

ALCOHOL AND CRIME: GETTING THE FACTS



What is the relationship between alcohol and crime?

Alcohol plays a key role in crimes such as public order offences, assault and murder, as well as rape and sexual assault¹. This is in addition to offences that are obviously alcohol-related, such as driving under the influence of alcohol.

The type and severity of alcohol-related offences are wide-ranging, from inconvenience and disturbance to violent assault and manslaughter. Harmful alcohol use is not simply a matter of individual responsibility. The impact of alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour has a ripple effect, extending beyond those directly affected to impact on the entire community, including our perceptions of safety and security.

What's the cost of alcohol-related crime?

The cost of alcohol-related crime in Ireland is an estimated €1.2 billion – that's almost a third of the total estimated annual cost of alcohol-related harm to the country of €3.7 billion². As well as the direct costs to the criminal justice system in terms of policing, prison and the courts, there are also additional, indirect costs such as those to businesses in lost productivity and those specific to the victim. These costs can include injury and trauma-related costs, as well as costs related to property.

What about the human costs?

In addition to the economic costs, it is crucial that we don't forget the human costs in terms of trauma and loss. The human impact can take its toll in the form of fear and anxiety, stress and intimidation, as well as the personal financial cost of repairing damage, painting over graffiti, etc.

Some facts on alcohol and crime in Ireland:

- Almost half of the perpetrators of homicide were intoxicated when the crime was committed³
- Alcohol has been identified as a contributory factor in 97% of public order offences as recorded under the Garda PULSE system⁴
- One in 11, or approximately 318,000 of the full adult population, said that they or a family member were assaulted by someone under the influence of alcohol in the past year⁵
- It is estimated that over half of all assailants had been drinking prior to the assault⁶

What about alcohol-related violence in the home?

Alcohol-related crimes that take place in the home, particularly those associated with domestic abuse, can often go unreported and unaccounted for in calculations of the economic and even human costs of crime. The growing trend in home drinking – over 50% of all alcohol bought in Ireland is now bought for domestic consumption – may in the future also be accompanied by a rise in alcohol-related intimidation, assault and violence in and near the home.

What is the role of alcohol in rape and sexual assaults?

The Rape Crisis Network Ireland has said that alcohol is the most common drug used in sexual assaults. A recent Irish study found that 76% of all rape defendants had been drinking at the time of the alleged offence⁷.

Alcohol is never an excuse or an explanation for rape or sexual assault. However, alcohol consumption is sometimes used to blame victims or to diminish the responsibility of perpetrators.

What is the relationship between alcohol and youth crime?

Alcohol is a factor in approximately half of all youth crimes. Alcohol offences (e.g. underage drinking) are the main offences for which children are referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme, accounting for almost a fifth of youth crimes. However, many other criminal offences are also committed by young people when drinking. When considered together, the proportion of crimes where alcohol is a factor is approximately half all of all youth crimes⁸.

85% of Garda Youth Diversion Programmes who took part in a 2009 study named alcohol-related crime as first on the list of offences committed in their area⁹. The offences committed when drinking were mainly public order and criminal damage, and to a lesser degree minor assault and trespass. Alcohol-related youth crime spikes at weekends, in the summer months and at calendar events, such as Hallowe'en.

Alcohol - where's the harm?

The Alcohol Action Ireland commissioned survey *Alcohol - Where's the Harm?* survey¹⁰ asked people about alcohol-related harm in communities and its effects on people and property. One in 11 people said they or a family member had been assaulted by someone under the influence of alcohol. People said they had also experienced the following in the previous 12 months as a result of someone else's drinking:

- 45% said they had gone out of their way to avoid drunk people or places where drinkers are known to hang out
- 21% said they had been kept awake at night or disturbed
- 18% said they had experienced trouble or noise because of drinkers at a licensed venue
- 18% said they felt unsafe while waiting for or using public transport
- 12% said they were verbally abused
- 12% said they had been involved in a serious argument
- 8% said they had been threatened

Overall, almost six in ten (58%) people said they were negatively affected in some way by someone else's drinking.

Is the role of alcohol in crime over-estimated?

No. In fact, the number of alcohol-related crimes is underestimated and under-recorded for a number of reasons. Many people state that they do not report crimes to the Gardaí, particularly offences that can be considered to be of a minor nature, such as damage to property or noise and intimidating behavior.

A key finding of Alcohol Action Ireland's *Alcohol - Where's the Harm?* survey was that much alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour was not reported to the Gardaí - 80% said they did not report that they had been threatened; 75% said they did not report being kept awake at night and seven out of eight people said they did not report verbal abuse. According to respondents, about half of all alcohol-related assaults were reported to the Gardaí. A CSO study in 2010 found that 45% assaults were not reported to the Gardaí¹¹.

Are people who drink alcohol more likely to commit crimes?

Alcohol is a significant risk factor when it comes to crime. However, while the role of alcohol in a wide range of crimes has been extensively documented and evidenced, it is not a simple cause and effect relationship. Most people who drink do not commit offences or become involved in anti-social or violent behaviour. However, what is clear is that alcohol consumption, particularly in large volumes, is a significant risk factor for violence and anti-social behavior.

¹Byrne, S. (2010) Costs to Society of Problem Alcohol Use in Ireland. Dublin: HSE; Hope, A. (2008) Alcohol-Related Harm in Ireland. Dublin: HSE

²Byrne, S. (2010) Costs to Society of Problem Alcohol Use in Ireland. Dublin: HSE

³Hope, A. (2008) Alcohol-Related Harm in Ireland. Dublin: HSE

⁴Hope, A. (2008) Alcohol-Related Harm in Ireland. Dublin: HSE

⁵Alcohol-Where's the Harm? is a nationally representative survey commissioned by Alcohol Action Ireland and conducted by Behaviour and Attitudes in 2011. The full survey is available at www.alcoholireland.ie

⁶Mongan, D., Hope, A. & Nelson, M. (2009) Social Consequences of Harmful Alcohol Use in Ireland. HRB Overview Series 9. Dublin: Health Research Board

⁷(Hanly, C., Healy, D. & Scriver, S. (2009) Rape and Justice in Ireland. Rape Crisis Network Ireland

⁸Irish Youth Justice Service (2009) Designing Effective Local Responses to Youth Crime

⁹IYJS (2009)

¹⁰See 5

¹¹Central Statistics Office (2010) Crime and Victimisation: Quarterly National Household Survey 2010

