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Study Estimates Alcohol Was Linked to 108,400 Deaths Among Working-Age Russians in 2019

Researchers say official death records likely missed many alcohol-related deaths across 75 regions, though the analysis cannot prove individual causation

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A study in the journal Population Health Metrics has estimated that alcohol was linked to 108,400 deaths among people ages 20 to 59 in Russia in 2019, including many deaths that were not officially certified as alcohol-related.

The research, titled Hidden alcohol-attributable mortality in Russia: evidence from regional panel data, 2000–2019, analyzed data from 75 Russian regions over a 20-year period. Its central finding is that the official record likely misses a large share of the country’s alcohol-related death toll among working-age adults.

According to the study, the problem is not limited to deaths directly labeled as alcohol poisoning or other clearly alcohol-driven causes. The researchers argue that a broader group of deaths can be statistically tied to alcohol use even when death certificates do not identify alcohol as a cause. That is why they describe the burden as “hidden” alcohol-attributable mortality.

The estimate of 108,400 deaths in 2019 points to a substantial gap between officially recognized alcohol-related mortality and the number suggested by the study’s regional analysis. The paper focuses on adults ages 20 to 59, an age range that covers much of the labor force and a large share of family caregivers, making the public health and

social effects potentially wider than the mortality figure alone.

At the same time, the authors' approach has important limits. The study uses regional panel data, which can show strong patterns and associations across places and over time, but it does not prove that alcohol caused any specific individual death. That means the findings should be read as a population-level estimate, not as direct evidence about the circumstances of each case.

Even with that caution, the study adds to longstanding concern about alcohol's role in Russian mortality. By looking beyond deaths explicitly coded as alcohol-related, it suggests that the full health burden may be significantly larger than official certification alone indicates. That matters for how researchers, health officials and policymakers measure risk and evaluate prevention efforts.

The findings could also shape debate in the beverage sector, including producers and sellers of beer, wine and spirits, because they add to the evidence base used in discussions about alcohol policy, health warnings, taxation, marketing restrictions and access controls. The study does not break down risk by beverage type, so it does not support conclusions about whether one category of drink is more responsible than another.

Because the analysis covers the period from 2000 through 2019 across 75 regions, it offers a broad view of trends rather than a snapshot from a single year or place. That long time span gives the study weight in discussions about how to measure alcohol harm in a country where mortality patterns have often shifted sharply over time.

The paper's estimate is likely to draw attention from public health researchers because undercounting in official cause-of-death statistics has been a recurring issue in alcohol research. If a large number of deaths associated with alcohol are being recorded under other causes, that can affect how governments set priorities and how the public understands the scale of the problem.

The study does not settle every question about alcohol-related mortality in Russia, and its design does not allow firm conclusions about individual causation. But its results suggest that relying only on deaths formally certified as alcohol-related may understate the true toll by a wide margin.