
IAS Factsheet

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Background

In recent years, two parallel trends have been evident:

1. the growth of the night-time economy and the associated problems of alcohol-related crime and disorder in town and city centres
2. an overall relative decline in the proportion of alcohol consumed in on-licensed premises and a growth in the proportion of alcohol purchased from off-licensed premises and consumed at home.

Is public drinking more dangerous than drinking at home?

The answer to this question probably depends on whether it is crime and disorder or health that is under consideration.

A major international review of the evidence concluded:

“The extent to which alcohol is consumed in public settings (bars etc) rather than in private settings has implications for harmful consequences (particularly violence), as well as prevention strategies.....The association between drinking problems and drinking context probably varies by culture over time.....Survey studies in several countries have found that drinking in public drinking venues is particularly associated with heavy drinking and intoxication, although this picture is not entirely consistent..”¹

One of the factors that appears to play a significant role in the generation of crime and disorder is the density of licensed premises in a locality and the numbers of people present. A main finding of studies of violence in Cardiff was that serious violence in the city’s entertainment thoroughfare was directly proportional to the capacity of licensed premises in that street.²

Part of the explanation of this link is simply that being in a crowd provides more opportunities for conflict with others, for example in situations where there is competition for scarce resources such as transport to get home.

Additionally, of course, conflict in the night-time economy is fuelled by alcohol and those who participate in it are known to drink more than the national average and, more significantly, more than the average for their age group (evidence summarised by Hadfield and Newton³). Indeed, the vast majority of late night drinkers are drunk.⁴

The explanation of these findings is presumably either that heavy drinkers are disproportionately attracted to the night-time economy, or that participation in the night-time economy encourages heavier consumption. These two possibilities are not, of course, mutually exclusive, and the likelihood is that that there is an interaction between the two.

Licensing Reform

In recent years, the possibility that features of the retailing of alcohol, and the night-time economy in particular, may positively encourage heavier consumption has been a matter of public concern and been at the heart of the debates around reform of the licensing law and the regulations governing the management of licensed premises. A basic premise of the Labour Government's licensing reform was that 'binge drinking' was largely the result of artificially early closing times which encouraged rapid consumption of alcohol in order to 'beat the clock'. The supposed solution to the problem, therefore, was to extend drinking hours so as to encourage more leisurely consumption. The expectation was that, provided with longer drinking hours, customers would not drink any more alcohol but that they would drink the same amount more slowly, thus reducing levels of drunkenness.

However, survey data suggest that, contrary to the assumption underlying the new Licensing Act, prolonged stays in premises with extended drinking hours actually result in higher levels of reported consumption. (Hadfield and Newton³) (For a discussion of the whole issue of the reform of the licensing law, see IAS paper).

Binge Drinking, Crime and 'Pre-loading'

Currently, there is considerable concern and controversy regarding heavily discounted sales of alcohol from supermarkets and this relates to a phenomenon known as 'pre-loading' whereby patrons of the night-time economy consume (cheap) alcohol at home or in other private venues prior to attending nightlife venues in town centres. There have been reports of patrons of the night-time economy being well under the influence of alcohol before they even arrive at the bars and nightclubs. A recent research paper⁵ confirms that these reports are not merely anecdotal. A survey of 18-35 year olds in a large city in the North West of England found that those who reported pre-loading reported significantly higher total alcohol consumption over a night out than those who waited to drink until reaching the bars and nightclubs. The pre-loaders were also over twice as likely to have been involved in a fight in the city's nightlife.

The researchers concluded that measures to reduce drunkenness and alcohol-related violence in the night-time economy should not be restricted to premises within the nightlife environment but should also tackle disparities in regard to pricing and policing between on- and off-licensed premises.

High Risk Premises

Other features of the night-time economy have also been identified as causes of excessive or otherwise problematic consumption, in particular, the presence of youth orientated 'vertical drinking' establishments where drinking is an end in itself rather than an accompaniment to other activities, such as having a meal while seated at a table.

Specific factors that have been linked to a higher likelihood of aggression in public drinking settings include:⁶

- crowding
- poor bar layout and traffic flow
- inadequate seating or inconvenient bar access
- dim lighting, noise, poor ventilation or unclean conditions
- discount drinks and promotions that encourage heavy drinking (eg 'happy hours')
- lack of availability of food
- a 'permissive' environment that turns a blind eye to anti-social behaviour
- patrons with a history of aggression and who binge drink
- bar workers who don't practice responsible serving
- aggression/intimidation by doorman and bouncers.

However, arguably, the problems go beyond the failings of a minority of high-risk premises. It is argued that the contemporary night-time economy is largely based upon selling as much alcohol as possible to as many, mainly young, people as possible and that in this context, 'binge drinking' is more accurately seen as the product on offer rather than an unfortunate and accidental consequence of a night out. A newspaper report published just prior to the new Licensing Act coming into effect, indicates the kind of issues involved:⁷

'£20,000 bonuses for pub managers who exceed targets

Staff race to sell more shots

The drinks industry is planning a ruthless campaign of economic incentives and psychological tricks to get customers to drink as much as possible when licensing laws are relaxed, The Observer can reveal. Managers of massive 'vertical drinking' pubs are being offered bonuses worth up to £20,000 a year if they beat targets as the industry moves to exploit Britain's binge drinking culture.

Managers are so concerned about the consequences of the pressure to sell that they have laid bare a litany of tricks and sharp practices that will be used to maximise profits once 24-hour opening is legalised next month. Managers for many of the big chain pubs dominating Britain's city centres are being ordered to draw up business development plans explaining how they will keep people in their pubs after 11pm and offered shares of the profits if they beat sales targets. One manager told of races between bar staff to sell as many 'shots' of spirits as possible within a set time and constant pressure to 'upsell'

singles to doubles.

Dave Daley, head of the National Association of Licensed House Managers, which represents Britain's thousands of pub managers, broke cover this weekend to reveal the plans. He said he was speaking out as a warning to his members not to jeopardise their livelihoods and relations with neighbouring communities by giving in to the ferocious drive to profit from bingeing.

'I have been a manager for 30 years in these superpubs and in town centres,' he said. 'How we make our money is to make people binge drink: the more people drink, the more I get as a bonus. The more alcohol you sell, the more bonus you get: they give you a target to reach.'

'We have these extra hours and companies are saying to managers "Give me your business plan, what are you going to do after 11 o'clock? If you sell x more we will give you more".'

Bonuses could be up to £20,000 a year, he said. Managers were being told that for the extra two hours they can open under the new laws, they could sell, for example, £2,000 worth of extra stock and keep 10 per cent of that as a bonus.....

James Purnell, the licensing minister, said irresponsible drinks promotions would be specifically targeted under the legislation and those found to be infringing it could lose their licenses.

'Any chain using irresponsible drinking promotions to boost its profits isn't operating in the real world,' he said. 'Public opinion has hardened since the mid-1990s and the act does put people on notice that we expect to make irresponsible drinks promotions a thing of the past.'

Daley, however, said that opening later would inevitably have an impact: 'People are going to drink more, no doubt about it. Your sales are going to go up by 10-15 per cent. All this stuff about a cafe society is a lot of rubbish.'

Plans to keep drinkers in the pub after 11pm are likely to include curry nights, quiz nights or karaoke, he said, but there were concerns that pressure to maximise profits would lead to more noisy late-night entertainment which would badly affect neighbourhoods.....

However, one former pub manager told The Observer that high-pressure sales tactics used in her pub were on orders from head office: 'Our job was to make as much money as possible - how could we do that except by selling as much alcohol as possible?'

Mandatory Code

Alongside changes to the Licensing Law, other measures have been adopted to regulate the retailing of alcohol, particularly in on-licensed premises, to reduce the likelihood of intoxication or crime and disorder. After encouraging the alcohol industry voluntarily to abandon socially

undesirable marketing practices, the previous Labour Government then introduced a mandatory code on the retailing of alcohol. The provisions of the code are:

1 (1) The responsible person shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that staff on relevant premises do not carry out, arrange or participate in any irresponsible promotions in relation to the premises.

(2) In this paragraph, an irresponsible promotion means any one or more of the following activities, or substantially similar activities, carried on for the purpose of encouraging the sale or supply of alcohol for consumption on the premises in a manner which carries a significant risk of leading or contributing to crime and disorder, prejudice to public safety, public nuisance, or harm to children

(a) games or other activities which require or encourage, or are designed to require or encourage, individuals to

(i) drink a quantity of alcohol within a time limit (other than to drink alcohol sold or supplied on the premises before the cessation of the period in which the responsible person is authorised to sell or supply alcohol), or

(ii) drink as much alcohol as possible (whether within a time limit or otherwise);

(b) provision of unlimited or unspecified quantities of alcohol free or for a fixed or discounted fee to the public or to a group defined by a particular characteristic (other than any promotion or discount available to an individual in respect of alcohol for consumption at a table meal, as defined in section 159 of the Act);

(c) provision of free or discounted alcohol or any other thing as a prize to encourage or reward the purchase and consumption of alcohol over a period of 24 hours or less;

(d) provision of free or discounted alcohol in relation to the viewing on the premises of a sporting event, where that provision is dependent on

(i) the outcome of a race, competition or other event or process, or

(ii) the likelihood of anything occurring or not occurring;

(e) selling or supplying alcohol in association with promotional posters or flyers on, or in the vicinity of, the premises which can reasonably be considered to condone, encourage or glamourise anti-social behaviour or to refer to the effects of drunkenness in any favourable manner.

- 2 The responsible person shall ensure that no alcohol is dispensed directly by one person into the mouth of another (other than where that other person is unable to drink without assistance by reason of a disability).
- 3 The responsible person shall ensure that free tap water is provided on request to customers where it is reasonably available.
- 4 (1) The premises license holder or club premises certificate holder shall ensure that an age verification policy applies to the premises in relation to the sale or supply of alcohol.

(2) The policy must require individuals who appear to the responsible person to be under 18 years of age (or such older age as may be specified in the policy) to produce on request, before being served alcohol, identification bearing their photograph, date of birth and a holographic mark.
- 5 The responsible person shall ensure that:
 - (a) where any of the following alcoholic drinks is sold or supplied for consumption on the premises (other than alcoholic drinks sold or supplied having been made up in advance ready for sale or supply in a securely closed container) it is available to customers in the following measures:
 - (i) beer or cider: ½ pint
 - (ii) gin, rum, vodka or whisky: 25 ml or 35 ml; and
 - (iii) still wine in a glass: 125 ml; and
 - (b) customers are made aware of the availability of these measures.

Reducing the Harm

Summary of strategies for reducing violence in and around licensed premises⁸

Nature of intervention	Examples
<p>Manipulation of the physical environment of pubs/clubs</p> <p>Controlling the social atmosphere</p> <p>Alcohol control</p> <p>Control of drinkers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No 'hidden' alcoves that prevent the easy monitoring of behaviour ○ Attention to the spacing of furniture, including tables, chairs, stools and pool tables to avoid customer crowding ○ Raised bar-areas to permit monitoring of customer behaviour ○ Attractive, well-maintained premises ○ Registered door-staff schemes and employment of well trained staff who discourage anti-social behaviour in a manner that does not escalate violence ○ The reduction of excessively loud music ○ No 'happy hours'/drinks promotions ○ Serving of hot food and soft beverages ○ Well ventilated premises with controls over the number of customers entering ○ Well trained and socially skilled door staff and bar staff experienced in dealing with aggressive or violent individuals (see also above) ○ Refusal of alcohol to already intoxicated customers ○ 'Pubwatch' schemes ○ The use of CCTV to monitor disorder and violence ○ Staggered closing times to avoid large numbers of individuals gathering in the same area together ○ Regular and reliable transportation away from pubs and clubs
<p>Injury reduction</p> <p>Nature of intervention Criminal justice policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use of toughened glass ○ Use of plastic cups ○ The banning of bottle-served alcohol ○ Swift removal of any glassware used ○ Weapons searches on entry to public houses and clubs <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heavier penalties for breaches of licensing laws such as serving to underage drinkers (relevant to both 'on' and 'off licences) ○ Courts to divert alcohol-offenders to treatment and education programmes ○ Monitoring of 'problem/violent' premises ○ Alcohol education schemes

Evidence of effectiveness

While many approaches to preventing harm are recommended and have been adopted, it can be difficult to find hard evidence of effectiveness. A study of European approaches to harm reduction⁴ found:

- Responsible server and staff training interventions could increase staff knowledge and improve serving practices, but the wider effects on alcohol harm were generally small, except where training was made mandatory
- There was little evidence to support the effectiveness of standalone interventions such as designated driver programmes
- There was no evidence to support the placement of age verification devices as a standalone method of reducing underage sales of alcohol
- Evidence for the effectiveness of policing and enforcement approaches was mixed, but targeted policing in high risk environments was more effective than street policing

The strongest evidence of effectiveness was provided by multi-component programmes working at community level. An example was a programme in Stockholm (Sweden) which combined community mobilisation with responsible beverage service training and stricter enforcement of alcohol laws, and was associated with significant reductions in violent crime.

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