand and accept”.

The booklet can be viewed at www.systembolagetkampanj.se/tonarsparloren/flash.html

Comité Européen des Entreprises Vins praised by DG SANCO Director at EU Alcohol & Health Forum

At the open EU alcohol & Health Forum that took place in Brussels on 30th of April CEEV’s commitment “Wine in Moderation, Art de Vivre” and its ongoing implementation has been explicitly praised by DG SANCO Director General Robert Madelin as one of the 5 best practice examples of commitments (out of a total of 108 commitments submitted by 60 stakeholders organizations) which were highlighted in his opening presentation reporting the Forum activities since its creation.

Robert Madelin noted the added value of WIM as an ambitious and consistent European commitment covering at the same time broad information/education and self-regulation efforts. He also gave praise for the effort given to this commitment first, to mobilise an extremely atomised sector to engage in the implementation of the programme at national and local level, and then trying to track the details of the various commitment activities deployed on the ground - which poses technical, functional and economic challenge for the wine sector professional organisations. He acknowledged the efforts to design workable monitoring tools aimed at capturing the range of modalities for the deployment of the various commitment activities in different Member States, adapted to the local contexts.

Around 250 people attended the meeting, with attendees from various DGs in the European Commission, national governments (mainly health departments), European and national NGOs, as well as European and national professional bodies and companies representing the various families of economic operators involved, including of course alcoholic beverages sectors.
Europe’s brewers contributions to the EU Alcohol & Health Forum

A report submitted by the European Commission’s Health Department in April showed that of the more than 100 total commitments filed so far under the Alcohol and Health Forum, Europe’s brewing sector has filed a total of 37 commitments as of mid-April 2009, with 6 additional commitments to follow. The new commitments come from the brewing associations of Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia.

The Brewers of Europe Secretary General Rodolphe de Looz-Corswarem stated: “This report recognises the brewing sector commitments made and we look forward to demonstrating that our locally-based commitments for action do actually work and are key in tackling alcohol related harm. Any proposed pan-European ‘one size fits all’ approach will never work.”

One example of the new commitments is from Austria where the brewing sector forged a partnership with the Austrian Automobile & Touring Club and the Austrian armed forces in launching an educational campaign reinforcing the message against drinking and driving.

The Italian campaign led by the national Brewers’ Association in cooperation with the Italian Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (SIGO) to ensure women’s awareness of medical advice against drinking during pregnancy is another leading example of The Brewers of Europe’s promotion of local partnerships. The Italian Ministry of Health has supported this campaign by introducing it into their “Guadagnare Salute” health initiative.

At the Open discussion platform on Alcohol and Health, Catherine Van Reeth, representing The Brewers of Europe in the Marketing Communication Taskforce of the Alcohol and Health Forum, drew attention to the sector’s pioneering commitment to introduce comprehensive self-regulatory systems for beer advertising across the EU: “The brewing sector is very serious in putting its emphasis on implementing self-regulation standards across Europe in line with EU best practice models,” she stated.

The Brewers of Europe Interim Report on their first 25 Commitments to the EU Alcohol and Health Forum is available from http://www.brewersofeurope.org

Call for Ireland-wide drink clampdown

The Republic of Ireland is calling for a joint initiative with Northern Ireland to crack down on alcohol promotions. Irish Justice Minister Dermot Ahern wrote to Northern Ireland’s minister for social development Margaret Ritchie to discuss a country-wide venture to end volume-based offers. He wrote: “I am conscious that the effectiveness of actions taken to curb such promotions could be reduced if action is not taken on an island-wide basis.”

The Republic of Ireland has already outlawed ‘Buy one get one free’ deals and reduced the times when alcohol can be sold. But in an emergency Budget last month, Eire decided not to raise drinks taxes amid fears that a price increase would drive more people to buy cheaper alcohol in Northern Ireland.

Ahern said in his letter: “I would welcome an opportunity to discuss the possibility of a joint north-south initiative to tackle alcohol promotions, especially the volume-based promotions which are designed to increase the quantities sold and which, in some cases at least, result in excessive consumption of alcohol and various types of alcohol-related harm”.

INEBRIA 2009 conference, 8-9 October 2009

The 6th INEBRIA Annual Conference: ‘Breaking New Ground’ will be held at The BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle/ Gateshead UK. INEBRIA 2009 (International Network on Brief Interventions for Alcohol Problems), a two day scientific conference, aims to address some outstanding issues in the field of screening and brief interventions (SBI) for alcohol use disorders.

Three plenary speakers with international reputations in the field of SBI and have been confirmed:
- Dr Peter Anderson, Public Health Consultant
- Professor Eileen Kaner, Chair of Public Health Research, Newcastle University
- Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Cardiff University

Further details about the conference including how to register can be found at the http://www.inebria2009.co.uk/
Anheuser-Busch Survey ‘Education vs. Restrictions’

The ‘Support For Education vs. Restrictions survey’ was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of Anheuser-Busch between January 9–13, 2009 among 2,194 US adults aged 21 and over. Results were weighted as needed for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income.

Respondents overwhelmingly supported better education about alcohol and stricter punishment of offenders (79%) over raising taxes and limiting advertising of alcohol beverages (12%). While alcohol drinkers and non-drinkers supported education and stricter punishment (82% and 71%, respectively), the percentage of drinkers who advocated raising taxes and limiting advertising was significantly lower than non-drinkers (9% vs. 22%).

Similarly, respondents aware of any slogans and those not aware of any slogans favoured education over restrictions (81% and 68%, respectively). However, respondents who were aware of any slogans were significantly more likely to favour education than those who were not aware.

- a majority of respondents were opposed to restriction-based statements, policies and programmes, including those advocating a ban on alcohol advertisements and the prohibition of the sale of alcohol.

- Statements, policies, and programmes promoting education regarding responsible alcohol use or those advocating stricter punishment were favoured by a large majority of the respondents, with most of these items being favoured by at least 90% of respondents.

- Significant differences on a number of issues were seen when comparing drinkers and non-drinkers as well as those aware of any slogans and those not aware of any slogan.

The survey results are available from [http://www.alcoholstats.com/mm/docs/6689.pdf](http://www.alcoholstats.com/mm/docs/6689.pdf)

Service in Action goes online in Quebec

Training responsible personnel is an effective way to combat alcohol abuse in licensed establishments. In April, Louise Nadeau, Chair of the Éduc’alcool Board of Directors, and Lucille Daoust, Executive Director of the Institut de tourisme et d’hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ), launched the online version of Service in Action, a training programme for serving staff in licensed establishments in Quebec. The goal of the programme is to inform people who work in bars, restaurants, taverns and brasseries about their legal obligations with regard to their customers, and to provide strategies to help them prevent alcohol abuse or intervene when customers show signs of excessive drinking.

Until now, the programme has been available only through formal courses given by trainers at the ITHQ and five other hotel schools in Quebec. The new online version makes the programme available to industry personnel across the province. People can take the training at their convenience, and the course makes them both more knowledgeable and more employable. Employers benefit from the online programme because it keeps costs down and ensures standardised training throughout the industry. People who complete the online course receive the same Service in Action certificate as those who take the conventional classes.

“Training programmes for serving staff in licensed establishments are among the most effective means to prevent impaired driving, particularly among such high-risk groups as young people and repeat offenders,” said Éduc’alcool Chair Louise Nadeau. “They also help reduce domestic violence, work absenteeism and health problems.”

With Service in Action now available online, Éduc’alcool and the Institut de tourisme et d’hôtellerie du Québec hope that all licensed establishments will register their employees, managers and owners for the training.

For more information [http://www.educalcool.qc.ca/en](http://www.educalcool.qc.ca/en)
SAMSHA Reach Out

The 2009 Reach Out Now materials, developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in collaboration with Scholastic Inc., are now available online to view and download. Reach Out Now provides school-based underage alcohol use prevention materials for fifth- and sixth-grade students, their families, and their teachers. These underage drinking prevention classroom materials feature lessons and worksheets, an interactive wall poster, bonus skill-building activity worksheets, and family activity pages. www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/community/teachin/Default.aspx

UC Davis programme credited with decrease in high-risk drinking

Students at the University of California at Davis are limiting the amount of high-risk drinking they participate in as a result of a major prevention initiative, a new survey concludes.

UC Davis’ Safe Party Initiative focused on reducing alcohol-related problems at off-campus parties; students participating in a 2003 survey said roughly one-third of alcohol-related problems take place at such parties. The programme included outreach efforts, a programme website (http://safe party.ucdavis.edu/) and messages targeting incoming students, student-athletes, and members of fraternities and sororities.

A campus survey showed that binge drinking, defined as consuming five or more drinks at a sitting for men, and four or more drinks for women, has decreased from 31% to 20% over the four years the programme has been in place. The survey also showed that underage drinking fell from 55% to 47%, and that the occurrence of student drinking with the intention of getting drunk or intoxicated dropped 10%.

“As a community, we have worked together and made a real difference in this problem,” said Michelle Famula, director of Student Health Services at UC Davis.

Illinois Coalition ‘Sticker Shocks’ Community

Teenagers, parents, prevention specialists, liquor retailers, and law-enforcement officials joined forces over the issue of underage drinking in Illinois for a campaign to discourage adults from buying alcohol for minors.

With the permission of retailers, campaigners placed thousands of warning stickers on liquor bottles and cases of beer and wine coolers as part of Project Sticker Shock. The bright yellow stickers featured messages reminding patrons that it is illegal to provide minors with alcohol or to use a fake ID to purchase alcohol.

Project Sticker Shock volunteers visited liquor retailers in over 50 counties throughout the state as part of Alcohol Awareness Month, with many participating in “Sticker Shock Day” on April 2. The Illinois Liquor Control Commission (ILCC) provided materials for the campaign through funds from its “Don’t Be Sorry” educational programme. The ILCC asked retailers to continue displaying Project Sticker Shock materials in their stores throughout the month.

The concept behind the programme is to change community ideas regarding underage drinking, said Ted Penesis, industry education manager at the ILCC, “If we’re going to be changing our society’s attitudes about underage drinking, we have to go after the people who are providing minors with alcohol,” he said.

Volunteers in Illinois also placed Sticker Shock window decals, posters, and signs with similar messages around stores. “We wanted to put materials in permanent places so the message stays in the store,” Penesis said, stressing that the project aimed to create dialogue between parents and teenagers. “There is information about underage drinking that parents just don’t know. It’s a way to get the conversation started.”

The campaign website is http://www.dontbesorry.org/
Apparent Consumption of Alcohol, Australia, 2007-08 report

A new report provides estimates of apparent consumption of alcohol based on the availability of alcoholic beverages in Australia. The publication provides estimates of the quantity of beer and wine available for consumption, and estimates of the quantity of pure alcohol available for consumption from beer, wine, spirits, and ready to drink pre-mixed products. It also gives estimates of apparent per capita consumption. This is the total apparent consumption divided by the total population aged 15 years and over.

The apparent per capita consumption of pure alcohol by persons aged 15 years and over decreased slightly by 0.5% between 2006-07 and 2007–08, after an increase of 1.7% between 2005-06 and 2006-07.

The report is available at http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4307.0.55.001Main+Features12007-08?

New Zealand alcohol law review

Consultation on the proposed Bill closed on the 23rd April. The bill proposes giving local authorities more powers on liquor licensing, tighter regulations for retail outlets, and tougher penalties for selling or supplying alcohol to minors. The Bill also includes a zero-alcohol limit for drivers under 20 without a full licence. For information on the submissions visit http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/SC/SubmCalled/0/3/4/49SCJEsaleandsupplyofliquor200904231-Sale-and-Supply-of-Liquor-and.htm.

A second opportunity to consult regarding New Zealand’s alcohol licensing laws will arise later this year with the release of a discussion paper for consultation by the Law Commission. The Law Commission is undertaking a full review of New Zealand’s liquor legislation. This is the first major review of the Sale of Liquor Act and associated alcohol policy since 1989.

Indonesia - high tax encourage black market alcohol

Analysts have asked the government of Indonesia to reduce the 500% tax it currently imposes on alcoholic drinks and have branded the current high import tax regime on alcoholic beverage as a policy failure that has “neither discouraged consumption nor maximised revenues” and, as many had predicted, has “fostered a thriving black market”.

Two scholars from Jakarta’s prestigious Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Dionisius A. Narjoko and Teguh Yudo said current alcohol taxes of 500%, among the highest in the world, has “failed to bring about the optimal outcome of generating revenue and protecting public health.”

The two researchers have recommended to the government that the alcohol tax be reduced and any new tariff be based on alcoholic content as opposed to value. The researchers report that the total tax revenue of US$5.8 million collected in 2008 by the sole government importer suggests that a large black market exists in smuggled alcohol. Government estimates of the size of the black market is equivalent to 60% of all alcohol consumed and represents lost tax revenues of US$1.3 billion. The report also suggests that high taxes do not curb alcohol consumption and have been linked to increased usage of low-quality liquor that endangers human life. The government estimates that more than 60 people died from home-made liquor consumption in 2008.

Global Brands launch low calorie, low alcohol RTD

Global Brands has launched a low calorie, low alcohol variant of its flagship brand, VK Vodka Kick. At just 49 calories, the new pineapple and grapefruit flavoured product is the lowest calorie RTD on the market. And with only a 1.2% ABV, the drink also has the lowest ABV of any RTD.

Steve Perez, chairman at Global Brands, comments: “This is a real first in the RTD category, giving consumers the option to choose a lower calorie and lower ABV alternative. There is really very little choice for people not wanting to drink alcohol, or those who just want to drink a small amount. Giving consumers more choice is imperative, as is ensuring that drinks are retailed responsibly… Consumers are now more conscious than ever when it comes to calories and units of alcohol, and so we wanted to give them an alternative to the standard RTDs that are currently on the market.”
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