

Gender divide in alcohol-related deaths persists

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A study by the University of Glasgow and the Medical Research Council (MRC) has found that more than twice as many men die every year in Scotland from alcohol misuse than women.

The findings, published online today (Monday 23 February), reveal that men's death rate from alcohol is 38 deaths per 100,000, while women's rate is 16 per 100,000. On average, the study found that 999 Scottish men and 448 women die from alcohol-related causes each year.

The study comes as the Scottish Government prepares to publish its new strategic approach to tackling alcohol misuse, which was put out to consultation last year. Scotland has one of the highest rates of mortality due to cirrhosis of the liver in Western Europe.

The university report, which consolidates existing data showing that alcohol-related fatalities in both genders have doubled over the past 10

years, also found that death rates within Scotland vary considerably. Most alcohol-related deaths occur in the Greater Glasgow area, though the authors identified areas with high rates in all regions of the country. However, researchers say the findings go against the prevailing public perception that alcohol abuse is more prevalent among young women.

The report was carried out by Dr Richard Mitchell, of the University of Glasgow's Public Health department and Dr Carol Emslie, of the University of Glasgow and MRC's Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, and can be found at www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpublichealth .

Dr Carol Emslie, of the University of Glasgow and MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, said the aim of the study was to establish a clearer picture of the gender and geographical divide in alcohol-related deaths in Scotland.

“We wanted to find out whether environment influenced the rate of alcohol-related deaths in both men and women across Scotland. In doing this, we looked at three main questions - which areas have the highest rates of alcohol-related death in Scotland; are these areas the same for men and women and are there areas in Scotland where the gap between men and women's alcohol-related death rates is unusually large or small?,” said Dr Emslie.

Dr Richard Mitchell added: “The study shows remarkable differences from place to place in alcohol-related deaths. Scotland is facing a huge public health problem which will require strong and radical action by the Scottish government. It is interesting that the areas in which alcohol-related deaths are a particular problem are largely the same for men and women.

“The results suggest to us that both men and women are vulnerable to the social, economic and cultural pressures which can make people drink too

much.

In carrying out their research Dr Mitchell and Dr Emslie divided Scotland into 144 areas based on the last population census. “These areas were about half a parliamentary constituency in size with a typical population 35,000 people,” explained Dr Mitchell.

It is the first time such a detailed scale has been used in a study of this kind. The researchers obtained records of alcohol-related deaths between 2000 and 2005 for each of these areas from the General Register Office for Scotland. “We used the National Statistics definition of ‘alcohol-related deaths’ which includes chronic liver disease and cirrhosis. We calculated rates of alcohol-related death separately for men and women. Our method took account of any differences in the population size of each of our 144 areas and the rates can be compared from area to area. We also looked for areas in which women’s alcohol-related mortality rates were unusually small or unusually large, compared to the men’s rate for that area,” continued Dr Mitchell.

Most of the areas with very high alcohol-related death rates are found in Greater Glasgow. However, rural areas in the Highlands also featured in the ‘top 25’, that is the 25 areas with the highest rates for men and women; Inverness West and Eilean Siar for example

“In the vast majority of areas, 136 out of 144, the gap between men’s and women’s alcohol-related death rate was as expected; areas with high rates for men tended to have high rates for women. Similarly, areas with low rates of alcohol-related death for men tend to have low rates for women. There was no clear pattern to the eight unusual areas in which the gap between men’s and women’s alcohol-related death rate was either smaller or larger than expected,” said Dr Mitchell.

Provided by University of Glasgow

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