

Potential effects of minimum unit pricing at local authority level on alcohol-attributed harms in North West and North East England: a modelling study

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Declared competing interests of authors: Petra S Meier is a member of the Public Health Research Research Funding Board (2016 to present).

Published March 2021

DOI: [10.3310/phr09040](https://doi.org/10.3310/phr09040)

Plain English summary

Effects of minimum unit pricing on alcohol-attributed harms

Public Health Research 2021; Vol. 9: No. 4

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Background

Alcoholic drinks have different strengths. One unit contains 10 ml (two teaspoons) of pure ethanol. A minimum unit price of 50p per unit of alcohol was implemented in Scotland in May 2018. It is now illegal to sell a typical beer of 2 units for < £1. A 9-unit bottle of wine must cost at least £4.50. English local authorities want to know the impact of a minimum unit price for alcohol at local authority level.

Study question

What is the estimated local impact of minimum unit pricing for alcohol at local authority level on deaths, hospitalisations and crimes in North West and North East England?

Methods

We gathered data on how much alcohol people drink, what prices they pay for alcohol, current deaths and hospitalisations for 45 alcohol-related diseases, and crimes. We estimated reductions in drinking for different population groups, and how many fewer deaths, hospitalisations and crimes might occur. We did not account for people shopping outside the area where the minimum unit pricing for alcohol at local authority level might be implemented.

Results

It was possible to make estimates using local data. Estimates suggest that a 50p minimum unit price for alcohol at local authority level in the North West could reduce annual deaths by 205 (-11.4%), hospitalisations by 5956 (5.5%) and crimes by 8528 (2.5%). This was mostly due to the 5% of people who were drinking at high-risk levels (men drinking the equivalent of about five bottles of wine weekly and women drinking the equivalent of about 3.5 bottles of wine weekly, spending around £2500 a year). Estimated effects are largest for high-risk drinkers in deprived areas, and are larger in the North West and North East than for all of England because more cheap alcohol is consumed in these areas and there are, currently, higher rates of alcohol-related deaths, hospitalisations and crime.

Conclusions

Computer modelling suggests that minimum unit pricing for alcohol at local authority level could be effective in reducing local deaths, hospitalisations and crime, while also reducing inequalities between areas. Estimates could be updated with future evidence from Scotland. Similar methods could potentially be used for other unhealthy products, for example smoking or high-fat food consumption.

Public Health Research

ISSN 2050-4381 (Print)

ISSN 2050-439X (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the PHR programme as project number 15/129/19. The contractual start date was in April 2017. The final report began editorial review in April 2019 and was accepted for publication in July 2020. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PHR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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