

Relationships between late night drinks marketing and alcohol related disorder

INTRODUCTION

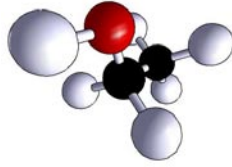
Although alcohol-related disorder in public space is a long-standing problem throughout the UK, in recent years this issue has become much more policy relevant. Whether or not current concerns about the ‘binge drinking’ phenomenon are fully justified, there is no doubt that alcohol-related problems in the night-time economy are widespread, bringing many negative consequences not only for those directly involved, but also for the taxpayer, the licence trade industry, the industry’s employees, the law-abiding patrons of licensed premises, the emergency services and the public at large. In light of new concerns that the lengthening of licensing hours (24 hour drinking) will exacerbate these problems, this report examines patterns of disorder in the late night (early AM) drinks market.

The research undertaken for this report investigated the issues above by way of participant observation in city centre nightclubs (venues holding an entertainments license) in Glasgow, Scotland. These observations assessed the different disorder risk apparent across a range of eight city centre nightclub premises and recorded in detail incidents of alcohol-related aggression in their naturalistic setting. These observations used internationally validated instruments and built upon a similar study conducted by the author in licensed premises within Glasgow city centre’s early night-time (late PM) drinks market (premises holding a public house license). Observations were supplemented by in-depth interviews conducted with patrons of the city’s nightclubs.

FINDINGS

The observational research found that there was great variance in disorder risk between premises. Premises also varied in terms of the nature and extent of aggressive incidents witnessed during observations, including those with no such incidents, those with a higher frequency of, mainly trivial, incidents and those where incidents were less frequent but appeared to have more serious consequences when they did occur.

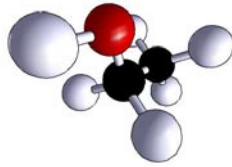
- These differences in disorder risk appeared to be related to differing clientele and patrons’ behaviours, which were in turn related to the entertainments on offer (i.e. because of music policy rather than any drinks marketing).



- The frequency and severity of aggressive incidents (mainly fights) witnessed was greater than that witnessed in the previous Glasgow (pub sector) research, though in common with the findings of that study, many incidents, including some of the most serious, involved female aggressors.
- Although within the nightclub sample, the frequency of these aggressive incidents appeared to be greater within premises characterised by younger more intoxicated patrons, in comparison to the previous early night-time, pub-sector research, overall levels of drunkenness did not vary significantly. This would suggest that it is features inherent to nightclubs (e.g. dancing behaviour), rather than alcohol sales, that are responsible for the greater levels of violence witnessed within late-night premises.
- Although there was little evidence of any overtly irresponsible alcohol promotion techniques being used (in the observed nightclubs at weekends), drunkenness was the norm, with consumption patterns varying according to clientele.

The interviews with nightclub patrons corroborated the above observations and helped to provide explanations for the alcohol-related disorder and aggressive incidents witnessed:

- Patron interviews revealed very heterogeneous patterns of alcohol consumption associated with nightclub attendance, including non-consumption (of alcohol), moderated consumption, heavier/prolonged sessions and regular patterns, including 'pre-loading' (both in pubs and from the off-trade) and also, less commonly, at 'after parties'.
- There was much evidence that patrons consumed alcohol before entering nightclubs, indeed many would not arrive at one sober. Reasons for this included, to get in the mood (e.g. while getting ready), to socialise or 'catch up' with friends in an environment more conducive to conversation and most worryingly to save money by 'pre-loading' from cheaper pub or off-trade outlets.



- Both observations and interviews implied three broad types of reasons for nightclub attendance; 1) for music, dancing and entertainment, 2) to meet new people, especially ‘pulling’ sexual partners and 3) to continue the ‘fun’ of a social/special occasion with pre-existing like-minded friends, regardless of whether or not nightclub attendance was planned.
- These three reasons, concerning why people went clubbing (music, ‘pulling’ or ‘fun’), could be reflected in both patterns of alcohol consumption and disorder risk, for example violent conflicts arising from disputes over ‘sexual jealousy’ at ‘pulling’ venues.

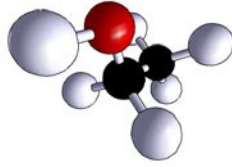
The study coincided with a time of considerable policy change within Glasgow’s night-time economy. These changes are likely to have implications for other parts of the UK in the near future, including:

a) A Glasgow bye-law introduced immediately prior to the commencement of this research which banned (most) glassware from the city’s entertainment venues.

- Some of the violent incidents witnessed during fieldwork bore out the advantage of plastic over (any) glassware in preventing serious injury.
- Patrons were positive about the introduction of plastic vessels into the nightclub drinking environment. They had quickly become used to this change and actually felt less safe when clubbing in other cities where glass was still in use.

b) The ban on smoking in public places across Scotland which was introduced at the midpoint of the observational phase of this research.

- This was observed, causing some door management difficulties for the nightclub sector, particularly in tying-up the time of some security staff, especially female security staff to monitor and search patrons exiting and re-entering premises to smoke outside.
- Patrons were in favour of the changes that the smoking ban had brought about, even smokers who were very positive about the emergent outdoor smoking or ‘smirting’ scene.



Finally, the study also examined patterns of disorder on the street when the nightclubs closed.

- The city centre streets appeared to be less disorderly at nightclub closing time (3.00 AM) than what was noted during the previous 'pub study' (closing time at midnight). This contrasts sharply with the observed differences within both types of premises.
- Patrons agreed that things were 'quieter' when the nightclubs came out, compared to the pubs, though many still experienced fear of crime at this time, with a need for safer late-night transport being stressed.

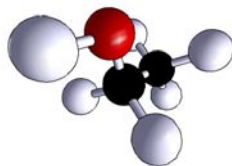
IMPLICATIONS

This research has highlighted some of the extra problems faced in managing alcohol-related disorder at late night entertainment venues (i.e. nightclubs):

- Although there appears to be a greater risk of alcohol-related disorder within premises operating in this sector, than say in the late PM sector (i.e. pubs), this extra risk appears to be related to problems associated with dancing behaviours rather than overt drinks marketing practices.
- The removal of all glassware from nightclubs is one measure which can clearly bring public safety rewards.
- Owing to the severity of some of the fights between females witnessed in this research, it is also felt that polices to introduce more female stewards (security staff) would be advantageous, especially, as was the case in this research, in premises where the majority of patrons are female or where female security staff numbers are limited to door searches (a shortage worsened by smoking exit door searches).
- Although high levels of drunkenness were witnessed, nightclub operators may be being unfairly singled out for any resultant problems as there was much evidence of 'pre-loading', buying cheaper alcohol from off-trade or pub outlets,

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prior to attempting to gain entry to nightclubs or even prior to entering the city centre night-time economy.

- The research confirmed the usefulness of the observational method for measuring disorder risk and recommendations are made towards using this type of premises assessment being used as part of violence reduction tool-kits. Rather than merely concentrating on the problems, some measure of the positive aspects of licensed premises should be included in future assessment instruments.

This research was carried out by Dr Alasdair Forsyth while at the Glasgow Centre for the Study of Violence in Glasgow Caledonian University.

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