

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDUCING
ALCOHOL-RELATED CRIME
IN
NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS
OF AUSTRALIA**

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BSc (Hons)**

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SIGNED: _____

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDUCING
ALCOHOL-RELATED CRIME IN
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SYNONYMS

Globally the consumption of beverage alcohol (alcohol) contributes to considerable mortality and morbidity. In developed nations such as Australia, alcohol use and misuse represents one of the leading contributors to death, disease and disability. Furthermore, the burden of alcohol consumption extends beyond the health of individuals, to impact on emotional and social well-being, and the economic prosperity of individuals, families, businesses, communities and governments.

Criminal incidents, specifically violence, anti-social behaviour and motor vehicle crashes, are strongly associated with excessive alcohol consumption. Inconsistency in the recording of alcohol-related crime data, however, has limited the understanding of the magnitude and characteristics of these forms of alcohol-attributed harm. Such limitations have impeded the ability to effectively address alcohol-related crime in the community.

In the context of these limitations and recent improvements in the collection of alcohol-related crime data in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, the aims of this thesis were to:

- 1 examine the prevalence and characteristics of alcohol-related harm, and in particular, incidents of alcohol-related crime in non-metropolitan areas of NSW, Australia. To address this aim, descriptive analyses were undertaken of alcohol-related violence, disorder and motor vehicle crash incidents, and their variability in terms of geographic area, day, time, location of alcohol consumption and contribution of licensed premises.
- 2 evaluate the effectiveness of an intelligence-led educational policing strategy in reducing crime associated with the consumption of alcohol on licensed

premises. To address this aim, an evaluation was conducted of an intervention delivered to licensed premises as a part of routine policing activity by the NSW Police Force. The intervention aimed to reduce the number of persons involved in police-recorded incidents following the consumption of alcohol on licensed premises. The intervention involved the provision to licensees of graduated educational feedback and resources designed to facilitate improvement in the service and management practices of licensed premises

- 3 identify opportunities for the development and implementation of policies, interventions and further research to reduce alcohol-attributed harm in non-metropolitan areas of Australia.

This thesis is comprised of six chapters that address the above aims. Outlined below is a summary of each of these chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a summary of the literature detailing the harm associated with alcohol use and misuse, globally and in select developed nations. Although epidemiological research suggests that alcohol-attributed deaths in Australia and New Zealand are decreasing, such research suggests that the prevalence of non-fatal harms attributed to alcohol consumption has increased in recent years. These increases may be due, at least in part, to an increase in the acute forms of alcohol-attributed harms such as violence and motor vehicle crashes. Across the developed nations selected for review, young people were most at risk of both acute alcohol-attributed harm and of drinking at levels that placed them at risk of harm in the short-term. Although males are most at risk of excessive alcohol consumption and related

acute harms, research evidence suggests that this gender disparity may be diminishing in the selected developed nations.

In Chapter 2, variability in the prevalence of people who have consumed alcohol or who are intoxicated prior to involvement in police-recorded incidents of violence and disorder across non-metropolitan NSW, was investigated. The study utilised NSW Police Force recorded data derived from enhanced alcohol intelligence collection and recording procedures.

The study found that annually, 9.1 in 1,000 people in the study area population consumed alcohol prior to involvement in a police-recorded incident of violence, and 2.2 in 1,000 people consumed alcohol prior to involvement in a disorder incident. These population rates of alcohol involvement in violence and disorder offences increased with increasing remoteness. Among those people involved in violence incidents, 37% were recorded as having consumed alcohol prior to the incident, whilst 74% of people involved in disorder incidents were recorded as having done so. Although this proportion of alcohol involvement increased with increasing remoteness for incidents of violence, a reverse association was found for disorder incidents. A high proportion of people who had consumed alcohol prior to involvement in either violence (71%) or disorder (87%) incidents were recorded as being intoxicated, with this proportion positively associated with remoteness.

To further inform the development of harm reduction interventions, additional examination of the characteristics of incidents of alcohol-related crime was undertaken as described in Chapter 3. Utilising the aforementioned enhanced NSW Police Force

recorded alcohol data, the variable involvement of people in incidents of violence and disorder following the consumption of alcohol, and following the consumption of alcohol to intoxication, was examined in terms of the day and time of incidents, drinking location, and by geographic area. Across the study area, Saturdays and late evenings were observed to be the peak days and times for police-recorded alcohol involvement in both violence and disorder incidents. The proportion of people involved in such incidents who were recorded as being intoxicated varied little, exceeding 60% across all days of the week and times of the day. Prior drinking in private residences was most commonly associated with violence incidents, while drinking in licensed premises was most commonly associated with disorder incidents. All such characteristics varied by geographic area. For example, the consumption of alcohol in a licensed premises prior to involvement in violence and disorder incidents was most common in regional city areas and decreased with increasing geographic remoteness. Alcohol consumption in a private residence prior to involvement in such incidents increased with increasing remoteness and was greatest in remote and very remote areas. Among people involved in such incidents, intoxication was a common feature, regardless of the remoteness of the geographic area, or location in which alcohol was last consumed.

Chapter 4 describes a study which investigated the association between particular licensed premises and patron involvement in police-recorded incidents of violence, disorder and motor vehicle crashes. The association was examined in terms of the prevalence of intoxicated persons who had last consumed alcohol in licensed premises prior to involvement in such incidents, by type of premises (licence type) and by individual premises. The study found that the risk of an intoxicated person involved in an incident of violence, disorder or a motor vehicle crash having last consumed alcohol

in a nightclub or hotel was at least twice as high as registered clubs and other licensed premises. Furthermore, approximately 20% of premises were found to be associated with 80% of persons involved in such incidents. This pattern of association was evident within each type of incident and each type of liquor licence. Six percent of premises were found to account for approximately 40% of intoxicated patrons involved in incidents of violence, disorder and motor vehicle crashes.

It has been previously suggested that an intelligence-led educational policing strategy targeted at high-risk licensed premises may represent an effective approach to reducing alcohol-related harms associated with licensed premises. Following positive findings from an efficacy trial of such a strategy conducted in a regional area of NSW, Chapter 5 describes a pre-post evaluation of its effectiveness when implemented routinely by police in 21 non-metropolitan police commands. The strategy involved police delivery of educational feedback and resources to licensees graduated according to the association between their licensed premises and persons involved in police-recorded incidents.

The study examined the impact of the strategy on the rate per licensed premises of patron involvement in police-recorded incidents of violence, disorder and motor vehicle crashes. This rate was calculated for a four month baseline period and an equivalent period one year later. For all premises combined, a reduction in the rate per premises of patrons being involved in incidents approached statistical significance (1.24 to 1.11, $P=0.08$). For those premises that received the most intensive police response, a reduction in the rate per premises of patron involvement in incidents was statistically significant (7.08 to 5.65, $P=0.03$). Further evaluation utilising a controlled design is

required to confirm the benefits and sustainability of the effect of the policing strategy on reducing alcohol-related incidents.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings of the previous five chapters and examines evidence-based alcohol policy and intervention options for reducing alcohol-related crime in non-metropolitan areas. It is apparent that the considerable, yet variable, burden of alcohol-attributed harm in non-metropolitan areas calls for the delivery of evidence-based policies and interventions that are tailored to the particular characteristics of such harm in different geographic locations. The implementation of universal policies, such as alcohol taxation that is commensurate with the pure alcohol content of the beverage and minimum legal age of purchase of alcohol, are likely to impact across all geographic areas, while the implementation of localised strategies, such as restricting the trading hours of on- and/or off-licensed premises and the declaration of dry areas, are likely to address localised problems and to have the greatest impact at the local level. The thesis concludes that the alcohol-related crime intelligence described in this thesis has the potential to contribute to both a greater understanding of alcohol-related crime in non-metropolitan areas, and to the implementation of effective harm-reduction strategies in these areas.

Each chapter of this thesis is written as a discrete study in the style of an individual peer-reviewed journal manuscript. Accordingly, some repetition in the methodology and source data of some of the studies is evident between chapters. At the time of thesis submission a paper based on the study presented in Chapter 4 has been published in a peer-reviewed journal. A further paper is currently under editorial review.