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► [Alcohol pricing, consumption and criminal harm: a rapid evidence assessment of the published research literature.](#)

**Booth A., Meier P., Shapland J. et al.
University of Sheffield, 2010.**

Though real-world evidence was scarce, and especially so for the UK, this review commissioned by the UK Home Office concluded that higher alcohol taxes or prices are associated with decreased crime. The findings informed a later Home Office assessment of the likely impact of a rise in the price of alcohol in Britain.

Original abstract

Introduction and aims

This rapid evidence assessment of the published research literature provides a specific Home Office focus after previous independent reviews of the effects of pricing and taxation on alcohol consumption and alcohol-associated harms. It looks specifically at the effects on crime-related outcomes excluding drink-driving offences. The assessment covers:

- primary [studies](#) examining a direct association between alcohol pricing/taxation and crime-related outcomes;
- review-level [evidence](#) for associations between pricing and consumption and between consumption and crime;
- new primary research examining the association between pricing and consumption.

The latter two areas provided an update to a [recent review](#).

This report examines the first of the three areas, and attempts to answer the following research question:

To what extent does the research evidence support a direct association between the price of alcohol and crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour?

Methodology

A rapid evidence assessment is a tool in the systematic review methods family and is based on comprehensive electronic searches of appropriate databases, internet sources and follow-up of cited references. To complete such assessments in a short time frame, researchers make some concessions in comparison with a full systematic review. Exhaustive hand searching of journals and textbooks is not undertaken, and searching of 'grey' literature is necessarily curtailed. This shortened timeframe is essential for policymakers to meet deadlines, but increases the risk of publication bias.

Key findings

Alcohol tax/price *increases*

Increases in alcohol tax/price were associated with reductions in overall crime, violent crime, sexual assault and criminal damage/property offences. Evidence for the effect of tax/price increases on homicide and domestic violence was inconclusive and there was conflicting evidence regarding tax/price increases being associated with a lower incidence of robbery. No evidence was found on the association between alcohol tax/price increases and anti-social behaviour.

Alcohol tax/price *decreases*

The evidence base for alcohol tax/price decreases and their impact on crime is smaller than that for tax/price increases. The evaluation evidence is dominated by Scandinavian studies on recent tax reductions, which concluded that while tax reductions had led to increases in overall crime levels, they had not led to increases in violent crime, domestic violence or robbery, and had led to a reduction in public order offences. In non-Scandinavian and modelling studies, decreases in tax/price were associated with an increase in overall crime, violent crime, and drunk and disorderly behaviour. Evidence for the effect of tax/price reductions on homicide was inconclusive. No evidence was found for an association between alcohol tax/price reductions and anti-social behaviour.

Specifically:

Overall crime Taxation decreases were associated with increased overall crime rates, and taxation increases with decreased rates of crime.

Violent crime While taxation increases in Australia and the US led to reductions in violent crime, studies on taxation decreases in Scandinavia found no significant effects on violent crime. Several correlational studies, including studies from the UK, supported an association of cheaper alcohol with higher violent crime rates. With two exceptions, modelling studies estimate that higher prices were associated with reductions in violent crime.

Sexual assault Most studies are based on modelling, which consistently links higher alcohol prices to lower rates of sexual violence. This finding was supported by one study that analysed the effects of actual price variations.

Homicide Evidence on whether murder rates are responsive to alcohol price changes was inconclusive.

Domestic violence Evidence on whether domestic violence rates are responsive to alcohol price changes was inconclusive.

Drunk and disorderly behaviour Only two studies covered this offence with both evaluating the same large tax reduction. Both studies found that the tax reduction was associated with increases in drunk and disorderly behaviour. Overall the evidence base

was not strong enough to arrive at firm conclusions.

Public order offences Only one study was identified, which found that a large tax decrease was associated with a decrease in public order offences.

Criminal damage The evidence was mainly from several modelling studies that project that tax and price increases would reduce criminal damage offences. Only one older observational study was located, with findings consistent with the modelling studies. The evidence base was weaker than for overall and violent crime.

Robbery The evidence on whether robbery rates were responsive to alcohol price changes was inconclusive.

Anti-social behaviour There was no evidence on whether rates of anti-social behaviour were responsive to alcohol price changes.

Specific policies A large majority of modelling studies from both the UK and internationally estimated that increased alcohol taxes, minimum alcohol prices or restrictions on discounting would be associated with a reduction in alcohol-related crime. The evaluation evidence relates only to taxation or naturally occurring price changes.

Conclusions and points for consideration

Evidence from this review is consistent with previous forecasts that levels of crime are reduced following tax/price increases. Significantly, more recent evidence from Scandinavia examined tax/price reductions. This review concluded that it was not possible to demonstrate a symmetrical effect between the effects of price increases and corresponding effects from price reductions for specific crime-related outcomes. On the whole, US evidence is more supportive of links between alcohol price and crime than the more variable Scandinavian evidence base. The role of policy and cultural contexts in explaining inconsistent effects remains unclear. Few evaluations of actual price or tax changes in the UK have been carried out but several modelling studies are specific to England and Scotland. UK evaluation studies showed significant associations between lower alcohol prices and higher rates of hospital admissions for violence-related injuries.

Most studies support an association between higher alcohol taxation/pricing and decreased crime. Available evidence typically focuses on average patterns of consumption and is unable to clarify whether specific pricing policies are differentially related to patterns of drinking.



This is one of the reports which informed a [UK Home Office assessment](#) published in January 2011 of the likely impact of a rise in the price of alcohol in Britain.

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[Economic impacts of alcohol pricing policy options in the UK](#) ABSTRACT 2011

[Effects of alcohol tax and price policies on morbidity and mortality: a systematic review](#) REVIEW 2010

[Model-based appraisal of alcohol minimum pricing and off-licensed trade discount bans in Scotland](#) STUDY 2009

[Alcohol misuse: tackling the UK epidemic](#) REVIEW 2008

[Purchasing patterns for low price off sales alcohol: evidence from the Expenditure and Food Survey](#) ABSTRACT 2010

[Alcohol licensing, price and taxation](#) HOT TOPIC 2010

[The effectiveness of tax policy interventions for reducing excessive alcohol consumption and related harms](#) REVIEW 2010