

ALCOHOL USE AND GAPS IN ITS EXISTING REGULATORY PROVISIONS IN INDIA: A REVIEW

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Introduction

Alcohol consumption in India is still lower than many other countries in the world. However, it has risen tremendously over the past few years, which is cause for concern.¹

The major factors associated with increased alcohol consumption in India are:

- Easy availability;
- Liberalized social values;
- Aggressive marketing strategies employed by the alcohol industry;
- Short-sighted economic benefit perspective of governments; and
- A lack of evidence based research in this area.^{2,3}

Methods

This paper reviewed literature from academic and organizational papers and reports available online.

PubMed and Google Scholar were employed to access relevant online data, using keywords and their combinations, to maximize support and gain evidence for the study.

Results

- It is difficult to estimate the amount of actual alcohol consumption in India because a large part of the consumption comprises of undocumented alcohol.^{1,4,5}
- The main factors contributing to undocumented alcohol are home-brewed/locally prepared alcohol, and large scale smuggling of alcohol across state borders within the country.¹
- An estimated 32% of Indians consume alcohol, out of which 4-13% are daily consumers.¹
- More alcohol use has been reported in educationally deprived populations (42.8% men and 4.3% women with no education versus 24.8% men and 0.6% of women with the highest level education).⁶
- Mean age of initiation of alcohol use has gone down from 28 years during the 1980s to 17 years in 2007.⁷
- Regarding alcohol regulation, each state and union territory has full control over its alcohol legislation and state excise rates, as well as organizing production, distribution, and sale of alcohol.⁸
- There is a lack of national policy for alcohol control, and the goal of state governments is to maximize revenue generation from alcohol sales, not to effectively implement existing alcohol control policies.⁸

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Identification of key factors directly and/or indirectly affecting alcohol use in India through evidence based research is necessary.⁹
- Introduction of a government monopoly for the retail and/or wholesale alcohol market may help to limit the harms attributable to alcohol use⁹, for example adapting the Swedish System Bolaget to the Indian context.¹⁰
- A ban on all direct/indirect alcohol marketing may help to reduce the number of people initiating alcohol use, for example adapting the French alcohol and tobacco policy law, La Loi Évin, to the Indian context.¹¹
- Raising prices and taxes on alcohol is one of the most effective interventions to reduce alcohol consumption. Thaihealth is a unique example of where additional surcharge taxes on alcohol and tobacco are utilized to promote and support public health activities in Thailand.¹¹ This model could be adapted to the Indian context.
- Introduction of measures to reduce the public health impact of illicit alcohol and its negative impact on taxation policies should be sought. For example, utilising good quality control measures, illustrating tax stamps and pictorial health warnings on alcohol products.^{9,11}
- Establishment of an institutional framework both at national and state level, together with well laid down roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders is necessary.⁹
- Formulation of an effective, comprehensive, national alcohol control policy is essential!⁹



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