

Evidence continues to point to alcohol as the main cause of nightlife violence, new study finds

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The results of a new national study, led by Deakin University, show that alcohol remains the driver for most of the harm experienced in the night-time entertainment districts across the country, with greater levels of intoxication and harm linked to later trading hours.

"Pre-drinking before going out, consumption of [energy drinks](#) and illicit drug use were also found to contribute to harm and offending behaviour, however it was high levels of drunkenness and pre-drinking that remain the major predictors of violence," said Deakin alcohol and [drug addiction](#) expert and the study's lead researcher, Associate Professor Peter Miller.

"It is time we are all held to account for the risky drinking practices in this country. Governments, the [alcohol industry](#), bar and nightclub owners and the public all have a responsibility to address this major issue and challenge our culture of condoning and celebrating [drunkenness](#).

"From what has been found with this, and previous, research we need to seriously consider a number of measures including reduced trading hours, a levy on bottle shop sales and banning multi-buy promotions. We also need to get serious about education, so included in the study's recommendations is that every alcohol advertisement is followed by a government-produced public health advertisement on the dangers of [excessive drinking](#)."

The results of the Patron Offending and Intoxication in Night-Time Entertainment Districts (POINTED) study are being presented today (21 March 2013) at the Australasian Drug and Alcohol Strategy Conference in Sydney. The study involved interviews with a total of 6804 people entering or leaving venues in the nightlife districts in Geelong, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and Wollongong. The interviews were conducted fortnightly from November 2011—June 2012 on a Friday or Saturday night between 10pm and 3am (sometimes as late as 5am). Those taking part were breathalyser tested and asked questions about their drinking behaviours, energy drink and [illicit drug use](#), and their experiences of aggression and other risky behaviours. The study also involved researchers noting their observations of patron behaviours in 68 venues.

Overall, the study found striking similarities across the sites studied and the many thousands of people interviewed. General levels of intoxication were moderate across the evening however there was a consistent trend across the cities of escalating intoxication throughout the night with 30 per cent of participants interviewed after 1am recording BAC levels above 0.1. The use of energy drinks and illicit drugs were both significantly associated with increased experiences of aggression and injury, however pre-drinking before going out remained the strongest predictor of harm and intoxication.

"The results of the study would suggest that the current RSA measures are insufficient and need more stringent regulation and systems of enforcement," Associate Professor Miller said.

"We also recommend that trading hour restrictions be imposed consistently across regions to ensure businesses can compete on a level playing field. Prohibiting the sale of alcohol 60 minutes before closing time should also be trialled in venues that trade after 2am."

When it comes to addressing the issue of pre-drinking the researchers' recommendations address a range of variables that contribute to the problem such as price, availability and advertising.

"The reasons the study participants gave for pre-drinking, such as it was cheaper than purchasing drinks at licensed venues and contributed to the fun of a night out, need to be addressed," Associate Professor Miller said.

"The most evidence-based measure to reduce alcohol consumption continues to be increasing the price through taxation, the proceeds of which could be spent on specific harm reduction strategies.

"We need to get serious about education and therefore it is recommended that for every alcohol advertisement, a government-produced public health advertisement should immediately follow (funded via a levy on all sales by [alcohol](#) producers) informing the public of the harms associated with drinking and addressing social norms around intoxication."

While the study found increased harms associated with energy drinks, the researchers concede that the evidence continues to be preliminary.

"Even though the evidence is not conclusive, we know for sure that people exceed recommended consumption by 11pm on average. Based on this, we should look at restricting energy drink sales after 10pm. Comprehensive labelling and education campaigns about the side effects and recommended intake of energy drinks are also needed," Associate Professor Miller said.

More information: www.ndlcrf.gov.au/pub/Monograph_46.pdf

Provided by Deakin University

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