

Impact of legislation to reduce the drink-drive limit on road traffic accidents and alcohol consumption in Scotland: a natural experiment study

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Plain English summary

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What was the problem?

In December 2014 the drink-drive limit was lowered in Scotland, but remained at the same level in England and Wales. Although there was evidence from other countries that this would lead to a reduction in road traffic accidents in Scotland, there was still uncertainty about what would happen after the legislation changed and whether or not the change provided good value for money.

What did the study do?

This study compared Scotland with England and Wales to see if the level of Scottish road traffic accidents and alcohol consumption were reduced after the 2014 drink-drive legislation was in place compared with England and Wales, where the legislation was unchanged.

What did the study find?

The study found no evidence that the level of road traffic accidents changed because of the change in drink-drive legislation in Scotland. Although there was a small reduction (i.e. < 1%) in the level of alcohol consumption in places, such as pubs and restaurants, there was no change in the level of alcohol purchased in shops and supermarkets, and this accounts for over two-thirds of all alcohol consumed in Scotland.

What does this mean?

The change in legislation appears to have failed in its objective to reduce road traffic accidents in Scotland. Possible reasons include not enough publicity or levels of enforcement by actions, such as breath testing. It might also be that most road traffic accidents involving alcohol are caused by people who continue to ignore the law under the 2014 legislation.

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