

Alcohol, sport and domestic, sexual & gender-based violence



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Summary

There is a significant body of research suggesting a complex relationship between sports, alcohol consumption and domestic violence. Studies have found a strong but complex link between alcohol and domestic abuse, suggesting that alcohol can either be seen as a contributing cause, an aggravating factor or a trigger of violent behaviour in domestic (and other) settings.

Given that alcohol is deeply intertwined with sport and alcohol is a risk factor for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, it is important that there is a whole-of-government approach to alcohol in Ireland.

There is a clear need for increased provision of policing and services for victims including children.

Central to addressing these difficult and complex issues is the need for prevention measures.

Reducing alcohol consumption across the whole of population has a significant role to play. This can be achieved by using the World Health Organisation's 'best buys' - controls on pricing, marketing and availability.

While sports, alcohol, and domestic violence are interrelated in certain contexts, efforts to address and mitigate these issues must focus on changing cultural norms and creating systems of support for both those affected by and those at risk of engaging in violence. Therefore, there is scope for athletes, clubs, counties, provinces, and national governing bodies to play a role in tackling alcohol harm and DSGBV, while it is imperative that government and state agencies ensure that the Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018) is implemented in full.

Alcohol Action Ireland believes there is a need to tackle the manufactured relationship linking alcohol and sport by tackling the mechanisms deployed by the alcohol industry to create and sustain this link.

To achieve this it is clear it is time to ban alcohol sports sponsorship.

About us

Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI) was established in 2003 and is the national independent advocate for reducing alcohol harm. We campaign for the burden of alcohol harm to be lifted from the individual, community and State, and have a strong track record in campaigning, advocacy, research and information provision.

Our work involves providing information on alcohol-related issues, creating awareness of alcohol-related harm and offering policy solutions with the potential to reduce that harm, with a particular emphasis on the implementation of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018. Our overarching goal is to achieve a reduction in consumption of alcohol and the consequent health and social harms which alcohol causes in society.

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Introduction

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) remains a pervasive issue in Irish society, impacting women, men and children in diverse and devastating ways.[1] DSGBV is not solely an issue for those directly affected – it is an insidious, society-wide problem that touches every community, every workplace and every home in Ireland.[2] These crimes are a blight on society and encompasses different forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

Recent findings from the 2022 Sexual Violence Survey, published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), found that 40% of adults have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime, with women disproportionately affected at 52% compared to 28% of men. Younger women, particularly those aged 18-24, reported even higher rates, with 65% having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Furthermore, in Ireland, one in four women who have been in a relationship have been abused by a current or former partner.[3]

“ Since the 1990s DSGBV has emerged as a human rights concern that warrants legal and political recognition at the highest level, where the State has an obligation to safeguard victims”

A 2014 EU-wide study by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) reported that 26% of women in Ireland have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since age 15, and 41% of Irish women know someone in their circle of family or friends who have experienced intimate partner violence.[4] While the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence stated that 29% of women in Ireland have been affected by domestic abuse.[5] Data from Courts Services from 2019 shows that 23,500 applications were received under Domestic Violence legislation, while more recent research conducted by Women's Aid, on young women and men in Ireland, found that 1 in 5 young women and 1 in 11 young men have experienced intimate partner abuse.[6]

However, since the 1990s DSGBV has emerged as a fundamental human

rights concern that warrants legal and political recognition at the highest level, and as an area where the State has an obligation to safeguard victims.[7] While the last two decades have seen an increased focus on DSGBV, the reality is much more work is needed to eradicate this human rights abuse. Central to this work is the need to investigate the factors which are drivers of domestic and gender-based violence.

Increased rates of DSGBV have been associated with events such as public holidays, seasonal variations, disasters and economic crises,[8] however, there is also a body of research suggesting a complex relationship between sports, alcohol consumption and domestic violence.

Alcohol Action Ireland considers it has an important contribution to make to the national debate on eradicating DSGBV. Therefore, this policy paper will look at alcohol consumption around sports events, live and/or televised, and the role alcohol plays in incidences of domestic violence.

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

Domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence can happen to anyone, and it can take many forms – psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse.[9] For instance, in 2023, Men's Aid had 8,682 contacts to their domestic violence support service with victims ranging in ages from 18 to 90+ years across the country.[10] In their annual report, the charity outlined how on average victims contacted their support service four times.

However, the reality is that DSGBV in Ireland is overwhelmingly perpetrated against women and against children. Shockingly, 2023 was a record-breaking year for all the wrong reasons with Women's Aid recording the highest level of disclosures of domestic abuse in its 50-year history. According to their annual report there were 28,638 contacts through frontline services detailing 40,048 disclosures of abuse – an 18% increase on the previous year. The disclosures to Women's Aid included 35,570 reports of domestic abuse against women and 4,478 reports of abuse of children.[11]

The CSO Sexual Violence Survey 2022 also made for grim reading. The survey outlined how four in ten adults in Ireland have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime, with 26% of adults having experienced sexual violence as an adult and 29% as a child. Again, as with domestic violence, women experience higher levels of sexual violence in their lifetime than men, with women almost four times more likely to have experienced sexual violence.[12] Since early 2015, the number of recorded sexual offences in Ireland has been increasing.[13] In 2023, the number of reported sexual offences was 2,884.[14]

Furthermore, since 2020, 38 women have been violently killed in Ireland, with 25 more women killed in Northern Ireland over the same period.[15] Shockingly, it remains the case that the most dangerous place for women is their own home as the nightmare of violence and abuse most commonly will be at the hands of a current or former intimate male partner.[16] Indeed, recent research led by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) found domestic femicides accounted for 74% of cases in Ireland between 2012–2023.[17]

Alcohol and crime

Alcohol and crime have a closely interconnected relationship, with alcohol consumption being a contributing factor to crime and antisocial behaviour. Alcohol plays a key role in crimes such as public order offences, domestic violence, assault and murder, as well as rape and sexual assault.[18] Many studies have demonstrated significant, and positive, associations between alcohol consumption and rates of criminal violence, and we can say with some confidence that more drinking tends to result in more violence, and less drinking tends to result in less violence.[19]

While alcohol use is neither necessary nor sufficient for violence to occur, research shows that more drinking tends to result in more violence, and less drinking tends to result in less violence, therefore addressing alcohol use could reduce the frequency and severity of violence in the home and interrupt intergenerational cycles of abuse.[20]

“ Addressing alcohol use remains an underutilised strategy in the violence prevention field; indeed, relatively few prevention efforts intentionally address alcohol use”

Given the relationship between alcohol and violence, it is clear that alcohol reduction strategies are a significant defence against alcohol-related violence. If we reduce alcohol consumption through controls on price, marketing and availability, there should be a corresponding reduction in alcohol-related violence.

However, addressing alcohol use remains an underutilised strategy in the violence prevention field; indeed, relatively few prevention efforts intentionally address alcohol use or draw on effective strategies from the alcohol field.[21] Therefore, reducing alcohol consumption and reducing alcohol-related violence should be key goals of government, which is especially true in relation to DSGBV.

Alcohol and DSGBV

“ Ask any woman if she would cross the street to avoid a drunk and aggressive man, and the answer would be unequivocally yes. But when women are at risk in their own homes, they don't have the luxury of walking away, and they're often told the threat is not real.” [22]

The consistent link between alcohol and domestic and gender-based violence has led to the recognition of alcohol as a “risk factor” for intimate partner violence by the World Health Organisation,[23] however, there has been relatively little research examining how alcohol affects violence, at least in part because of concerns that such research would be used to justify the use of alcohol as an excuse for violence against women.[24]

Alcohol is not, and never will be, an excuse or explanation for domestic violence. However, it is a known driver of domestic violence. Research continuously identifies alcohol use as one of the most consistent risk factors for domestic violence and violence against children.[25] Indeed, alcohol has long been known to increase both the incidence and severity of physical and sexual violence within intimate relationships and families. [26]

International research also shows that the accessibility and availability of alcohol is closely linked to violence, the more alcohol outlets there are and the later they trade, the more violence we see, and vice versa. For example, a two-hour reduction in late-night trading hours in New South Wales, Australia, in the late 2000s was found to reduce reports of domestic violence by 29%. Unfortunately, the inverse was also proven when the New South Wales Government decided to extend alcohol sales by one hour in 2016, and a significant increase in family violence assaults was experienced.[27] In Northern Ireland, following the extension of licensing hours in October 2021, there has been a 17% increase in alcohol-related crime.[28]

Alcohol-related crimes that take place in the home, particularly those associated with domestic abuse, can often go unreported to An Garda Síochána. However, we know from research that a “higher density of alcohol retailers is associated with greater incidences of violence, assault, and domestic violence”. [29] Indeed, international research shows that density is “positively associated with rates of assault hospital admissions”. [30] In Ireland, 73% of the population live within 300 metres of a licenced

premises, with the number of off-licences increasing by 95% from 2003 to 2021.[31] This, coupled with low off-trade prices,[32] means Ireland has a growing trend in home drinking, with close to 50% of all alcohol bought in Ireland now purchased from the off trade.[33]

Alcohol can never be used as excuse for criminality, and this is especially true with incidents of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence. Research shows that, in incidences of domestic abuse, it appears the role of alcohol is one of a facilitative nature, a contributing cause.[34] Research from Australia found that alcohol is involved in about 30-40% of both intimate partner and family violence. Similarly, national research from 2005 on domestic abuse in intimate partner relationships found that alcohol was a trigger for abusive behaviour in 34% of cases.[35] While, McGoldrick, Collis, and Mulligan, in their paper on 'Femicide in Ireland 2012-2023', found that in many cases the history of perpetrators' "...revealed a complex range of potential risk factors for the progression of IPV, including...alcohol and substance misuse...".[36] In addition, 2006 research found that alcohol was a factor in up to 70% of cases of domestic violence against women. [37]



Alcohol is never an excuse or an explanation for rape or sexual assault. Yet, alcohol consumption is sometimes disgracefully used to blame victims or to diminish the responsibility of perpetrators. It must be unequivocally stated that sexual violence is never the victim's fault, and therefore the responsibility for assault always lies with the perpetrator,

under any circumstances.[38] Nevertheless, alcohol is consistently found in a high proportion of those who perpetrate sexual assault.[39] The Rape Crisis Network Ireland has said that alcohol is the most common drug used in sexual assaults. The Rape and Justice in Ireland Report found that 76% of all rape defendants had been drinking at the time of the alleged offence.[40]

Despite the known role of alcohol as a driver of DSGBV, a 'Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches' in Australia which looked at actions to end domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) found that "a failure to consider DFSV in alcohol policy has allowed unprecedented growth in alcohol availability, both in the density of liquor outlets and the length of online delivery hours".[41] The Review recommended that alcohol legislation be examined and strengthened. As a result, the national government in Australia in September 2024 agreed to carry out such an examination.[42]

Alongside this the South Australia government introduced draft legislation in December 2024 which includes clear primary objectives to prevent gendered violence and to restrict alcohol sales and delivery timeframes. The bill is the first of its kind in Australia, and affirms the South Australian government's commitment to reduce gendered violence through alcohol law reform. [43] Such action is in keeping with the developing international frameworks, which guide the global agendas around violence against women and children, and which now recognise reducing harmful alcohol use as an important prevention strategy.[44]

Children's issues

Children are often the unseen victims of domestic abuse. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey on violence against women found that 73 % of women who have been victims of violent incidents by their previous or current partner indicate that children living with them were aware of the violence.[45] It is well recognised that children's exposure to domestic violence is a serious Adverse Childhood Experience and that such children are victims in their own right. One third of children in Ireland have at least one parent who regularly binge drinks or is dependent on alcohol.[46]

Harmful alcohol use by a parent or caregiver has been shown to have a range of detrimental consequences for children, including negative health, educational, and social outcomes.[47] Furthermore, given the close connection between alcohol and domestic violence it is likely that hundreds of thousands of children are living in homes with alcohol fuelled violence. Alcohol use is implicated in an increased risk of child maltreatment, including physical or sexual abuse and neglect.[48] Indeed, a review of studies examining the presence of both child maltreatment and intimate partner violence found that they occurred during the same period in 45–70% of studies.[49]

“ Children's exposure to domestic violence is significantly correlated with child problems in the areas of social, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and general health functioning”

Children may experience domestic violence directly, but children who witness domestic violence may also be significantly affected. Findings from several reviews show that witnessing intimate partner violence can also negatively affect the development of children.[50] For example, one meta-analysis concluded that “children's exposure to domestic violence is significantly correlated with child problems in the areas of social, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and general health functioning.”[51] Indeed, children in such circumstances may experience emotional and psychological harm, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.[52] In some cases, this trauma can last well into adulthood.[53] Unfortunately, “some research has also shown that boys

who were exposed to domestic violence in their childhood homes are more likely to engage in domestic violence as adults, and girls who have been exposed to domestic violence as children are more likely to be victims of domestic violence in their adult lives".[54]

Despite the existing scholarship on alcohol and its accelerating role in DSGBV, many health professionals do not make the connection between parental problem alcohol use (PPAU) and possible physical and psychological abuse of children in the home. A study carried out by UCC and AAI found that 70% of mental health professionals receive no training on problem alcohol use in the home despite the serious psychological impacts on children and adolescents.[55]

Too often children are only considered once a parent presents with an alcohol problem or is in treatment. The reality is that children need services and supports independently of whether a parent is in treatment or not. Not acting is unconscionable as early interventions and support are essential to offset trauma and lifelong harm. Key in this is that all professionals – from teachers to mental health professionals, understand the impact of PPAU and have the resources to support children and families at a whole of population level, not just if there are child welfare concerns.[56]



73%

of women who have been victims of violent incidents by a partner indicate that children living with them were aware of the violence

Sport and alcohol marketing

Alcohol sponsorship of sport is the keystone for a wide range of alcohol marketing activity in Ireland and abroad. An array of marketing activities are used to build links between alcohol, sports and elite athletes, which ultimately drives consumption of alcohol. Indeed, a systematic review of the 'Association Between Alcohol Sports Sponsorship and Consumption' reported a positive association between exposure to alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption.[57] In particular the research revealed there is a positive association between exposure to alcohol sports sponsorship and increased alcohol consumption amongst adult sportspeople and schoolchildren.[58] Essentially, advertising "activates" sports sponsorship to increase sales.[59]

While the alcohol industry representative bodies like to claim that there is no link between sponsorship and alcohol consumption, alcohol producers sponsor a wide range of sports events at home and abroad. In their annual report, Diageo states, "we are using sport to lift our brands, partnering with iconic sporting occasions giving us incomparable visibility across the globe".[60] This sponsorship includes Diageo building official partnerships with 20 different American NFL teams over the past five years, and closer to home, Guinness is the official partner of the Six Nations Rugby Championship and the official beer of the English Premier League. Furthermore, Carlsberg is advertised as the Official Beer Sponsor of the Football Association of Ireland.[61] With such hazardous advertising of alcohol, it is little wonder that international research indicates that participation in sport can be associated with increased rates of hazardous drinking.[62][63][64]

The purpose of marketing is to create a need or desire for a product. Alcohol is not a staple, it is not a necessary purchase, therefore a market must be created for it – and new drinkers must be recruited to create and expand that market.[65] From a commercial perspective, this makes sense for the alcohol industry because sport, especially sports such as football and rugby, have undergone rapid process of 'hypercommodification' which has resulted in increased presence and importance of sponsorship deals with alcohol producers.[66] Therefore, sport is particularly attractive for commercial sponsors, as it provides positive brand associations and a gateway to global audiences.[67]

For instance, Budweiser, which has been “the World Cup beer” since the 1986 tournament will again be the official beer of the 2026 tournament in North America, after brewer AB InBev renewed with FIFA.[68] Announcing the deal the chief marketing officer of AB InBev stated “FIFA World Cup tournaments are the most popular sporting events in the world” and AB InBev “are deeply connected to the fans and to football all over the world, which is why we’re excited about extending the relationship with FIFA.”[69]

Not to be outdone, Diageo provides sponsorship for football and rugby through Guinness. In 2024 Guinness engaged in its first ever global partnership in football by becoming the official beer of the English Premier League. Announcing the sponsorship a joint statement on the Premier League website exclaimed: “As the most watched football league on the planet where games are broadcast into 900 million homes in 189 countries, Guinness will bring together the beautiful game and the beautiful pint through its activation of the partnership with the Premier League”.[70]

“ Carlsberg, sponsor of the FAI, in its most recent annual report, says: “Brand marketing is an investment in the Group’s brands... to drive the sale of branded products, sales campaigns and sponsorships”

At home, another Diageo brand, Rosckshore, recently became the official beer of the League of Ireland.[71] Announcing the partnership the Head of Beer at Diageo Ireland proclaimed that, “Through this partnership we are committed to investing in the passion of fans across the country. From local pubs to packed stadiums, Rockshore will be there, raising a pint to the magic of Irish football.”.[72] Within the League of Ireland itself, Guinness recently partnered with Bohemian Football Club as sponsor of the club’s 2025 away jersey. Speaking about the sponsorship deal, Marketing Director of Guinness Ireland said: “The partnership celebrates the coming together of two Dublin institutions, to promote and support modern Irish football and the League of Ireland – that’s something we’re incredibly excited to be part of.”[73] Indeed, the jersey will even be on sale at the Guinness Storehouse at St James’s Gate.[74]

Meanwhile the website for Guinness, the title partner and official beer of



the Six Nations Rugby Championship, states “We’ll be making sure you get the most from the game, so you can be sure of an epic match day experience whilst enjoying a great pint of the black stuff!”.^[75]

Indeed, the alcohol industry often attributes sales increases directly to sports sponsorship activity. In their 2024 annual report Diageo stated: “Whilst Guinness has been the official partner of the Six Nations Rugby Championship since 2019, in 2024 the tournament helped it reach new heights. During this year’s Six Nations, sales of pints of Guinness in stadiums were up 15% compared with 2022...”^[76] Meanwhile Carlsberg, sponsor of the FAI, in its most recent annual report, says, “Brand marketing is an investment in the Group’s brands... to drive the sale of branded products, sales campaigns and sponsorships.”^[77]

The relationship between sports sponsorship and increased sales of alcohol is not only of concern for the drinking behaviour of adults, but also of children. Research from Australia shows that children easily identify alcohol brands from sponsorship of sporting events, and this recognition influences children’s behaviour.

Academics have documented the techniques used by industry to appeal to children, and to ensure that children associate sport with these products such as alcohol from an early age.^[78] Indeed, Diageo is currently the Number 4 broadcast advertiser to children in Ireland ^[79] where 50,000 children start to drink every year. ^[80]

It was for these reasons that a central aim of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act (2018) (PHAA) was to reduce the direct or indirect promotion of

alcohol products, especially to children. In order to achieve this, Section 19 of the PHAA legislated for a daytime broadcasting ban on alcohol advertising, with no advertisements for alcohol products on television from 3am to 9pm and on radio on a weekday from 3pm to 10am the following morning. The measure, which commenced on 10 January 2025, aims to reduce the level of exposure of children to alcohol marketing, which is known to be a key driver of both initiating alcohol use by children and increasing use.

Unfortunately, during the live coverage of the Ireland v England rugby match in the 2025 Six Nations we saw alcohol marketing being broadcast into the homes of hundreds of thousands of people, doubtless tens of thousands of the viewers were children. The advertising was a seamless blend between Guinness and Guinness 0.0 using identical branding across ads on hoardings and ads on the field of play.

This is not the first time we have seen sections of the PHAA circumvented by industry. In November 2021, Section 15 of the PHAA introduced a modest measure outlawing alcohol advertising on the field of play, while still allowing them

on hoardings around the pitch. However, 0.0/alcohol-free products are now being used to side-step these restrictions and have become prevalent in settings where alcohol is not allowed to be marketed e.g. on public transport and on advertisements close to youth-oriented facilities such as schools and public parks.

We are also now seeing alcohol brands being broadcast on TV channels during the day and on the field of play in sports events, this then creates a further issue in terms of broadcasting as alcohol branding emblazoned on playing surfaces is then being carried on television. The increase of 0.0/alcohol-free ads, especially during sports events, using the same logos and branding of full-strength products, is exposing children to alcohol brand marketing and the normalisation of alcohol-like products in new settings.

“ During the live coverage of the Ireland v England rugby match in the 2025 Six Nations we saw alcohol marketing being broadcast into the homes of hundreds of thousands of people, doubtless tens of thousands of the viewers were children”

Just as restrictions under the PHHA came into force, big alcohol brands began brand sharing – that is advertising zero alcohol beers using the same parent branding. It is of note that in the outdoor space where most of the PHAA restrictions are in place, zero alcohol ads made up 25% of the spend of alcohol brand advertising in 2022, up 31% from 2021, even though these products only make up around 1 percent of the market.[81] Zero alcohol ads are not being pushed because the alcohol industry wants people to drink less but because of the aforementioned restrictions on where they can advertise their products. Brand sharing means that children who see people drinking what appears to them to be alcohol – because of the same branding – will at a young age be conditioned to think differently about when and where it is appropriate to drink alcohol.

Strong brand recognition, whether driven by advertising the brand through zero-alcohol or alcohol products, can result in higher sales and profit margins. Indeed, the marketers of Heineken 0.0 have admitted as much in their submission to Effie Awards Ireland 2021. The Effie Awards, launched in 1968 by the New York

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American Marketing Association, are an awards program to honour the most effective advertising efforts.[82] It is the pre-eminent award in the industry, and the award recognises any and all forms of marketing that contribute to a brand’s success.[83]

Elaborating on their Heineken 0.0 campaign in Ireland, which won a silver medal at the Irish Effie Awards, the marketers were keen to show that their efforts are increasing brand loyalty and also contributing to increased sales not just of 0.0 but also of the main product – Heineken. [84] The case study reference guide for the Heineken 0.0 campaign stated that advertising the non-alcoholic product “drove advocacy through excellent product experience and positive conversation around the brand”. [85] This also had a beneficial effect on Heineken main brand. The submission further noted that the “success of the Heineken 0.0 campaign has compounded growth for the brand overall in a shrinking market”. [86]

Recent sports events have revealed these practices first hand as alcohol companies have sought to put their brand at the centre stage of important sporting events. Guinness displayed their logo and name with an additional 0.0 on the pitch during Six Nations matches earlier this year. Indeed, research from the University of Stirling found that alcohol brand references being shown at a rate of up to one every 8 seconds on the field of play during some high profile rugby matches after the PHAA restrictions came into place.[87]

Similarly, during the recent Nations League football match between Ireland v England, Carlsberg displayed their logo behind both goal end lines, again, with 0.0 tagged on. There was a particularly egregious example of a zero-alcohol product being advertised on the sports surface which is not even available on the market.[88] Forged Irish Stout 0.0 was prominently displayed on the boxing ring during a high-profile Katie Taylor fight in May 2023. Under PHAA rules, alcohol branding should not be displayed on the ring. The manufacturer claimed that the product was in development. This product is still not available (May 2025).

The purpose of marketing is to create a need or desire for a product, and the alcohol industry uses sport to drive increased sales and thereby increased alcohol consumption, and as previously stated, research and systematic reviews have reported a positive association between exposure to alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption.



Sport and alcohol consumption

For many in Ireland, sport is a regular part of their lives, as social activity or way to maintain physical health, or as a spectator experience following athletes, clubs, counties, provinces, or national teams. Over generations, sport has become a core part of people's local and national identity, with many people, rightly or wrongly, looking up to athletes as role models. What society, policy makers, and sporting bodies themselves often miss, however, are the hazardous behaviours that coexist with sport, especially alcohol use.

Alcohol and sport have long had a complex relationship, this is especially true in relation to the alcohol industry trying to associate its product with sport at almost all levels – from local sports clubs, to televised sports events, to live sport at large venues, amongst others. However, the reason this is a concern is because of the known connection between alcohol marketing and increased alcohol consumption,[89] and alcohol consumption and violence.[90]

Research in Britain which surveyed 1,750 football supporters found one third of participants agreed that alcohol is easily accessible at football grounds and 44.1% agreed most people attending football had consumed alcohol beforehand.[91] Similarly, research from the United States of America shows a strong association between sports and heavy drinking among both sports participants and spectators.[92] Further American research identified that, among college students, heavier drinkers were more likely to drink alcohol, and drink alcohol heavily, on the days of high profile games.[93]

Meanwhile Australian research into the attitudes and behaviours of drinkers found fans of the winning team would drink more heavily than those who supported the losing team – with cricket and football examples of sports events where there is significant alcohol consumption.[94] Indeed, this corresponds to experiences in Britain where males aged between 45 and 60 have been identified as drinking at higher levels, both when watching and when socialising after a sporting event.[95]

Alcohol consumption has also become a concern for fans and governing bodies. In 2018 the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) announced that

alcohol-free zones would be trialled for Wales' November internationals after several reports of alcohol fuelled anti-social behaviour, including a disabled fan being abused by drunken spectators.[96] In 2022, the WRU took things further and decided to close all bars after half time in all three home matches in the Guinness Six Nations Championship at the Principality Stadium after a number of high-profile incidents, including two intrusions onto the pitch in consecutive matches,[97] and a six-year-old boy being left in floods of tears after he was vomited on by a drunk fan.[98]

Rugby in Ireland has experienced similar difficulties. In 2023 the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) conducted a survey of 744 fans' attitudes towards alcohol as part

of an effort to counter accusations that the international matchday experience had become alcohol orientated.[99] The IRFU survey found that 68% of adult fans surveyed said they went to the 2023 autumn international games against South Africa and Australia intending to drink.[100] The situation

further came to a head in 2024 when Irish Times rugby correspondent Gerry Thornley bemoaned the "flat" atmosphere at Ireland's Guinness Six Nations Championship matches, saying that fans were treating rugby games as a drinking occasion.[101]

However, by 2025 it appeared little had changed. On the afternoon of Tuesday 4th February, RTÉ's 'Liveline' show received multiple calls from Irish rugby fans raising concerns about the scale of alcohol consumption at that weekend's Six Nations rugby match between Ireland and England at the Aviva Stadium, Dublin.[102] The callers raised concerns that the event was alcohol orientated, with rugby playing second fiddle to drinking. Those fans who contacted 'Liveline' outlined how the spectacle was ruined by fans constantly going to and from the bar, and in one case, by a drunk fan vomiting on a row of spectators.[103] Yet, such a situation is hardly

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surprising given comments from the organisers of the Six Nations that Guinness and the Six Nations were now synonymous.[104]

Recently, an exploratory study funded by football authorities in Scotland concluded that reintroducing the sale of alcohol in football grounds could result in increased alcohol consumption, reduced fan safety and increased public disorder.[105] Researchers from the University of Stirling spoke to a variety of stakeholders within football clubs, safety management, the police, public health and NHS, the Scottish Government and alcohol licensing as well as conducting site visits to Scottish and English stadia regarding the possibility of reintroducing the sale of alcohol at football stadia in Scotland.[106] However, the impact of such a move was found to be overwhelmingly negative, ranging from concerns about the added risk of disorder at matches, to increased alcohol consumption by those attending matches, a loss of income to local pubs, and the exposure of children and young people to alcohol consumption and increased alcohol marketing.[107] Alcohol Focus Scotland quite rightly branded the study an ‘own-goal’ for the footballing authorities.

The issue of alcohol permeates almost every sport, as seen recently at the Australian Open where the tournament director had to publicly reject suggestions crowd behaviour had taken a turn for the worse after tennis players, such as Novak Djokovic and Danielle Collins, linked rowdy fan behaviour to the level of alcohol consumed by patrons.[108] Meanwhile, alcohol-fuelled spectator violence at horse racing events has become a damaging problem, evidenced by recent high-profile incidents at Goodwood and Ascot racecourses.[109]

In their conference paper ‘Alcohol and sport: can we have one without the other?’, Jones, Phillipson, and Lynch, outlined that “It remains difficult to have any involvement in sport – as a participant or a fan – without being exposed to a strong message that alcohol and sport are inextricably linked”.[110] Alcohol is also a common feature of the spectator experience, especially in situations where spectators access televised sporting events in pubs and other licensed premises, thereby ensuring that the presence of alcohol is a part of their spectator experience.[111] Indeed, sporting events have been identified, alongside public holidays and music festivals, as the most common events to result in increased alcohol-related presentations to emergency departments.[112]

Sport, alcohol and DSGBV

Studies have highlighted the link between alcohol consumption, violence, and aggression, and it is for this reason that many sporting venues have decided to restrict alcohol consumption on site and turn away intoxicated fans.[113] While much focus has been on “player violence” and “crowd violence” it is recognised that a variety of other incidents of sports-related violence exist, including domestic violence.[114] When such violence happens in the home victims don't have the ability to turn away the perpetrator.

In their paper, ‘Sport-related domestic violence:

Exploring the complex relationship between sporting events and domestic violence’, Williams and Neville state “It is not that [sporting events] cause the violence, but rather that the excitement, disappointment and flow of adrenalin resulting from

watching a ... team play may exacerbate existing tensions within a relationship and result in lost tempers and violence or abuse. Such behaviour may be made worse or more likely when alcohol has been consumed”.[115]

“ Sporting events do not cause domestic violence, as perpetrators are responsible for their actions, but the levels of alcohol consumption linked to the highly charged emotional nature of such events seems to increase the prevalence of such incidents”

In Britain, the association between alcohol, sport events, and domestic violence prompted the Home Office to highlight the link during the 2006 World Cup.[116] Further research of the Home Office analysis found that domestic violence increased in the case of a definite win or lose result for the England men's team.[117] During the London 2012 Olympics the London Borough of Newham produced beer mats designed to be used in an information campaign about domestic violence,[118] an approach also used by Haringey Council, London during Euro 2024.[119] Moreover, police forces around the world have identified surges in domestic abuse reports following big events in national and international sports competitions. [120]

Research by Brimicombe and Café looked at the association between domestic violence and England fixtures during the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. The research used uniquely detailed data to estimate the hourly dynamics of intimate partner domestic abuse during and after a football game and found that when the England national team either won or lost there was a significant increase in domestic violence reports, with the authors highlighting the importance of match outcome on levels of domestic violence reports.[121]

Such research is backed up by the most comprehensive study to date on the link between sport, alcohol, and DSGBV. Ivandić et al. analysed confidential and uniquely detailed individual call data from Greater Manchester Police with the timing of football matches over a period of eight years to estimate the effect on domestic abuse. The records used contained detailed information on the timing, location, description, type of relationship, information on the victim and information on the perpetrator, among others.

The research team then complemented this with data on all football matches of Manchester United and Manchester City in competitions held between April 2012 and June 2019 – amounting to almost 800 games – with detailed data on the timing, location, result, and ex-ante winning probabilities of the game.[122] Ivandić et al. established that a football game changed the dynamics of domestic abuse – such as a 5% decrease in abuse incidents during the 2-hour duration of a game – suggesting a substitution effect of football and domestic abuse.[123] However, following the initial decrease, domestic abuse incidents between current partners started increasing after the game and peak about 10–12 hours later.[124]

The research further showed that increases in domestic abuse were driven by increases in alcohol-related domestic abuse incidents following early games, while abuse caused by non-alcoholised perpetrators remained stable and games scheduled later in the day did not lead to an increase in abuse. Essentially, when the perpetrator is under the influence of alcohol and games are earlier in the day, Ivandić et al. found a positive and statistically significant cumulative effect of a football game on domestic abuse throughout the day.[125] The authors concluded that the observed increase in domestic abuse was driven entirely by alcoholised perpetrators and that it was therefore important to implement policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption during and where possible after sporting events.

Meanwhile in their research into 'Family Violence and Football: The Effect of Unexpected Emotional Cues on Violent Behavior', Card and Dahl found a rise in violence after an upset loss, concentrated in a narrow time window near the end of the game, and that such episodes of violence are larger for more important games.[126]

Nevertheless, it must be stated that major sporting events do not cause domestic violence, as perpetrators are responsible for their actions, but the levels of alcohol consumption linked to the highly charged emotional nature of such events seems to increase the prevalence of such incidents. [127] Therefore, it is clear that there is a need to reduce alcohol consumption among spectators at live events, [128] but more importantly, there is a need to reduce whole of population alcohol consumption using the World Health Organisation's 'best buys' – controls on pricing, marketing and availability.



Data from Greater Manchester Police analysing the timing of Man Utd and Man City football matches and domestic abuse incidences over a period of eight years - almost 800 matches - showed a 5% decrease in abuse incidents during the 2-hour duration of a game followed by an increase peaking 10-12 hours after the match

Conclusion and recommendations

There is a significant body of research suggesting a complex relationship between sports, alcohol consumption, and domestic violence. Studies have found a strong, but complex link between alcohol and domestic abuse, suggesting that alcohol can either be seen as a contributing cause, an aggravating factor, or a trigger of violent behaviour in domestic (and other) settings.[129] Moreover, research also argues that social contexts where excessive drinking is encouraged, such as through the promotion of alcohol during sporting events, are often permissive of violent behaviour and sexism, which can increase the likelihood of alcohol-related domestic abuse.[130]

Given that alcohol is deeply intertwined with sport,[131] and alcohol is a risk factor for DSGBV, it is important that there is a whole-of-government approach to alcohol in Ireland. As Graham et. al. stated in their paper, 'Alcohol May Not Cause Partner Violence But It Seems to Make It Worse:

A Cross National Comparison

of the Relationship Between Alcohol and Severity of Partner Violence':

"Ignoring the presence of alcohol will neither eliminate its role in intimate partner violence nor prevent its being used as an excuse for violence. On the contrary, the more we know about how alcohol affects violence, including intimate partner violence, the better able we will be to develop effective prevention strategies and treatment responses". [132]

Given the likelihood of increased domestic, sexual and gender-based violence around sporting occasions there is a clear need for increased provision of policing and services for victims including children. Central though to addressing these difficult and complex issues is the need for

“ Research argues that social contexts where excessive drinking is encouraged, such as through the promotion of alcohol during sporting events, are often permissive of violent behaviour and sexism, which can increase the likelihood of alcohol-related domestic abuse”

prevention. Reducing alcohol consumption across the whole of population has a significant role to play. This can be achieved by using the World Health Organisation's 'best buys' - controls on pricing, marketing and availability.

While sports, alcohol, and domestic violence are interrelated in certain contexts, efforts to address and mitigate these issues must focus on changing cultural norms and creating systems of support for both those affected by and those at risk of engaging in violence. Therefore, there is scope for athletes, clubs, counties, provinces, and national governing to play a role in tackling alcohol harm and DSGBV, while at national level it is imperative that government and state agencies ensure that the Public Health (Alcohol) Act is implemented in full, and that its measures are not ignored or circumvented, as we have seen with Section 15 and Section 19 of the legislation.

Furthermore, the government must implement the 2012 recommendation of the Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy and implement a ban on sports sponsorship by alcohol companies.[133]

AAI believes there is a need to tackle the manufactured relationship linking alcohol and sport by tackling the mechanisms deployed by the alcohol industry to create and sustain this link.

It is time to ban alcohol sports sponsorship.

World Health Organisation's 'Best Buys' are policy solutions that are highly cost-effective, evidence-based, and yield a significant return on investment for governments to adopt



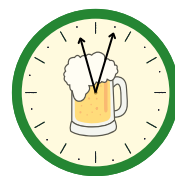
Increase excise taxes on alcoholic beverages

PRICE



Enact and enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising

MARKETING



Enact and enforce restrictions on the physical availability of alcohol

AVAILABILITY

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