

Harm Reduction Approach to Alcohol Use



VACEK, J., VONDRÁČKOVÁ, P.

Department of Addictology, 1st Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague and General University Hospital in Prague, Czech Republic

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SUMMARY: According to the World Health Organisation, in 2003-2005 Europe was the region with the highest level of alcohol consumption in the world, and the Czech Republic ranked second (with 16.5 litres per person per year). With its negative impact on individuals and society, alcohol belongs among the most harmful psychoactive substances. Its high level of potential for harm, combined with its widespread use, makes the application of pragmatic harm reduction and risk reduction (programmes and interventions to minimise risk and damage) approaches to alcohol most appropriate. The reduction of the risks and harm associated with alcohol use has also been a priority of the WHO and the European Union in recent years. The article presents an overview of these interventions systematised according to levels of functioning. At the structural level, interventions involving the licensing of the production and distribution of alcohol, the regulation of prices by means of special taxes, access control using sales restrictions (in terms of age, place, and time), the regulation of marketing and promotion, and situational restrictions on consumption are discussed. At the community level, the text highlights intervention involving restrictions on the sale or consumption of alcohol, the local monitoring of compliance with laws and regulations, support for, and the provision of, a safer environment for alcohol consumption, and the promotion of a safe return home. At the individual level, harm reduction focuses on safe use on the part of unproblematic drinkers and on controlled drinking among individuals engaging in harmful alcohol use. In terms of cost-effectiveness, experts especially recommend controlling the production and taxation of alcohol, restricting availability as regards age, place, and consumption situations, checking compliance with such measures, and supporting brief interventions.

KEY WORDS: HARM REDUCTION PROGRAMMES – DRUG POLICY – PUBLIC HEALTH – COST-EFFECTIVENESS

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Address for correspondence: Jaroslav Vacek / vacek@adiktologie.cz / Department of Addictology, 1st Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague and General University Hospital in Prague, Apolinářská 4, 128 00 Prague 2, Czech Republic