SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ALCOHOL AND SOCIETY 2026

Binge Drinking

Acute Consequences and Lasting Impacts

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Excecutive summary

- Binge drinking is typically defined as drinking 5 or more drinks per occasion. This is sometimes modified to 4 or more drinks per women or may be defined by grams of ethanol (e.g., 60 grams) given the variability in standard drink sizes internationally.
- In recent decades overall levels of binge drinking in Sweden, Norway and Denmark have been steady at between 30 and 35% but with some divergent trends by age and gender.
- While the major contribution to road crashes, violence and poisoning (i.e., acute effects) is widely understood, the enduring effects of binge drinking on dementia, alcohol dependence and chronic disease in later life are largely overlooked.
- Rapid alcohol use on a binge drinking occasion overwhelms the body's ability to process alcohol, leading to oxidative stress and to an increase in acetaldehyde, a dangerous metabolite and a major carcinogen.
- The body's increased exposure to high blood alcohol concentrations, to acetaldehyde concentrations and to oxidative stress leads to impairments in the short-term and risks enduring toxic and carcinogenic impacts on all organs.
- The extent of binge drinking is largely underestimated. Among people who drink within 'moderate' levels on average (e.g., up to one or to drinks per day), the majority also engage in occasional binge drinking.
- Rates of binge drinking decline and fall with total alcohol consumption in a population. This is because 5+ drinking occasions account for a at least half of consumption in high income countries such as Sweden. As a result, policies that reduce total consumption also reduce rates of binge drinking and related harms.
- Fortunately, there are many effective strategies that reduce binge drinking and its consequences, including for those with established or early-stage alcohol use disorders. Examples of effective population-level policies include higher alcohol taxes, minimum unit pricing, restrictions on sales hours, reduced outlet density, marketing limits, minimum drinking age laws and , drink-driving enforcement, and liability laws for serving intoxicated patrons.
- Effective interventions for individuals include brief counselling in health care settings, medications, treatments for alcohol use disorder and use of devices such as ignition interlocks and alcohol detection systems in cars (that reduce drink driving).
- A cultural shift in societal norms and attitudes towards binge drinking throughout Sweden and other Nordic countries is in order. Future nutritional guidelines could include specific recommendations for avoiding binge drinking, in addition to recommended limits for total consumption.

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