

Alcohol and Crime

Introduction

Alcohol impinges on crime from several directions. Some offences are defined in relation to alcohol, concerning the degree or manner of consumption permitted. Other offences are increased in frequency by the effect of alcohol on the perpetrator or, in some cases, the victim. Strategies to reduce alcohol-related crime can attempt to alter the behaviour of society so that fewer people drink enough to transgress, or to address problem drinking in known offenders.

Estimates of the cost to the NHS depend to some extent on attributing a set proportion of the blame for each type of illness or accident to alcohol. On that slightly crude basis, the Department of Health estimated £2.7 billion (2006/7 prices) annually.¹

Crimes Defined by Alcohol

Drink Driving²

Table 1 Estimated number of reported drink drive accidents and casualties in Great Britain 1995 - 2009

Year	Accidents				Casualties			
	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Killed	Serious	Slight	Total
1995	460	2,140	7,590	10,180	540	3,000	12,450	16,000
1996	480	2,150	8,240	10,870	580	3,010	13,450	17,040
1997	470	2,140	8,100	10,710	550	2,940	13,310	16,800
1998	410	1,860	7,840	10,100	460	2,520	12,610	15,580
1999	400	1,850	8,800	11,050	460	2,470	13,980	16,910
2000	450	1,950	9,410	11,800	530	2,540	14,990	18,060
2001	470	2,020	9,780	12,270	530	2,700	15,550	18,780
2002	480	2,050	10,620	13,150	550	2,790	16,760	20,100
2003	500	1,970	9,930	12,400	580	2,590	15,820	18,990
2004	520	1,790	8,900	11,210	580	2,340	14,060	16,980
2005	470	1,540	8,060	10,070	550	2,090	12,760	15,400
2006	490	1,480	7,430	9,400	560	1,970	11,840	14,370
2007	370	1,400	7,520	9,280	410	1,760	11,850	14,020
2008	350	1,280	6,980	8,620	400	1,620	10,960	12,990
2009	340	1,180	6,530	8,050	380	1,490	10,150	12,030

Since the present basis for collecting statistics began in 1995, drink-driving incidents accounted for consistently 5 per cent of road accidents and 15 per cent of road deaths.³ For comparison there were

¹ The cost of alcohol harm to the NHS in England, Department of Health 2008, available from http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_086412?IdcService=GET_FILE&dID=169373&Rendition=Web

² <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/tables/ras51001.xls>

³ <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/tables/ras40001.xls>

618 homicides in England and Wales in 2009/10⁴ and 79 in Scotland.⁵ Recent falls in the number of accidents have affected all cases, not specifically those related to alcohol.

Penalty Notices

Most offences for drunkenness are handled with Penalty Notices for Disorder. These are offences at the less serious end of the scale, not leading on to crimes for the courts. In 2011, there were 36,000 notices for 'Drunk and Disorderly' in England, almost 2,000 more for 'Drunk in a Highway' and 'Consumption of alcohol in a designated public place' and a further 3,000 concerning licensing regulations of selling alcohol to minors or to drunken persons.⁶

The figures for Drunk and Disorderly represent a substantial reduction since 2007, when there were 47,000 notices in England and Wales, and an approximate return to 2005 levels.⁷

Alcohol Contributing to Offences

Until 2008/9, the British Crime Survey reported victims' views on whether their assailants were under the influence of alcohol. Only recently did the annual figure drop below one million⁸.

(000s) BCS	1995	1997	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
			/02	/03	/04	/05	/06	/07	/08	/09
Offender(s) perceived to be under the influence of alcohol	1,656	1,457	1,244	1,177	1,299	1,105	1,023	1,087	971	973

Opinions differ about how much alcohol contributes to offences beyond ordinary, disorderly drunkenness. For obvious reasons, a Government keen to promote the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England may place more emphasis on the adverse effects of alcohol than will an industry body of brewers and distillers. A balanced assessment requires detail of the prevalence of alcohol use surrounding other types of crime.

Rape

Rape is distinctive in that the claims made for alcohol's contribution include the victim. Alcohol does not shift the blame for rape but it does affect the risk. Cumbria police force⁹ is one of several to put out advice not to accept drinks from strangers or leave drinks unattended, and encourages people to help get friends home safely. Sexual offences are not consistently reported to the police but there are frequent studies suggesting that members of the public will attribute some responsibility to a victim if she (or he) has been drinking alcohol. For example, research for the ESRC using mock juries found:

⁴ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/historical-crime-data/rec-crime-1990-2011>

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/Datasets/HomData>

⁶ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/statistics-and-data/criminal-justice-stats/out-of-court-disposals-0611.xls>

⁷ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-data/criminal-justice/criminal-annual.htm>

⁸ Crime in England and Wales 2008/09, available from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.cumbria.police.uk/advice-and-information/personal-safety/drug-and-alcohol-crime>

*'that jurors often took the view that it was 'reasonable' for a man to assume that silence represented sexual consent, even if the silence was due to the fact that the woman was totally intoxicated.'*¹⁰

Drinking by Offenders

For most offences, alcohol may affect the perpetrator: for violent crimes it reduces self-control; for acquisitive crimes, the motivation is the need to feed a habit. Evidence for the first will take the form of offenders being more intoxicated at the time of the incident than the general public, or of offences taking place close to outlets for alcoholic drink. Evidence for the second may be longer term, such as greater dependency among offenders.

Greater consumption than among the general public

The 2000 British Crime Survey, quoted by the Institute of Alcohol Studies¹¹ found 40 per cent of victims of violence believed that their assailants were under the influence of alcohol. The proportions were lower for mugging (17 per cent) than where the violence constituted the whole crime.

The Institute also reports¹² findings from a study of 41 probation areas in 2004 and 2005 by the Offender Assessment System Data Evaluation and Analysis Team¹³:

- *over one-third (37%) of offenders had a current problem with alcohol use*
- *a similar proportion (37%) had a problem with binge drinking*
- *nearly half (47%) had misused alcohol in the past*
- *32% had violent behaviour related to their alcohol use*
- *38% were found to have a criminogenic need relating to alcohol misuse, potentially linked to their risk of reconviction*

Another study¹⁴, published in 2003 but not nationally representative, of 336 men convicted of domestic violence, found that:

- in 73 per cent of cases that alcohol had been consumed beforehand;
- 48 per cent of offenders were alcohol-dependent.

There were several other major risk factors:

- At least 36 per cent had witnessed violence between their parents;
- At least 23 per cent had been physically abused;
- 60 per cent were unemployed.

For comparison, alcohol-dependence afflicts approximately 9 per cent of men in England¹⁵.

According to NHS alcohol statistics, in 2007, 73 per cent of men reported drinking an alcoholic drink on at least one day in the week prior to interview. 13 per cent of men reported drinking on every day in the previous week, although the rate was 9 per cent for the 25-44 age bracket that was more

¹⁰ From press release to 'From Sobriety to Stupefaction: Intoxication & Jury Decision-Making in Rape Trials', Munro, V and Finch, E, ESRC, 2004.

¹¹ Alcohol-related crime and Disorder, http://www.ias.org.uk/resources/factsheets/crime_disorder.pdf

¹² Alcohol and Crime, <http://www.ias.org.uk/resources/factsheets/crime.pdf>

¹³ Working with alcohol-misusing offenders – a strategy for delivery: National Offender Management Service, May 2006

¹⁴ Domestic violence offenders: characteristics and offending related need, sHome Office Findings Series 217. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r217.pdf>

¹⁵ Statistics on Alcohol, England 2009, <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/alcohol/statistics-on-alcohol-england-2009-%5Bns%5D>

typical of the offenders, with little change over the previous decade. The offenders in the study were drinking more and were more frequently dependent than the general population. There is still a further step to demonstrate that the alcohol contributed to the offence rather than being a characteristic of the offenders.

The National Probation Service advises offenders that 'alcohol is a factor related to a lot of crimes including many assaults, murder and rape cases (between 50 and 80%).'¹⁶ Drinkaware, the industry body, publish lower figures for where alcohol is a factor¹⁷:

- One in three (30%) sexual offences
- One in three (33%) burglaries
- One in two (50%) street crimes.

These estimates generally come from victims' responses to the British Crime Survey.

Studies among prisoners

Among prisoners, a US study found that alcohol dependence was 2 to 10 times higher among female offenders than in the general population, although the increase for men was not statistically significant.¹⁸ The figure from the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust, who annually assess over 13,000 prisoners in 15 British prisons, 34 per cent of prisoners are severely dependent on alcohol¹⁹. Unless this is a problem that begins or grows in prison, it is a large increase on the general levels reported by the NHS.

Vicinity of Licensed Premises

Factors around licensed premises such as over-crowding, noise, high temperature and the presence of people misusing drugs can, in some cases, make these into likely venues for an increase in crime.²⁰ Nevertheless, the incidence of crime around such premises can be remarkably high. Abbey Ward, the night club zone in Bath, witnessed 46 violent crimes per 1,000 population in 2001, against an average for Bath and North East Somerset of only 6.²¹ The Metropolitan Police report success in their Pubwatch scheme, reducing numbers of violent offences in participating bars.²²

Acquisitive Crime

A study in the British Journal of Addiction²³ was not confident of any relation between acquisitive crime and drinking. The majority of offenders interviewed saw no causal connection between their alcohol use and their criminal behaviour. Patterns of pre-offence drinking and normal drinking were similar.

¹⁶ Alcohol Information Pack Offenders' Guide

http://www.alcohollearningcentre.org.uk/library/Alcohol_Information_Pack_for_Offenders_August_08.doc

¹⁷ <http://www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/binge-drinking>

¹⁸ Fazel S, Bains P & Doll H (2006) Substance abuse and dependence in prisoners: a systematic review. *Addiction* 101, 181-191, cited in Review of Drug and Alcohol Treatments in Prison and Community Settings,

<http://www.ohrn.nhs.uk/resource/Research/SMreview.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.rapt.org.uk/news.asp?section=36§ionTitle=News+%26+Views&itemid=301>

²⁰ See 'Managing and Designing Out Crime and Disorder at Licensed Premises', Avon and Somerset Constabulary,

http://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/information/documents/cache/PDF/Document604_403489.pdf

²¹ Reported in http://www.ias.org.uk/resources/factsheets/crime_disorder.pdf

²² <http://www.met.police.uk/crimeprevention/pubwatch.htm>

²³ Bennett, T. and Wright, R. (1984), The Relationship between Alcohol Use and Burglary. *British Journal of Addiction*, 79: 431-437. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.1984.tb03892.x, available from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1360-0443.1984.tb03892.x/abstract>

Alcohol is popular with shoplifters, especially well-known spirits. European retailers in 2011 reported shrinkage of 2.25 per cent by value (cheese was 3.9 per cent), but the category was top of the list of sought-after items.²⁴

Anti-Social Behaviour

As well as outright criminal incidents, alcohol is associated with general anti-social behaviour, affecting people's general quality of life. Drinkaware report in 2012 that 'around 40% of patients admitted to A&E are diagnosed with alcohol-related injuries or illnesses, many of which result from binge drinking.' The British Crime Survey reports trends of anti-social behaviour. Interviewed in 2011, 24 per cent, nearly a quarter of adults in England and Wales, reported people being drunk or rowdy in public places as 'a fairly big problem' or worse in their area.

Remedial Steps

Education

Cumbria police force offers typical advice for staying out of trouble²⁵:

- Avoid drinking games and 'spirited banter';
- Return home promptly after leaving venues, by public transport or lifts with a non-drinker.

The public information website 'Alcohol Issues' warns that greater consumption tends to reduce inhibitions to drinking more and concludes 'The most valuable thing we can do, as individuals, is to educate ourselves and those around us to the dangers of this most social of drugs.'²⁶

Pricing

Despite warnings about the amount of alcoholic drink stolen through shoplifting, it is possible to reduce legal consumption by increasing the price. The Home Office is planning (in 2012) to introduce restrictions on selling alcohol below its VAT price, following results of several observational studies that suggested that changes in price had affected crime levels in the opposite direction. One such study found that alcohol-related harm, including crime, rose in Finland in 2004 when the duty was cut by one third.²⁷

Design of bars and glasses

Careful consideration is being given to designing a less crime-inducing drinking environment:

- The layout of pubs and bars can work to reduce crowding, overheating and 'vertical drinking'.²⁸
- Glasses and bottles can be designed to be less useful as weapons.²⁹

²⁴ Global Retail Theft Barometer 2011, Centre for Retail Research <http://www.retailresearch.org/shopliftershitparade.php>

²⁵ <http://www.cumbria.police.uk/advice-and-information/personal-safety/drug-and-alcohol-crime>

²⁶ <http://www.alcoholissues.co.uk/alcohol-crime.html>

²⁷ Study by Mäkelä and Österberg reported in Alcohol pricing, consumption and criminal harm, Home Office 2011,

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/alcohol-drugs/alcohol/alcohol-pricing/rapid-evidence-assessment>

²⁸ http://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/information/documents/cache/PDF/Document604_403489.pdf

²⁹ Design Out Crime, a Home Office initiative available

from http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/Documents/Documents/Publications/Crime/DesignOutCrimeAlcohol_Insights_Design_Council.pdf

Reduction of Alcohol Dependency

Offender treatment programmes address the problem of excessive drinking among people that have already transgressed into criminality.

Examples are:

- RAPT (the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust)³⁰, which offers alcohol-specific treatment to over 200 prisoners a year across HMP Bullingdon, HMP Everthorpe and HMP Downview.
- EDP Drug and Alcohol Services³¹, providing CARAT (Counselling - Advice - Referral - Assessment – Throughcare) and other alcohol-related services in Devon prisons since 2008.

Know Your Limits

Public health organizations attempt to train the public to avoid the levels of drinking so often associated with crime. At the most basic level, this involves teaching limits for safe drinking.

- 14 units per week for women, not all consumed in one session.
- 21 units per week for men, not all consumed in one session.

1 unit is 10ml of alcohol by volume.

Beer	Wine
1½ pints of normal beer at 4.1% ABV is 568 + 284 ml, making 4.1% of 852ml. 34.9 ml of alcohol = 3.5 units.	1 small (175 ml) glass of red wine at 12% ABV is 12% of 175 ml, 21 ml of alcohol = 2.1 units.
One and a half pints every day would exceed a man's limit of 21 units in a week.	A single glass this size, the smaller measure in many pubs, every day would exceed a woman's limit of 14 units in a week.

These are illustrations only. Many women drink beer and many men drink wine. Repeated servings, larger portions and stronger brews all rapidly breach the suggested guidelines.

³⁰ <http://www.rapt.org.uk/>

³¹ <http://www.edp.org.uk/Criminal-Justice-Services/>