Based on the analyses of 100 individual country profiles, The World Health Organization (WHO) has released The Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health focused on analyzing available evidence on alcohol consumption, consequences and policy interventions at global, regional and national levels.

The harmful use of alcohol is a global problem which compromises both individual and social development. It causes harm far beyond the physical and psychological health of the drinker, including the harm to the well-being and health of people around the drinker. Alcohol is associated with many serious social and developmental issues, including violence, child neglect and abuse, and absenteeism in the workplace.

The harmful use of alcohol (defined as excessive use to the point that it causes damage to health) has many implications on public health as demonstrated in the following key findings:

• Harmful use of alcohol results in the death of 2.5 million people annually, causes illness and injury to millions more, and increasingly affects younger generations and drinkers in developing countries.

• Nearly 4% of all deaths are related to alcohol. Most alcohol-related deaths are caused by alcohol result from injuries, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and liver cirrhosis.

• 6.2% of male deaths are related to alcohol, compared to 1.1% of female deaths.

• 320 000 young people aged 15-29 years die annually, from alcohol-related causes, resulting in 9% of all deaths in that age group.

• Almost 50% of men and two-thirds of women do not consume alcohol.

• Harmful alcohol use is one of four common risk factors, along with tobacco use, poor diet and physical inactivity, for the four main groups of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic lung diseases and diabetes.

• Alcohol is the world's third largest risk factor for disease burden; it is the leading risk factor in the Western Pacific and the Americas and the second largest in Europe.

The harmful use of alcohol is also associated with several infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is because alcohol consumption weakens the immune system, reduces inhibitions, effects judgment and has a negative effect on patients' adherence to antiretroviral treatment.

Alcohol Impact Measured in Potential Years of Life Lost Due to Premature Death:

As part of the research, the following chart from the Global Health Risks report compares the top global health concerns using the disability-adjusted life year (DALY). DALY extends the concept of potential years of life lost due to premature death to include equivalent years of "healthy" life lost by virtue of being in states of poor health or disability.

As you can see below, of 19 health concerns, alcohol is ranked #3, and is greater than unsafe

water, high blood pressure, tobacco, obesity and illicit drugs (ranked #18).

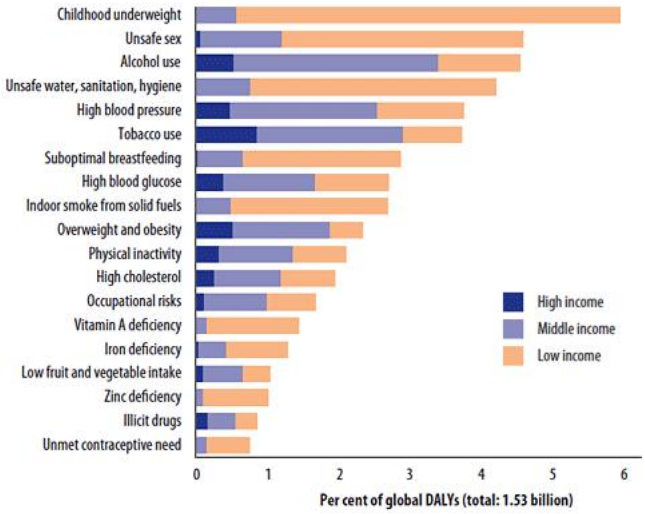

Figure: Global percentages of DALYs1 attributed to 19 leading risk factors by income group.

Source: Global Health Risks (2009)

In response to the growing global crisis, in May 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) released The Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol, endorsed by WHO's Member States. http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/msbalcstragegy.pdf

The Global Strategy promotes a number of proven effective measures for reducing alcohol-related harm including:

• taxation on alcohol;

• reducing availability through allowing fewer outlets to sell alcohol,

• raising age limits for those buying

• using effective drink-driving measures

• promotion of screening and brief interventions (SBIRT) in healthcare settings

• treatment of alcohol use disorders;

• regulating or banning marketing of alcoholic beverages and

• conducting information and educational campaigns in support of effective policy measures.