Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

Forensic Learning Disabilities Service

We care for those who commit crimes and suffer from learning disabilities (LD).

The crimes range from Breach of Peace to serious sexual violence crimes against children and vulnerable adults. Those crimes include murder.

In an audit 80% of serious crimes committed by those referred to the forensic learning disability service in 2008 by criminal justice and courts were committed while the person was under the influence of alcohol.

Of 17 convicted paedophile Learning Disabled inpatients in long term secure hospital care, 10 committed their crimes having consumed excessive amounts of alcohol first.

Rates of alcohol dependence among learning Disabled offenders have increased exponentially in the last 10 years. Since the final closure of the institutions those with Learning Disabilities are living in the community and accessing alcohol very cheaply. The effect of the alcohol on their health and their criminal activity is greater than on those who do not suffer learning disability. This is due to the vulnerability of the already damaged brain.

Some mildly learning Disabled patients took part in a study of patients alcohol purchasing habits. They were able to find the cheapest alcohol and used their disability allowances to consume vast quantities placing themselves and others at high risk.

One convicted arsonist female with LD was found unconscious surrounded by 9 empty bottles of “White Lightening Cider” She had purchased this for 11 pence per unit. She had set fire to the corridor in a high rise block of flats before entering another flat which was the home of a convicted sex offender and completing her alcohol binge. She has an IQ (intelligence Quotient) of 60. (average is 100). She has in the past assaulted numerous NHS staff, severely damaged property and assaulted members of the public. She knows exactly how to find the cheapest alcohol.

Minimum pricing would affect the purchasing habits of those on low income and benefits which includes most of our patients. One strategy employed in our forensic day hospital is to encourage those who insist they wish to continue drinking alcohol to change their drinking to times in pubs with support and peers or to save for celebrations with family and support teams in supported housing with assistance to prepare meals and use their income for food.

The average price per unit in a pub is well above 50 pence. If the minimum price of alcohol per unit was 45 pence or above it would be more likely that Learning Disabled people would have more of their alcohol in pubs. They may also purchase alcohol which was less harmful than the cheap white ciders and
vodka they can get from the supermarkets or certain off licenses. It is our teams view that if there was a minimum price for alcohol imposed upon off licenses these three outcomes are possible:

1. Some Learning disabled people would drink less and would not become ill themselves.

2. Some vulnerable adults would not be assaulted

3. Some children would not be sexually abused or murdered.

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