



Alcohol-related violence and deprivation

Dr Carly Lightowlers, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Liverpool & Lucy Bryant, Research and Policy Officer, Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS)

**SHAAP/SARN Alcohol Occasionals Seminar
Tuesday 30 March 2021, hosted on Zoom**

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems ([SHAAP](#)) and the Scottish Alcohol Research Network ([SARN](#)) are proud to host the lunchtime Alcohol Occasionals in conjunction with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh ([RCPE](#)). The seminars showcase new and innovative research on alcohol-related topics and provide the opportunity for researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers and members of the public to discuss and debate implications for policy and practice. The current theme is alcohol and inequalities. [Event reports](#) aim to capture the main discussion points and communicate these to a wider audience. SHAAP is responsible for the contents of this report, which are our interpretation.

Introducing the seminar, Interim SHAAP Director Lindsay Paterson welcomed the participants and the speakers, [Dr Carly Lightowlers](#) (@Carly_LL) and [Lucy Bryant](#) (@LucyElBryant), on behalf of SHAAP and SARN.

Bryant first thanked SHAAP/SARN for the invitation and shared that this research has been [commended](#) for collaboration and impact in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Research Excellence Awards, and well received in policy circles.

Bryant provided background information, explaining that alcohol is linked to a substantial amount and



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array of crime. Alcohol is implicated in around [two-fifths of all violent offences](#) in England/Wales and strong associations with alcohol are seen across different forms of violence (domestic, stranger, etc.).

Despite the prevalence of alcohol-related violence, there was an important research gap which Bryant and Lightowlers addressed: how is alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour (ASB) victimisation spread across socioeconomic status (SES) groups? Limited earlier evidence had been conflicting or inconclusive. For example, a British Crime Survey [report](#) from 2003 found that the unemployed had far higher rates of alcohol-related assault than those in employment/self-employed or economically inactive. Meanwhile in [Australia](#), police data suggest that higher SES neighbourhoods are

associated with greater alcohol-related crime at community level. Another issue with previous research has been a lack of differentiation by type of alcohol-related violence, which Bryant and Lightowlers addressed in their research.

Bryant explained that they used data from the [Crime Survey for England & Wales](#), a nationally representative victimisation survey, including whether the offender was under the influence of alcohol; type of violence (domestic/stranger/acquaintance); risk factors for alcohol-related violence; and three measures of SES (income/housing/occupation). They gathered data on incidence and prevalence rates for each type of violence ([learn more](#)), by SES, for 2013/14 to 2017/18 (n=174,178). By conducting separate analyses for the three measures of SES, consistent patterns provide

greater confidence in the findings. They also used a technique called regression analysis to determine if SES remains a risk factor for alcohol-related violence when other known risk factors are accounted for. Key results include:

- Prevalence of alcohol-related violence is highest in the lowest SES group (by occupation/income) and prevalence falls as SES increases.
- By any measure of SES, the prevalence of alcohol-related domestic and acquaintance violence is highest for the lowest SES group and prevalence falls as SES increases. Incidence is highest for lowest SES groups for domestic and acquaintance violence for two SES measures. In contrast, alcohol-related stranger violence shows a mixed picture.
- Disparities can be staggering: incidents of alcohol-related domestic violence are 14 times as common amongst social renters compared with homeowners.
- Low SES remains a risk factor for alcohol-related violence even when controlling for other known risk factors (age, sex, disability status, pub/club attendance).
- Whilst experiencing alcohol-related ASB is spread fairly evenly across SES groups, of those who do experience alcohol-related ASB, around half of those of the lowest SES experienced this at least weekly.

Bryant discussed that there is an urgency to reduce inequalities in alcohol-related violence, which suggest an underlying structural problem. Price and availability interventions offer great hope, particularly minimum unit pricing. There is also a need to reassess criminal justice policy. For example, policing of alcohol-related violence has historically focussed on the night-time economy; however, most of the inequalities found lie in domestic and acquaintance violence, which likely requires a different approach.

Read their research

For more information, you can read the [IAS research report](#) and the [journal article](#).

Lightowlers then shared separate research on the role of deprivation and alcohol availability on shaping trends in violent crime, providing [an overview](#). There has been a research gap in the extent to which deprivation and alcohol availability independently drive trends in violence, and also whether or not deprivation moderates (whether it amplifies or dampens) the effect of availability on violent crime. Lightowlers and colleagues' research linked measures of alcohol availability, police data on violent crime (n=7.7 million), and deprivation level. Data for 2011-18 were analysed ecologically (at area level). This research found:

- An upward trend of recorded violence in England between 2011-18.
- Substantial variation between areas in violent crime, with inequalities between areas increasing during the study period.
- Recorded violent crime was higher in areas with increased deprivation and alcohol availability (particularly for on-licensed trade, e.g. bars/clubs).
- Deprivation had a stronger contribution to violent crime than alcohol availability.
- Deprivation amplified the effect of on-licensed availability on violent crime.

Overall, this research demonstrates that deprivation is an important contextual factor in alcohol-related violence at the area-level, aligned with what Bryant shared at the individual-level.

Lightowlers provided policy implications:

- The positive association between alcohol availability and violent crime suggests restricting availability should reduce violent crime.
- Licensing decisions should take outlet density and deprivation profiles into account.
- The structural drivers of socio-economic deprivation should be

tackled to ameliorate alcohol-related violence.

Lightowlers also highlighted that there is a need for research of alcohol-related violence in the context of COVID-19. Inequalities have widened and reported domestic violence has increased. Meanwhile on-trade restrictions and the shift to home drinking present new research opportunities: what have their impact been on alcohol-related violence?

The [discussion and Q+A](#) was wide-ranging, including: the siloed conversations about the rise in domestic violence during the pandemic, with little recognition of the potential role of cheap alcohol and home drinking on violence; alcohol licensing and challenges to public health-guided decision-making; the impact of disability on victimisation (requiring further research); additional potential risk factors for victimisation including people in the LGBTQI+ community; lack of alcohol-specific policies within the criminal justice policy area; and the need for meaningful and dignified inclusion of lived and living experience of alcohol harm, crime and deprivation in policy-making and research through co-production.

Watch this seminar

You can [watch this seminar](#), and other recent webinars



Forthcoming events

All 2021 *Alcohol Occasionals* are [available for booking](#)

The next will be on 28 April: *Drinking transitions during lockdown*, by Dr Emily Nicholls - [book now](#)

SHAAP Blog

[Read our blog](#), including posts on FASD, alcohol monopolies, and more

