

# Britain targets binge-drinking with minimum alcohol price

March 23 2012

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The British government will introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol in England and Wales to tackle their infamous binge-drinking culture, Prime Minister David Cameron announced on Friday.

Cameron said a minimum price of around 40 pence (\$0.60, 0.50 euros) per 10-millilitre unit of alcohol would help stop the "scourge of violence" caused by rowdy revellers in town centres and would cut alcohol-related deaths.

"Binge drinking isn't some fringe issue, it accounts for half of all alcohol consumed in this country," said Cameron.

"The crime and violence it causes drains resources in our hospitals, generates mayhem on our streets and spreads fear in our communities."

The government, which also plans to ban supermarket multi-buy discounts and to introduce a "late-night levy" forcing pubs and nightclubs to contribute to policing costs, intends to consult on the proposals this summer.

Scotland is also considering introducing minimum alcohol pricing.

Excessive alcohol consumption costs Britain's National Health Service (NHS) around £2.7 billion (\$4.3 billion, 3.2 billion euros) a year, while the interior ministry estimates wider societal costs of around £21 billion a year.

"Just under half of all violent crime is connected to alcohol, and drunken brawls have made many town centres no go areas for law-abiding citizens," interior minister Theresa May told parliament.

"We need to deal with the dangerous drinkers, crack down on irresponsible businesses, and stem the tide of cheap alcohol," she added.

The government hopes a minimum price would discourage Britons from drinking cheap, shop-bought alcohol at home before heading out for the evening.

The drinks most affected would be strong cut-price ciders and super-strength lagers. A can of cider, containing four units of alcohol, equivalent to 40 millilitres, currently costs as little as 87 pence.

Retailers and drinks companies have strongly opposed the proposal, saying it would punish people who enjoy alcohol responsibly while failing to tackle binge drinking.

"It's simplistic to imagine a minimum price is some sort of silver bullet solution to irresponsible drinking," said Andrew Opie, food director of the British Retail Consortium.

Cameron admitted the minimum pricing would not be "universally popular" but insisted it would not hurt pubs and nightclubs, whose drinks are already more expensive than the suggested minimum price per unit.

"In fact, pubs may benefit by making the cheap alternatives in supermarkets more expensive," he said.

A 2010 study of the European Union's 27 nations by pollsters Eurobarometer found that while the British are not the most regular drinkers, they drink the most in one sitting.

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Citation: Britain targets binge-drinking with minimum alcohol price (2012, March 23) retrieved 9 May 2023 from

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