

Impact of Minimum Unit Pricing on people with experience of homelessness: qualitative study



Carol Emslie: Lead substance use, Glasgow Caledonian University

Lawrie Elliott, Elena Dimova, Martin Whiteford, Rosaleen O'Brien (GCU)

Sarah Johnsen (Heriot-Watt University, Scotland)

Robert Rush (Independent Consultant, Scotland)

Iain Smith (NHS Forth Valley, Scotland)

Tim Stockwell (University of Victoria, Canada)

Anne Whittaker (University of Stirling, Scotland)

Partners: Homeless Network Scotland



University for the Common Good



- Scotland 2018: minimum unit price (MUP) set at 50 pence
- Targets cheapest, strongest drinks consumed mainly by the heaviest drinkers

Why focus on people with experience of homelessness?

- Disproportionately affected: limited income & consumption of strong, cheap alcohol
- Concern about unintended consequences of this policy (eg substitute non-beverage alcohol, switch to other substances, crime)



Qualitative interviews with 46 people in Glasgow

(face-to-face & by phone via gatekeepers)

Thematic analysis

- 30 men and 16 women
- Aged 21-73 years
- Broad definition of homelessness (eg rough sleeping, temporary or insecure accommodation - hostels, sofa surfing)
- AUDIT C: Possible dependence (n=36); Increasing risk (n=3); Low risk (n=7)

1) High awareness of MUP (particularly increase in cost of cider) but not seen as particularly salient

“No we don’t discuss it at all (in the hostel). That’s not a conversation people have”

2) Range of impacts on the quantity and type of alcohol consumed

No impact of MUP

“Cause it was only really wine that I would buy, so it didn’t really impact on me”

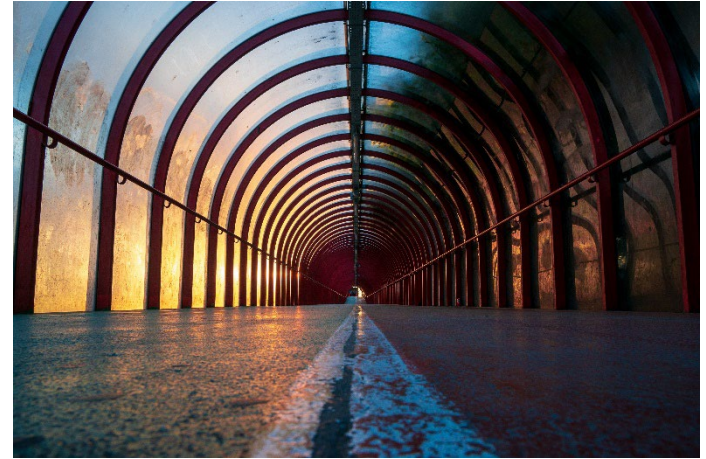


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Reduced drinking (in line with policy intentions)

“I’ve had a major problem with alcohol.. But I’m managing to kick it because of the increase in price.. With the medication I’m on, that makes me feel sick anyway. I’ve got 4 kids – I want them to know who I am without that side of the drink”. So I have cut down”

Switching drink (away from cider)

“I went onto the vodka rather than getting cider ‘cause I was basically budgeting”

“I don’t know if it affected the amount of alcohol I’d take, but it definitely affected what type of alcohol I was taking.”

3) Relatively few unintended consequences

Perception that MUP would push **OTHERS** to ‘turn to drugs’

- .. but very few narratives where participants talked about MUP changing their OWN drug use
- No clear cut relationship between increase in price of alcohol & increase use of illicit drugs
- None of our respondents made any reference to drinking non-beverage alcohol

Begging

“You’ll sit and beg for an extra hour or two to make that extra money (after MUP)”

“So it really affected me, at the time, ‘cause I was [out] begging for money, and you’ve got £2 and you think, ‘yaas, that’s two cans.’ And then you remember, ‘oh no, it’s one can.’”

Conclusions

MUP worked as intended for some people with experience of homelessness; others however were unaffected, and a minority experienced unintended consequences (begging).

Policy makers should consider marginalised groups when implementing population level policies. Need for investment in secure housing, support services & evaluation of harm reduction initiatives.

Publications & contact

Dimova, E.D et al 2023. **Alcohol minimum unit pricing and people experiencing homelessness: A qualitative study of stakeholders' perspectives and experiences.** *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 42(1), pp.81-93.

Emslie, C. et al 2023. **The impact of alcohol minimum unit pricing on people with experience of homelessness: qualitative study.** *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 118, p.104095.

Carol.Emslie@gcu.ac.uk
@SubMisuseGcu

