

**Submission
No 332**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Organisation: National Drug Research Institute

Date Received: 1 July 2019

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY INQUIRY INTO SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

***Submission from the National Drug Research Institute
July 2019***

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Introduction

Since its inception in 1986, the National Drug Research Institute ([NDRI](#)) has grown to employ about 30 research staff, making it one of the largest centres of drug research and public health expertise in Australia. It is a designated World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and a Curtin University Research Institute.

Institute staff have completed hundreds of research projects, resulting in positive outcomes for policy, practice and the community. While there may be other factors the Committee will inquire into, this submission will focus predominantly on issues around alcohol-related harm – one of the primary issues influencing individual and community health and safety in Sydney's night time economy – with an emphasis on the evidence around several key related factors, including alcohol-related violence.

Responding to alcohol-related harm

Apart from caffeine, alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive recreational drug in Australia. NDRI [research](#) has shown that an estimated 5,785 Australians aged 15+ years died of alcohol-attributable disease and injury in 2015, while hospitalisations attributable to alcohol exceeded 144,000 in 2012/13 (Lensvelt et al., 2018).

National and international evidence indicates availability of alcohol – for example, via price, numbers of outlets and hours of sale – significantly influences alcohol use and related problems, including violence.

Governments at all levels have at various times implemented a range of strategies to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm, from random breath testing and liquor licensing laws, price controls and controls of hours and days of sale, to hypothecated taxation to fund prevention and treatment initiatives, controls on alcohol promotion and universal and targeted education strategies.

International and national evidence supports multi-faceted approaches, indicating that initiatives implemented as part of a package of measures are more likely to be effective than any single measure implemented in isolation, and not all strategies are equally effective.

Factors that influence availability, (as summarised by Babor et al., 2010), include:

- **Tax/Price:** Alcohol taxation influences the price of alcohol over and above market forces and changes in taxation and other price changes (even small changes) have an effect on alcohol consumption;
- **Physical availability:** The ease or difficulty of accessing alcohol affects consumption;
- **Drinking context:** Overcrowded venues with poor crowd control techniques have higher risk of a range of adverse outcomes, such as violence, than venues with well-trained staff who comply with responsible server practices;
- **Drink-driving:** Random breath testing reduces drink driving if there is a perceived high probability of detection;
- **Alcohol promotions:** Greater exposure to alcohol promotions has been associated with increased product recognition, more positive attitudes to alcohol and drinking and, in some studies, heavy drinking; and
- **Education and persuasion:** These include mass media communication, communicating guidelines on low-risk drinking and school- and university-based programs (e.g. information about the risks of alcohol; resistance skills).

The most consistent evidence indicates that factors, such as price, hours of sale, number of outlets, and minimum purchase age, are among the strongest influences on consumption.

Availability determines harm

The influences on violence are diverse and the relationship between alcohol and violence is complex. Not everyone who becomes intoxicated becomes violent and of course not all violence is associated with alcohol. Some people are violent without alcohol and perhaps more violent with alcohol. How much is consumed, contextual factors, such as time of day and factors related to how venues are managed and who else is present and cultural influences all play influential roles.

However, the relationship between violence and the night time economy (NTE) has been well documented. City areas that have drinking establishments show higher rates of violent crime than those that do not have such venues. Research has also consistently found links between assault rates and the number of licensed venues in inner-city and inner-suburban areas. As such, the association between alcohol and violence in the NTE as well as the associated health and financial damage to the broader community, is robust and evident in a variety of settings and cultures (Miller et al., 2011).

Consistent national and international evidence indicates that the physical availability of alcohol – e.g. numbers of outlets and hours of sale – influences alcohol use and related problems. The physical availability of alcohol has increased in Australia as shown, for example, in a longitudinal study on Victoria (Livingston, 2011).

Typically, as it becomes 'easier' to access alcohol within a community, overall alcohol consumption, at least among some, and related problems also increase. Australian and overseas evidence clearly identifies late night/early morning trading for hotels and nightclubs as being closely linked to alcohol-related violence and road trauma.

There are many ways that access to alcohol can be 'controlled'. Alcohol may be totally banned (e.g. 'dry areas' or discrete 'dry community' declarations) or controls placed on the type of alcohol available at certain times or events (e.g., at some sporting events there are controls on the types of alcohol available and alcohol content as well as limitations on how many drinks an individual can purchase at one time). There can be limitations on the days and hours of sale and, in some communities, there are restrictions on the nature of purchases (e.g. no bulk packaged liquor sales).

Outlet density

Studies, including Australian research, have found that the density of alcohol outlets in an area is positively associated with the rate of violence in that area, with similar patterns for other outcomes including road crashes and general injuries (Livingston, 2011; Morrison et al., 2016; Morrison et al., 2016).

An NDRI study examined associations between outlet numbers, outlet sales and assaults across 140 local government areas of Western Australia. The study distinguished between outlet type (on- versus off-site) and location of offences (on-site licensed, residential settings). Numbers of off-site outlets were not associated with assault but average alcohol sales volume per off-site outlet was strongly associated with assaults occurring at both on-site licensed outlets and in domestic settings. Numbers of on-site outlets significantly predicted assaults that occurred at on-site outlets but not assaults that occurred in residential settings. It was concluded that the link between on-site outlets and violence may be primarily underpinned by negative amenity effects while off-site outlet effects occur via increased availability. The relationship between off-site outlet alcohol sales and assaults occurring at on-site outlets can be partly explained by pre-loading activities encouraged by large differences in minimum beverage prices between off-site discount stores and on-site outlets. (Liang and Chikritzhs, 2011). A subsequent NDRI study at local government area

level showed a significant positive association between numbers of hotels/nightclubs and assaults reported in Queensland. A positive association was also apparent for numbers of restaurants and the risk of assault, although the size of effect was small. In Western Australia, the number of on-site outlets was a significant predictor for assaults occurring at hotels/taverns (Gilmore et al., 2015).

Trading hours

Trading hours are a critical lever available to government for the regulation of alcohol's physical availability in different settings, and policy decisions on this issue impact on the health and welfare of many people.

Restrictions on the availability of alcohol have been associated with reduced levels of alcohol-related problems. An evaluation of reducing trading hours in the Australian city of Newcastle, for example, showed that modest restrictions reduced recorded assaults by 37%, reducing the number of assaults from an average of 99 per quarter to 67.7 per quarter, even though trading hours were only reduced by a short time. In that case, formal complaints about violence, damage to property and disorderly behaviour arising from service to intoxication in the Newcastle CBD led to the Liquor Administration Board in NSW restricting opening hours of 14 pubs in the CBD from 5am to 3.30am closing, with a 1.30am lockout. Reducing the overall number of assaults in the CBD did not simply displace problems to a nearby entertainment precinct with further evaluations of the seven-year period following the introduction of measures demonstrating that reductions in violence persisted (Kypri, et al, 2011, 2014, 2016). While the Newcastle experience is sometimes held as an example of the effectiveness of lockout laws, in reality it reinforces evidence around a suite of measures, that restrict overall availability in the early hours of the morning, being required to address alcohol-related harm and there is no evidence that lockouts as a single strategy are effective (Nepal et al., 2018) (see 'Lockout laws' section below).

An NDRI study specifically examined the effect of extended trading permits in Perth. It analysed data from the then WA Office of Racing, Gaming and Liquor and the WA Police Service regarding sales and problems associated with individual premises for 75 hotels, taverns and nightclubs in Perth that were granted longer hours between 1989 and 1996 (Chikritzhs and Stockwell, 2002, 2006, 2007).

Significant changes in problem levels were found: there was a 70% increase in assaults in premises with later trading (e.g. 1 or 2 additional hours of trading after midnight), and premises trading normally (e.g. midnight closing) had a significant reduction in the number of times they were cited as the last place of drinking by a convicted drink driver with a blood alcohol level above 0.08ml/mg.

Average alcohol purchases for ETP premises were significantly higher than their non-ETP counterparts, and a very strong link between the increase in violence and the increase in alcohol purchases was also found. It is interesting to note that of all the officially recorded assault cases in metropolitan Perth associated with licensed premises, less than 1% were recorded by police as involving drugs.

The introduction of Extended Trading Permits in metropolitan Perth also had a definite effect on the timing of alcohol-related incidents of harm for many premises. For the main harm indicators, road crashes and violent assaults, there was a consistent and obvious shift in the timing of incidents to increase after midnight.

Given strong evidence from experiences in Perth that extended trading in late night venues results in an increase in levels of assault offences, the study recommended either that

extended trading was discontinued and/or that greater precautions taken to protect public health and safety as well as to recoup the extra costs of providing emergency and police services at a time when they are more costly. The study recommended that if extended trading was to continue:

- Levels of violence and drink driving in and around licensed premises are closely monitored by licensing, police and health authorities. Where levels of violence, road crashes and/or drink-driving associated with a particular ETP licensed premises increase, the ETP be revoked.
- All forms of public transport be made more available after midnight to make it easier for drinkers to not drive during the early hours of the morning. Licensees with extended trading could be required to provide private transport services for their patrons.
- There could be an additional harm reduction levy applied to those premises permitted to have late trading to compensate the community for additional costs in deterring drink-driving as well as responding to increases in crime, particularly violent crime, and drink-driving road crashes, after midnight. Those who benefit most from such changes should contribute to the costs of minimising problems for the rest of the community.

Lockout laws

Lockout laws first appeared in Australia in the early 1990s as part of local liquor accords, aimed at fostering safer drinking environments through collaborative efforts between local licensees, community representatives and authorities (De Andrade et al., 2016). Licensed venue lockouts involve venues having a designated time of night after which no more patrons are allowed entry. The venue may still operate until close, and serve drinks to patrons already inside, but no new customers are allowed in after the lockout time. This approach is based on the rationale that much of the alcohol-related violence is due to the movement of people between venues during early morning hours (Miller et al., 2011). The first scientific evaluation of the lockout as a stand-alone intervention to use both ambulance data and police data, which also performed spatial and temporal displacement analyses, showed introduction of a lockout had no significant impact on crime, violence, injury and intoxication rates over time (De Andrade et al., 2016). The evaluation of the Queensland lockout pilot in Surfers Paradise, where patrons could not enter or re-enter licensed venues after 3am, demonstrated no statistically significant impact on rates of crime, violence, head and neck injuries, and intoxication over the two years following introduction of the lockout. Hot spot maps indicated limited spatial shift of crime within Surfers Paradise. These results reflect the small existing body of evidence on lockouts that indicates they are largely ineffective in reducing crime and injuries in entertainment districts. The study also suggested the problems associated with the introduction of lockouts need to be addressed, which include overcrowding outside popular venues; inadequate public transport; inadequate communication from door staff; increased police presence at lockout and closing times; and lost revenue for small and/or early closing bars.

The research evidence does not support the use of lockouts (Nepal et al., 2018). As indicated though, all of the factors outlined can play a role in alcohol-related violence, particularly in the night time economy. However, effect sizes are generally small when compared to the proven effects of more structural level interventions aimed at reducing alcohol consumption – reduced trading hours, reduced alcohol outlet density and increased price of alcohol. Interventions that do not focus on alcohol availability and consumption

reduction are only ever likely to show small effect sizes and relatively little practical impact on alcohol-related problems (Miller et al., 2011).

Licensed venue practices and design influence violence

Connections between alcohol-related violence and specific environmental and venue characteristics have been demonstrated. Physical aspects are typically related to venue capacity and crowding, practical venue layout, interior décor and seating style. How crowded a venue is, dysfunctional in-house patron traffic flow and overall comfort of a given venue appear to be related to patron intoxication, aggression and violence. Most of these factors, however, are likely to interact to contribute to violence and other alcohol-related problems, so potential solutions should take into account all of these factors collectively (Miller et al., 2011).

Clear links have also been established between patron violence and several factors in the surrounding areas of many licensed premises. Venue queues, for example, is a relatively robust predictor of patron aggression and violence in the night time economy, and is most likely related to the overall professionalism with which the line-up is supervised and organised. Similarly, the outpouring of patrons onto the streets after venues close has been associated with violence and disorder in surrounding areas. Studies on staggered venue closing times suggest the success of such measures is related to transport availability rather than extending trading hours (Miller et al., 2011). Empirical evidence suggests a decreasing impact on aggression and violence by increased availability and quality of transportation, such as supervised taxi ranks and night-rider buses, but the relationship is ambiguous and needs further study.

Evidence connects security personnel to increased violence and aggression in the night time economy. The presence of door staff has been positively correlated with the frequency and severity of violent incidents. However, the research has also demonstrated the significance and value of well-trained and professional security personnel on licensed premises. Effective security personnel typically display firm, rather than aggressive, demeanour; act as patron guardians rather than antagonists; and aim to defuse and resolve an explosive situation peacefully. This suggests education and training of security personnel is crucial, and that it is not the presence of security personnel that increases violence, but rather a lack of quality training. Security arrangements at licensed premises also reflect wider venue management, with teamwork and proper management of all staff, including bartenders, servers, non-servers and security personnel, and in particular employee conduct and professionalism, responsible service of alcohol (RSA), and staff-to-patron ratio all relevant and important to overall venue security (Miller et al., 2011).

With regards to RSA, there is not good evidence that just training of bar staff in responsible service of alcohol is effective in preventing service of patrons to intoxication. This is not because service staff fail to learn from the training but because the conditions where they are expected to make judgements about patrons, the pressure from patrons, and financial imperatives make it unlikely that even well trained servers will consistently comply with the desired practices. What evidence does exist on service practices shows that regular, intense police enforcement is necessary to maintain compliance with liquor laws (Kypri, 2015).

Other considerations

Evaluation

Regular review of policy interventions is critical to effective alcohol and drug policy. While evaluating measures ensures limited resources are well spent, it also allows effective measures to be continued and potentially expanded or replicated in other jurisdictions. NDRI suggests the Committee include specific evaluation timeframes in its recommendations, particularly as changes in policy can take many years to become evident or to show trends.

Information campaigns

With regards to educational and other information campaigns designed to reduce alcohol-related violence, the balance of evidence is that education and social marketing campaigns are not effective in modifying drinking behaviour (Wakefield et al., 2010; Foxcroft and Tsertsvadze, 2011; Wilkinson and Room, 2009). As indicated, the effectiveness of such campaigns may be improved if they are part of a wider group of measures, rather than as a stand-alone initiative, particularly aimed at addressing alcohol availability. Drink-driving is a pertinent example in this area. The introduction of random breath testing has been effective and the measure has been supported by sustained campaigns that create a perception of a high probability of detection and generate community support for the intervention.

Alcohol sales data

Furthermore, with regards to national approaches to violence and other alcohol-related problems, robust measures of alcohol consumption are essential for the development of effective evidence-based policy responses to alcohol-related harm. Knowing how much alcohol is consumed is a critical measure of the impact of policies and strategies and is essential to intelligence led policing and public health strategies – and it is well demonstrated that per capita alcohol consumption is closely related to rates of alcohol-related problems in a population.

Alcohol sales data are considered to be the best indicator of alcohol consumption at a population level as they are not susceptible to the errors inherent in self-report surveys, and can be used to identify patterns of consumption of different beverage types (World Health Organization, 2000). WA, Queensland, Victoria, the ACT and the Northern Territory currently collect alcohol sales data (Loxley, et al, 2016).

Alcohol sales data are important for planning, research, and many Government and community-based interventions that aim to prevent alcohol-related harm. The data allow monitoring of trends in per capita alcohol use, the study of relationships between changes in per capita consumption and population health outcomes, benchmarking to assess the reliability of survey estimates of consumption, and evaluations of interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm. Local-level alcohol sales data can be used to evaluate community initiatives and the impact of changes to liquor licensing on alcohol consumption. Alcohol sales data has been used to evaluate alcohol policy changes.

NDRI believes there is policy value in all states and territories collecting volumes of alcohol sold by beverage type at the individual licensed outlet level at least annually.

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