

**SERIOUS VIOLENCE INQUIRY
WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY THE INSTITUTE OF ALCOHOL STUDIES**

Executive summary:

“We know that a significant proportion of violence is linked to...alcohol, but [this important element is] not driving the increases we are seeing in violent crime. That is why [it is] not the focus of this document” – the government’s Serious Violence Strategy¹

“My unit is the alcohol harm reduction unit. We don’t have the drug reduction unit and there is a reason for that; drugs aren’t causing us the same problems that alcohol is” – police officer’s evidence to Alcohol Harm APPG²

- Last year, there were nearly half a million violent crimes committed under the influence of alcohol in England and Wales – 40% of all violent offences.³ Around 60% of murders are committed under the influence of alcohol.⁴ The cost to the taxpayer of this alcohol-related crime and disorder has been estimated to be £11bn per year,^{5, 6} although some suggest this may be an underestimate.⁷ Considering this, it is unclear why any strategy hoping to address violence would overlook this major driver of crime, injury, and loss.
- It is positive to see that early intervention and prevention is one of the Serious Violence strategy’s themes. Further, the collaboration between health, policing, and third sector organisations proposed is positive. However, it is concerning that the prevention of alcohol-related violence is overlooked.
- While we recognise this strategy focuses on recent spikes in homicide, knife crime, and gun crime, addressing the burden alcohol-related crime places on the public and police does not conflict with the strategy’s main focus – in fact, it may complement this. Alcohol has been demonstrated to be involved in drawing vulnerable people, including children, into these acts,⁸ and further, the huge boost to police funds and manhours a reduction in all forms of alcohol-related violence would represent, would free up resources for officers to focus on these other concerning trends.
- There is a wealth of evidence suggesting action on price and availability of alcohol offers promising, cheap to implement, interventions that would reduce the staggering levels of alcohol-related violence currently being perpetrated against the British public – and cut the bill to police services at the same time.⁹ These are violence reduction measures the government cannot afford to ignore.

¹ HM Government. 2018. [Serious Violence Strategy](#). p. 15.

² Alcohol Concern. 2016. [The Frontline Battle](#). p. 26.

³ ONS. 2018. [The nature of violent crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2017](#). p. 24.

⁴ Quigley, B. M. and Leonard, K. E. 2000. Alcohol, drugs, and violence. In V. B. Van Hasselt & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Aggression and violence: An introductory text*. pp. 259–283. Cited in, Foran, H. and O’Leary, K. 2008. [Alcohol and intimate partner violence: A meta-analytic review](#). *Clinical psychology review*, 28(7), p. 1223.

⁵ At 2010/11 prices.

⁶ [www.parliament.uk](#). 2013. [Written evidence from the Department of Health \(GAS 01\), in 3rd report – Government’s Alcohol Strategy, Health Committee](#).

⁷ Bhattacharya, A. 2017. [Which cost of alcohol? What should we compare it against?](#). *Addiction*, 112(4), pp.559-565.

⁸ The Children’s Society. 2018. [What is county lines?](#)

⁹ Angus, C., Holmes, J., Pryce, R., Meier, P. & Brennan, A. 2016. [Alcohol and cancer trends: Intervention Studies](#). University of Sheffield and Cancer Research UK. p. 28

Answering items: Whether the Serious Violence Strategy is likely to be effective in combatting serious crime.

1. Almost half of all violent crime in England and Wales is committed under the influence of alcohol

1.1. Research has linked alcohol to a huge array of violent acts, including domestic violence, sexual assault,¹⁰ child abuse,¹¹ and violent crime including murder.¹² Indeed, figures from the National Probation Service suggest “alcohol is a factor related to a lot of crimes including many assaults, murder and rape cases (between 50 and 80%)”.¹³ It is unsurprising, therefore, that this is reflected in national data; alcohol-related violence represents a significant proportion of all violence committed in England and Wales, making up more than 40% of violence every year between 2006/07-2016/17, peaking at 55% in 2009/10.^{14, 15}

1.2. Despite the high levels of alcohol-related violence suggested by official statistics, it is likely that these figures in fact underestimate the problem. There are many reasons, including victims choosing not to report crimes, that crime statistics might be underestimations. This problem is confounded further for alcohol-related violence, as while the incident itself may be recorded, the alcohol-related nature of the crime may not be detected; only in specific cases such as drink driving offences is the presence of alcohol tested for. As such, the true scale of this violence may be much greater.

2. Alcohol is involved in the perpetration of the violence this strategy hopes to address

2.1. Not only is alcohol a primary driver of violence in England and Wales, but the direct role alcohol plays in the violence this strategy hopes to address must be considered. Alcohol is often involved in the exploitation of vulnerable people and children in county lines drug markets. Alcohol and Families Alliance members, The Children's Society, note how alcohol can be used to exploit children into involvement in county lines drug gangs¹⁶ – echoed by the National Crime Agency in their report into the county lines phenomenon, which notes the role alcohol plays in grooming young people within this.¹⁷ The report further notes how vulnerable victims of the practice of cuckooing – forcibly using someone's residence as a base for drug sales – often suffer from addictions such as alcoholism.¹⁸

3. Alcohol wastes police time, money, and manpower

3.1. Not only does alcohol generate substantial violence in England and Wales but dealing with its effects wastes police time, money and manpower, hampering efforts to address worrying trends in serious violence including the knife crime discussed in the strategy.

3.2. Alcohol related crime is estimated to cost the taxpayer £11bn per year, at 2010/11 prices,¹⁹ although some suggest this figure is an underestimate.²⁰ Alcohol-related crime and disorder also takes up substantial proportions of the police's time and manpower. In a survey of almost 5000 emergency service professionals, the Institute of Alcohol Studies found that alcohol takes up 53% of police workload.²¹ This problem is particularly acute at weekends. Here, over 80% of arrests are alcohol-related,²² and findings from the Alcohol Harm APPG suggest “policing the night time economy requires 30% more resourcing at the weekend.”²³ This inhibits effective policing of rural areas, as manpower and resources are drawn from these to city centres²⁴ – a major concern when we are asking our forces to tackle rural-based county line drug markets. Findings from interviews with

¹⁰ Galvani, S. 2010. [Supporting families affected by substance use and domestic violence](#). p. 5.

¹¹ Galvani, S. 2010. [Grasping the Nettle: alcohol and domestic violence](#). p. 3.

¹² Quigley, B. M. and Leonard, K. E. 2000. *ibid.*

¹³ Interventions & Substance Misuse Group: National Offender Management Service, Alcohol Concern, and MP Consultancy. 2008. [Alcohol Information Pack for Offenders Under Probation Supervision](#). p. 41.

¹⁴ ONS. 2018. [Table 3.11 Offender\(s\) under the influence of alcohol or drugs in violent incidents, year ending March 2007 to year ending March 2017 CSEW](#).

¹⁵ The cause of the decline since 2009/10 has not been determined and requires further research. Alcohol remains a significant driver of violence and it should not be assumed that this relatively recent decline will continue.

¹⁶ The Children's Society. 2018. *ibid.*

¹⁷ National Crime Agency. 2017. [County Lines Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply 2017](#). p. 17.

¹⁸ National Crime Agency. 2017. *ibid.* p. 13.

¹⁹ [www.parliament.uk](#). 2013. *ibid.*

²⁰ Bhattacharya, A., 2017. *ibid.*

²¹ The Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2015. [Alcohol's impact on emergency services](#). p. 3.

²² Stoddart, J. 2011. [Alcohol's impact on policing](#). Balance – The North East Alcohol Office. p. 19.

²³ Alcohol Concern. 2016. *ibid.* p. 13.

²⁴ Alcohol Concern. 2016. *ibid.* p. 13.

emergency service personnel further confirmed this drain alcohol places on police time, with officers describing the time-consuming process of 'babysitting' intoxicated individuals, often during their busiest periods.²⁵

- 3.3. Not only are police resources wasted in dealing with such incidents, police and emergency service workers find themselves victims of alcohol-related violence. Police frequently suffer alcohol-related attacks, with survey findings suggesting as many as 3 in 4 officers experience this,²⁶ placing a physical and emotional toll on officers.²⁷

Answering items: The Committee will be particularly interested in evidence on whether the four main themes in the Serious Crime Strategy are the right ones and whether they will provide the clarity and direction needed to tackle the problem.

- 4.1. It is positive to see that early intervention and prevention is one of the four main themes of the strategy. Further, the collaboration between health, policing, and third sector organisations proposed within the strategy is positive – particularly when the success such an approach can bring has been demonstrated through the renowned Cardiff Model for Violence Prevention.²⁸
- 4.2. However, it is concerning that the prevention of alcohol-related violence is overlooked. Preventative action on alcohol-related violence can be cheap and effective and does not conflict with the strategy's main focus. As demonstrated, alcohol is involved in drawing vulnerable people, including children, into these acts,²⁹ and the huge boost to police funds and manhours a reduction in alcohol-related violence would represent would free up resources for officers to focus on these other concerning trends. Action on the price and availability of alcohol offers promising, cheap to implement, interventions that would reduce the staggering levels of alcohol-related violence currently being perpetrated against the British public – and cut the bill to police services at the same time.³⁰

5. Action on affordability and availability of alcohol has been proven to lower violence

- 5.1. *Affordability*: Multiple studies have found alcohol price to be associated with levels of violence.³¹ In reviewing the relevant literature, the Home Office themselves recognise this: "The balance of this evidence tends to support an association between increasing alcohol price and decreasing levels of violence."³² Research from Canada examining real world pricing changes found that a 10% increase in provincial minimum alcohol prices was associated with a 9.17% reduction in crimes against persons.³³ Further, meta-analysis evidence suggests doubling alcohol tax would reduce violence by 2%.³⁴ Evidence from England and Wales echoes these findings; research examining beer prices' influence on injuries suggested "increased alcohol prices would result in substantially fewer violent injuries and reduced demand on trauma services",³⁵ and findings released in 2016 suggest a 1% increase in alcohol prices above inflation could avoid more than 6,000 violence-related emergency department attendances in England and Wales every year.³⁶ Levels of domestic violence have also been found to be associated with the price of alcohol,³⁷ with one study finding a 1% increase in alcohol prices was associated with a 5% reduced risk of being a victim of domestic violence as a

²⁵ Alcohol Concern. 2016. *ibid.* p. 20.

²⁶ The Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2015. *ibid.* p. 4.

²⁷ Alcohol Concern. 2016. *ibid.* p. 5.

²⁸ Cardiff University. n.d. [Reducing violent crime.](#)

²⁹ The Children's Society. 2018. *ibid.*

³⁰ Angus, C., Holmes, J., Pryce, R., Meier, P. & Brennan, A. 2016. *Ibid.*

³¹ Booth A., et al. 2010. [Alcohol pricing and criminal harm: a rapid evidence assessment of the published research literature.](#) ScHARR, University of Sheffield, p. 14.

³² Secretary of State for the Home Department. 2011. [The likely impacts of increasing alcohol price: a summary review of the evidence base.](#) HM Government. p. 4.

³³ Stockwell, T., Zhao, J., Marzell, M., Gruenewald, P.J., Macdonald, S., Ponicki, W. R. and Martin, G. 2015. [Relationships between minimum alcohol pricing and crime during the partial privatization of a Canadian government alcohol monopoly.](#) Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs, 76(4), p. 634.

³⁴ Wagenaar, A.C., Tobler, A.L. and Komro, K.A., 2010. [Effects of alcohol tax and price policies on morbidity and mortality: a systematic review.](#) American Journal of Public Health, 100(11), p. 2270.

³⁵ Matthews, K., Shepherd, J. and Sivarajasingham, V. 2006. [Violence-related injury and the price of beer in England and Wales.](#) Applied Economics, 38(6), p. 661.

³⁶ Page, N., Sivarajasingam, V., Matthews, K., Heravi, S., Morgan, P. and Shepherd, J. 2017. [Preventing violence-related injuries in England and Wales: a panel study examining the impact of on-trade and off-trade alcohol prices.](#) Injury prevention, 23(1), p. 39.

³⁷ Markowitz, S. 2000. [The Price of Alcohol, Wife Abuse, and Husband Abuse.](#) Southern Economic Journal, Volume 67, Issue 2, accessed from the National Bureau of Economic Research. p. 20.

wife.³⁸ Not only this, but a survey of 18-35 year olds in North West England found that those who 'pre-loaded' – consuming alcohol in a private setting before moving to the on-trade, a practice largely driven by the price differential between the off- and on-trade – were more than twice as likely to have been involved in a fight.³⁹

- 5.2. These findings are highly concerning when considering that alcohol is substantially more affordable today than it has been for more than three decades.⁴⁰ This jump in affordability has been largely driven by cheap, supermarket alcohol – off-trade beer is 188% more affordable than it was in 1987, while off-trade wine and spirits are 131% more affordable. This trend has accelerated in the last five years, due to the scrapping of the alcohol duty escalator.⁴¹
- 5.3. Minimum unit pricing and the reinstating of the alcohol duty escalator offer a solution. Minimum unit pricing sets a floor price below which a unit of alcohol cannot be sold, selectively raising the price of the cheapest alcohol products which are most responsible for harm, while leaving the price of most drinks, including those served in bars and restaurants, unchanged. Modelling suggests a 50p MUP in England would lead to a 2.4% reduction in alcohol-related crime, saving the criminal justice system £2.2 billion in 20 years.⁴² This measure is also supported by Action on Violence, the team behind the drastic turnaround of Glasgow's murder statistics.⁴³
- 5.4. Reinstating the duty escalator would also raise prices, reducing crime and generating revenue which could fund police forces. Between 2008 and 2012, the alcohol duty escalator automatically increased alcohol duties by 2% above inflation each year. However, this was scrapped for beer in 2013 and for wine, cider and spirits in 2014. Alcohol duties were cut or frozen in 2015 and 2016. They were all increased in line with inflation in the 2017 Spring Budget but were frozen again in the 2017 Autumn Budget. Reinstating this would go some way to protecting the most vulnerable from the harms of cheap alcohol, whilst protecting the Treasury from the £8.1 billion loss over the ten years to 2023 that has been projected from the current duty landscape.⁴⁴
- 5.5. *Availability*: Violence rates have also been shown to be significantly affected by the physical and temporal availability of alcohol. Alcohol Focus Scotland and Centre for Research on Environment, Society and Health (CRESH) at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow found crime rates, including violent crime, "were consistently and significantly higher in areas with more alcohol outlets. This relationship was found for total outlets, on-sales outlets and off-sales outlets."⁴⁵ Temporal availability plays a similarly key role. The introduction of trading hour restrictions in New South Wales was found to reduce incidence of assault, resulting in a 60% reduction in serious facial injuries requiring surgery in the two years following the restrictions being put in place.⁴⁶
- 5.6. The introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 has created significant increases in alcohol's temporal and physical availability in England and Wales. Home Office figures show that not only has there been an 8% increase in premises licenses between 2008 and 2017, but that there has been a 16% increase in premises with a 24-hour license in the same period.⁴⁷ Indeed, in their evidence-based report into UK alcohol policy, the University of Stirling, Alcohol Health Alliance, and British Liver Trust note that "Alcoholic drinks are no longer bought in specific places and at specific times for specific drinking routines. They can be bought anywhere, at any time, as part of the routine of daily life. This has eroded the public perception that these are distinctive, and above all harmful, products."⁴⁸ These changes in temporal and physical availability have created difficulties for police forces; research interviewing police professionals produced by the APPG on Alcohol Harm found these changes had "severe resource implications for police forces all over the country."⁴⁹

³⁸ Patra, J., Giesbrecht, N., Rehm, J., Bekmuradov, D. and Popova, S. 2012. [Are alcohol prices and taxes an evidence-based approach to reducing alcohol-related harm and promoting public health and safety? A literature review](#). Contemporary Drug Problems, 39(1), pp.7-48.

³⁹ Hughes, K., Anderson, Z., Morleo, M. and Bellis, M. A. 2008. [Alcohol, nightlife and violence: the relative contributions of drinking before and during nights out to negative health and criminal justice outcomes](#). Addiction, 103(1), pp.60-65.

⁴⁰ NHS Digital. 2017. [Statistics on Alcohol](#).

⁴¹ Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2018. [The rising affordability of alcohol](#).

⁴² Angus, C., Holmes, J., Pryce, R., Meier, P. & Brennan, A. 2016. *ibid.* p. 28

⁴³ Action on Violence. 2017. [Minimum Unit Pricing Decision Statement](#).

⁴⁴ Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2017. [Budget 2017 analysis](#).

⁴⁵ Alcohol Focus Scotland and CRESH. 2018. [Alcohol Outlet Availability and Harm in Scotland](#). p. 8

⁴⁶ The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education and The Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2017.

[Anytime, anywhere? Addressing physical availability of alcohol in Australia and the UK](#). p. 16

⁴⁷ Home Office and ONS. 2017. [Alcohol and Late Night Refreshment Licensing England and Wales](#). Table 1.

⁴⁸ University of Stirling, Alcohol Health Alliance, and British Liver Trust. 2013. [Health First: An evidence-based alcohol strategy for the UK](#). p. 30.

⁴⁹ Alcohol Concern. 2016. *ibid.* p. 13.

5.7. A comprehensive review of current licensing legislation could address this expansion of availability, reducing levels of violence experienced by citizens and frontline emergency service personnel.⁵⁰ Further, it could free up resources and manpower to deal with the more intractable problems the strategy hopes to address.

6. Action on alcohol harm is needed, wanted and workable

6.1. As the former Home Secretary herself said – "we cannot arrest our way out of this issue."⁵¹ We couldn't agree more. We need preventative action and police forces need the time, space, and resources to unpick these difficult issues. Action on alcohol harm will go some way to achieve this. At a time when officers are being asked to do more with less, our officers and citizens deserve action on alcohol harm from their government.

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⁵⁰ IAS. 2015. *ibid.*

⁵¹ HM Government. 2018. *ibid.* p. 7.