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Drink and deprivation links cause major problems

The North East has some of the greatest problems in the country because of links between many drink-related problems and deprivation, according to figures published today (Aug 14).

The Association of Public Health Observatories report reveals the full extent of the suffering experienced by populations across England as a result of excessive alcohol consumption.

It identifies that poorer areas are suffering higher levels of alcohol-related deaths, hospital admissions, crime, absence from work, school exclusions, teenage pregnancy and road accidents.

The report - the eighth in a series commissioned by chief medical officer Sir Liam Donaldson - uses 36 different indicators of alcohol-related harm, health and wellbeing.

Key findings show that there are substantial differences in the health consequences of alcohol use between richer and poorer communities across England.

There are around 1.55 million people drinking to harmful levels in England with the North East, North West and Yorkshire and The Humber generally showing higher levels of excessive alcohol consumption than other regions. In the North East, 26% of men and 16% of women drink at hazardous and harmful levels.

On average men living in the more deprived areas of the North East lose 19 months of life and women lose eight months compared to five months for men and three months for women living in more affluent areas.

Across all regions, the most deprived places also have the highest recorded levels of chronic liver disease, incapacity claims due to alcoholism, unauthorised school absences, teenage conceptions, crime and violence related to alcohol and anti-social behavioural orders.

In the North East, every year alcohol is estimated to result in at least 19 people being admitted to hospital, nine crimes and 1.7 claims of incapacity benefit for every 1,000 people living in the region.

The report also shows that for some indicators, the already pronounced gap between regions is widening even further.

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For example, binge drinking - in females in particular - has continued to increase in the north but some areas in the south showed a decrease over the last five years. In the North East, 19% of men and 9% of women now binge drink.

Years of life lost and deaths related to alcohol are increasing. In the North East, 6% of men and 4% of women now die from a condition related to alcohol.

All regions show an increase the rates of people admitted to hospital as a result of alcohol consumption but these are greater in the North.

Regional director of public health for the North East Dr Stephen Singleton said: "This report highlights what we already know.

"Alcohol misuse is recognised as a growing problem across the region and an increasing number of individuals consume too much and too often - usually through binge drinking rather than enjoying alcohol in moderation.

"We know we have a higher prevalence of hazardous or dependent drinkers than other parts of the country.

"Earlier this year we launched a regional statement of priorities and framework for action which will help us to focus our efforts and begin to address the problems.

"The longer term goal needs to be to tackle the drinking culture in the North East. I believe the best way to do this is by adopting a regional approach which will coordinate the activity of all our partners."

Sir Liam added: "Alcohol misuse has become a major problem in England that contributes greatly to ill health and inequalities across the regions.

"I welcome the report and hope it will encourage public health leaders to find innovative and creative ways to reduce the impact of harmful drinking."

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Note to editors: This report will act as a reference document, providing the latest and most comprehensive information available on alcohol to a wide range of agencies involved in promoting and protecting public health. Such detailed information, as provided by the report, will act as a warning sign and help to identify areas and populations who are likely to be at risk in the future. A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.nwpho.org.uk and www.apho.org.uk

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