

ALCOHOL-RELATED CRIME AND DISORDER

Briefing Note

1 Definitions

1.1 'Alcohol-related crime' is a popular rather than a legal term. Normally, it is used to refer to two main categories of offences:

- a) Alcohol-defined offences such as drunkenness offences or driving with excess alcohol.
- b) Offences in which the consumption of alcohol is thought to have played a role of some kind in the committing of the offence, usually in the sense that the offender was under the influence of alcohol at the time. Examples of offences which are often committed by people under the influence are assault, breach of the peace, criminal damage and other public order offences.

1.2 The Government states: *Alcohol related crime and disorder has a major impact on the quality of life of many people.*

It is associated with a wide range of offences ranging from minor public order offences, which are anti-social by nature, through traffic offences, minor assaults, serious assaults to murder.

The Government is determined to assist crime and disorder reduction partnerships in tackling these alcohol-related problems by giving the police and local authorities the support and powers required.

In launching the Government's Action Plan in August 2000, Home Office Minister Charles Clarke said: 'Public drunkenness can give rise to serious problems of disorderly conduct, nuisance, criminal damage and alcohol-related assaults, particularly in the proximity of licensed premises at closing time. In addition, it can increase fear of crime and so reduce the quality of life for many people. This is clearly unacceptable.'

Alcohol-related crime featured prominently in over 70% of Crime and Disorder Strategies.¹

1.3 In regard to the offences committed 'under the influence', the implication is that they would either not have happened or would not have reached the level of seriousness that they actually did if the offender had been sober. This is of course difficult territory. Normally, in relation to individual offences alcohol is best regarded as being one link in the causal chain rather than the sole operating cause. Clearly, for example, there is not an automatic relationship between alcohol and violence. Whether or not the one gives rise to the other depends on a range of factors, personal, inter-personal, situational. and cultural

1.4 The complexities involved in establishing the causes of individual offences allow those minded to do so to attack the whole concept of 'alcohol-related' crime as misleading or used so inconsistently as to be largely meaningless. In the report produced for the alcohol industry's Portman Group,² Dr Peter Marsh attacks the very concept of alcohol-related crime and disorder. He concludes that due to inconsistent definitions and inaccurate and unreliable sources of data, claims such as 70% - 80% of late night violence in town centres being attributable to alcohol consumption cannot be empirically substantiated

1.5 Another report commissioned by the Portman Group³ concluded that ‘there is no evidence that alcohol is a major factor in crime and no general link between alcohol and crime has been found’ and a Home Office report also states ‘There is no evidence that various types of crime are actually caused by alcohol consumption.’⁴

1.6 These are surprising conclusions for a number of reasons.

- They flatly contradict the whole basis of government policy as outlined in statements such as the one quoted above
- They fly in the face of the face of a mass of evidence from many countries showing that alcohol is indeed a major factor in some kinds of crime, as well as a range of other social problems.
- They are difficult to square with the keen advocacy of both the Government and the Portman Group of longer drinking hours in order allegedly to reduce binge drinking and so bring about a reduction in crime and disorder. If alcohol does not cause crime, why should reducing binge drinking make any difference?

1.7 However, for what may be considered the main purpose in relation to town centre management, discouraging crime and disorder, the question of whether or not an individual offence is causally attributable to alcohol is hardly the central issue. The causal role of alcohol is an interesting and important question scientifically, and it may also be a highly relevant one in relation to the management of an individual offender by the court, for example in relation to appropriate sentencing or deciding on a treatment programme.

1.8 But from the perspective of the local resident, the would-be visitor, or the crime and disorder partnership, what matters most is simply that offences would not be occurring in the range and numbers that they actually do, and at the times and places that they do, if it were not for the institutionalised sale and consumption of alcohol. Generally, increases in the number of licensed premises and in their total capacities are accompanied by rises in assaults and public order offences.⁵ What proportion of these offences are ‘caused’ by alcohol is of secondary importance compared with the fact that in most town and city centres, the majority of hot-spots for violence and public disorder are located in the areas containing concentrations of licensed premises. For example, in 2001 in the City of Bath, levels of crime and disorder were far higher in Abbey Ward, which contains the night-club zone, than in any other ward of Bath and North East Somerset.⁶

	District Average	Abbey Ward
Violent crimes Per 1,000	6	46
Disorder/nuisance Per 1,000	33	231
Criminal damage Per km ²	6	242

1.9 For these reasons, possibly the most realistic and appropriate definition of ‘alcohol-related’ is offences generated or committed within the context of the sale and consumption of alcohol, particularly in relation to the evening and night-time economy.

2 Available Information

- 2.1 Statistics of alcohol-defined offences are collected and are available from Government sources, normally the Home Office.
- 2.2 Statistics of other alcohol-related offences are not collected per se. Offences such as assault are recorded statistically, but the involvement if any of alcohol in them is not routinely investigated or recorded.
- 2.3 Reliable or indeed any statistics relating to offences such of breach of the peace are difficult to obtain because, firstly, policies in regard to prosecutions are particularly variable from one area to another and over time, and, secondly, because even if they are recorded such offences are not centrally collated.
- 2.4 Special research programmes are sometimes undertaken into alcohol involvement in particular kinds of offences, and these provide a basis for estimates to be made of the proportions of assaults or whatever that are 'alcohol-related'. (see paragraph 4.3 below)
- 2.5 Statistics of drink driving convictions are given in IAS Fact Sheet 'Drinking and Driving'.

3 The Burden of Alcohol-Related Crime

- 3.1 Alcohol-related crime and drunken offenders place a huge burden on the police and other public services:-⁷
 - from approximately 10.30pm to 3.00am the majority of arrests are for alcohol-related offences
 - there is the potential for routine incidents of public nuisance to escalate to more serious, especially violent, offences
 - dealing with intoxicated offenders can be difficult and time consuming. For example, they may have to be kept in cells long enough to sober up; while they are there the police have a duty of care and have to ensure the offender does not come to harm by choking on their own vomit. The offender may have to be checked every 15 minutes. Medical attention may be necessary. Female offenders need female police officers to attend certain procedures who may have to be taken off other duties.
 - intoxicated prisoners can be disruptive, uncooperative and may present severe hygiene problems, urinating or defecating in their clothing during or after arrest.

4 The Scale of the Problem

4.1 Drunkenness Offenders in UK

(Source: Home Office, Scottish Executive Justice Department, Royal Ulster Constabulary)

Year	England & Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Total	Rate per 10,000	
					Total	15 & over
1964	73,299	10,778	1,731	85,808	15.9	20.7
1965	69,138	10,380	1,451	80,969	14.9	19.4
1966	66,701	10,620	1,371	78,692	14.9	18.8
1967	71,774	10,490	1,368	83,632	15.2	19.9
1968	75,341	10,937	1,275	87,553	15.9	20.8
1969	77,180	10,327	743	88,250	19.9	20.9
1970	79,004	10,594	1,305	90,903	16.3	21.5
1971	83,251	10,898	815	94,964	17.0	22.4
1972	88,621	11,664	216	100,501	17.9	23.6
1973	97,308	13,516	241	111,065	19.8	26.0
1974	98,392	14,683	250	113,325	20.2	26.4
1975	100,150	14,999	308	115,457	20.5	26.8
1976	103,720	14,156	385	118,261	21.0	27.3
1977	103,811	12,346	311	116,468	20.7	26.7
1978	101,283	12,643	360	114,286	20.3	26.1
1979	106,209	13,628	354	120,191	21.4	27.2
1980	110,211	13,795	374	124,380	22.1	27.9
1981	97,890	11,328	284	109,502	19.4	24.5
1982	97,251	9,730	259	107,240	19.0	23.9
1983	98,301	8,080	317	106,698	18.9	23.6
1984 (a)	81,669	6,618	322	88,609	15.7	19.5
1985	75,324	5,099	274	80,697	14.3	17.6
1986	67,567	3,660	244	71,471	12.6	15.5
1987	83,036	3,625	189	86,850	15.2	18.8
1988	93,891	3,357	282	97,530	17.1	21.1
1989	92,822	2,961	227	96,010	16.7	20.6
1990	86,392	2,833	127	89,352	15.5	19.2
1991	75,350	2,275	138	77,763	13.5	16.6
1992	68,770	2,161	120	71,051	12.2	15.2
1993	59,907	1,735	114	61,756	10.6	13.2
1994	57,890	1,429	94	59,413	10.2	12.6
1995	42,681	1,313	90	40,084	7.5	9.3
1996	50,132	1,103	81	51,316	8.7	10.8
1997	54,475	928	116	55,519	9.4	11.7
1998 (b)	53,587	725	116	54,428	9.2	11.4
1999 (b)	49,020	478	100	49,598	8.3	10.3

(a) Since 1984 the figure for England and Wales, and Scotland include cautions and convictions.

(b) 1998 and 1999 figures for Northern Ireland are estimates as data not yet available.

4.2 These figures reflect changes in public practice as much or more than changes in the actual incidence of drunkenness. This is particularly clear from the Scottish figures, the most recent of which if taken at face value imply that drunkenness has virtually disappeared north of the border. A more likely explanation is that police practice has changed and drunks are either not being charged or are being charged with other offences. As DAC Trotter of the Metropolitan Police explained to the ODPM inquiry into the evening economy, in a packed entertainment area, such as Leicester Square, police could arrest any number of people any

night of the week. They have to target arrests very carefully to ensure they do not use up their officers too early in the night.⁸

4.3 Studies of People Arrested By Police

Surveys⁹ carried out for the Home Office in six English cities in 1996 and 1999 found varying but significant proportions of arrestees tested positive for alcohol for a range of offences:-

1996

- aggravated bodily harm/grievous bodily harm 32%
- robbery 32%
- burglary 24%
- joyriding 36%
- criminal damage 46%
- breach of the peace 75%

1999

- assault 32%
- robbery 75%
- criminal damage 29%
- breach of the peace 61%
- theft of/taking vehicle 30%

A high proportion of arrestees also tested positive for other drugs.

- 4.4 The 2000 British Crime Survey (BCS)⁹, a large-scale survey asking people about their experience of victimisation, found that in 40% of all violent incidents the victim described the assailant as being under the influence of alcohol at the time of the assault. In relation to the different kinds or locations of violent offences, the proportions of assailants described as under the influence were:

Domestic Violence	44%
Mugging	17%
Stranger Violence	53%
Aquaintance Violence	36%
All Violence	40

- 4.5 Data for the 2001/2002 BCS show victims believed offenders to be under the influence of alcohol in almost half (47%) of violent incidents and under the influence of other drugs in 21% of cases.

Whether offender/s under the influence of drink or drugs in violent incidents

Percentages					BCS
	All violence	Domestic	Mugging	Stranger	Acquaintance
Under influence of drink					
Yes	47	45	19	58	51
No	44	49	62	31	43
Don't know	9	5	18	10	6
Under influence of drugs					
Yes	21	17	14	20	27
NO	56	74	55	42	58
Don't know	23	9	31	38	15

1 Source 2001/2002 BCS interviews

2 Not asked if offender identified as under school age. There was one incident of stranger violence where the offender was said to be under school age.

5 Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder

- 5.1 The terms 'anti-social behaviour' and 'disorder' are often used inter-changeably. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 defined anti-social behaviour as acting 'in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress'.
- 5.2 The proportions of acts of vandalism etc. that are alcohol-related in the 'under-the-influence' sense are unknown. However, because anti-social behaviour or its effects are often conspicuous around licensed premises, particularly where there are concentrations of them, what little information there is available is of interest.
- 5.3 For England and Wales as a whole, respondents to the BCS 2001/2002 were asked about types of disorder that they saw as being 'very' or 'fairly' big problems locally:

Respondents perceiving disorder to be a very or fairly big problem

	Vandalism	Teenagers hanging around	Rubbish or litter	Drug use / dealing	Drunk or rowdy	Noisy neighbours	Racial attacks	People sleeping rough
%	34	32	32	31	22	10	9	4

- 5.4 For these disorders that have been asked about since the 1996 BCS, the percentages perceiving there to be problems has increased.

Trends in disorder perceived to be a ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ big problem (1996 to 2001/2002 BCS)

Percentages					BCS
	1996	1998	2000	2001	2001/20002
Noisy neighbours	8	8	9	9	10
Teenagers hanging around	24	27	32	31	32
Rubbish or litter lying around	26	28	30	32	32
Vandalism	24	26	32	34	34
Racial attacks	5	5	8	9	9
People using or dealing drugs	21	25	33	30	31

1 Source 2001/2002 BCS. Excludes don't knows.

2 Only six disorders are included as ‘drunks’ and ‘sleeping rough’ are not included in all five sweeps.

5.5 The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, produced by the Social Exclusion Unit, stated that successfully measuring anti-social behaviour is hampered by under-reporting. Many visitors do not report incidents to the police with vandalism being one of the least likely offences to be reported. Reasons for non-reporting include fear of recriminations, believing the incident to be too trivial to report and lack of confidence in the authorities.

5.6 The report also states that there appears generally to be an upward trend in anti-social behaviour in recent years.

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