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## Measured Impacts of Alcohol ‘Happy Hours’ on Health

A mini-scientific review provided by the Quaboag Hills Substance Use Alliance

Alcohol consumption is in part [affected by price](#). Research from the US and around the world suggest that decreased prices lead to increased consumption. Research on ‘Happy Hours’ (a time when restaurants or bar provide cheaper-than-normal alcoholic drinks) have found that people, particularly young people and college students, are more likely to consume more alcohol when offered it is offered at a discounted price. Findings from some recent studies on this topic are included below:

- (1) People who took advantage of drink specials were four times more likely to have a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.8. This study was conducted among a “college community” in the southwest. ([Study here](#))
- (2) Approximately two in three college-aged persons (64%) reported drinking more and/or drinking faster when they were offered drink specials during ‘Happy Hours’. Being of non-legal drinking age was more strongly associated with changing drinking behaviors. People who drank more/faster during Happy Hours were approximately two times more likely to report driving under the influence and fighting while drinking, compared to those who did not change drinking patterns or drank less during Happy Hours ([Study here](#)).
- (3) An Australian study found that the members of soccer clubs that had Happy Hour pricing were 2.8 times more likely to engage in risky drinking than soccer clubs that didn’t have that pricing, adjusting for other factors and removing non-drinkers from analyses ([Study here](#)).
- (4) An Italian study of young people age 15-23 years who visited the emergency room due to alcohol consumption found that 1 in 4 (26%) of these patients visited after visiting an institution with Happy Hour pricing. ([Study here](#))
- (5) There are numerous theoretical studies that report that hypothetical drinking behavior decreases as price decreases and that drinking behavior is associated with price. Most, if not all, of these studies have been conducted with college-aged persons. ([Example 1](#), [Example 2](#), [Example 3](#), [Example 4](#))

The above studies show an association between some drinking behaviors and/or consequences and Happy Hour pricing, but they do not show cause and effect. There is no guarantee that instituting Happy Hour pricing would result in any of these negative outcomes. One well designed study ([here](#)) showed no significant effect of Happy Hour pricing on drinking habits.

It is likely that Happy Hour drink specials may be attractive to some patrons. We recognize that restaurants and bars are trying to make-up economic losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Happy Hours would potentially benefit them economically. Because we are concerned about substance use and addiction prevention, we encourage the legislature to review the scientific literature while discussing bills aimed at changing, particularly lowering, alcohol prices, and weigh the potential benefits and risks for adverse public health consequences from these changes.

Sincerely,

Maegan Boutot, MS ([mboutot@townofware.com](mailto:mboutot@townofware.com)), on behalf of  
the Quaboag Hills Substance Use Alliance, [www.qhsua.org](http://www.qhsua.org)