



From Dr A Majid Katme

One in eight deaths before retirement is caused by alcohol, study finds

- **Addiction experts call on England to follow Scotland's lead and set a minimum price per unit of alcohol**

One in eight deaths of UK adults under the age of 64 is caused by alcohol, an international conference on tackling problem drinking has heard.

The social cost of alcohol abuse has been estimated to be £240 a year for each European, with the annual bill for the NHS alone being £2.7 billion.

A major conference of addiction specialists from across the world is meeting at Newcastle University and organisers have called for England to follow Scotland and set a minimum price per unit.

They have also demanded a ban on advertising alcohol.

Too easy to splurge: Prof Eileen Kaner from Newcastle University said the government had to be bolder about tackling cheap alcohol

Professor Eileen Kaner cited new research which showed one in eight UK deaths of people aged 15 to 64 was caused by alcohol.

In Europe, alcohol consumption is more than twice the global average and it represents the biggest addiction in the UK, greater than any illegal drug or gambling.

The conference has heard that the cost per capita in Europe is around £240 when the bill for health, welfare, crime and reduced output is calculated.

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- [Scots set to go on cross-border booze raids after Scottish government sets cheapest price of alcohol higher than England's in minimum price crackdown](#)

Professor Kaner, who is director of the Institute of Health and Society at Newcastle University, said: 'Alcohol costs the UK so much in so many ways, both in financial and social impacts.

'Governments need to have a clear and unbiased view of the most up-to-date research on alcohol problems and be bolder about tackling some of the root causes such as overly cheap alcohol and irresponsible marketing that encourages heavy drinking.

'This conference will hopefully help inform the debate and highlight key measures governments should be taking to improve public health and safety around drinking behaviour.'

BRITS LEAD THE WAY IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Britain has one of the highest drinking rates in the world, figures collected last year have revealed.

The average drinker in the UK has 15-and-a-half litres of pure alcohol a year - the equivalent of 775 pints of beer.

That's the same as 500 glasses of strong wine or 1000 shots of whisky or other spirits.

Only eastern European countries such as Russia, Croatia and Estonia drink more.

Although Britain's overall alcohol consumption was 13th highest in the world behind former Soviet Bloc countries, it drinks the fourth highest amount of beer in the world.

The research was carried out by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which measured alcohol consumption between 2000 and 2005.

Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Assistant Director-General for Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health said: 'Many countries recognize the serious public health problems caused by the harmful use of alcohol and have taken steps to prevent the health and social burdens and treat those in need of care.'

'But clearly much more needs to be done to reduce the loss of life and suffering associated with harmful alcohol use.'

She felt there was growing agreement between the public and policy-makers that something must be done.

'I think there is more political will than we have ever known and the public are alive to this debate and receptive to the idea that it is part of the government's responsibility,' she said.

She believed the most cost-effective way of reducing the harm caused by alcohol would be to reduce demand by banning advertising and implementing a minimum price per unit.

The Scottish Government announced on Monday it would implement a 50p per unit minimum charge.

Professor Peter Anderson, who specialises in alcohol and addiction policies at the universities of Newcastle and Maastricht, said stricter regulations on drink were being discussed by governments across the EU.

He said: 'If England really introduces a minimum unit price, other countries will be persuaded to follow. At the moment it is a waiting game.'

He said Finland was in the process of strengthening its advertising laws, while in France, alcohol adverts cannot be shown on television or in the cinema.

The ALICE RAP (Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe - Reframing Addictions Project) conference in Newcastle, involves 150 researchers from across the globe who help to shape addiction policy internationally.



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