

### **IMPACT OF THE NEW LICENSING LAW ON EMERGENCY HOSPITAL ATTENDANCES: A COHORT STUDY.**

**Emergency Medicine Journal. 24, 532-534.**

**Newton, Sharker, Pahal, van den Bergh & Young, (2007).**

Plain English summary and implications for police prepared by Roger Nicholas.

#### **Aims and Methodology**

The researchers sought to assess the effect of changes to United Kingdom licensing laws which permitted 24 hour alcohol trading. The researchers measured the impact of these changes on overnight attendances at the emergency department (ED) of St Thomas Hospital in inner city London. The researchers examined the attendances of 2736 patients over the age of 16 years who attended the ED in March 2005, (prior to the introduction of the new laws) and compared these with 3135 attendances in March 2006 (after the introduction of the laws). The attendances were examined to determine the extent to which they were related to alcohol intoxication. Additional information was obtained concerning those attendances that were alcohol intoxication related (hereafter called alcohol-related). Alcohol-related presentations that were not related to acute intoxication (such as cirrhosis) were excluded from the study.

#### **Key findings:**

- During March 2005 there was a total of 10,290 attendances to the ED (at any time of the day). During March 2006, there was a total of 9,978 attendances which represented a reduction of 3% over the preceding year. In March 2005 there were 2,736 overnight attendances at the ED, compared with 3,135 March 2006, a rise of 15%.
- Of the 2,736 overnight ED attendances in March 2005, 79 (2.9%) were classified as alcohol-related. Of the 3,135 attendances in March 2006, 250 (8.0%) were classified as alcohol-related.
- The median age of patients who attended the ED after consuming alcohol in March 2005 was 27, compared with 31 years in 2006.
- The proportion of total attendances that were associated with alcohol related assault increased from 0.99% in 2005 to 1.98% in 2006. The proportion of attendances that were associated with alcohol-related injury increased from 1.61% in 2005 to 4.11% in 2006. The proportion of attendances to the ED that resulted in alcohol-related hospital admissions increased from 0.88% in 2005 to 2.46% in 2006.
- In addition to an increase in overnight alcohol-related ED attendances that occurred following the introduction of the new licensing laws these patients were more difficult to manage and required more resources, including larger and longer assessments.

#### **Implications for policing**

The licensing laws in the United Kingdom were liberalised in 2005 with a view to preventing crime and enhancing public safety. It was thought that by allowing pubs and clubs to stagger their

**Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing as part of its commitment to the National Drug Strategy.**

[www.ndlerf.gov.au](http://www.ndlerf.gov.au)

closing times, this would reduce the amount of binge drinking that took place at the previous uniform closing time. It appears, however, that the change in legislation has had the opposite effect. At least in this study, this change has been associated with an increase in alcohol-related assaults, injuries and alcohol-related hospital admissions.

The level of alcohol-related attendances at the ED that were found in this study is perhaps somewhat lower than might otherwise be expected. This is because the researchers applied relatively strict exclusion criteria in terms of which attendees were included in the study.

There is now well established literature on the adverse impact of extending the hours during which alcohol can be sold. The findings of this study reinforce this evidence base and could be used to make representations to liquor licensing authorities concerning applications for extensions of trading hours.

**Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing  
as part of its commitment to the National Drug Strategy.**

**[www.ndlrf.gov.au](http://www.ndlrf.gov.au)**