The Public Health Benefits of Alcohol Regulation: The Case of Sweden


Sweden has a government-run alcohol retail monopoly, called “Systembolaget,” which controls the sale of all alcohol greater than 3.5% strength through its 436 stores. Systembolaget operates within a public health and safety mandate to minimize possible harms from alcohol consumption. It does not have a profit incentive.

We led an international team of scientists to estimate the public health impacts of deregulating the Swedish alcohol system under two hypothetical privatization scenarios:

**Scenario 1: Private liquor stores**
- 1,200 stores
- Hours of sale: +68% +96% +200% +1500%
- Store density: +5% +6% +10% +16%
- Average price: +4% +2% -3% -1%
- Minimum price: -2% +13% +17%
- Promotions: undefined +3% +5%
- Open: +5% +6% +10% +16%

**Scenario 2: Alcohol in grocery stores**
- 6,900 stores
- Hours of sale: +68% +96% +200% +1500%
- Store density: +5% +6% +10% +16%
- Average price: +4% +2% -3% -1%
- Minimum price: -2% +13% +17%
- Promotions: undefined +3% +5%
- Open: +5% +6% +10% +16%

- **Unrecorded alcohol consumption**: +31% (3.07 L)
- **Recorded alcohol consumption**: +20% (1.86 L)
- **Total alcohol consumption**: +27% (1.97 L)

Includes extended hours + addition of Sunday openings.

This increase (in Litres of pure alcohol) is equivalent to each person in Sweden drinking an additional 108 (Scenario 1) or 169 (Scenario 2) beers per year.

**Less alcohol regulation** → **Increased accessibility of alcohol** → **Increased per capita alcohol consumption** → **Increased population-level harms**

**Unrecorded alcohol consumption**
- Travellers imports, smuggling, illicitly produced alcohol, etc.

**Recorded alcohol consumption**
- Additional cases of drunk driving/year: 7,940
- Additional assaults/year: 28,680
- Additional deaths/year (cancers, digestive conditions, injuries, suicides): 1,271
- Additional hospital stays/year: 19,860

**Total alcohol consumption**
- Additional cases of drunk driving/year: 7,940
- Additional assaults/year: 28,680
- Additional deaths/year (cancers, digestive conditions, injuries, suicides): 1,271
- Additional hospital stays/year: 19,860

**Store density**
- Includes extended hours + addition of Sunday openings

**Average price**
- +4% +2% -3% -1%
- +27% (1.97 L)

**Minimum price**
- -18% -22%
- +13% +17%
- -0.11 L -0.17 L

**Promotions**
- +3% +5%
- +5%

**Hours of sale**
- +68% +96% +200% +1500%
- +5% +6% +10% +16%

**Open**
- +5% +6% +10% +16%

**Unrecorded alcohol consumption**
- +31% (3.07 L)

**Recorded alcohol consumption**
- +20% (1.86 L)

**Total alcohol consumption**
- +27% (1.97 L)