Alcohol and Violent Crime



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Reducing harm caused by alcohol

Reducing alcohol consumption is key to violence prevention, due to the strong association between alcohol consumption and an individual's risk of becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence. As well as having an often devastating impact on people's lives, alcohol-related crime is estimated to cost Scotland £727 million each year.² Alcohol-related violence is not limited to the night-time economy: almost three quarters of alcohol is sold in shops and supermarkets for consumption at home³ and more violence is occurring behind closed doors.4

With this in mind, and the difficulties associated with policing the private sphere, primary prevention measures are vital. The best ways to reduce alcohol consumption and harm are to increase the price, reduce the availability and restrict the marketing of alcohol. For example, the introduction of a minimum unit price of 50p per unit of alcohol is estimated to prevent 3,500 crimes in Scotland each year, including around 500 violent crimes.5

There is a strong link between alcohol and violent crime.

42% of violent crime in Scotland is alcohol-related.⁶ While there has been a decrease in the number of alcohol-related violent crimes in Scotland over the past five years or so, dropping from 63% in 2008/09 to 42% in 2016/17, almost 100,000 alcohol-related violent crimes still take place in Scotland each year.⁶ In addition:

Over two fifths of violent crimes in Scotland are alcohol-related¹⁰

- The Scottish Ambulance Service attended over 1,000 emergency incidents relating to alcoholrelated violence in 2016-17.7
- One third of police, ambulance and fire service staff have been subjected to physical abuse while attending an incident as a result of alcohol.8
- 42% of all people accused of homicide over the last ten years were under the influence of alcohol.9
- Two in five (41% of) prisoners report being drunk at the time of their offence 10, rising to 60% for young offenders.11

Scotland's prison and custody populations have a high prevalence of alcohol problems:

- 1 in 5 young male offenders got drunk daily before being imprisoned. 10
- Between 18-34% of those in police custody have alcohol problems (mostly at the dependency end of the spectrum).12
- Nearly three quarters (73%) of male prisoners have an Alcohol Use Disorder with 36% possibly dependent.13

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Victims of violent crime are also often under the influence of alcohol:

In 22% of violent crime, the victim had been drinking. 6











More crime occurs in areas where alcohol is readily available

Alcohol availability refers to the ease or convenience of obtaining alcohol. This includes the number and capacity of alcohol outlets in an area (both on-sales such as pubs and restaurants and off-sales such as supermarkets and shops), and opening hours of premises selling alcohol.

Research has found a consistent relationship between alcohol availability and violence.¹⁴ In particular, the concentration of premises selling alcohol in an area ('outlet density') has been found to be associated with higher levels of alcohol-related crime¹⁵, domestic violence and murder. ¹⁶ A recent Scottish study found that neighbourhoods with the most outlets had significantly higher crime rates than in neighbourhoods with the least.¹⁷

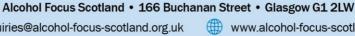
The type of premises is also important in relation to levels of alcohol-related crime, with more violence found to be linked to off-premises than on-premises in two studies 18, and bar density more strongly associated with rates of assault than restaurant density. 19

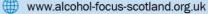
The **hours during which alcohol is sold** also affects rates of alcohol-related crime, with late night trading hours associated with higher assault rates²⁰, and a reduction in assault rates resulting from cutting pub late night opening by two hours in an Australian city.²¹













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⁶ Scottish Government (2018), Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2016/17: Main Findings. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

⁷ Figures provided to Alcohol Focus Scotland by the Scottish Ambulance Service: Number of Emergency Incidents attended by the Scottish Ambulance Service in financial year 2016/17, Total and Where Alcohol is Recorded as an Additional Factor.

⁸ Police Scotland (24 Aug 2016), Emergency workers reveal alcohol-related abuse, accessed 28/11/17 http://www.scotland.police.uk/whatshappening/news/2016/august/999-workers-say

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