

# Fact sheet // Alcohol and harm to others

**That alcohol can cause harm to the consume is well-known. Harm to others is a less discussed aspect, despite it accounting for the largest part of the overall problem.**

Several studies show that alcohol's secondary harm is in fact greater than the direct damage to those who drink. That makes alcohol as a risk factor unique, even in comparison to tobacco, where harm to others is often used as a reason for more regulation, although the damage is greatest to the tobacco users themselves.<sup>1</sup>

A British study attempting to rank drug-related harm estimated that alcohol's secondary harm was twice as high as the harm to consumers themselves.<sup>2</sup> The total harm of alcohol was estimated to be almost twice as large as the total harm from tobacco.

## Affects many different areas

Alcohol differs from other risk factors because it affects so many different areas, both medical and social. According to the large study Global Burden of Disease<sup>3</sup> there is no other risk factor that affects so many different diseases and injuries.

The consequences range from very serious (premature death) to annoying (people's sleep is disturbed by drunk people). Some secondary harm is well known, such as traffic accidents due to drunk drivers, birth defects, accidents and violence.

Others are more unknown and have only begun to be noted in recent years, for ex-

## In brief:

// Harm to people other than those who drink is **generally greater than the harm to alcohol consumers**. When this is taken into consideration, alcohol likely causes significantly more total harm to society than for example tobacco does.

// **Children and families** are often especially vulnerable, but among the harm caused by alcohol are also general crimes and major social costs.

// **Alcohol policy measures** at local or national level can help reduce the risk of harm, including measures such as regulating price and availability.

ample the connection between alcohol and HIV/Aids and tuberculosis.

## Children and families especially vulnerable

When parents' or other custodians' alcohol consumption is high - whether temporarily or habitually – the risk of harm to other members of the family increases.

In our projects around the world, we see how children are affected by adult alcohol consumption. The risk of witnessing or being subjected to violence increases. The family is often financially affected, especially if one or both parents drink so much that they cannot work, which can lead to the children no longer going to school and having to work.

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An Australian study shows similar results.<sup>4</sup> More than a quarter of respondents said they had experienced harm due to the drinking of other family members. Among the children it was common to see and experience quarrels and violence, as well as to be left unattended for long periods of time.

Alcohol is clearly linked to violence, whether in close relationships, in child abuse or in public places. Estimates of the proportion of partner violence that is alcohol-related vary between countries, from 48 to 87 percent.<sup>5</sup> A similar estimate of sexual violence shows that alcohol is a factor in one third to three quarters of the cases.<sup>6</sup>

### Other crimes and injuries

Studies have also shown a connection between alcohol and theft, robbery and burglary.<sup>1</sup> As a result, alcohol policy measures have effects that are not always anticipated. A research overview from the United States and the United Kingdom shows that increases in alcohol tax lead to a reduction in general crime levels.

Attempts have been made to calculate the total societal costs of alcohol in different countries. It is a difficult task and the results vary depending on the calculation method, but it is clear that the costs are enormous. A global overview found the costs to be between 0.45 and 5.44 percent of GDP, which is fully sufficient to affect national economic development, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

## Rekommendationer

// **Alcohol policy measures** such as increased prices and limited availability have been proven to have a positive effect on many types of alcohol-related harm. This applies to both direct harm and harm to others, including violent crime.

// Alcohol policy is also a development issue. One of the consequences of harm to both the consumer and others is that it **contributes to cementing poverty**.

// **A global framework convention** on alcohol control, similar to that which applies to tobacco, would contribute to a much more effective alcohol policy in many low- and middle-income countries.

## References

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## About us

The international work of the IOGT-NTO Movement takes place in 14 countries in East Africa, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and the Balkans. Our focus is on alcohol as an obstacle to development.

Read more at [www.iogntororelsen.se/internationellt/](http://www.iogntororelsen.se/internationellt/) or contact us at [info@iogntororelsen.se](mailto:info@iogntororelsen.se).

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