

What do people with experience of alcohol dependence think about alcohol pricing policy?

AUTHORS

Lauren McMillan (1) Audrey Belo (1),
Laura Fenton (2), Allison Ford (1) &
John Holmes (2)

AFFILIATIONS

(1) University of Stirling
(2) University of Sheffield



INTRODUCTION

Although alcohol pricing policies such as minimum unit pricing (MUP) and tax increases are effective in reducing alcohol-related harms (1), concerns remain about their effects on people experiencing alcohol dependence.

AIMS

To explore the views and experiences of people with alcohol dependence in relation to MUP implemented in Scotland in 2018 and UK-wide alcohol tax reforms introduced in 2023.

METHODS

We recruited 22 people in recent or active dependence from non-NHS alcohol services in England and Scotland. Interviews explored their experiences of increasing alcohol prices, what they thought about MUP and changes to alcohol taxes in the UK, as well as their wider views on alcohol policy. Data was analysed thematically.

*"I'm not being negative I'm just being real for me. **I wouldn't even look at [the price]. I would pay whatever it cost, regardless, you know. But for some other people, yeh it's good because it'll maybe reduce their intake and stuff. But for me, being in that addiction, I wouldn't care less...**"*
- Scottish participant

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, participants held nuanced views on pricing policies:

- Most did not see them as beneficial as increasing alcohol prices exacerbated existing financial issues and cost was not a motivating factor in seeking treatment or recovery.
- Some saw population benefits or reflected on how it may have benefitted them in the past.
- A handful would support policies more if money generated was reinvested in alcohol treatment and recovery.
- Participants supported a variety of other policy measures including restrictions on alcohol advertising and availability, reducing visibility in shops, and more education and awareness on alcohol harms.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The views of people with alcohol dependence suggest policymakers should consider the following points for alcohol policy:

1. Consider financial impacts of pricing policy
2. Invest tax revenues in treatment and recovery
3. Strengthen restrictions on alcohol advertising
4. Regulate home delivery services
5. Reduce retail visibility of alcohol
6. Improve public awareness and health education

