

The economic burden of alcohol in Belgium: Incremental healthcare costs and lost productivity

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BACKGROUND

In Belgium, 77% of the population over the age of 15 regularly consume alcohol. Alcohol is known to be associated with a high disease burden, resulting in economic consequences.

AIM

To provide a contemporary overview of the direct medical and indirect costs attributable to alcohol in Belgium.

METHODS

Data from the Belgian Health Interview Survey (2018) was combined with health insurance data. Healthcare costs were calculated on individuals' alcohol use patterns while cost of absenteeism was calculated by multiplying the number of absence days by the national average wage cost per day in Belgium. Univariate and multivariable regression analysis with negative binomial distribution and log link were performed to evaluate the average healthcare costs and indirect costs in relation to alcohol use.

	Abstainer	Current –hazardous ^o	Current – non-hazardous ^o	Former
Total, (N)	N= 1,286	N= 341	N= 5,059	N= 516
Age, mean (SD)*	49.5 (20.7)	52.1 (16.6)	50.4 (18.2)	57.0 (17.9)
Gender, % (n)*				
Men	32.3% (415)	46.6% (159)	51.3% (2596)	45.9% (237)
Women	67.7% (871)	53.4% (182)	48.7% (2463)	54.1% (279)
Education level, % (n)*				
No diploma	13.3% (171)	4.40% (15)	3.89% (197)	10.7% (55)
Lower secondary	19.9% (256)	7.33% (25)	10.2% (517)	21.7% (112)
Higher secondary	34.7% (446)	25.5% (87)	29.1% (1472)	37.6% (194)
Higher education	29.9% (385)	61.3% (209)	55.2% (2795)	28.5% (147)
Preferential Reimbursement*				
No	63.6% (818)	86.2% (294)	88.5% (4476)	65.7% (339)
Yes	36.1% (464)	13.8% (47)	11.4% (575)	34.3% (177)

*P<0.05, based on t-test or chi-square test, ^o20g/day ethanol for women and >40g/day ethanol for men

Direct costs	RR	Standard error	P-value	95% CI	Incremental cost ^o
No alcohol (reference)	1	—	—	—	—
Current - hazardous	0.81	0.12	0.06	0.64-1.01	-511.28
Current – non-hazardous	0.81	0.07	0.002	0.71-0.93	-467.75
Former drinkers	1.25	0.09	0.02	1.04-1.49	888.46

^oPer individual, per year

Indirect costs	RR	Standard error	P-value	95% CI	Incremental cost ^o
No alcohol (reference)	1	—	—	—	—
Current - hazardous	1.01	0.33	0.97	0.53-1.94	-4.68
Current – non hazardous	0.80	0.20	0.24	0.54-1.17	-876.57
Former drinkers	1.55	0.29	0.13	0.88-2.74	2723.10

^oPer individual, per year