

## Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy Institute of Alcohol Studies Submission

### About the Institute of Alcohol Studies

The Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) 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, please visit [www.ias.org.uk](http://www.ias.org.uk).

The evidence we submit to this call for evidence is concerned with the relationship that violence against women and girls has with alcohol consumption and marketing.

### Domestic Violence

There is a clear link between domestic violence and alcohol. The World Health Organization has acknowledged that alcohol consumption – especially at hazardous and harmful levels – is a major contributor to the occurrence of intimate partner violence.<sup>1</sup> Research typically finds that between 25% and 50% of those who perpetrate domestic violence have been drinking at the time of assault,<sup>2</sup> with some studies putting the figure as high as 73%.<sup>3</sup> A large Swedish study found that men with alcohol use disorder were 4.4 times more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence against women compared with matched controls.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the evidence of co-occurrence, the role of alcohol in domestic violence and abuse is complex. Evidence suggests alcohol is not the root cause of abuse, but it can be a compounding factor, sometimes to a significant extent.<sup>5</sup> Alcohol must never be an excuse for abuse. However, the World Health Organization note that “individual and societal beliefs that alcohol causes aggression can lead to violent behaviour being expected when individuals are under the influence of alcohol, and to alcohol being used to prepare for and excuse such violence.”<sup>6</sup>

Alcohol may be consumed by the victim as well as the perpetrator. A report found two thirds of domestic incidents known to police involved at least one person being “under the influence” of alcohol.<sup>7</sup> In intimate partnerships where one partner has a problem with alcohol or other drugs, domestic abuse is more likely to occur than not.<sup>8</sup>

The experience of violence can make women more likely to drink - women who have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence are more than twice as likely to

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization - [Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol Fact Sheet](#), p.1

<sup>2</sup> Bennett and Bland (2008) [Substance abuse and intimate partner violence](#). National online recourse centre on violence against women

<sup>3</sup> Home Office (2003) [Domestic violence offenders: characteristics and offending related needs](#), Findings, 217

<sup>4</sup> Yu et al (2019) [Mental disorders and intimate partner violence perpetrated by men towards women: A Swedish population-based longitudinal study](#). PLoS Medicine, 16(12).

<sup>5</sup> Abbey et al (2001) [Alcohol and Sexual Assault](#). Alcohol Research and Health, Volume 25: Issue 1, pp.43–51

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization (2010) [Preventing intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women](#)

<sup>7</sup> Gilchrist et al (2014) [Roles of Alcohol in Intimate Partner Abuse](#)

<sup>8</sup> Galvani (2010) [Supporting families affected by substance use and domestic violence](#), The Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care, University of Bedfordshire, ADFAM, p.5

have a problem with alcohol than those with little experience of violence and abuse.<sup>9</sup> Alcohol may also be embedded in an abusive relationship - perpetrators can use alcohol to control their victims, for example by limiting access, or may use alcohol as an apology after abusive incidents.

ONS figures show that around 10% of those accessing domestic violence support services (95% of whom were women) had an “alcohol misuse need”.<sup>10</sup> However, there is a lack of coordinated services equipped to meet these dual needs. This can lead to survivors prioritising one need over another – forcing them to decide whether either their domestic abuse or their substance use needs are met.<sup>11</sup>

Survivors may be turned away from refuges because of their alcohol needs. A review of London refuges found that while almost all boroughs require refuges they fund to support women with alcohol, drug or mental health problems, two boroughs actively exclude them. Only 26% of refuges reviewed reported that they “always” or “often” accept women who use alcohol or other drugs.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, alcohol treatment services can be ill-equipped to consider the trauma of domestic abuse survivors. Women who have experienced male violence may be reluctant to engage in mixed-gender services. However, women-only provision of substance use is available in less than half of local authorities in England and Wales.<sup>13</sup> A lack of anonymity and a lack of services that fit around childcare arrangements can also be a barrier to treatment.

#### Policy recommendations:

- A comprehensive, cross-departmental alcohol strategy to enable joined-up working and to ensure that the needs of those harmed by alcohol, including alcohol-related violence, are met. Responsibility for the strategy should sit with a ministerial lead responsible for reducing alcohol harm.
- World Health Organization highlights emerging evidence that reducing alcohol consumption through limiting alcohol availability, regulating alcohol prices and treatment for alcohol-use disorders “may be effective in preventing intimate partner violence.” The WHO quotes a study using economic modelling which estimated that in the US a 1% increase in the price of alcohol may decrease by 5% the probability of intimate partner violence towards women.<sup>14</sup> Policies to reduce consumption must be included in the alcohol strategy.
- Domestic abuse and alcohol treatment services must be better coordinated. Women-only spaces should be available in alcohol treatment and there should be increased availability of residential treatment and recovery support for

<sup>9</sup> Women’s Aid - [the nature and impact of domestic abuse](#).

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics (2018) [Table 63: Personal characteristics of clients accessing Independent Domestic Violence Advisor \(IDVA\) services that use SafeLives' Insights tool](#).

<sup>11</sup> Fox and Galvani (2020) [Substance Use and Domestic Abuse. Essential Information for Social Workers](#) BASW.

<sup>12</sup> 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](#), p.17.

<sup>13</sup> Agenda and AVA (2017) [Mapping the Maze: services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage in England and Wales Executive Summary](#).

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization (2010) [Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence](#). p.51.

women and children, as well as increased availability of support that allows anonymity, including online.<sup>15</sup>

### Rape, sexual harassment and assault

Use of alcohol by both victim and perpetrator is strongly correlated with sexual assault.<sup>16</sup> Of respondents to the Crime Survey for England and Wales who reported experiencing rape or assault by penetration since the age of 16 (96% of whom were women) 38% of victims reported the offender(s) to have been under the influence of alcohol. The same proportion of victims (38%) reported they were under the influence of alcohol themselves during the assault.<sup>17</sup> A study cited in a Royal College of Physicians report found that blood alcohol levels in victims in 60% of rape cases raised questions as to whether the victim would be in a position to give informed consent.<sup>18</sup>

A further study reported that consumption of alcohol by the perpetrator may make a serious assault more likely with a greater degree of sexual abuse taking place and more likelihood of physical injury.<sup>19</sup>

Research by the Institute of Alcohol Studies found that many within the emergency services had experienced sexual harassment and assault while on duty. 74% of female ambulance staff reported experiencing sexual harassment or assault at the hands of intoxicated people while working. While experience of sexual harassment and assault was reported by both male and female emergency service personnel, incidence was higher amongst female respondents. This was in contrast to injuries, where male respondents were generally more likely to have experienced receiving an injury through dealing with drunken members of the public.

Table 1: Alcohol’s Impact on Emergency Services data<sup>20</sup>

	<b>Have received any form of sexual harassment / assault from intoxicated people whilst on duty</b>	<b>Have received an actual injury through dealing with intoxicated members of the public</b>
<b>Ambulance</b>	41% male 74% female	53% male 45% female
<b>Emergency department</b>	15% male 60% female	41% male 44% female
<b>Police</b>	34% male 59% female	79% male 69% female
<b>Fire service</b>	33% male 42% female	10% male 5% female

<sup>15</sup> SHAAP and IAS (2018) [Women and Alcohol: Key Issues](#), p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Standerwick et al (2007) Binge drinking, sexual behaviour and sexually transmitted infection in the UK. Cited in Royal College of Physicians (2011) [Alcohol and sex: a cocktail for poor sexual health](#). Report of the Alcohol and Sexual Health Working Party.

<sup>17</sup> Office for National Statistics (2018) Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Scott-Ham and Burton (2005) Toxicological findings in cases of alleged drug-facilitated sexual assault in the United Kingdom over a 3 year period. Cited in Royal College of Physicians (2011) [Alcohol and sex: a cocktail for poor sexual health](#).

<sup>19</sup> Ullmann and Knight (1993) The efficacy of women’s resistance strategies in rape situations. Cited in Royal College of Physicians (2011) [Alcohol and sex: a cocktail for poor sexual health](#).

<sup>20</sup> Further analysis on data collected from: Institute of Alcohol Studies (2015) [Alcohol’s Impact on Emergency Services](#).

## Gendered marketing of alcohol

Gendered marketing of alcohol products affects gender norms and how women are perceived by society. Objectification of women in alcohol marketing can occur across marketing platforms such as product labels, advertisements and social media. Marketing in the night time environment (NTE) is particularly highly sexualised, using women's bodies to increase patronage in bars and nightclubs, for example through photos in promotional materials and free entry for women policies.

A rapid narrative literature review examined the sexualisation and objectification of women in alcohol marketing targeted at men, and its implications for violence against women. The review identified several studies which linked alcohol and NTE marketing with violence against women:

- Qualitative research with women aged 18-28 in the UK found that unwanted sexual attention and the fear of sexual violence were a normalised part of young women's experience in the NTE. The study authors argued that this was influenced by sexualised culture, including in NTE marketing.<sup>21</sup>
- A UK qualitative study of male students concluded that depictions of women in NTE marketing undermined the effectiveness of anti-violence messages with participants failing to notice the anti-rape campaigns, which were "felt to be invisible in the context of sexualised NTE and drinks marketing."<sup>22</sup>
- A study from California observed a significant positive relationship between the level of sexual content of alcohol marketing in certain Latino areas, and the level of sexual violence perpetrated towards women in the area.<sup>23</sup>

The Advertising Standards Authority introduced new codes prohibiting causing offence through the use of gender stereotypes in 2019.<sup>24</sup> The effect of these new codes is not yet known. Similarly, the alcohol industry body the Portman Group publishes voluntary codes that prohibit the association of alcohol products with sexual activity or sexual success.<sup>25</sup> However, research from several countries, including the UK, has found that self-regulatory systems have failed to restrict marketing content related to sex, with specific studies identifying examples where the existing codes have been breached in relation to sex and gender.<sup>26</sup>

## Policy recommendations:

- Alcohol marketing must have stronger restrictions, including online, to prevent the objectification and sexualisation of women. A restriction on the use of

<sup>21</sup> Rogan et al (2016) Marketing "Raunch Culture": Sexualisation and Constructions of Femininity within the Night-Time Economy. Cited in Atkinson et al (2019) [A rapid narrative review of literature on gendered alcohol marketing and its effects: summary report](#).

<sup>22</sup> Gunby et al (2016) Location, libation and leisure: An examination of the use of licensed venues to help challenge sexual violence. Cited in Atkinson et al (2019) [A rapid narrative review of literature on gendered alcohol marketing and its effects: summary report](#).

<sup>23</sup> Parker et al (2013) Sexual Violence, alcohol and advertising. Cited in Atkinson et al (2019) [A rapid narrative review of literature on gendered alcohol marketing and its effects: summary report](#).

<sup>24</sup> Advertising Standards Authority (2019) [Harm and offence: gender stereotypes](#).

<sup>25</sup> Alcohol Concern and Alcohol Research UK (2018) [Fit for purpose? An analysis of the role of the Portman Group in alcohol industry self-regulation](#).

<sup>26</sup> Atkinson et al (2019) [A rapid narrative review of literature on gendered alcohol marketing and its effects: summary report](#).

lifestyle messaging in alcohol advertisements, as in place in France, would ensure that sexualised and disrespectful images are not permitted.

- Exploitative marketing in the NTE could also be addressed through licensing legislation and enforcement.

### Victim blaming

In a seminar on alcohol and women, hosted by the Institute of Alcohol Studies and Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP), Dr Cliona Saidléar, Executive Director of Rape Crisis Network Ireland, discussed victim blaming. She noted a tendency to focus on the actions taken by women to prevent sexual assault, arguing that this reinforced rape culture, implying it is a woman's responsibility to manage her safety. This focus on individual responsibility fails to take account of the wider societal factors that lead to women experiencing violence. She explained that information can be framed to legitimise victim blaming, or differentiate between 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims, giving examples of prevention campaigns and public safety adverts using this discourse.<sup>27</sup>

A report on intimate partner violence found that the context of alcohol consumption in relationships was viewed differently when men and women were concerned. Women who drank were held more accountable for relationship conflict (victim blaming) while men who drank were seen as less accountable (accused excusing).<sup>28</sup>

### Policy recommendation:

- The Government should fund a mass media anti-stigma campaign to begin a national conversation about alcohol and other substance use, to combat stigmatising attitudes and victim blaming.

### The impact of socio-economic inequality

An investigation of alcohol-related violence in England and Wales from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018, drawing on nationally-representative data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, found that lower socioeconomic groups experience higher prevalence rates of alcohol-related violence overall – particularly alcohol-related domestic violence. The most deprived groups were found to experience as much as 14 times as many incidents of alcohol-related domestic violence every year, compared with the least deprived. When controlling for other known violence risk factors, women were similarly found to be at higher risk of experiencing these alcohol-related domestic violence incidents.<sup>29</sup>

Some studies have also found gendered associations with socio-economic inequality and victimisation. For example, a US study found a significantly higher likelihood of crime victimisation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods for women, but not men.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> SHAAP and IAS (2018) [Women and Alcohol: Key Issues](#)

<sup>28</sup> Gilchrist et al (2014) [Roles of Alcohol in Intimate Partner Abuse](#)

<sup>29</sup> Bryant and Lightowlers (forthcoming 2021) The socioeconomic distribution of alcohol-related violence in England and Wales. PLOS ONE; Bryant (2020) [Inequalities in victimisation: alcohol, violence, and anti-social behaviour](#). Institute of Alcohol Studies.

<sup>30</sup> Karriker-Jaffe and Greenfield (2014) [Gender differences in associations of neighbourhood disadvantage with alcohol's harms to others: A cross-sectional study from the USA](#). Drug and Alcohol Review, 33(3), 296-303.

Policy recommendation:

- The Government should publish a cross-departmental strategy on reducing inequalities to tackle all aspects of inequalities including the unequal impact of violence against women and girls.