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# Alcohol availability, premature mortality, and life expectancy in Estonia

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This summary gives a brief overview of the recent developments in life expectancy and premature mortality in Estonia over the last two decades. Risky health behaviors contribute to premature mortality, and alcohol is one of the main risk factors in Estonia. Alcohol-related adverse outcomes can be reduced by implementing effective alcohol control policy measures. One such measure is reducing alcohol availability. It can be shown that reducing alcohol availability decreases alcohol-attributable mortality in Estonia, and thus improves the overall life expectancy in the country.

Life expectancy has constantly increased since 2000, reaching its all-time high of 78.8 years (74.4 years for males and 82.8 years for females) in 2019 (Statistics Estonia 2021). This increase in life expectancy corresponds to an increase of almost 8.5 years (ca. 12.9%) for the male population, and an increase of nearly 6.4 years (ca. + 8.4%) for the female population. Additionally, the gender gap in life expectancy has narrowed down from 10.5 years to 8.4 years.

Despite a significant decline in premature mortality by 42% between 2000 and 2015, it remains higher than the EU average. Consequently, there is still room for improvement in this regard. Alcohol is one of the main

contributing factors to premature mortality (Stoppel 2021). Around one third of premature deaths are related to alcohol, and around one tenth are 100% alcohol-attributable.

To address this issue, policymakers in Estonia introduced in 2008 an alcohol sales policy that reduced alcohol availability. This policy was able to reduce alcohol-attributable mortality in Estonia by around 40%. More particularly, this policy was most effective for those aged 35–49 and for the male population.

To sum up, while there are positive developments in Estonia, such as the increase in life expectancy, the narrowing down of male-female gap in life expectancy, and the decrease in premature mortality, there is still room for improvement. The main area for improvement is the area of risky health behaviors that contribute strongly to premature mortality. Implementing health policies, such as alcohol control policies, can have a positive impact on the overall life expectancy in the country.

**Key words:** health, alcohol, public health, mortality, health policy.

## DISCLOSURE

The author reports no conflict of interest.