

Criminal Justice Research Programme

Liquor Licensing and Public Disorder: Review of Literature on the Impact of Licensing and Other Controls, and Audit of Local Initiatives

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The Nicholson Committee is currently carrying out a review of liquor licensing in Scotland and considering issues such as whether current legislation relating to alcohol remains appropriate. One of the specific areas which has been identified for consideration is the link between alcohol misuse and crime, and the Committee is examining this issue through a sub-group. The report upon which this research finding is based was commissioned to inform that sub-group, and provides a review of the literature around initiatives to address alcohol-related crime and disorder in Scotland and internationally. An audit of initiatives in Scotland designed to tackle alcohol-related disorder was also undertaken

Main Findings

The main findings suggested by the review and audit are as follows:

- Although the link between **measures to regulate the general consumption of alcohol** and alcohol related crime and disorder is clearly complex, and there is a need for caution in applying the findings of some of the research directly to Scotland, it appears that some measures of this type, (such as initiatives relating to hours of alcohol sales; the age at which young people can drink alcohol on licensed premises; staggered closing times; and curfews and limitation of the numbers of alcohol outlets) can have an impact on alcohol-related crime and disorder.
- Only a small number of initiatives intended to regulate the general consumption of alcohol were identified in Scotland, and these tended to focus on the imposition of conditions on licenses. However, the majority of these were considered to have been successful, particularly where there had been partnership working and co-operation between those involved.
- A number of measures to **address issues for specific groups or to enforce the existing law** can have a positive impact on alcohol-related crime and disorder, such as high profile policing; enforcement of the law relating to under age drinking; community enforcement programmes; proof of age schemes; enforcement of server laws; 'pubwatch' schemes; prohibition of drinking in public places (particularly when combined with other measures) and actions to address drink driving.
- Considerable work is being undertaken in Scotland in relation to the enforcement of the law, as well as targeting specific groups / areas to regulate the availability and consumption of alcohol, and this is also seen to be largely positive.
- A number of aspects of the **drinking environment and the context of consumption** can also affect alcohol-related crime and disorder. Overcrowding, poor bar layout / inconvenient access, a permissive environment, bar workers failing to practice responsible serving and inappropriate promotions can contribute to alcohol-related aggression, whilst aspects of physical design can reduce this, as can staff / server and door staff training. The use of toughened glass has been found to have an impact on the number of "glassing" attacks and facial injuries.
- Considerable work is taking place in Scotland in relation to server training (although there are some problems with voluntary participation). There are also examples of the use of toughened glass and the use of the physical layout and environment to address crime and disorder with, again, a perception that such measures are useful.
- There is, across initiatives of all types, a general lack of systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing alcohol-related crime and disorder.

Introduction

There have been many changes in the last 25 years in Scotland in the ways in which alcohol is perceived, sold, promoted and consumed. There have been changes in attitudes to drinking alcohol, an increased availability of alcohol and changes to patterns of drinking. There has also been a growing concern with the impact of harmful drinking on health and on society.

The research reported on here took place against a background of considerable work focusing on alcohol issues in Scotland. For example, the Scottish Executive Health Department (Substance Misuse Division) recently published a "Plan for Action on Alcohol Problems", with a large amount of evidence gathered to inform that process. Further to this, the Nicholson Committee, in carrying out a review of liquor licensing in Scotland, is involved in the collection and consideration of a range of evidence. This review forms part of that evidence.

The purpose of the research

In this overall context, the research had two purposes:

- To review existing literature relating to initiatives which undertake to tackle alcohol-related crime and disorder.
- To carry out an audit of existing initiatives in Scotland which aim to tackle alcohol-related disorder.

The literature review was carried out through library searches of relevant journals / publications, and through the use of recent publications which were developed in Scotland to inform the 'Plan for Action'. Specific material was also provided by some key contacts.

The audit of initiatives in Scotland was carried out by circulating a pro forma to organisations, at a national and local level, which were identified as likely to be involved in relevant initiatives. Information was sought about the nature of the work taking place and the impact of the work.

Difficulties in definition of alcohol-related crime and disorder

It was recognised at the outset that there were difficulties with the definition of "alcohol-related crime and disorder". A recent report for the Portman Group¹ notes that it is often assumed that the use of the term "alcohol-related" implies a direct causal relationship between alcohol and some types of behaviour which are seen to constitute crime and disorder. There is, however, a lack of evidence of such a direct relationship, and the use of the term "alcohol-related"

is more usually employed to indicate behaviour where alcohol is a contributory factor in the outcome, along with other influences. The same report notes, however, that this term can extend to a broader definition, which includes situations in which those involved in the behaviour have been drinking. These variations in definition lead to difficulties in definitive measurement of the extent of alcohol-related crime and disorder, and should be borne in mind.

The purpose of this review, however, is not to measure the extent of alcohol-related crime and disorder, but to identify the nature of initiatives undertaken, and the perceived effectiveness of these, on the basis of existing evidence.

Types of initiatives identified

The types of initiatives identified in the review to address alcohol-related disorder fell into three main categories:

- Initiatives to control the availability of alcohol through licensing.
- Regulation of aspects of consumption, initiatives aimed at specific groups or crimes, and the enforcement of existing law.
- Regulation of the environment / context of alcohol consumption.

Regulation and control through licensing

The first category defined above included initiatives to control the general availability of alcohol, using means such as the imposition of conditions upon licenses, controls on opening hours, or other controls upon the sale of alcohol. The review found a range of literature which reported on the effectiveness of such measures, although the evidence was not always clear. The individual nature of such initiatives necessitates that some caution is employed in applying the results to Scotland.

There was some indication in the literature to suggest that extended licensing hours may be linked to increased problems with alcohol-related crime and disorder. However, evidence from the UK and Scotland is mixed on this issue.

Studies have also suggested that staggered closing times (and curfews) may have an impact on disorder, although it is stressed that local circumstances must be taken into account in developing such work. In Scotland, initiatives were found (in the audit) which attempted to tackle the general availability of alcohol by imposing conditions upon the extension of opening hours and the provision of local guidelines about permitted extensions. A small number of initiatives which made use of curfews were also found.

There is also some evidence that the age which young people can buy and consume alcohol on licensed premises has an impact upon juvenile crime. Some studies suggested

¹ 'Counting the Cost: The Measurement of Alcohol-related Disorder'. Social Issues Research Centre (2002)

that *lowering* the legal drinking age can raise the levels of male juvenile crime, while *raising* the age can, for example, reduce alcohol-related car crashes and fatalities. Other studies suggest, however, that lowering the age at which people can buy and drink alcohol on licensed premises can reduce the likelihood of young people drinking in unsafe and unsupervised locations.

Some evidence was found of a link between the number of alcohol outlets and levels of alcohol-related problems, and there is data to suggest that limiting the number of such outlets may have an effect on alleviating problems. There is also some evidence that different types of outlet may experience different levels and types of alcohol-related crime / disorder. The audit found that, in Scotland, some areas consider outlet density when asked to grant new licenses.

Although outwith the remit of legislation in Scotland, the review also found a lack of evidence regarding the impact of alcohol advertising on alcohol-related harm. Further to this, although there is perceived to be a link between alcohol price and consumption, little direct evidence of the impact of this upon alcohol-related crime and disorder has been reported.

Where initiatives relating to the control of general availability of alcohol in Scotland were identified, they were generally considered successful.

Regulation of aspects of consumption, work with specific groups and enforcement of existing law

The second category of initiatives are those intended to address the consumption of alcohol by particular groups and in particular locations. The review found evidence of success in a number of such measures.

The findings from the literature review suggested, for example, that high profile policing and enforcement of the law relating to under age drinking can be linked to a reduction in the number of crimes and arrests (although there is mixed evidence of the impact of test purchasing²). The audit found that the largest amount of work in Scotland was taking place in relation to the enforcement of the law, and targeting specific groups and areas in order to regulate availability and consumption of alcohol. It was frequently found in the audit that young people were often the target group of such initiatives, and there were many examples of the operation of local proof of age schemes

High profile policing around some licensed premises has also been associated with a reduction in arrests and crime rates, and it has been suggested that the enforcement of the law relating to serving alcohol to people who are intoxicated may

² Covert testing of a vendors' likelihood of selling alcohol to underage consumers through using 'decoy' purchasers

also impact upon crime and disorder. A number of initiatives were reported in Scotland as targeting specific areas which were seen to be "hotspots"

There was also some evidence in the literature reviewed to support the value of community enforcement programmes. It was suggested, however, that the effect of these may not be sustained in the longer term, and that there may be a need for them to be combined with more formal measures.

The review found considerable material relating to "pubwatch" information-sharing schemes, and these appear to have had some success in the reduction of alcohol-related disorder. Such schemes are also being used alongside other measures e.g., the dissemination of information, the use of exclusion orders and the use of CCTV. The audit found a number of examples of pubwatch schemes across Scotland. One such example is an area in which licensees have a direct radio link to CCTV operators, and there is a general perception that there has been a reduction in crime and an increase in public safety with these schemes.

In terms of regulating the location in which people can drink alcohol, the review identified some evidence to suggest that the prohibition of drinking in public places has had some success in addressing alcohol-related crime and disorder, particularly, again, where this was combined with other measures.

Actions to address drink driving found by the audit and identified in the literature review have also been generally found to be successful, particularly when they are enforced vigorously and have a high public profile. Information-gathering was also identified as a vital aspect of law enforcement initiatives, and some measures were also being undertaken to encourage reporting of crime.

There is anecdotal evidence from Scotland which suggests the success of such measures in reducing crime and disorder as well as, in some cases, improving local relationships.

Regulation of the environment / context of alcohol consumption

For the third type of initiative, which involve changing the drinking environment and the context of consumption, again there was evidence of the value of some forms of this work.

The literature review noted that many aspects of the layout and operation of licensed premises can contribute to alcohol-related aggression. There are, for example, identifiable aspects of the design of premises which can reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder, and there are some initiatives of this type in Scotland.

There was also evidence to suggest that the provision of training to licensees, servers and door stewards (particularly where this was backed by management, used to enforce legislation and repeated regularly), could help to prevent and

deal with alcohol-related crime/disorder. Such training was the commonest type of work in this category identified in Scotland, with work taking place in many different areas to provide this training. The difficulties, however, of securing participation in training when this is on a voluntary basis were noted.

There was little evidence of the impact of health warning information upon alcohol-related crime and disorder in the literature, and the review suggested that this was considered unlikely to have a significant impact without other measures. The audit found few examples of the provision of such information in Scotland. There were also few examples of the control of inappropriate promotions (although the evidence suggested that such promotions can contribute to alcohol-related disorder, and organisations such as the Scottish Beer and Pubs Association encourage good practice in relation to the control of these, with a guide being developed).

Finally, in terms of the use of specific materials in licensed premises, the research found some evidence in the literature to suggest that the use of toughened glass can have an impact on the number of "glassing" attacks and facial injuries.

Where initiatives in this category took place in Scotland, they were generally perceived to be successful.

Implications of the findings

The implications of the findings will require to be considered in terms of the ways in which future legislation can promote the types of work which have the clearest impact upon alcohol-related crime and disorder.

The literature review identified a number of areas in which there is currently limited evaluation data and this was borne out by the audit undertaken in Scotland, where almost none of the initiatives was identified as having been evaluated (with a small number of exceptions).

In the context of alcohol-related crime and disorder, there is a clear need for experimental and ongoing work to develop, and use measures which provide clear information relating to the impact of initiatives upon relevant behaviour and activities. This will assist in future planning in the longer term.

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