

1. **Executive Summary:**

- **The Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) welcomes action from Government on domestic abuse.**
- **However, while we support many of the proposed measures discussed in the Government's own consultation on the upcoming legislation, we feel the effectiveness of this is likely to be hampered if the scope of the legislation and associated non-legislative package is not widened.**
- **Particularly, it is essential to consider alcohol's role in domestic abuse, and the action on alcohol availability, marketing, and price required to address this.**

1.1. Alcohol is not a cause of domestic abuse. However, while it is right for us to push back against narratives that place the blame for incidents of abuse on drinking alone, it is essential to consider that research has repeatedly suggested that alcohol is a compounding factor.

1.2. Multiple studies have suggested that a substantial portion of domestic violence perpetrators have been drinking at the time of their assault (with estimates ranging from 25% to 73%^{1,2}). Further, alcohol appears associated with severe violence, with these cases found to be twice as likely as others to involve alcohol.³ Alcohol misuse also seems to be a risk factor, with this consistently found in a high proportion of those who perpetrate domestic abuse and sexual assault – in fact, where one partner in an intimate relationship is experiencing drug or alcohol misuse, domestic abuse is more likely than not to occur.⁴ Clearly, alcohol ought to be considered in any discussion of domestic abuse.

2. **What further measures need to be taken to help prevent domestic abuse?**

2.1 Our response to the proposals contained within the Government's consultation can be read [here](#). While we welcome many of the proposals put forward, we feel the scope of this work needs to be expanded to adequately address domestic abuse. For example, there has been some discussion surrounding the use of electronic monitoring of alcohol use of perpetrators. There are many reasons why such a scheme may be unsuitable to deploy in cases of domestic violence, including ethical concerns surrounding alcohol dependent offenders, and a failure to engage offenders in long-term behavioural and attitudinal changes. However, what should be of primary concern, is that such a scheme can only ever hope to address the offending of those known to the criminal justice system.

2.2 In relation to alcohol in particular, there is much benefit that might be gained from population level action, rather than a focus on offenders known to the criminal justice system, who – as the Government's consultation recognises – currently represent only a small proportion of those committing such abuse. What is required is population level action on the affordability and availability of alcohol.

2.3 **Affordability:** Multiple studies have found alcohol price increases to be associated with reductions in levels of domestic violence and sexual assault. A 1% increase in alcohol price has been demonstrated to be associated with a 5% reduced risk of being a victim of domestic violence as a wife,⁵ while US research has shown that an increase in the price of alcohol reduced the probability of severe violence against wives.⁶ Research examining international evidence from across 16 countries found a 1% increase in alcohol tax resulted in a 0.25% decrease in the probability of assault and a 0.16% decrease in the probability of sexual assault.⁷ Findings of an evidence review commissioned by the Home Office suggest increases in alcohol price were associated with reductions in overall crime, including violent crime and sexual assault.^{8,9}

2.4 This evidence is concerning when it is considered that alcohol is dramatically more affordable today than it has been for more than 30 years.¹⁰ Strong alcohol products are being sold for pocket money prices up and down the UK. This is most pronounced in the off-trade – off-trade beer is 188% more affordable than it was in 1987, while off-trade wine

¹ Bennett L., and Bland P. [Substance Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence](#). National online recourse centre on violence against women.

² Gilchrist E., Johnson R., Talriti R., Weston S., Beech A., and Kebell M. 2003.

[Domestic Violence offenders: characteristics and offending related needs. Findings. 217](#). Home Office.

³ McKinney, C.M., Caetano, R., Harris, T.R. and Ebama, M.S. 2009. [Alcohol availability and intimate partner violence among US couples](#). *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 33(1), pp.169-176.

⁴ Galvani S. 2010. [Supporting families affected by substance use and domestic violence](#). p. 5.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Markowitz, S., 2000. [The price of alcohol, wife abuse, and husband abuse](#). *Southern Economic Journal*, pp.279-303.

⁷ Markowitz, S., 2000. [Criminal violence and alcohol beverage control: evidence from an international study \(No. w7481\)](#). National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁸ Booth, A., Meier, P., Shapland, J., Wong, R., and Paisley, S. 2011.

[Alcohol pricing and criminal harm, a rapid evidence assessment of the published research literature](#). pp. 4–5.

⁹ This study also assessed four studies examining alcohol prices and domestic violence, finding: "Modelling studies indicate a possible effect of alcohol price increases in reducing domestic violence. In contrast, a natural experiment found no significant difference in the reduction in domestic violence following a 33% average tax reduction." (p. 20). However, the paper also notes that only a limited number of studies were available examining this, and as such "no firm conclusions can be drawn on whether or not there are direct effects of pricing changes" (p. 24) on domestic violence. However, the wider literature on violence in general is suggestive that a price increase would lower levels of these incidents.

¹⁰ NHS Digital. 2017. [Statistics on Alcohol](#).

and spirits are 131% more affordable. These jumps in affordability have been most pronounced in the last five years, following the scrapping of the alcohol duty escalator.¹¹

- 2.5 Minimum unit pricing offers a solution. This 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.
- 2.6 **Availability:** The physical and temporal availability of alcohol have both been demonstrated to be associated with rates of violence. Alcohol Focus Scotland and Centre for Research on Environment, Society and Health (CRESH) at the Universities of Edinburgh found crime rates, including crimes of violence and sexual offences, "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."¹² Temporal availability has also been shown to affect this. Recent restrictions of trading hours in New South Wales saw reductions in harm including incidence of assault and a 60% reduction in serious facial injuries requiring surgery in the two years after the policy was introduced.¹³
- 2.7 In the years since the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003, alcohol's temporal and physical availability has dramatically increased. Figures from the Home Office show that not only has there been an 8% increase in the number of premises licenses between 2008 and 2017,¹⁴ but that there has been a 16% increase in the number of premises with a 24-hour license between 2008 and 2017.¹⁵ Indeed, as discussed in their evidence-based report into alcohol policy in the UK, 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."¹⁶
- 2.8 A comprehensive review of current licensing legislation could address this explosion of availability, reducing levels of domestic violence, as well as the commonplace alcohol-related sexual harassment and assault, including of frontline emergency service personnel, experienced in the night-time economy.¹⁷

3. Is the response of public authorities to domestic abuse good enough, and if not, how could it be improved?

- 3.1 One area the response of public authorities to domestic abuse could be improved is through better data collection. It is possible valuable data could be gathered, particularly regarding the role of alcohol in these offences. By providing Intervention and Brief Advice (for more information on this, please head [here](#)) – both to perpetrators and to those accessing domestic abuse services – the understanding of alcohol's place in such offences, and how it ought to be considered in the development of domestic abuse services, could be enhanced. This call for better data collection surrounding alcohol use is supported by a report from Standing Together Against Domestic Violence, discussing findings from Domestic Homicide Reviews, which suggests that GPs should discuss abuse with patients if they present with alcohol dependence.¹⁸

4. What else is required to ensure that there is sufficient support, protection and refuge for victims of abuse?

- 4.1 Any strategic response to domestic abuse hoping to provide sufficient support for victims of abuse must consider how victims might use alcohol to cope with their experiences, and what barriers this might place to their protection and access to refuges. There is evidence that a proportion of those experiencing domestic abuse may use alcohol as a method of coping – for example, it has been found that women who experience domestic abuse were twice as likely to drink following an instance of domestic violence than the perpetrator.¹⁹
- 4.2 However, many refuges refuse women with co-occurring alcohol use problems. AVA and Solace Women's Aid have found that 61% of London boroughs only 'sometimes accept' women who use alcohol or drugs into their refuges, while two boroughs actively exclude them.²⁰ As well as this, these women are also likely to find barriers to any attempt they make to access alcohol treatment services. In a report discussing the provision of treatment services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage, Agenda have found that less than half of the authorities in England and less than a quarter in Wales ran substance misuse services for women, and where they did, this was often a substance misuse midwife or a women's only session within a generic mixed service.²¹ For women who have experienced domestic violence, entering a mixed-gendered space may be intimidating, and a barrier to accessing treatment.

¹¹ Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2018. [The rising affordability of alcohol](#).

¹² Alcohol Focus Scotland and CRESH. 2018. [Alcohol Outlet Availability and Harm in Scotland](#). p. 8

¹³ The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education and The Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2017.

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

¹⁴ Home Office and ONS. 2017. [Alcohol and Late Night Refreshment Licensing England and Wales](#). Table 1.

¹⁵ Home Office and ONS. 2017. [Alcohol and Late Night Refreshment Licensing England and Wales](#). Table 1.

¹⁶ University of Stirling, Alcohol Health Alliance, and British Liver Trust. 2013. [Health First: An evidence-based alcohol strategy for the UK](#). p. 30

¹⁷ IAS. 2015. [Alcohol's Impact on Emergency Services](#).

¹⁸ Standing Together Against Domestic Violence. 2016. [Domestic Homicide Review \(DHR\) Case Analysis](#). p. 9

¹⁹ University of Bedfordshire & Alcohol Concern. 2010. [Grasping the Nettle: alcohol and domestic violence](#). p. 2

²⁰ Against Violence and Abuse. 2014.

[Case by Case: Refuge provision in London for survivors of domestic violence who use alcohol and other drugs or have mental health problems](#).

²¹ AVA and Agenda. 2017. [Mapping the Maze: Services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage in England and Wales](#).

4.3 There are two pillars to the solution to this problem: funding and training. Suitable refuge and women-only treatment spaces and staff must be funded (calls echoed by AVA and Solace Women's Aid,²² and Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)²³ respectively). It is also essential that existing refuge service workers are trained regarding substance misuse, while alcohol treatment service workers are trained regarding domestic abuse. AVA and Solace Women's Aid raise many other detailed recommendations to improve this picture, including a call for greater multi-agency working between the domestic abuse and alcohol treatment fields, which can be accessed in their report on the state of treatment provision in London.²⁴

5. *The impact of domestic abuse on children and child safeguarding and what more the Government could do to ensure that more children are protected from domestic abuse?*

5.1 Children are regularly subjected to harmful gender stereotypes, perpetuated through alcohol advertising, which promote and normalise the objectification of women, and potentially, domestic violence and sexual assault. As noted by SHAAP and IAS in their report examining issues surrounding alcohol and women, "when marketing is targeted at women...the aim is to establish a link between alcohol and empowerment...Marketing targeted at men often depicts women as sexual objects..."²⁵

5.2 This is clearly highly problematic. However, the UK's current self-regulatory approach to alcohol marketing does very little to prevent this from occurring. Indeed, while the current industry-funded regulatory bodies, the Advertising Standards Authority and the Portman Group, state that alcohol ads must not be directed at people under 18, when the Health Select Committee obtained internal communications from alcohol producers and their advertising agencies in 2009, they found young people put forward as a target for such advertising. Market research data from 15-16 year olds had been used to develop campaigns, and brands appeared to work to generate appeal amongst young people – Lambrini's TV advertisement was intended to be "a cross between Myspace and High School Musical" while Carling hoped to "become the most respected youth brand..."

5.3 Particularly troubling, however, is the link between possibly toxic notions of masculinity and femininity, sexual success, and alcohol use that these brands seek to embed in young people's minds. One Carling executive suggested "[Young men] think about 4 things, we brew 1 and sponsor 2 of them" – targeting young people with such outdated ideas may perpetuate social norms around gender inequality.²⁶

5.4 In order to address this, we must move away from the self- and co-regulatory approach currently governing alcohol advertising. Legislation similar to France's 'Loi Évin' model should be implemented, which places restrictions on the placement and content of advertising messages. The law bans all lifestyle messaging in such ads meaning the images we often see in UK alcohol advertising objectifying women would not be permitted.²⁷

6. *What are the key difficulties encountered by victims of domestic abuse in the justice system, and in particular in the family courts?*

6.1 Improved understanding and recognition of the impact of alcohol on the capacity to consent within the justice system might go some way to address shortfalls in rates of conviction for sexual violence. The Crown Prosecution Service guidance for prosecuting child sexual abuse cases uses alcohol use as an indicator that abuse has in fact occurred, and there is support for this logic to be extended to sexual assault and rape cases.²⁸ This recognition would prevent those victims who have been drinking from being considered unreliable witnesses. Training on this topic for justice system professionals and juries would likely improve conviction rates.

7. *The proposed role and powers of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.*

7.1 Overseeing the Domestic Homicide Review Quality Assurance process will be an essential aspect of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's role. Findings from past reviews suggest there is a great deal of valuable learning relating to alcohol's role in such incidents to be gained from this process. Indeed, in recent analysis of these from the Home Office, alcohol use issues were present in 16 of the 33 intimate partner homicides analysed.²⁹ Ensuring efficient and accurate data collection occurs regarding other agencies involved in domestic abuse will also be central.

8. *About the Institute of Alcohol Studies*

8.1 The Institute of Alcohol Studies is an independent institute bringing together evidence, policy and practice from home and abroad to promote an informed debate on alcohol's impact on society. Our purpose is to advance the use of the best available evidence in public policy decisions on alcohol. For more information, visit www.ias.org.uk.

²² Against Violence and Abuse. 2014.

[Case by Case: Refuge provision in London for survivors of domestic violence who use alcohol and other drugs or have mental health problems.](#)

²³ SHAAP and IAS. 2018. [Women and Alcohol: Key Issues.](#)

²⁴ Against Violence and Abuse. 2014.

[Case by Case: Refuge provision in London for survivors of domestic violence who use alcohol and other drugs or have mental health problems.](#)

²⁵ SHAAP and IAS. 2018. [Women and Alcohol: Key Issues.](#) p. 7

²⁶ Memorandum by Professor Gerard Hastings. 2010.

["They'll Drink Bucket Loads of the Stuff": An Analysis of Internal Alcohol Industry Advertising Documents](#), to the House of Commons Health Select Committee Inquiry. p. 1 & p. 3

²⁷ Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2017. [Policies to regulate alcohol marketing.](#)

²⁸ Against Violence and Abuse. 2014. [Not worth reporting: women's experiences of alcohol, drugs and sexual violence.](#)

²⁹ Home Office. 2016. [Domestic Homicide Reviews: Key findings from analysis of domestic homicide reviews.](#)