Abstract

Alcohol abuse has numerous adverse health and social consequences. The consumer response to changes in alcohol affordability is an important issue on alcohol policy debates. Studies from many countries have shown an inverse relationship between alcohol prices and alcohol consumption in the population. There are, however, suggestions that increasing the price of alcohol by rising taxes may have limited effect on alcohol-related problems, associated with long-term heavy drinking. The aim of the present study was to evaluate the relationship between alcohol affordability and alcohol-related mortality rates in post-Soviet Belarus. For this purpose trends in alcohol-related mortality rates (mortality from liver cirrhosis, pancreatitis, alcoholism and alcohol psychoses) and affordability of vodka between 1990 and 2010 were compared. The time series analysis revealed that 1% increase in vodka affordability is associated with an increase in liver cirrhosis mortality of 0.77%, an increase in pancreatitis mortality of 0.53%, an increase in mortality from alcoholism and alcohol psychoses of 0.70%. The major conclusion emerging from this study is that affordability of alcohol is one of the most important predictors of alcohol-related problems in a population. These findings provide additional evidence that decreasing in affordability of alcohol is an effective strategy for reducing alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm.

Keywords

Alcohol, affordability, alcohol-related mortality, Belarus.