



LESS ALCOHOL HEALTH PROMOTION WEBINAR SERIES

UNRECORDED ALCOHOL: WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELL US?

2 July 2021 – 14:00–15:30 CET

Why is this webinar series needed?

It is estimated that about 25% of worldwide alcohol consumption is unrecorded, i.e. not registered because usually produced, distributed or sold outside formal channels¹ (1,2). In countries of the former Soviet Union, surrogate alcohol, artisanal spirits and counterfeit industrially produced alcoholic beverages are prevalent; and their consumption is rooted in the area's history (3,4). Cultural norms and traditions of the Eastern and sub-Saharan Africa countries explained the consumption of home-brew alcohol and artisanal distilled beverages (5,6). In some African countries, home production of alcoholic beverages represents the sole source of income for the households, essential to the economic independence and empowerment for women (7). In Northern Peru, traditional home-brew beverages that

sometimes contain alcohol are provided by mothers to children as part of the local culture (8). Recent trends suggest that homemade distilling in some countries is slowly transitioning to mass production. Some of the artisanal spirits producers in East Africa have grown into enterprises. In rural China, baijiu (home-distilled spirit) is now produced in small-factory distillers operating in nearly every town (9). In India, it is estimated that about 50% of the alcohol consumed is illicitly made, including home-brew liquor (10). In Finland, Sweden and other northern European countries, a large proportion of unrecorded alcohol is shipped cross-borders (11).

Unrecorded alcohol may contain toxic ingredients, e.g. methanol, that could lead to poisoning and even death (12). Recent evidence suggests that most of the harm derived from unrecorded alcohol is caused by

¹ Unrecorded alcohol includes alcoholic beverages homemade; small-scale artisanal production, illegally produced, illicitly sold, counterfeit (brand fraud), illicitly transported, i.e. smuggling, cross-border shopping; as well as the consumption of surrogate of alcohol such as cologne, mouthwash, medicinal compounds, rubbing alcohol.

³ Ethanol drunk in large quantities.

hazardous drinking patterns and not by its quality. The higher affordability of unrecorded alcohol increases inequalities because it is often drunk by people of low socioeconomic status and heavy drinkers, accelerating the harms attributable to alcohol consumption that they might already experience. Informal production of alcohol is difficult to regulate, curtailing the impact of cost-effective alcohol control interventions (13). The lack of standardization and quality control makes it difficult to measure and estimate the consumption of unrecorded alcohol (14). Unrecorded alcohol also impacts the economies since taxes cannot be collected.

Addressing the phenomenon of unrecorded alcohol involves sectors such as health, finance, economic development and agriculture. Policies options to tackle unrecorded alcohol depend on how prevalent and normalized its consumption is in each country.

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What do we aim to achieve?

This webinar seeks to shed light on the dimensions of the unrecorded alcohol phenomenon and showcase country practices, their challenges and possible policy responses.

The event is co-organized by the European Office for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases at the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe and the Less Alcohol Unit of the Department of Health Promotion at the World Health Organization headquarters.

What should participate?

Government officials, civil society associations, researchers, local authorities, consumer associations, general public.

References

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