

Alcohol-related social problems

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Alcohol-related problems can be divided into two groups: problems caused by individual occasions of drinking and those due to prolonged consumption. Typical examples of problems caused by occasional and often rather heavy drinking include alcohol poisoning and various accidents linked with intoxication, such as drowning, or injuring oneself by falling. Alcohol-related violence like fights and batterings, including domestic violence, is also commonplace. Some of the best known consequences of prolonged, excessive consumption of alcohol include hepatic cirrhosis, alcoholism and diseases of the pancreas.

Alcohol-related problems have increased considerably in Finland after the Second World War. During the periods of increase in alcohol consumption, in the late 1960's, early 1970's and during the latter half of the 1980's, the increase in ill-effects was particularly rapid, as it was again in the latter half of the 1990's and following the cut in alcohol tax in 2004. After the mid-1970's the consumption and the ill-effects of alcohol remained constant for approximately 10 years. A decrease in alcohol consumption in the beginning of the 1990's was accompanied by a decrease in alcohol-related problems. The development of alcohol-related problems has, in other words, followed the development of alcohol consumption.

In Finland, the problems related to occasional drinking – social problems and trouble with law and order – have traditionally been more frequent. When alcohol consumption has been on the increase, however, the health hazards caused by prolonged high-scale consumption increased more rapidly than alcohol-related social conflicts. Deaths due to alcohol-related liver disease increased very sharply following the cut in alcohol tax in 2004. Still, alcohol-related social problems continue to be a problematic issue in Finland.

International studies constantly show that we have more social problems related to heavy, individual occasions of drinking than most other countries. The social ill-effects of alcohol are significant also because they do not concern only the so-called problem drinkers. Even those who consume alcohol very seldom are exposed to accidents, relationship problems and violence, if the amount of alcohol consumed on a single occasion is high. The hazards caused by heavy long-term drinking are certainly not limited to health problems. Heavy long-term drinking also affects the drinker's family life and causes problems in interpersonal relationships and at work, as well as financial problems.

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