

Pre-drinking alcohol before hitting the nightclubs likely to lead to violence, study finds

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(Medical Xpress)—The increasingly common practice of drinking at home before hitting the nightclubs is the major predictor of people experiencing harm or violence, Australia's largest study into alcohol-related nightlife crime has found.

The 'Dealing with alcohol-related harm and the night-time economy (DANTE)' study compared the effectiveness of alcohol-related crime prevention measures put in place between 2005 and 2010 through licensing regulation in Newcastle (NSW) and voluntary programs run in Geelong (Victoria). The study was conducted by researchers at Deakin University and Hunter New England [Population Health](#) and was funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund.

Among the study's key findings was that the measures that dealt directly with alcohol consumption employed in Newcastle, such as restricted trading hours, were the most effective in reducing alcohol-related crime. The harm associated with pre-drinking was also highlighted in the results.

"That drinking before going out was shown to be a major predictor of harm in the night-time economy indicates that addressing this practice requires strong action by government to turn this increasing trend around. The problem could be addressed by introducing a levy on packaged liquor to make it less attractive for people to pre-drink before

going out clubbing," said Deakin researcher and study author, Associate Professor Peter Miller.

"Limiting trading hours was found to be immediately effective in reducing the alcohol-related [crime rates](#) in Newcastle

"This type of intervention comes at no cost to the community and frees up police and other emergency staff to deal with matters other than drunks and alcohol-related violence, and should be considered wherever alcohol-related violence is identified as a problem," he said. The study found such measures need to be implemented across all venues, rather than just specific venues to ensure a level-playing field for business and act as a vehicle for cultural change amongst patrons.

A range of interventions were analysed in the study including locking patrons out of clubs after 1.30am, clubs closing by 3.30am, banning alcohol shots after 10pm and limits on the number of drinks being served (as mandated by licence conditions in Newcastle) and the introduction of ID scanners, improved communication between venues and police and education campaigns (which were voluntary in Geelong).

The researchers also reviewed hospital and police records and ambulance callouts to evaluate the rate of alcohol-related violence. A massive program of 4000 patron interviews was conducted into alcohol-related crime and more than 120 unannounced venue observations were undertaken. Community attitudes towards alcohol-related harm and the available policy options were also canvassed.

"We found that the number of assaults in Newcastle dropped significantly during the study period while the interventions in Geelong had no impact," Associate Professor Miller said.

"Other findings included strong, consistent policing using substantial

personal fines is also effective, but requires policing levels which are seldom sustained. Lockouts appear to harm smaller bars and those that trade earlier and show no evidence of being effective in their own right. And illicit drug use is fairly low, but does predict greater experience of violence and harm."

The community surveys revealed that most people believed alcohol was a problem in their entertainment precincts.

"We found that most people surveyed had witnessed an aggressive act in licensed venues and that nine out of ten people believed licenced venues should shut by 3am. There was similar support for more police on the street," Associate Professor Miller said.

The night-time economies, such as [nightclubs](#) and bars, are an important part of our urban and regional centres. They provide entertainment and jobs for many people. However they are also places where violence and injury occur at great cost to the community.

"This study provided a unique opportunity to evaluate what works and what doesn't by comparing two cities with similar populations that implemented different approaches to reducing alcohol-related violence," Associate Professor Miller said.

"The evidence we have from the DANTE study should now be used by respective governments to implement proven strategies to seriously address the harms that result from excessive [alcohol consumption](#) in our entertainment precincts."

More information: www.ndlerf.gov.au/pub/Monograph_43.pdf

Provided by Deakin University

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