

Alcohol industry strategies to influence the overall reform of the law on alcohol in Finland

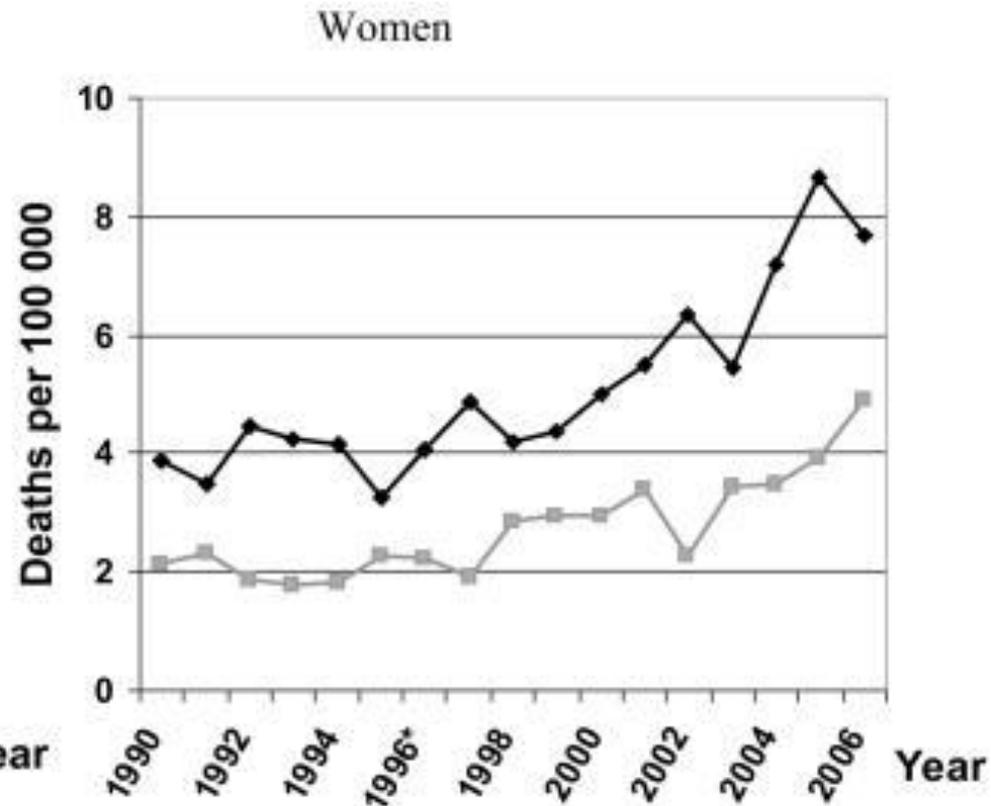
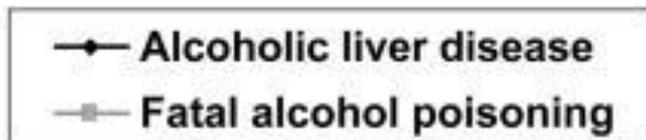
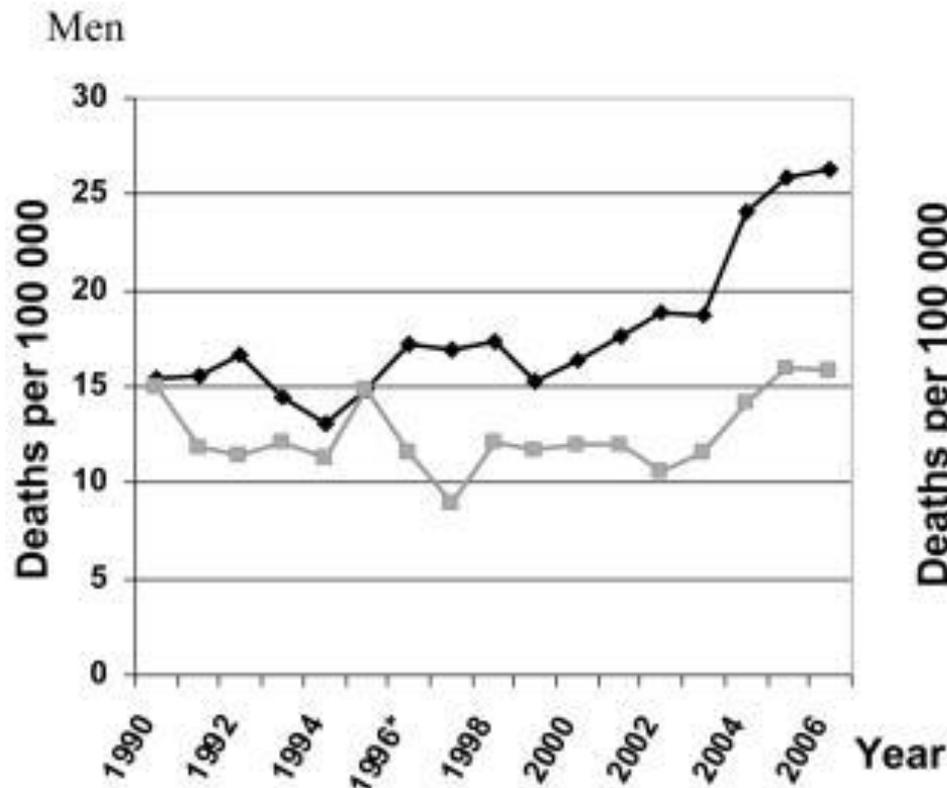
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VAIKUTTAMISTA JA VASTARINTAA – MITEN PÄIHTEISTÄ
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Introduction (I)

- Alcohol as a global and EU problem.
- Alcohol as a problem in Finland.
- Globalization of production and marketing networks of alcohol and influence on policies.
- Estonian membership in the EU in 2004 and import of cheap alcohol into Finland.

Age-adjusted mortality from alcoholic liver diseases and fatal alcohol poisoning among men (left) and women (right) in 1990–2006 (Pia Mäkelä 2016).



* Change in classification system in 1996

Preparations for new alcohol law

- Need for a new Alcohol Act in Finland with the aim to reduce alcohol harm.
- The preparations for a new alcohol law in Finland began in 2016 with the specific aim to reduce alcohol related harm.
- Involvement of the alcohol industry in policy making (EU influence).
- The main changes in the proposed alcohol law were: loosening alcohol regulation and the sale of stronger alcoholic drinks from 4.7% to 5.5% in grocery stores.

Aim of the study

- Looking at the proposed alcohol law, the original purpose which was meant to restrict sales was changed between 2016 and 2017.
- The **aim** of this study was to **investigate** the strategies used by the alcohol industry to change the original purpose of the reform.
- The **focus** was on the ways in which the alcohol industry federation (Panimoliitto) intervened in the process of the policy-making.
- This study utilized interview and document data.

Research question

- What strategies were used by the alcohol industry to change the original purpose of the reform?

Research Methodology

- This study adopted a case study design in which primary and secondary data were collected.
- **Primary data** was collected through **interviews** with experts who had participated in the preparation of the reform, namely:
 - **politicians** - who were Members of the Parliament;
 - **researchers** - from the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare and the University of Helsinki;
 - **a civil servant** - from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health;
 - **representatives** - from the alcohol industry interest groups namely, the Finnish Food and Drink Industries Federation, and the Finnish Grocery Trade Association.

Primary data

- Interviews were conducted with NGOs representing public health interests, namely: the Finnish Association for Mental Health and the Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention.
- The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling on grounds that as experts, they had first-hand knowledge of alcohol industry's influence on the overall reform.
- A total of 16 interviewees.

Secondary data

- **Secondary data** was collected from previous literature, journal articles, and Google databases.
 - The data was **analyzed** qualitatively through content and thematic analysis.
 - Social media data was collected from Twitter.
- > Separate study

Theoretical Framework

Savell et al. (2016) categories of alcohol industry political strategies to lobby against marketing restrictions:

- (1) gaining access to political decision makers by providing information,
- (2) targeting political decision makers indirectly through constituent support,
- (3) promoting alternative policy or voluntary measures,
- (4) providing incentives to influence government policymakers to act in a certain way, and
- (5) employing pre-emption, litigation, circumvention of the law, and trade.

Results: Strategies and tactics used by the AI to change the original purpose of the reform.

Strategy	Tactics
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct lobbying of politicians in the Parliament through MPs of the NCP • Working groups (Parliament, Ministry of Health) • Revolving door • Commissioned or disseminated research - shaping the evidence base • Economic benefits for the government (e.g., more job creation in the service sector and tax revenue)
Constituency Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming alliances with interest groups in the grocery chain and with sports federations • Media advocacy (social media using Twitter, press releases, public information campaigns, participation on public debates on TV) • International partners (The Brewers of Europe)
Policy substitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting alternative policies • Promoting self-regulation.
Legal	n/a
Regulatory redundancy	n/a

Key message

The involvement of the alcohol industry in policy making in Finland may represent a key barrier to the development of effective alcohol policies in the country.

Twitter Data

- Tweets were collected from comments, embedded links and images and retweets.
- Tweets were also collected from alcohol industry stakeholders, their adversaries and neutral actors.
- Retweets seem to be an important resource for Twitter users, with about 50 % share of all tweets.
- The tweets focused on policies, drinking habits and culture, decreasing alcohol-related harm, employment and productivity, freedom of market versus monopolies, law and bureaucracy, information and education.

Theoretical Framework II

Babor et al. (2017) has the following key messages of the alcohol industry:

- 1) drinking is normal;
- 2) abstinence is abnormal;
- 3) the damage done by alcohol is caused by a small group of deviants;
- 4) the alcohol industry is part of the solution;
- 5) alcohol marketing is not harmful and
- 6) education about responsible drinking is the best solution.