

## Should soccer and alcohol mix? Alcohol sales during the 2014 World Soccer Cup games in Brazil

*The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) requires Brazil to suspend a national ban on the sales of alcoholic beverages in soccer stadiums during the forthcoming 2014 World Soccer Cup. This editorial focuses on the political and public health-related debate resulting from this request.*

### THE 2014 WORLD CUP AND THE SALES OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES: BAN OR NO BAN?

There is an important alcohol control policy debate going on in Brazil: Whether or not the country should lift an existing ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages in soccer stadiums during the 2014 World Cup matches. This is an imposition by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the international body that governs the World Cup. FIFA's actions are linked to a multimillion-dollar contract that the organization has with Budweiser, and which is active until 2014. This is an ironic twist given that in 2008 the then American Anheuser-Busch sold the majority of their stock to Belgian-Brazilian beer giant InBev. InBev is the product of a previous merger between the Belgian Interbrew and the Brazilian AmBev. Therefore, Brazilian corporate interests appear to be behind FIFA's effort to lift the ban and risk a return of violence during the World Cup games (more on violence below). Obviously, and a sports analogy is inevitable given the context of this editorial, not all Brazilians are playing for the same team. Corporate interests are trumping the public health and safety interests of Brazilians who plan to attend the World Cup games.

The alcohol sales ban in Brazil began in São Paulo in 1995 as a response to a violent fight between the supporters of two opposing soccer teams which led to a death and to many injuries. In 2003, the Brazilian Congress approved the Lei do Torcedor (Spectators' Law) [1], which was signed into law by the then president Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva on 15 May 2003. Article 13-A II of this law states that in order to have access to sports events, spectators cannot have objects, beverages or prohibited substances capable of generating or enabling acts of violence. Although alcoholic beverages are not directly mentioned in the text of the law, there is wide agreement that they are 'substances capable of generating or enabling acts of violence,' and thus have been banned from soccer stadiums and other sporting events. It is this article of the law that is under debate and that, under pressure from FIFA, would be suspended for 30 days in June 2014—the month in which the World Cup games will be played.

### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BAN

The debate on whether to lift or not to lift the ban would, perhaps, be easier to conduct if there was evidence of the ban's effectiveness in curbing violence during soccer games. Unfortunately, such data are not available. Existing data seem to indicate that violence exists both inside and outside soccer stadiums, and, in both cases, that there is a strong association with alcohol [2]. For instance, there have been press reports of 42 deaths associated with soccer games in Brazil between 1999 and 2008. This puts Brazil at the top of a list of countries in terms of the number of deaths associated with soccer violence [3].

### THE PRESENT STATE OF THE DEBATE

While most people in Brazil believe that the ban will be lifted no matter where the games are played and no matter what types of laws mandate the ban, the political debate is not over. First, on 28 March 2012, the bill 'Lei Geral da Copa' (Cup General Law), which provides a legal framework regulating the cup in Brazil, was approved by the lower chamber in the Brazilian Congress (Camara dos Deputados or the Deputies Chamber). The bill was then debated by the senate side of the Brazilian Congress in May 2012, and approved. Finally, on 5 June 2012, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff signed Law 12.663, the 'Lei Geral da Copa', which eliminates the article banning alcoholic beverages from soccer games during the World Cup. The issue is now in the hands of each of the nine states hosting games in the 2014 World Cup.

### CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, Brazilians as a whole have become more aware of the problems associated with alcohol use. There is more debate in popular and political discourse about violence and alcohol, and some cities have successfully implemented alcohol-control measures to decrease violence (see, for example, Duailibi *et al.* [4]). There has also been new interest in controlling drinking and driving, with the enactment of a lower legal blood alcohol content level (0.02) [5–8]. There is also, as in many other countries where alcohol is legally produced and sold, considerable ambiguity about the place of alcohol in society. Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity [9]; people often experience pleasure with alcohol consumption; alcohol generates jobs and tax revenues for states and countries;

and the alcohol industry has an active and powerful lobby pressuring governments and legislators around the world to weaken alcohol-control policies.

It is significant that the debate in Brazil does not seem to have included alternative policies to the ban. A recent analysis of alcohol-control policies in professional sports stadiums in the USA showed that not only do most stadiums have policies (65 out of 66 surveyed), but that several policies were implemented per stadium [10]. For instance, managers and servers are required to attend alcohol training, servers are required to check the customer's age and staff younger than 21 years old cannot sell alcohol. There are also designated alcohol-free sections and a limit of two beverages per sale, with distinguishable cups required for alcohol; intoxicated patrons are also prohibited from entering. Perhaps as the debate about the ban shifts to local jurisdictions in Brazil, some of these alternatives will be considered in cases where the ban cannot be upheld.

It is also significant that in a country with a limited tradition of implementing alcohol control policies, the attempt to lift the ban on alcohol sales during the World Cup games has been so intensely debated in the media and in political circles. Supporters of the ban, among whom are the state attorney generals and local chapters of national professional organizations [e.g. Brazilian Association for the Study of Alcohol and Other Drugs (ABEAD)], vow to continue the fight to maintain the ban. Independent of the final result, Brazilians will still feel ambiguous about the place of alcohol in their culture, but future debates about this topic will likely have a stronger public health dimension.

#### Declaration of interest

None.

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