

WHO EXPERT COMMITTEE ON PROBLEMS RELATED TO ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Second Report

The disease burden attributable to alcohol consumption is significant and, in many countries, public health problems caused by harmful use of alcohol represent a substantial health, social and economic burden. Reduction of the alcohol-attributable burden is becoming a priority area for international public health. Alcohol-related harm can be reduced through the implementation of proven alcohol strategies, including at a global level.

This report of a WHO Expert Committee reviews the health and social consequences of alcohol consumption and disease burden attributable to alcohol in the context of alcohol-related harm and recent trends in alcohol consumption worldwide. Based on the reviews of available evidence, including the latest data on the contribution of alcohol consumption to the global disease burden, the Committee makes several recommendations emphasizing WHO's role in coordinating a global response, and the need for global action to reduce alcohol-related harm through effective mechanisms of international action and country support.

The Committee recommends a range of strategies and policy options that have a sound evidence base and global relevance for reducing alcohol-related harm, emphasizing that their adaptation and implementation at the national and sub-national levels should take into account specific cultural and legal contexts and the local configuration of alcohol problems. The Committee also recommends that WHO should support governments, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, in developing, implementing and evaluating national and sub-national evidence-based policies, action plans and programmes. The Committee's conclusions and recommendations have significant implications for future developments in this area.

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This report contains the collective views of an international group of experts, and does not necessarily represent the decisions or the stated policy of the World Health Organization

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WHO Expert Committee on Problems Related to Alcohol Consumption

Geneva, 10–13 October 2006

Members

Professor D. Ofori-Adjei, Director, Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

Professor S. Casswell, Director, Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand

Professor C. Drummond, Professor of Addiction Psychiatry and Head of Section of Addictive Behaviour, Division of Mental Health, St George's University of London, London, England

Professor Wei Hao, Professor of Psychiatry, Director of WHO Collaborating Centre for Psychosocial Factor, Drug Abuse and Health, Mental Health Institute, Second Xiangya Hospital, Central South University, Changsha, China

Professor M.E. Medina-Mora, Epidemiological and Psychosocial Research, National Institute of Psychiatry Ramón de la Fuente, Mexico City, Mexico

Dr S. Ranganathan, Honorary Secretary, T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation, Chennai, India

Dr E.M. Razaghi, Director, Iranian National Center for Addiction Studies, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Professor R. Room, University of Melbourne and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Fitzroy, Australia (*Rapporteur*)

Dr I. Rossow, Norwegian Institute for Alcohol and Drug Research, Oslo, Norway

Professor D.S. Samarasinghe, Associate Professor of Psychological Medicine, Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka (*Vice-Chairman*)

Professor C. Weisner, Department of Psychiatry and Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute, University of California, San Francisco, CA, USA (*Chairman*)

Representatives of other organizations¹

International Labour Organization

Ms M. Deluca, Specialist, Workplace Health Promotion, SafeWork, Geneva, Switzerland

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

Dr A. Chatterjee, Senior Adviser, Prevention and Public Policy, Geneva, Switzerland

¹ Unable to attend: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy; World Bank, Washington, DC, USA; World Psychiatric Association, Geneva, Switzerland.

Secretariat

- Dr T. Agossou, Regional Adviser for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO Regional Office for Africa, Brazzaville, Congo
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- Mr D. Rekve, Technical Officer, Management of Substance Abuse, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO, Geneva, Switzerland
- Dr Benedetto Saraceno, Director, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO, Geneva, Switzerland
- Dr E. Streel, Avenida J. Nyerere, Maputo, Mozambique (*Temporary Adviser*)
- Dr T. Yasamy, Regional Adviser, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo, Egypt

1. Introduction

A World Health Organization (WHO) Expert Committee on Problems Related to Alcohol Consumption met in Geneva from 10 to 13 October 2006.

The meeting was opened by Dr B. Saraceno, Director, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland, who noted that, since the adoption in 2005 by the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly of resolution WHA58.26 on “Public health problems caused by harmful use of alcohol”, there had been intense activity at the global and regional levels in WHO. In the WHO European Region, the Framework for alcohol policy, building on the European Alcohol Action Plan 2000–2005, had been endorsed and adopted at the Regional Committee in September 2005; in the WHO Region of the Americas the first Pan American Conference on Alcohol Public Policies had been held in Brasília, in November 2005; in the WHO African Region, a WHO Technical Consultation on the Public Health Problems caused by harmful use of alcohol in the African Region had taken place in May 2006; in the WHO South-East Asia Region, a resolution on alcohol consumption control policy options had been adopted by the Regional Committee in August 2006; in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, the Regional Committee had passed a resolution on the public health problems of alcohol consumption in September 2006; and in the WHO Western Pacific Region, a resolution had been passed in September 2006, endorsing the regional strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm. At the global level, the WHO Secretariat conducted several technical expert meetings and had started an intensive consultative process with main stakeholders through organizing several meetings and consultations with civil society groups, scientists and representatives of the industry, trade and agricultural sector. Dr Saraceno emphasized that the Committee's recommendations would be used by the WHO Secretariat in the process of developing further activities to reduce health and social problems attributable to alcohol consumption.

In her welcoming address on behalf of the Director General of WHO

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