

An Examination of Support for More Diverse Alcohol Warning Labels (AWLs) in Ireland

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SUMMARY

Alcohol poses a significant threat to public health in Ireland. In 2026, Ireland is due to introduce a mandatory alcohol warning label (AWL). Using a convenience sample of students and staff at an Irish Technological University (TU), this research sought to explore support for current and potentially expanded alcohol control measures. Online survey data was collected from 335 participants. Analysis revealed a very high level of support for the forthcoming introduction of Ireland's AWL. Additionally, there was considerable support for a broader range of AWLs. More than half of the respondents supported the introduction of bland packaging on alcohol containers, and over 60% supported the introduction of more explicit tobacco-style graphic warnings on alcohol. Over 40% of respondents reported that AWLs would impact their intention to consume alcohol.

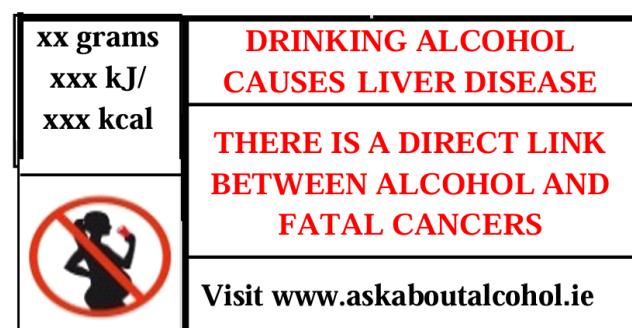
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INTRODUCTION

Alcohol has been identified by the WHO as an important Commercial Determinant of Health (CDoH) [1,2]. Alcohol is responsible for more than 3 million deaths annually and causes more than 5% of the total global burden of disease and injury [3–5]. Research from Ireland confirms that the adverse impact of alcohol is also highly evident there [6–7]. In response to this threat, the Irish Government passed the Public Health (Alcohol) Act, 2018 [8]. Although criticised for its slow implementation and deficits [9–11], this Act has introduced Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) of alcohol and significant restrictions on alcohol advertising. Importantly, from May 2026 onward, alcohol containers in Ireland must display a prescribed alcohol warning label (AWL) [12]. As can be seen from Figure 1, this label features a warning about the threat posed by alcohol in developing liver disease and cancer. The warning also features a pictograph warning pregnant women not to drink, nutritional information, and a website address for

further information [12]. There is growing evidence and support for the introduction of AWLs [13–16].

Figure 1. Ireland's Forthcoming Alcohol Warning Label [17]



This research sought to explore support for the overall introduction of AWLs, as well as its various constituent elements. It also examined approval of more substantive alcohol control measures, such as more explicit tobacco-style graphical warnings, as well

as the introduction of bland packaging. Support and opposition to a more diverse range of AWLs are also investigated [18].

METHOD

Ethical approval for this study was given by the Queen's University of Belfast and the Technological University of the Shannon. Data was collected via anonymous MS Forms surveys and subsequently examined in SPSS. Data was collected from an opportunistic sample of 335 respondents who were students or employees of a provincial Technological University (TU) in the Republic of Ireland. College participation in Ireland is significantly higher than the EU-27 average [19], and the TU sector in Ireland teaches a broad range of courses from apprenticeships in the Trades to PhDs. As such, it attracts a broader socio-economic base of students than the traditional university sector [20]. Based on a 90% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the target sample size was 268.

The participants included 90 men (26.9%) and 244 women (73.1%). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 73, with a mean age of 37.4 (SD=15.9). 24.5% (82) of participants lived in rural areas, 15.5% (52) in villages, 23.9% (80) in towns, and 33.7% (113) in a city. Full-time employees comprised 47.5% (159) of the

respondents, while students accounted for 20.6% (69) of the respondents. 20.0% (67) of respondents worked part-time, with 12% (40) reporting other status. Of the sample, 40.9% (137) of respondents scored over five on the AUDIT-C, indicating potentially hazardous drinking, i.e. a level at which individuals are at risk of harm or experiencing harm from their alcohol consumption.

RESULTS

Support for Ireland's forthcoming AWLs was 81.1% (272). Table 1 details support for various components of Ireland's proposed AWLs. The risk-to-pregnancy pictogram was the most strongly supported element (80.6%, 270). Almost two-thirds (63.9%; n = 167) of respondents were supportive of more explicit tobacco-style graphic alcohol warnings (AWLs), while more than half (52.3%, 136) supported the introduction of bland packaging for alcohol containers, similar to that currently required in Ireland for tobacco packaging.

Table 1 also examines support for a more diverse range of AWLs as recommended elsewhere [18]. The most substantial level of support was evident for an AWL focussing on the risk of drink-driving (86.3%, 289). Support for all 11 AWLs exceeded 73%. Of the respondents, 56.4% (189) did not feel AWLs would impact their intention to consume alcohol, while 43.3% (145) reported that it would.

Table 1. Degree of Support/Opposition for Proposed & More Diverse Health Warnings/ Interventions

Warning Type	Strongly support	Tend to support	Either support nor oppose	Tend to oppose	Strongly oppose
Elements of forthcoming (May 2026) Alcohol Warning Label					
Ireland's proposed AWL	50.7% (170)	30.4% (102)	10.5% (35)	4.8% (16)	3.6% (12)
Risk to pregnancy	59.7% (200)	20.9% (70)	7.8% (26)	8.4% (28)	3.3% (11)
Risk of liver disease	52.4% (175)	25.1% (84)	10.2% (34)	8.1% (27)	4.2% (14)
Risk of cancer	51.0% (171)	24.8% (83)	11.6% (39)	8.4% (28)	4.2% (14)
Nutritional information	39.7% (133)	32.5% (109)	17.0% (57)	6.3% (21)	4.5% (15)
Enhanced alcohol control measures					
Tobacco-style graphic AWLs	40.0% (134)	22.4% (75)	11.0% (37)	17.6% (59)	9.0% (30)
Plain packaging for alcohol	29.9% (100)	25.7% (86)	16.7% (56)	15.8% (53)	11.9% (40)

(continued)

Table 1. Degree of Support/Opposition for Proposed & More Diverse Health Warnings/ Interventions (continued)

Warning Type	Strongly support	Tend to support	Either support nor oppose	Tend to oppose	Strongly oppose
Proposed warning about the risk of alcohol and...					
Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)	57.3% (192)	19.7% (66)	9.3% (31)	9.3% (31)	4.5% (15)
Drink driving	67.5% (226)	18.8% (63)	6.9% (23)	4.2% (14)	2.7% (9)
Taking medications	53.4% (179)	25.1% (84)	12.5% (42)	6.3% (21)	2.7% (9)
Swimming	48.7% (163)	26.0% (87)	15.5% (52)	6.9% (23)	3.0% (10)
Cardio-vascular disease	50.4% (169)	24.5% (82)	14.6% (49)	6.3% (21)	4.2% (14)
Operating machinery	54.0% (181)	23.9% (80)	11.6% (39)	6.9% (23)	3.6% (12)
Using ladders & working at heights	46.9% (157)	26.6% (89)	15.5% (52)	6.6% (22)	4.5% (15)
Fertility	48.1% (161)	26.0% (87)	13.4% (45)	7.2% (24)	5.4% (18)
Young People	56.1% (188)	23.0% (77)	10.7% (36)	6.0% (20)	4.2% (14)
Alcohol dependency	57.3% (192)	20.6% (69)	10.7% (36)	6.6% (22)	4.8% (16)
Polydrug use	54.7% (177)	23.2% (75)	11.8% (38)	5.6% (18)	4.6% (15)

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSION

Support for Ireland's forthcoming AWL was notable at over 80% (81.1%), although this is somewhat lower than that reported elsewhere [21]. There was also widespread approval of the introduction of a more diverse range of AWLs. More than half of respondents were also supportive of both plain packaging for alcohol (55.6%) and more explicit tobacco-style graphic warnings for alcohol (62.4%). Over 40% (43.3%) of respondents reported that AWLs would impact their intention to consume alcohol. Future research should explore the public acceptability of other impacts of alcohol including self-harm, suicide, domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault, as well as assault and homicide.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the conceptualisation of the study and data collection. FH led the formal

analysis of the data, as well as interpretation and data curation. All authors contributed to the writing and review of the manuscript.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was approved by the research ethics committees of the Queen's University of Belfast (QUB), and the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS).

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All authors are involved in alcohol control research, policy and advocacy.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data available on request.

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