



This paper arises from the project Standardizing Measurement of Alcohol Related Troubles (SMART) which has received funding from the European Union, in the framework of the Public Health Programme Agreement Number: 2007308

Jacek Moskalewicz, Łukasz Wieczorek, Thomas Karlsson and Esa Österberg

SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR ALCOHOL POLICY. LITERATURE REVIEW

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Title: Social support for alcohol policy. Literature review.

J. Moskalewicz, Ł. Wiczorek, T. Karlsson, & E. Österberg

Jacek Moskalewicz – Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, Sobieskiego 9, 02-957 Warsaw,
Poland

Łukasz Wiczorek – Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, Sobieskiego 9, 02-957 Warsaw,
Poland

Thomas Karlsson – National Institute for Health and Welfare, Mannerheimintie 166, P.O. Box 30,
FI-00271 Helsinki, Finland

Esa Österberg – National Institute for Health and Welfare, Mannerheimintie 166, P.O. Box 30, FI-
00271 Helsinki, Finland

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Abstract.

Aims: The aim of this paper is to review existing research literature on public support for different alcohol policy measures, its variation in time, geographical area and population with regard to age, sex and drinking habits. A broad ideological, political, economic and cultural context will be taken under consideration.

Methods: Articles for the review were collected by SCOPUS browser which is a database of abstracts and number of citations. Articles were also searched by MEDLINE browser but the results overlapped with the results obtained by SCOPUS. In our search we used combinations of following words 1) *“policy support” and “alcohol”*; 2) *“public opinion” and “alcohol policy”*; and also 3) *“policy support” and “alcohol policy”*. In addition to a systematic review, a number of papers were included through opportunistic methods such as searching in bibliographies and reference lists of relevant publications.

Conclusions: Numerous European and North American studies have dealt with trends as regards support for restrictive alcohol policies. They have revealed both declining as well as increasing support for different alcohol control measures. These trends tend to fluctuate for instance because of changes in a level of alcohol control, alcohol consumption and related harm and because of general cultural and societal changes, including mutual relationship between the State, market and civic society.

Key words: Alcohol, Review, Adults / General population, Alcohol Policy, Availability, Prices

Preferred reviewers: Norman Giesbrecht, Sturla Nordlund

Editor: Betsy Thom

Introduction.

There is substantial research evidence that alcohol control measures are the most efficient and cost-effective tools of alcohol policy aiming at diminishing overall alcohol consumption and reducing prevalence of alcohol related problems (Anderson et al., 2009a; Babor et al., 2010). These measures include high taxes on alcoholic beverages, low physical availability through limited number of alcohol outlets and restrictions on hours and days of alcohol sales. In addition, restrictions on alcohol advertising seem to delay onset of drinking and reduce volume consumed by adolescent drinkers (Anderson et al., 2009b; Casswell & Zhang, 1998; Ellickson et al., 2005). In result, a concept of evidence-based policy has developed and been recommended in a number of scientific books and policy documents (Babor et al., 2003; 2010; Edwards et al., 1994).

Often alcohol control measures are recommended as purely technical solutions which once introduced ameliorate our lives thanks to less drinking and less harm associated with drinking. Reluctance of national governments to introduce these measures are attributed to economic interests of private alcohol sector on the one hand, and budget revenues on the other. Short-term economic interests seem to prevail over public health interests and over long-term economic gains. Level of public support is considered of secondary importance in this crucial battle between economic and public health interests. It is believed that introduction of control measures will be followed by an increased public support than the other way round. Thus priority should be given to convince politicians as much as policy-makers to initiate a change (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006).

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If considered at all, public support is seen in terms of a number of votes which can be either won or lost in next Parliamentary elections. Rarely, public support is considered in terms of a behaviour of individuals who can either quietly obey imposed restrictions or find ways to overcome them by a great variety of semi-legal or illegal manners. This approach tends to neglect painful experiences of American prohibition of the 1920s (Warburton, 1932) or Soviet anti-alcohol policy in the mid-1980s which were effectively resisted due to a low if any public support. Despite initial gains in public health and order, both these severe anti-alcohol crusades produced a number of unintended side-effects including expansion of black market, organised crime and poisonings with non-beverage alcohol (Shkolnikov & Nemtsov, 1997). Long terms effects were even more harmful as organised crime sustained for decades to come and an idea of alcohol control lost its credibility at all. In result, a high tide of alcohol consumption emerged and lasted for a long time.

The aim of this paper is to review existing research literature on public support for different alcohol policy measures, its variation in time, geographical area and population with regard to age, sex and drinking habits. A broad ideological, political, economic and cultural context will be taken under consideration. In addition, efforts will be made to identify experiences and lessons to be learned as regards the impact of public support on adopting and implementing alcohol policies, including potential side-effects, in particular of unpopular policies.

Details of literature search.

Articles for the review were collected by SCOPUS browser which is a database of abstracts and number of citations. Articles were also searched by MEDLINE browser but the results overlapped

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with the results obtained by SCOPUS. No time restrictions as regards publication year were imposed.

In our search we used combinations of following words 1) “*policy support*” and “*alcohol*”; 2) “*public opinion*” and “*alcohol policy*”; and also 3) “*policy support*” and “*alcohol policy*”. To be selected a paper had to have combination of these words in the title of the article, in the abstract or in the authors key words. Using the first combination of words 19 titles were found, and 32 articles in the second combination -. The third combination of words identified 5 titles which overlapped with the titles found in the previous search. In sum we managed to identify 49 different papers. After careful selection 25 papers remained to be reviewed. In addition, a search in references of selected papers was carried out which helped to identify 33 more papers. Lists of references of these papers were also reviewed. Finally, 49 articles, which met the criteria, were selected but 8 of them were classified as not accessible. One paper was a research report (Anglin et al., 2001a), one was a handbook for educators, counselors and clinicians (DeJong, 2003), four were conference papers (Giesbrecht & Greenfield 1991; Giesbrecht & Farinon, 1991; Greenfield & Kaskutas, 1994; Greenfield et al., 1998) , and two journals we had no access to (Harwood et al., 2004; Lavigne et al., 2008). Six articles treat alcohol policy in general without focusing on their instruments (Alcohol Policy: Globe, 2000; Casswell et al., 1989; Casswell et al., 1993; Klingemann, 1989; Waagenar & Holder, 1995; Saglie, 1996;). Eventually 35 publications were reviewed.

Most of the articles described North American surveys; ten surveys conducted in United States and eight in Canada. Two publications compared Canadian and United States surveys. Remaining

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articles describe a European perspective on alcohol policy. Countries in which the surveys were conducted were: Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, UK (Scotland).

Years when the identified surveys were conducted were divided into three decades to show changes in research interest:

- The late 1970's – only one survey was conducted in Canada.
- The 1980's – four surveys were conducted, three in Europe and one in New Zealand.
- The 1990's – eighteen articles were identified reporting from seven surveys in the United States, one from Canada and three from Europe.
- The 2000's - seventeen articles were identified reporting from sixteen surveys: seven from United States, six from Canada and three from Europe.

Twelve journals published papers that were identified in our search. Six papers were published in British Journal of Addiction/Addiction, five in Journal of Substance Use, four in Journal of Studies on Alcohol, three in Journal of Public Health Policy. Contemporary Drug Problems and Canadian Journal of Public Health published two articles each while remaining five journals published one paper each: Globe, International Alcohol and Drug Problems, Journal of American College Health, Health Policy, Alcohol and Alcoholism, Drug and Alcohol Review, Addictive Behaviors, Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, Scandinavian Political Studies.

In addition to these studies, a dozen or so publications were identified in an opportunistic way, by checking reference lists and conference abstracts. In addition to a handful of peer reviewed articles (Flaherty et al., 1991; Hawks et al., 1993; Jones-Webb et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Paglia &

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Room, 1999; Room et al., 1995) , these findings include conference reports, papers presented at KBS meetings (Hettige., 2003; Hope, 2003), an omnibus survey report, two recent EUROBAROMETER reports as well as a number of book chapters mostly summarising Finnish and Nordic studies on alcohol policy opinions (Cahalan et al., 1976; Holder et al., 1998; Leifman, 2000; Mäkelä, 1987; Sieroslawski, 1992; Room & Paglia, 1999; Special Eurobarometer 331, 2010).

Results.

Majority of studies under review did not focus on a single policy measure but covered a broader range of alcohol policies. For analytical purposes, however, six policy areas could be distinguished:

1. Advertising
2. Public drinking/drunkenness
3. Physical availability
4. Taxation
5. Drunken driving
6. Access to youth

Advertising.

The oldest study, dating back to 1980, is reported from Holland by Garretsen and Knibbe (1985). The study compared Limburg located in the southern part of the Netherlands and Rotterdam. Respondents from Limburg, inhabiting a region neighbouring countries with high alcohol

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consumption like Belgium, Germany and France were a little bit less positive towards restrictive measures. Nevertheless, the percentage of those who were against a ban on advertising was relatively low – about 21 %. Support for the ban expressed over 50 % of inhabitants of Rotterdam and over 40 % in Limburg. Percentage of respondents who had no definite opinion or were indifferent in this regard was quite high ranging from 26.5 % in Rotterdam to 37.7 % in Limburg.

Twenty years later, in an Irish study the opinions seemed to be more crystallised. Two thirds of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with a statement that advertising of alcohol should be restricted on TV and public places, one quarter was against any restrictions and less than ten percent had no opinion (Hope, 2003). Both studies cannot be compared direct as the Irish one did not provide any option for indifferent opinions (neither degree nor disagree). Another difference is in wording as the Dutch survey asked about advertising ban (should be prohibited) while the Irish question was on “restrictions”. Nevertheless, both studies seem to indicate that substantial proportion of Europeans, at least in the past would support some restrictions if not a total ban and clear minority would oppose such restrictions.

In spite of earlier support for general restrictions on advertising, recent EUROBAROMETER surveys on attitudes towards alcohol do not intend to confirm this opinion restricting itself to the question if “alcohol advertising targeting young people should be banned”. On average over three quarters of the inhabitants of EU countries would support such measures and this proportion had not changed between 2006 and 2009 (Special Eurobarometer 331, 2010). A question what percentage of adult EU citizens would be in favour of general ban on alcohol advertising needs to be investigated.

North American studies prevail, however, in this area too. Greenfield et al., (2007) compared the results from surveys conducted in 1989-1994 and 2000. They found out remarkable stabilization among American people throughout the 1990s. The support for ban on alcohol advertising was never lower than 52 % and never higher than 57 %.

Table 1.

Similar comparison made by Wagenaar et al., (2000) indicated certain increase in support for general ban on alcohol advertising in 1997.

Table 2.

Contrary to the US surveys, Giesbrecht and colleagues (2001) found that support for ban on TV alcohol advertising in Canada had been on decline from 50 % in 1989 to 43 % in 1996.

Further comparisons of two surveys conducted in 1989 and 2004 confirmed trend for declining support in major socio-demographic categories: in men from 44.8 % to 33.9 %; among women from 62.3 % to 46.3 %. In 2004 even though the amount of decline was similar across all age groups the relatively lower support was expressed by the younger age groups; among teenagers and young adults it dropped below 30 % while in the older age groups proportion of supporters had not decreased below 40 % (Giesbrecht et al., 2007).

In 2004 the decline was similar across all educational categories with the lowest proportion of supporters among people having completed some collage (Giesbrecht et al., 2007).

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Changes in support for alcohol policy were observed as regards drinking patterns – lifetime abstainers were more likely to support advertising ban (1989 – 72.2 %, 2004 – 62.5%) similarly to former drinkers (1989 – 70.1 %, 2004 – 59.4 %). The biggest discrepancy appeared between light/infrequent drinkers (1989 – 57.9 %, 2004 – 41.9%) and heavy/frequent (1989 – 34.9%, 2004 – 17.3%) (Giesbrecht et al., 2007).

Public drinking/drunkenness.

In their pioneering study in Limburg and Rotterdam, Garretsen and Knibbe (1985) found out that over three quarters of respondents in both cities were in favour of restricting drinking in public places like trains and libraries while 12 % of respondents were against.

A comprehensive study on public drunkenness was carried out in Scotland in 2002. Kara & Hutton (2003) conducted telephone interviews with 1003 respondents. The sample was representative of Scottish adults aged 16 and over, and across the dimensions of age, sex, social classification and population distribution. When asked what concerned them most about public drunkenness, 34% of respondent voiced concerns of violence. Almost two-thirds of 16–17 year olds were particularly concerned about this (61 %), along with over a quarter of 18–24 year olds (29 %), over a third of 25–34 year olds (37 %) and 41 % of 35–44 year olds. Moreover, open-ended responses to this question revealed concerns about under-age drinking and its consequences, with 13 % of the sample making reference to the problems of under-age drinking in relation to public drunkenness. Over one quarter of the respondents (28 %) were unsure as to how public drunkenness could be controlled. Responses to open questions regarding the controlling of public drunkenness included the following: better education needed, ban on drinking in public places e.g.

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parks and streets, raise the age limit, heavier fines/ harsher penalties/ stricter laws, ensure that under 18's cannot get hold of it, control of under-age drinking, give the police more power, ask people for ID more often in pubs and clubs and shops (Kara & Hutton, 2003).

A question of drinking in public was studied by Latimer et al., (2001, 2003) in USA. A scale called Regulate Public Alcohol Consumption was constructed consisting of four items. Respondents were to show their level of support for restrictions on three point scale: no restrictions, by permit only, absolute ban as regards public drinking in parks, beaches, at concerts, in stadiums, city streets and on campuses. The scale had a range from 3 to 12. Americans seemed to be quite restrictive with average mean of 9.75 and low standard deviation of 2.13. There was small variation in opinions across different socio-demographic categories e.g. men were less restrictive than women, White and Native Americans less restrictive compared to African-Americans or Hispanics, employed less restrictive than retired people (Latimer et al., 2001; Latimer et al., 2003).

Physical availability: number of outlets and hours of their operation.

In the Nordic alcohol monopoly countries, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, alcohol content combined with the category of alcoholic beverages has been one important determinant of alcohol availability. For instance, In Iceland selling beer was totally prohibited in the 1919–1989 period. In Finland, all alcoholic beverages were sold in Alko state monopoly stores until 1969 when medium beer, beer with an alcohol content up to 4.7 per cent by volume, was allowed to be sold in ordinary grocery stores. In Sweden most alcoholic drinks were sold in System Bolaget monopoly stores, except for medium beer which was allowed in grocery stores from

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1964 to 1977. In Norway all beer was sold in grocery stores up to 1993 after which strong beer along side with all other beverages with higher alcohol content was only allowed to be sold in the retail alcohol monopoly, Vinmonopolet.

As a consequence of different treatment of beer, wine and distilled spirits with regard to their availability, people in the Nordic countries have for a long time been asked in opinion polls of their view on the proper selling practice of different alcohol beverage categories. In Finland, asking peoples opinion of the proper selling practice of medium beer goes back to 1964. In late 1960 people were also asked if strong beer and wine should besides Alko stores also be sold in grocery stores (Mäkelä, 1987).

When medium beer sales in groceries became possible in Finland in 1968 this implied a huge increase in the number of beer retail outlets, from little over one hundred monopoly shops to more than 17 000 grocery shops, and longer hours in which medium beer could be bought. Support among the Finns for this radical change tended to grow rapidly from about 30 % in 1964 to over 80 % in the year when the law was changed. The alcohol reform resulted in 1969 in a nearly 50 % increase in total alcohol consumption and related harm. During the next years popular support for medium beer sales in groceries was decreased and in 1976 only 44 % was in favour of it (Mäkelä, 1984). Since then support in favour of medium beer in grocery shops started to grow again to reach 80 % again in the beginning of the 1990's. Women tended to be more restrictive than men but this gap had clearly narrowed (Ahlström & Österberg, 1992).

The 1990's witnessed further expansion of liberal attitudes in Finland. Proportion of those who demanded less restrictive policy increased twofold to 40 % in the mid-1990's. At that time also

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majority of population was willing to start retailing strong beer and wines in ordinary grocery stores, and that also happened with regard to cider. Sales of medium beer, cider and fermented based long drinks at most 4.7 per cent ethyl alcohol by volume also started in kiosks and gasoline stations. Since the mid-1990s, however, Finns have tended to be increasingly happy with existing system of alcohol control. By the year 2005 over two third was satisfied, 18% wanted harsher policies and only 12 % demanded more liberal approach (Österberg, 2007).

Also in other Nordic alcohol monopoly countries similar opinion polls have been conducted during later decades (Holder et al., 1998; Leifman, 2000). At times they have shown growing tendencies for liberal attitudes and at other time growing satisfaction with current policies. At the moment, however, public opinion is satisfied with the prevailing alcohol monopoly system in all Nordic monopoly countries (Information on the Nordic Alcohol Market, 2010).

Attitudes as regards physical availability of alcohol have also been studied in another “monopoly” country, Canada. In 1998, in a telephone survey carried out in Ontario Anglin et al., (2001b) put series of questions on alcohol policy including following ones:

- “Do you think there should be more or fewer LCBO (liquor) stores in Ontario or is there a right number now?”
- “Should there be more or fewer Brewers’ retail stores selling only beer in Ontario or is there a right number now?”
- “Do you think liquor and beer store hours should be increased, decreased or remain the same?”

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In response to two first questions on a number of alcohol outlets over 80 % of respondents and as regards opening hours over 70 % were satisfied with status quo. In general men and younger Ontarians were more likely to express liberal attitudes demanding more outlets and longer opening hours but differences were not large. Drinking patterns differentiated respondents in a much stronger manner: only 4–5 % of abstainers or light drinkers were in favour of more alcohol outlets compared to almost 30 % of heavy drinkers. A difference was even larger on opening hours: 4–7 % of light drinkers and abstainers demanded longer opening hours compared to almost 40 % of heavy drinkers. Logistic regression confirmed or even reinforced conclusions from bi-variate analyses. Heavy drinkers appeared to be much more likely to prefer a relaxation of alcohol controls while controlling for sex, age and education (Anglin et al., 2001b).

In their next paper based on the same study, the authors conclude that heavy drinkers are in general against restrictions on access to alcohol and against external control of drinking behaviour. In this context, progressing liberalisation of alcohol control is in fact to satisfy demands of small minority of Ontarians and against prevailing opinion of their vast majority (Anglin et al., 2003).

Following Ontario surveys run in 2000 and 2002 showed that vast majority of Ontarians are satisfied with density of alcohol outlets. In 2002, almost 80 % considers present number of outlets to be about right, 9 % is of the opinion that there are too many while 11 % are of the opinion that they are too few (Giesbrecht et al., 2005).

In national Canadian surveys a question of outlets density was not asked or at least was not reported. Two other questions on alcohol in a corner store and on opening hours may be indicative

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in this regard. Despite weak tendency towards more liberalisation, over two thirds of Canadians were in favour of a ban on alcohol in their corner stores. Proportion of supporters of a more restrictive policy seemed to be much lower. Those who were for diminishing opening hours in alcohol outlets represented less than 20% of all Canadians (Giesbrecht et al., 2007).

The US studies showed relatively widespread support for restrictive policy measures. Major support comes probably from that fraction of the population who is still in favour of alcohol prohibition and which represented about one fourth of the population in 1989 (Hilton & Kaskutas., 1991).

In state-wide surveys supporters of limiting density of outlets represented majority as in Michigan where 63 % were for “limiting alcohol outlets”. Less support of about 40% received a policy of limiting hours of sales (Wagenaar & Streff., 1990).

Comparison of six national surveys run between 1989 and 2000 showed that even though proportion of supporters of “no alcohol in a corner store” declined by 3 percentage points they still represent over 60 % of the population. Proportion of those who were in favour of decreasing “store hours” is on decline too but still they are in strong minority of about one third of the population. As relevant data were not reported it can be guessed only that majority of Americans is for existing status quo (Greenfield et al., 2007).

Taxation.

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Garretsen & Knibbe (1985) in their survey on alcohol control in Limburg and Rotterdam studied support for an increase in prices of alcoholic beverages by 0.5 guilder per glass. Proportion of those who were against this measured varied between 34 and 45 %. However, the percentage of supporters was also significant ranging from 27 % in Limburg to 42 % in Rotterdam. Every fourth respondent was neither for nor against price increase.

In a survey conducted in UK, Pendelton and colleagues (1990) found that more than half (56 %) of respondents were in favour of alcohol taxes going up at least as much as the cost of living. Also more than half (58 %) of British people thought that it would be a good idea for beer, lagers, wines and ciders to be taxed according to how much alcohol they contain. According to 56 % of the respondents thought it would be a good idea for the profit margin on soft drinks and other non-alcoholic beverages in public houses to be the same as that on alcoholic drinks. Moreover, 84 % thought that the sale of coffee, tea and a wide range of soft drinks should be encouraged in pubs. There was a clear majority for those policies across all drinking categories but for taxation, which was supported by around 60 % of all respondents except for heavy drinkers where support was just below 40 % (Pendleton et al., 1990).

In a national survey in Ireland opinions as regards alcohol taxes were clearly divided: 28 % of respondents supported increase, 23 % decrease with a majority of 39 % “voting” that taxes remain the same. Logistic regression confirmed that women are more likely to support tax increases. Some regional variation was also noted. However, largest split of opinions was noted as regards drinking status: non-drinkers were 6.8 times more likely to support higher taxes than drinkers (Hope, 2003).

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Österberg presents the results of a survey conducted in Finland in January 2005. Half of the respondents were satisfied with the current alcohol prices even if these prices were still far higher in Finland than in most other European countries. With regard to distilled spirits even one fifth of the respondents thought that prices of distilled spirits were too low (Österberg, 2007).

Recent EUROBAROMETER surveys completed in 2006 and 2009 had introduced a number of questions on prices and intentions to buy alcohol. First of these asked whether young and heavy drinkers would buy less alcoholic beverages if prices should increase by 25 %; second one regarded respondent's own purchasing behaviour should prices increased by 25 %. Surprisingly distribution of responses was almost identical. About one third was of the opinion that 25 % rise in prices would be followed by lower consumption by the respondent as well as among both heavy and young drinkers. Respondents were more sceptical as regards lowering alcohol prices. Only around 15 % would think that lowering alcohol prices would make them buy more alcohol. All those opinions are remarkably stable over three years between 2006 and 2009 (Special Eurobarometer 331, 2010).

All Canadian surveys show slow decline in support of higher taxes on alcohol. Percentage of supporters decreased from almost 30 % in 1989 to 27 % in 1994 and to 23 % in 2004. As in many other studies women, older people, with low education were more likely to support higher prices. There was a huge discrepancy according to drinking status; percentage of supporters ranged in 2004 from about 50 % among total abstainers and former drinkers, to 23 % among light/infrequent drinkers, to 11 % of light/frequent drinkers and to less than 5 % among heavy/frequent drinkers (Giesbrecht et al., 2007).

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Declining trend in support for higher taxes was not translated into a rise in support for lower alcohol taxes. Over the decades around one quarter of Canadians was in favour of this measure (Giesbrecht et al., 2001). Logistic regression showed that support for lower alcohol taxes was evident among those who had five or more drinks per occasion weekly and/or scored 8+ on AUDIT (Giesbrecht et al., 2005).

Giesbrecht and Greenfield (1999) analysed two surveys conducted in Canada in 1989 and the US in late 1989 and 1990 in order to compare opinions on alcohol policy in view of cultural and international differences. The US respondents showed higher support for increased taxes for alcoholic beverages (49 %) than their Canadian counterparts (28 %). It is important to note that about half of the respondents in both countries remained neutral and those against higher taxation were in clear minority, 6 % in the US and 18 % in Canada (Giesbrecht & Greenfield, 1999). This support for higher taxes had tended to decline in the US. As summarised by Greenfield and colleagues (2007) it dropped from about 50 % in 1989–1990 to 35 % in 2000. However, fluctuations in support have to be noted; it fell down between 1990 and 1991 from 51 % to 45 % to grown again to 52.5 % a year later.

Kaskutas (1993) reported the survey conducted between 1989 and 1991 in the US. Researcher asked 2017 adults about support for increasing taxes for alcoholic beverages. Three quarters of supporters of higher taxes were convinced about affecting of moderate drinkers. Half of the supporters claimed that higher taxes would affect their own drinking.

In the study of Greenfield and others (2007) the trend of support for increased alcohol taxes fluctuated. At the end of the 1980's, support for this policy manifested in less than 50 % of the

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respondents. One year later it was just over 50 %. Such increases and decreases within a few percentage points could be observed over the three editions of the survey. Americans are more likely to support higher taxation if potential revenues are earmarked for management of different problems. As found out by Wagenaar et al., (2000), 70 % of them would support higher alcohol taxes to reduce budget deficit and 82 % to improve for management of alcohol-related problems.

As already mentioned, Latimer and colleagues (2001, 2003) created a different scale for different policy instrument. One of them was called Increase Alcohol Taxes which included four opinion:

1. Increase alcohol taxes to pay alcohol treatment,
2. Increase alcohol taxes to lower other taxes,
3. Increase alcohol taxes to pay for any government purpose,
4. Tax drinkers to pay for alcohol costs.

Support for Increase Alcohol Taxes scale was associated with younger age, student status, lower alcohol use frequency, knowledge about teens, and concern for teens. Higher educated and independent party status was in opposition for the scale.

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Drunken driving.

Despite existing evidence about relationship between blood alcohol concentration (BAC) in drivers and risk of accident (Borkenstein et al., 1974; Jonah, 1986; Mayhew et al., 1981) very few studies were identified which investigate public support for lowering BAC. One of these studies was carried out in Ireland where legal BAC level was 0.8g/l. The question was: “Blood alcohol limit for drivers should be lowered to 50 mg %” (0.5g/l). In line with other EU countries, two out of three respondents agreed this statement while less than 20 % disagreed (Hope, 2003). The opinions did not differ by gender and age with slight tendency for young people, rural dwellers and weekly binge drinker to express less support (61 % versus 69 %). This relatively high level of public support may have been encouraged by giving reference to other EU countries.

Reluctance to apply a question on public support for lowering BAC may be related to the fact that majority of EU citizens do not know “their” respective legal BAC. According to the recent EUROBAROMETER a little over a quarter of the respondents were able to give a correct answer. Nevertheless, the EUROBAROMETER include an issue of reducing BAC for young and novice drivers to 0.2 g/l which was supported by three quarters of respondents (Special Eurobarometer 331, 2010).

The question of lowering BAC was approached by an US study carried out in Michigan. To control for respondent’s ignorance as regards binding BAC and its operationalisation, the authors (Wagenaar & Streff, 1990) formulated a long question: “Currently, a driver with blood alcohol level of 0.10 % (1.0g/l) is considered legally drunk. An average 189 pound adult male would have to drink 5 drinks in an hour to be over this limit. It is suggested that the limit be lowered to 0.05

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percent. Would you favour or oppose toughening the law by changing the legal limit to 0.05 percent?" (0.5g/l). Small majority of 55 % supported lowering BAC with clear tendency for better-off people, abstainers and infrequent drinkers to be more supportive.

Random breath testing (RBT) of drivers seem to enjoy even higher support in EU. In the Irish study from the beginning of the 2000's over 80 % of respondents were in favour of this measure with very small or no variation among different socio-demographic groups. Even as many as 77 % of weekly binge drinkers would support RBT (Hope, 2003). Similarly 82 % of participants of EUROBAROMETER survey expressed their support for random breath tests ranging from about three quarters or less in Slovenia, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany to over 90 % in Portugal, Greece, Ireland and Malta (Special Eurobarometer 331, 2010).

RBT enjoyed much lower support in the US. In the study from the beginning of the 1990's just less than half of respondents would support introduction of this measure (Hilton & Kaskutas, 1991).

An Australian study (Wilkinson et al., 2009) explored the Australian public opinion towards different alcohol policy options. This was done by selecting sixteen items from the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey to factor analysis. The study concluded that hardened penalties against drunk driving had the strongest support together with stricter laws against serving customers who were drunk. Least support had policies that controlled accessibility to alcohol. Control measures had more support among females, older respondents and those drinking less.

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Access to youth.

The earliest survey referring to the age limits was conducted in The Netherlands in Limburg and Rotterdam (Garretsen & Knibbe, 1985). About 60 % of respondents were “for” the increasing age limits to buy alcoholic beverage in both cities. Only one in four wanted maintenance of status quo or were against rising age limit.

According to Ahlström & Österberg (1997) one-fifth of the adult Finnish population in 1996 wanted a stricter alcohol policy, while 40 per were happy with the restrictions in force. Age-limits for sale of alcoholic beverages had the broadest approval, and there were even more people who considered the current age limit of 18 years for light alcoholic beverages as too low as there were people that considered the limit to be too high.

In a survey conducted in Scotland by Kara & Hutton (2003) almost all respondents (94%) believed that there was a problem with under-age drinking. When respondents were asked “Where do underage drinkers in Scotland obtained their alcohol”, over half of them (55 %) thought that they bought it themselves at off licenses, quarter (25 %) believed that they bought it from the supermarkets, 21 % thought that they obtained it from friends, 17 % thought that strangers bought alcohol for the under aged. This survey included 16–17 years old too, who are best informant with this regard. Half of them (50 %) mention same sources as the total sample (buy it themselves at off licenses), over 40 % gained alcohol from friends, one fifth believed that they bought it in licensed premises and with a help of strangers (22 %).

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In Gallup poll conducted in Finland in 2005 acceptance of status quo regarding legal drinking age was very high. Ninety percent of respondents supported existing limit age 18 years old for selling beer and wine and over 80 % of respondents favoured maintaining the age 20 years old for selling distilled spirits (Österberg, 2007).

Issue of the underage drinking was studied by Latimer et al., (2001, 2003) in the US when current legal drinking age is 21. A scale called Regulate Youth Access consisted of four items:

- 1) lower the drinking age to 19,
- 2) conduct youth compliance checks,
- 3) penalize individuals who provide alcohol to minors,
- 4) address stores being too lax about selling alcohol to teens.

Respondents were asked to favour or oppose changes in proposed policies. Support for the Regulate Youth Access scale was associated with older age, female gender, having children, lower alcohol use frequency, knowledge about teens, and concern for teens.

Greenfield et al., (2004) cite a battery of surveys conducted between 1989 and 1994 in the US. Percent of supporters of rising drinking age had been stable at about 30 % level between 1989 and 1994 to drop to 26% in 2000 (Greenfield et al., 2007).

In Canada support for rising legal drinking age in total sample decreased to about 10% between years 1989 and 1994.. This change is evident in all regions, both genders, across age groups and education levels and among respondents with different drinking experiences (Giesbrecht & Kavanagh, 1999).

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Giesbrecht et al., (2001) made comparison of Canadian surveys conducted between 1989 and 1998. As regards opinions about minimum drinking age, most of the respondents wanted to maintain status quo. Twenty percent points decrease of supporters of rising age limit was observed (1989 – 51 %, 1998 – 32 %). The percentage wanting the legal drinking age to be lowered never surpassed 5 % (Giesbrecht et al., 2001).

Table 3.

In Ontario's survey conducted in 1998 over half of respondents wanted drinking age to stay at the existing level of 19 years old., 39 % advocated its rising and only 5 % wanted to lower it. Support for lower drinking age tended to increase among more frequent drinkers e.g. among those who go to bar once a week and more often, over 20 % would be in favour of lowering drinking age (Anglin et al., 2001).

In Canadian surveys conducted over the years 1989 – 2004, Giesbrecht et al., (2007) claimed that support for rising legal drinking age weakens. Over half of respondents (51 %) favoured this strategy in 1989. In 2004 support has dropped to no more than 30 % across all demographic categories. The biggest decrease of support can be observed among the youngest respondents 15-19 years old from 25 % in 1989 to 13 % in 2004.

Discussion.

Numerous European and North American studies have dealt with trends as regards support for restrictive alcohol policies. They have revealed both declining as well as increasing support for

different alcohol control measures. These trends tend to fluctuate for instance because of changes in a level of alcohol control, alcohol consumption and related harm and because of general cultural and societal changes, including mutual relationship between the State, market and civic society. Still today, supporters for stringent alcohol control constitute a strong minority, often outnumbering those who demand more liberal alcohol control. In addition to those who would vote for more stringent alcohol policy, the largest proportion of people is happy with existing level of control. This shows that for majority alcohol is a commodity of special concern whose consumption needs external control, including restrictions on advertising, physical availability and prices.

Support may change both ways depending on changing ideologies and emerging patterns. Visibility and awareness of negative consequences of the policy change may also influence on public support (Österberg, 2007). Support can precede policy change and may follow it (Greenfield et al., 1998; Hettige, 2003; Österberg, 2007; Sierosławski, 1992).

Level of support as measured by public opinion surveys may depend on formulation of the question; questions which include justification or a reason of an individual control measure are more likely to win public support than questions formulated in purely technical terms.

Those who are going to be least affected are more in favor of alcohol control policies. Therefore abstainers, infrequent drinkers, women, older persons are more supportive than men and younger persons (Anglin et al., 2001b; Anglin et al., 2003; Giesbrecht et al., 2007; Latimer et al., 2001). On the other hand, high risk heavy drinkers are most likely to be pleased by those policies that

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reduce alcohol controls, including physical availability and taxation (Anglin et al., 2001b; Giesbrecht et al., 2005; Giesbrecht et al., 2007)

Public education, school-based education, warning labels, measures targeting youth enjoy more support as those do not affect majority in a direct way (Anglin et al., 2003). The public is also more likely to support interventions such as treatment or server training than further controls on physical, or economic access to alcohol (Giesbrecht & Greenfield 1999; Greenfield et al., 2004).

Unfortunately, this review did not identify studies showing how level of public support affects implementation or maintaining of alcohol control policies, including cost of implementation and unintended side-effects of different measures.

Acknowledgement of funding and conflict of interest:

Funding: Article was financed by funds from the SMART project and by the statutory funds from Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Conflict of interest: The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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