



AUGUST 2015 NEWSLETTER

Pre-loading adds to UK alcohol problems

By Lise Gervais

Like other places, the UK has a problem with alcohol-fueled violence. According to the National Crime Survey of England and Wales, in 47 out of 100 cases, victims report that the perpetrator appeared to be under the influence of alcohol. In Scotland, the number is closer to 63%. About a quarter of these crimes occurred at or near a drinking establishment and almost half occurred during weekends, between 6 at night and 6 in the morning.

Across England, Wales and Scotland night time entertainment areas, though profitable for some, have earned reputations for being rowdy, sometimes unsafe places, impacting visitors and full-time residents with noise, litter and crime.

"Preloading", or drinking before going out to bars and clubs, adds to the problem. Alcoholic drinks can be sold for very cheap in supermarkets and other off-license establishments. Some stores even sell alcohol as a loss leader-- bringing customers in with low prices on one item and raising the prices of others.

After the shops have closed for the night, already intoxicated patrons venture into bars and clubs, drink more and sometimes end up involved in incidents that require the assistance of police or medical professionals. These kinds of events can impact an establishment's reputation and even cast a shadow on a neighborhood or a whole town.

Pub industry groups have asked parliament to take action on supermarket prices and promotions to level the playing field. While pubs aren't allowed to offer promotions such as 2-for-1 specials, supermarkets get around these kinds of rules and customers pay much less per unit in taxes, industry groups say. They also point out that supermarkets have less responsibility for what customers do once the product is consumed.



In an effort to reduce negative incidents in late night entertainment areas, breathalyzers have been used in a number of pilot programs. Door supervisors ask patrons to blow into a breathalyzer before gaining entrance to a club or bar. If the person is over a set limit, they are not allowed in. While there is some controversy about the use of breathalyzers, since individuals may metabolize alcohol differently, the use of a mechanical device to establish

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intoxication takes some of the responsibility off the door staff to recognize signs of intoxication among patrons who might not appear to be drunk.

A pilot program in the city of Liverpool called "Say No To Drunks" included the use of breathalyzers by door staff, and a marketing information campaign. The campaign aimed to increase knowledge of, and compliance with the law among patrons and staff. Surveys were taken before and after by some faculty and students of the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University. **Pre-program surveys revealed that many customers and servers did not know that it is illegal to serve alcohol to someone who is already intoxicated; after the program many more did.** Servers who participated in the training program said that they were less likely to serve an intoxicated person and felt more confident in their refusal skills. Close to half felt that since the pilot program, there had been less drunkenness in their establishments. They also found breathalyzers easy to use but most did not want to continue using them after the trial period.

Early Morning Restriction Orders, or EMRO's, are also being used in an attempt to deal with the other end of a night started with pre-loading. Dialing back the hour that bars close from 6 a.m. to 3 a.m. which could limit total intake, has support from the Association of Chief Police Officers.

In our reports on alcohol problems in the United Kingdom, we noted that drinking rates for UK adults and youth rose slowly over 50 years in tandem with deregulation. While there has been some decline in overall consumption, drinking rates are still high. For example, a recent survey of UK adults by SodaStream indicated that one in seven adults drink more alcohol than water!

This example is similar to the United Kingdom's deregulation current problems with alcohol as illustrated in our [report](#) and [update](#).

Over and over, UK police and health care professionals have recommended minimum pricing of alcohol, limits to hours and venues where alcohol is available, limited promotions and marketing, and more money for enforcement. While these measures would certainly help, they still would not match the US regulatory system which employs multiple means to control price, availability, and promotions. Our experience suggests that multiple measures are more likely to achieve results.

Links:

<http://www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Crime-and-social-impacts/Factsheets/UK-alcohol-related-crime-statistics.aspx>

<http://www.morningadvertiser.co.uk/Legal/Legislation/Supemarkets-Wetherspoons-ALMR>

<http://www.cph.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Say-No-To-Drunks-pilot-intervention-evaluation-report-April-2015-3.pdf>

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/about-us/press-office/drinkaware-response-to-health-warnings-about-alcohol>

http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/alcohol_consultation_0.pdf

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/one-seven-brits-drink-more-6209543>

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