

Alcohol-related illnesses cause for concern in Ireland

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While Euromonitor International's research shows that the alcoholic drinks industry in Ireland was worth â‚¬6.6 billion in 2004, alcohol-related problems are estimated to cost Irish society around â‚¬2.4 billion per year.

One of the fastest growing causes of death in Ireland is chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, of which alcohol is the major contributory factor. Death by chronic liver disease and cirrhosis has grown by 108% between 1990-2003 and in 2003, it was reported that chronic liver disease and cirrhosis was the cause of death of half a million Irish people.

Binge drinking the norm

A drinking occasion in Ireland involves binge drinking more often than in any of the other countries surveyed, to the extent that binge drinking is now 'the norm' for Irish men and occurs in about one-third of drinking occasions for women. Many Irish people exceed their recommended weekly intake on a Friday or Saturday night alone. Since binge drinkers might only drink once a week, they may not see their habit as a problem, but the habit of binge drinking actually exacerbates the problem. On the continent, alcohol is generally taken slowly and often accompanied by food. In Ireland and the UK, however, pub culture has people propped up at the bar for hours on end, shocking their organs with a week's worth of alcohol in one night. As a result of this high alcohol consumption, there are a significant number of people with alcohol dependency problems such as alcoholism, depression and other alcohol-related illness, according to the report.

A survey of 10 GP surgeries throughout the country involving 2,290 patients found that 68% of patients were low risk, while 13% were teetotal or in recovery from alcohol addiction. However 16% were in the hazardous category, while a further 3% were in the harmful/dependent category. This means that around one in five patients surveyed had a problem with alcohol.

Government initiatives to curb alcohol abuse

Alcohol abuse is an issue that the Irish Government has attempted to tackle through its national awareness campaign - 'Think before you drink â€“ less is more'. The Government has also recently introduced strict new provisions for pubs, including a ban on 'happy hour' promotions and strict fines for those who sell alcohol to people who are already drunk. Taking into account the results of the European survey, which compared Ireland's drinking habits with six other countries, including Britain and Germany, the new Government provisions were well overdue. Irish people now drink 12.1 litres of pure alcohol each year, which is almost twice the level reported in most of the six countries surveyed, the only exception being Britain, with nine litres.

The Irish Government's Strategic Task Force on Alcohol has made a number of recommendations to deal with what is something of a national crisis. It argued for more regulations on the availability of alcohol, better drink-driving countermeasures, increased taxation, restricting alcohol promotions, better community action, education and promoting alcohol free activities. Some of these measures are more effective than others but if they are all applied then the impact should be significant.

Euromonitor International's new "Consumer Lifestyles in Ireland" report analyses national habits and lifestyle choices, allowing you to understand factors that influence consumer spending. It includes detailed coverage of: population, urban development, home ownership, household profiles, labour, income, consumer and family expenditure, health, education, eating habits, drinking habits, shopping habits, personal grooming, clothing, leisure habits, savings and investments, media, communication, transport and travel and tourism.