

Sorry WE'RE OPEN

The impact of extended opening hours on workload and worker safety



Hospitality staff



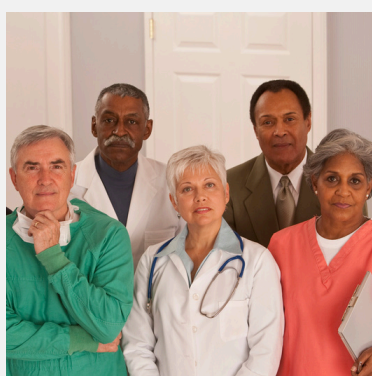
Security staff



Gardaí



First responders



Hospital staff



Transport workers

Key stats & facts



HOSPITALITY

Research from Australia revealed 89% of hospitality workers surveyed had experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment in their working life.



AMBULANCE CREWS & PARAMEDICS

Research from Britain revealed that 96% of ambulance crews and paramedics they surveyed had been threatened or verbally abused by someone who appeared to be intoxicated whilst on duty, and half of respondents reported sustaining an actual injury at least once through dealing with intoxicated members of the public, while 52% reported to have been the victim of intoxicated sexual harassment or assault.



POLICE

A survey of police officers operating in the north-east of England found that 97% felt at risk of physical assault when policing the night-time economy, 1 in 5 have been subject to six or more alcohol related assaults during their career, and 80% felt working the NTE affected their work/life balance.



EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

British research into alcohol's impact on emergency services found that 35% of emergency department consultants reported being sexually harassed or assaulted by drunk people whilst on duty.



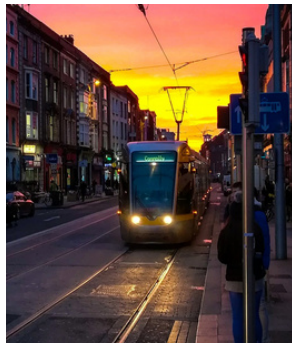
HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

HSE data indicates an average of 16 health and social care workers are assaulted every day in hospitals and healthcare facilities in Ireland.



WITNESSING VIOLENCE

Surveys conducted in Australian and British cities show that between half to three-quarters of NTE patrons have witnessed violent encounters.



PUBLIC TRANSPORT SAFETY

The National Transport Authority's 'Public Transport Passenger Personal Security Report' for 2024 found that 31% of customers felt unsafe on public transport at night, with many passengers fearing for their personal safety when they encounter drunk or drugged passengers.



FEMALE SAFETY

The 2023 Dublin City Council survey, 'Your Dublin, Your Voice', reported that 50% of female respondents indicated feeling unsafe at night in Dublin City.

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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- Pat Cahill, former President ASTI (Company Secretary)
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Alcohol Action Ireland is a registered Irish charity
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Company number: 378738
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Introduction

During and after the Covid-19 crisis, the expansion of night-time leisure and the night-time economy became a particular focus of government, industry, and lobby groups as a response to a sector badly impacted by the pandemic. Resultantly, the Night-Time Economy Taskforce was established by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media on 30 July 2020. The taskforce sought to afford an opportunity for relevant stakeholders from across the night-time culture sector to develop an approach to supporting the night-time economy in Ireland. Emanating from this was the 'Report of the Night-Time Economy Taskforce', published in September 2021, which recommended, amongst other things, the extension of licensing hours to support the night-time economy.[1] This has led to the General Scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill (2022) and an Intoxicating Liquor Bill proposed in 2024.

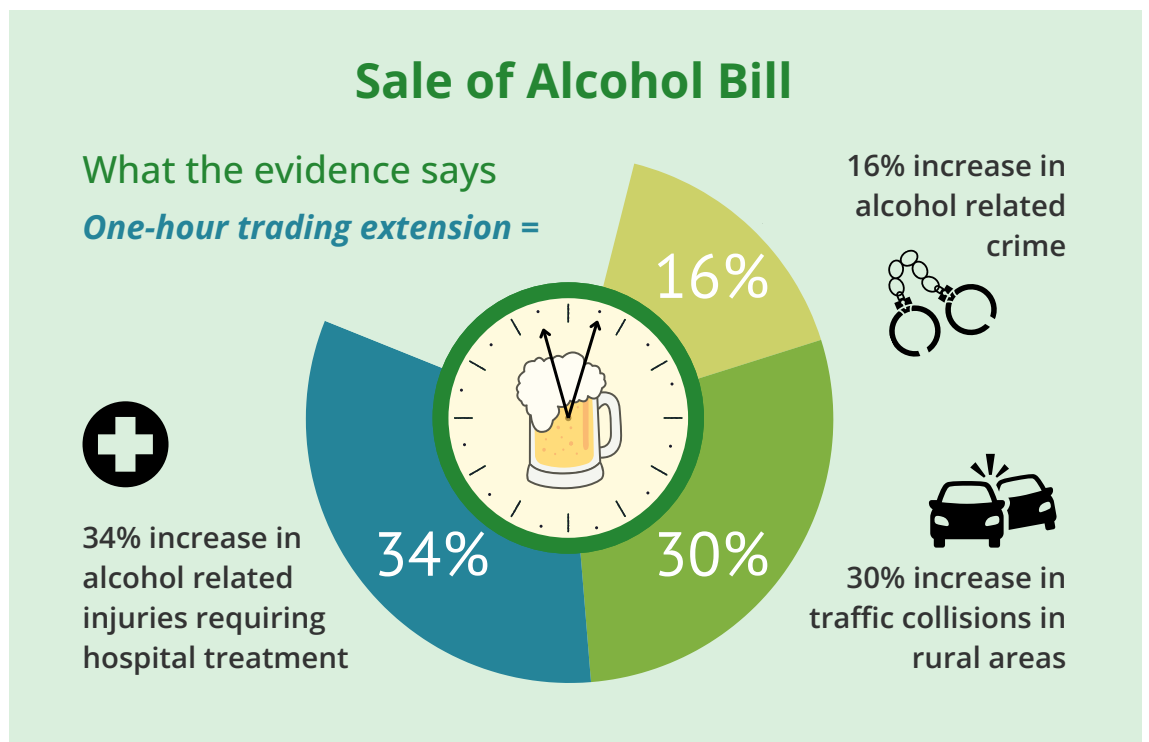
The taskforce membership, its meetings, and its final report were striking for two reasons – the lack of any public health or worker/trade union representative, and the failure to analyse the impact of expanding the night-time economy, through extending licensing hours, on the health service, on frontline workers, and on the staff who would have to service an expanded night-time economy.

The importance of worker protection and public health cannot be understated, because regardless of the fashionable and romantic notions of politicians, industry, and urban theorists, it is alcohol, mass intoxication, and profit rather than 'cultural regeneration' which lies at the heart of the expansion of the night-time economy.[2] This, therefore, immediately puts workers and the health service at risk because alcohol is a driver of violence and crime, and extending licensing hours not only puts workers at risk, as they are required to service this sector of the economy, but it also causes increased alcohol consumption which we know results in more violence. [3]

Alcohol and crime have a closely interconnected relationship, with alcohol consumption being a contributing factor to crime and antisocial behaviour. It is not always possible to tell the exact number of crimes caused due to alcohol use due to a lack of systematic data collection, but studies have estimated that between 30% and 65% of assaults, disorderly conduct, public order, and other social code incidents are associated with alcohol-use.[4] However, harmful alcohol use is not simply a matter of

individual responsibility. The impact of alcohol-related crime directly affects workers, and anti-social behaviour has a ripple effect, extending beyond those directly affected and impacts entire communities, society, and the economy. Furthermore, it has a pernicious effect on people's perceptions of safety and security, especially in our town and city centres.

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. [5] Indeed, research from the Institute of Alcohol Studies highlighted strong evidence of an association between alcohol availability and violence – “that is to say, as opportunities (in space and in time) to purchase alcohol increase, so do levels of violence.[6] It is through this prism, the factual reality underlined by research and data, that we must analyse the impact of extending licensing hours on the public, on workers, on society, and the economy.



Hospitality, shopkeepers & fast-food outlet staff

The expansion of the night-time economy (NTE), via the proposed Sale of Alcohol Bill and Intoxicating Liquor Bill, is a euphemism for extending licensing hours. The NTE is an economic sector that is intrinsically focused on the sale and consumption of alcohol, and as with all sectors of the economy, it relies on its workers. However, to date, there has been scant discussion on how an extension of licensing hours will impact workers, rosters, shifts, working hours, and working patterns, not to mention health and safety.

As Matthew Huddleston stated in his study on the night-time economy: “The service industries that support the night-time economy perform a vital function in its maintenance and growth, yet those who are employed within them are at risk of falling victim to violence and anti-social behaviours that are frequent within the night-time environment”.^[7]

“ Pub and nightclub workers play a key role in health and safety in nightlife environments... Yet this work comes with significant risk factors, such as exposure to patron aggression at work, stress, alcohol use, risk of sexual harassment and assault”

Pub and nightclub workers play a key role in the overall health and safety conditions in nightlife environments. They serve alcohol to patrons and, along with other staff such as bouncers and DJs, contribute to the regulation of those environments.^[8] Nevertheless, this work comes with significant risk factors, such as exposure to patron aggression at work, stress, alcohol use,^[9] risk of sexual harassment and assault,^[10] as well as unsociable working hours.

Indeed, Freedom of Information records show that in meetings with officials from the Department of Justice regarding the draft scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill, representatives of the Irish Music Rights Organisation called for musicians and artists to be adequately protected and compensated for the increased workload that comes with longer trading hours. ^[11]

Research from the Unite trade union in Britain shows the vast majority of workers in bars, restaurants, clubs, and hotels are subjected to sexual harassment.[12] The 'Not on the Menu' report revealed 89% of workers surveyed had experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment in their working life.[13] Indeed, both officials from the Mandate trade union[14] and Dr Deirdre Curran, Vice-Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, College of Business, Public Policy and Law at the University of Galway,[15] have also highlighted similar levels of harassment and abuse in the Irish hospitality sector.

Furthermore, research into environmental risk factors also found that bar workers are exposed to a substantial risk of violence, that violence is associated with higher levels of stress, and that bartenders drink in ways that are associated with risks of short- and long-term harm.[16] Similarly, national data in England and Wales has consistently found that those with access to alcohol at work, such as publicans and bar staff, are more likely to die from alcohol-related causes.[17]

Shopkeepers and fast-food outlet staff often find themselves at increased risk of customers who have consumed alcohol. Many shops and fast-food restaurants operate late into the night, coinciding with pub and club closing times. This means that customers who have consumed alcohol are more likely to enter these premises, leading to an increased chance of verbal or physical confrontations. Therefore, as these workers are at the frontline of customer service, it puts them at heightened risk. Indeed, security consultant, Chris McGoey indicated that one of the main reasons that violence arises in fast food outlets is the presence of drunk patrons. [18]

Shopkeepers and shop workers face similar difficulties, as well as the added issue of shoplifting. For those in the retail sector, customers who have consumed alcohol may act unpredictably, leading to arguments, inappropriate behaviour, or abuse of employees and other customers, and it can also lead to violence and aggression putting staff and other customers at risk.

Customers who have consumed alcohol may also engage in shoplifting. Indeed, the Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association (CSNA) have highlighted these risks for some time, with the association indicating that antisocial behaviour, shoplifting and threats perpetrated against retail workers increased 100% between 2021 and 2024.[19]

While data is not available in relation to the level of injury/aggression to staff working in late-night shops and fast-food outlets in Ireland, concern has long been expressed about alcohol-fuelled public disorder and anti-social behaviour in their vicinity. It seems likely that their staff, like those across hospitality, are at risk from extended licensing hours.

Increased numbers of people consuming more alcohol later into the night within town and city centres will undoubtedly see greater violent disorder. [20] For example, when the New South Wales Government decided to extend alcohol sales by one hour in 2016, a significant increase in violent assaults was experienced.[21] In Northern Ireland, following the extension of the licensing hours in October 2021, there was a 17% increase in alcohol related crime.[22]

Therefore, we can assume with a degree of certainty that extending licensing hours will exacerbate environmental risk factors for workers in the hospitality sector. It will elongate working hours, thereby exposing workers to further patron aggression and violence and increased stress and strain.



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Security staff

The liberalisation of licensing laws and expansion of the NTE in other countries has been accompanied by a rise in alcohol consumption, violence, and alcohol-related accidents.[23] A multi-level analysis of "... environmental predictors of aggression in late-night large-capacity bars and clubs found that intoxication of patrons was significantly associated with more frequent and severe patron aggression.".[24] In such an environment security staff function in a capacity that controls or prevents such incidents. Nevertheless, this also puts them at heightened risk of patron aggression and violence.

Security staff, along with bartenders, DJs, other nightlife employees, play an important role in creating a safe and pleasant atmosphere inside venues. When doing so these nightlife professionals, however, sometimes run personal risks as part of their work. A research paper, 'Violent work environments: A survey of bouncers and their experiences of violence, stress and other work-related problems', produced by the Danish Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, found that 40% of security staff surveyed reported having been threatened with a weapon and 58% reported that they had been physically assaulted at work, while 16% reported feeling stressed and 50% reported weekly sleeping difficulties.[25]

In the discussion about the NTE and extending licensing hours, there has been almost no discussion regarding security staff working conditions, well-being and their experience of occupational risks and distress. This is particularly staggering given security staff are often the primary policing agents of urban nightlife districts.[26]

A Danish survey of bouncers found that 40% of security staff reported having been threatened with a weapon and 58% reported that they had been physically assaulted while at work



Gardai

There is a clear relationship between alcohol and crime, and An Garda Síochána have to deal with the problems caused by alcohol on a daily basis. The Health Research Board estimates that, in Ireland, between 30% and 65% of assaults, disorderly conduct, public order, and other social code incidents are associated with alcohol-use.[27] Internationally, a wealth of studies have demonstrated a link between the provision of alcohol and the occurrence of crime and disorder in the NTE, particularly in town and city centres.[28] Research from the experiences of Perth, Australia, revealed that extending opening hours by an hour contributed to an increase in crime, violence and drunk driving.[29]

Not only do An Garda Síochána have to deal with the outworking of such matters, but they are also at heightened risk themselves. These risks include entering situations where substances such as

alcohol are mixed with violence. A paper by the British 'College of Policing' reported that in the night-time economy existing frustrations or aggression can become focused on police officers who intervene to enforce lawful powers and protect the public.[30] Indeed, research by Brown and by Christopher and Noaks, examining assaults on police officers, found a connection between alcohol and the night-time economy, with a heightened chance of assaults around 11pm and midnight.[31]

A survey of police officers operating in the north-east of England found that 97% felt at risk of physical assault when policing the night-time economy, 1 in 5 had been subject to six or more alcohol related assaults during their career, and 80% felt working the NTE affected their work/life balance.[32] Meanwhile research from the Institute of Alcohol Studies in London revealed 41% police respondents reported being sexually harassed or assaulted by drunk people whilst on duty.[33] Therefore, it

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is little wonder that in Britain incentives to work in the NTE are wearing thin on police services.

Policing the night-time economy within built up town and city centres is often resource intensive and potentially dangerous for the officers themselves.[34] Gardaí in Ireland are already under significant pressure as numbers remain below strength and issues surrounding recruitment and retention continue to place extra workload, stress and pressure on their members.[35] This has coincided with an escalation of assaults on Gardaí and intimidation.[36] Extending licensing hours will undoubtedly increase pressure on a police service who already feel abandoned and exposed on many fronts.[37]

Indeed, the Gardaí themselves articulated such concerns in their submission to the Oireachtas Justice Committee Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill.[38] These concerns were further reinforced in private meetings with the Department of Justice. Minutes of meetings between representatives of An Garda Síochána and senior departmental officials reveal the Gardaí's belief that the proposed changes "will present a serious issue from a resource and rostering perspective. AGS said that there are insufficient resources to deal with the existing situation of 2.30am closing times as it is, and said this will exacerbate the demands on an already overwhelmed force." [39] Indeed, An Garda Síochána were unequivocal that more public order and associated issues would be the inevitable consequence of the proposed licensing changes.[40]



An Garda Síochána have stated that there are insufficient resources to deal with the existing situation of 2.30am closing times as it is, and an extension will exacerbate the demands on an already overwhelmed force

Paramedics, fire fighters and ambulance crews

Alcohol is a key contributor to ambulance and fire brigade callouts. Common reasons for paramedics, fire fighters and ambulance staff to be called to alcohol-related incidents include assaults and injuries, drink driving collisions, domestic violence, people experiencing seizures or fits, unconsciousness, overdoses, self-harm, as well as reports of people being 'generally unwell'.^[41] Research by University Hospital Galway and the School of Medicine, NUI Galway found that 58.9% of drink-related emergency department (ED)

presentations were brought by ambulance, reflecting the substantial burden of alcohol-related incidents on the casualty services.^[42]

In the course of their work, and dealing with alcohol related callouts, ambulance staff are at increased risk, evidenced by the fact that ambulance staff suffer an average

of seven attacks or assaults per month.^[43] In Dublin, Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) provides a fully integrated fire, emergency ambulance and rescue service for the four Dublin local authorities,^[44] while across Ireland the fire services provide a range of supports, including supporting ambulance services.^[45] This means firefighters and retained firefighters also deal with a multitude of alcohol related issues in the course of their work.

Indeed, a series by the online newspaper, The Journal.ie, followed the Dublin Fire Brigade in the course of their work, which on the night in question they observed that "...every incident that the crew on ambulance D24 from Dolphin's Barn attended was alcohol related."^[46] From alcohol overdose – to accidental injury caused due to alcohol – to an alcohol fuelled assault, the fire brigade crew dealt with the sharp edge of alcohol harm.

“ Research from Britain revealed that half of all ambulance crews and paramedics surveyed reported sustaining an actual injury at least once through dealing with intoxicated members of the public”

Research from the Institute of Alcohol Studies in Britain revealed that 96% of ambulance crews and paramedics they surveyed had been threatened or verbally abused by someone who appeared to be intoxicated whilst on duty, and half of respondents reported sustaining an actual injury at least once through dealing with intoxicated members of the public.[47]

The research further outlined that 52% of ambulance staff reported to have been the victim of intoxicated sexual harassment or assault.[48] Therefore, it is little wonder that the National Ambulance Service (NAS) 'Workforce Support Policy: Managing Violence and Aggression towards staff' warns ambulance crews that calls to pubs and nightclubs will often be as a result of alcohol, drugs, or other substances and patients can be in a confused or potentially aggressive state. The NAS further reiterate that relatives or friends may be hostile and aggressive as a direct result of stress or from the effects of alcohol or drugs.[49]

Not only do attacks from intoxicated patients make the work of paramedics, fire fighters and ambulance crews more difficult and dangerous, but they can also take these frontline workers off the streets, as they may need to receive medical treatment, including time to recover and speak to the Gardai, slowing down the service and reducing its ability to respond to other incidents.[50]

There is no doubt that expanding pub and nightclub licensing hours will have a significant and negative impact on ambulance crews, fire fighters and paramedics, and the health service as a whole.

British research found that 96% of ambulance crews and paramedics they surveyed had been threatened or verbally abused by someone who appeared to be intoxicated whilst on duty

96%



Doctors, nurses and emergency department staff

Alcohol is a significant factor in many emergency department (ED) admissions. Common alcohol-related reasons for attending EDs include: road traffic accidents, assaults, fractured limbs, domestic violence, head injuries, unconsciousness, seizures, psychiatric problems, overdose and self-harm.[51] Research conducted at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, found that alcohol-related presentations account for almost 20% of all ED presentations at the hospital.[52] Similarly, research by McNicholl, Goggin, and O'Donovan on

'Alcohol-related presentations to emergency departments in Ireland: a descriptive prevalence study' found that 29.0% of ED presentations in the early hours of Sunday mornings are alcohol related.[53]

When a patient presents who is intoxicated, they can be very resource intensive and time

consuming. The intoxicated patient, or their friends or relatives, may be aggressive in the waiting room to other patients and staff, they can damage equipment and property, they can vomit over the floor or on other people, they can walk around the ED being unruly and rowdy in and around the cubicles, and they put staff at risk.[54]

According to the data from the Health Service Executive, staff members made 4,796 reports of workplace physical, verbal or sexual assaults in 2021,[55] while HSE data indicates an average of 16 health and social care workers are assaulted every day in hospitals and healthcare facilities in Ireland.[56] Indeed, comparable research from the British Institute of Alcohol Studies into 'Alcohol's impact on emergency services' found that 35% of ED Consultants reported being sexually harassed or assaulted by drunk people whilst on duty.[57]

“ HSE data shows hospital staff members made 4,796 reports of workplace physical, verbal or sexual assaults in 2021, while 16 health and social care workers are assaulted every day in hospitals and healthcare facilities”

Staff working in busy emergency departments across Ireland witness first-hand the devastation that excessive alcohol use causes. As stated by the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine (IAEM) – medical professionals “see worsening and avoidable alcohol-related harm, injury, violence, and death on an all too frequent basis involving younger patients, adults and frail older persons presenting to the ED.”[58]

The IAEM are firmly of the belief that increasing the availability of alcohol through extending licensing hours risks adding significant and avoidable demands on already overstretched EDs.[59]

Irish research found that almost three in every ten emergency department presentations in the early hours of Sunday mornings were alcohol related

29%



Transport workers

Late shifts are particularly challenging for public transport operators. Lower overall travel demand, safety concerns, combined with fiscal and operating constraints, often restrict public transport operators from providing the same types and level of service as they do during the daytime.[60] Public transport late at night also brings safety and security concerns. The National Transport Authority 'Public Transport Passenger Personal Security Report' for 2024 found that 31% of customers felt unsafe on public transport at night, with many passengers fearing for their personal safety when they encounter drunk or drugged passengers.[61] In addition to passengers, late-night public transport services also come with additional risk for workers. Indeed, research from Australia found that alcohol is a key driver of violence against bus drivers.[62]

“ Recent data from Dublin Bus shows that reports of anti-social behaviour on services have more than doubled since 2019, rising from 500 incidents to over 1,000 in 2023”

A recent survey of members in the transport sector of the SIPTU trade union found that 80% of respondents felt that abuse and anti-social behaviour was an issue for them at work.[63] Recent data from Dublin Bus shows that reports of anti-social behaviour on services have more than doubled since 2019, rising from 500 incidents to over 1,000 in 2023.[64] Resultantly, as of October 2024, security guards are now patrolling Dublin Bus services as part of a pilot project established to enhance the safety of passengers and staff due to increasing anti-social incidents.[65]

Bus Éireann saw 287 reports of antisocial behaviour on their services in the second half of 2023 and the first half of 2024,[66] and Irish Rail has found that increasing numbers of passengers are consuming alcohol or drugs while onboard their services.[67] Similar experiences were reported on Luas trams, with alcohol or drugs often fuelling domestic incidents between family/friends.[68]

Taxi drivers also perform a strategic role in night-time transportation. In his research on 'Taxi Drivers and the Nigh-Time Economy: An Exploratory Study of their Experiences', Matthew Huddleston stated this places drivers at risk of falling victim to violence, theft, or abuse as a result of excessive alcohol consumption.[69] The Immigrant Council of Ireland have also raised serious concerns around racist and violent abuse of taxi drivers. In their paper, 'Taking Racism Seriously: Experiences of Violence, Harassment and Discrimination in the Taxi Industry', taxi drivers spoke of significant levels of racist abuse, violence, and other situations where alcohol played an accelerating role.[70] Furthermore, research from Canada found that victimisation rates amongst taxi drivers were 21 times higher than the average worker and was estimated to be four to five times higher than police officers.[71]

As services that cater for the night-time economy, transport workers can find themselves operating in a volatile environment that may aggravate the issues inherent to the job.[72] Any extension of licensing hours would further exacerbate these issues as increased numbers of people consuming more alcohol later into the night would undoubtedly increase the risk of aggression, violence, and discrimination directed at transport workers.



Irish Rail has found that increasing numbers of passengers are consuming alcohol or drugs while onboard their services

Female workers and the night-time economy

The safety and wellbeing of female workers in night-time economy has been a longstanding concern of trade unions, activists, and public health advocates. Such concerns are well founded and reinforced by research such as the 2023 Dublin City Council survey, 'Your Dublin, Your Voice', which reported that 50% of female respondents indicated feeling unsafe at night in Dublin City.[73]

Doubtless many of the respondents were women working in the night-time economy. Such research is reinforced by other examinations, such as a discussion paper by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre on workplace sexual harassment and abuse which found that, of the respondents who reported having experienced sexual harassment, 59%

“ A discussion paper by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre on workplace sexual harassment and abuse found that, of the respondents who reported having experienced sexual harassment, 59% experienced this in their place of employment”

experienced this in their place of employment.[74] Given the high levels of female employment in sectors which would be affected by any extension of licensing hours, especially hospitality, it is useful to look at the national and international evidence of issues affecting female workers in the night-time economy.

The Australian 'Safer Spaces: Gendered Safety and the Night-Time Economy' Report (2023), which sought to promote safer environments within the night-time economy, highlighted sexual harassment in the hospitality sector as a particular problem of the NTE.[75] The research was striking because the presence of alcohol was consistently prevalent throughout the testimonies submitted by victim-survivors. The report was at pains to state that “although substance use is not a direct cause of gender-based violence (GBV), it was identified by respondents as exacerbating or enabling a culture where harassment and assault is perpetrated, tolerated and normalised” in the hospitality sector.[76]

Indeed, the report paints a picture of late-night hospitality settings as places where a culture of heavy drinking is normalised, influencing the effectiveness of safety measures and negatively impacting the wellbeing of hospitality staff.[77]

A study of working conditions in the hospitality sector in Ireland by Dr Deirdre Curran found that sexual harassment was one of the most likely forms of harassment reported during her research of the sector.[78] While in Britain, research from a YouGov survey conducted by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust found high levels of violent, aggressive, sexual and unwanted behaviours whilst working in the night-time economy.[79] The research found that 44% of female respondents had experienced harassment of some kind whilst working in the night-time economy.[80]

In her article on 'Addressing sexual harassment in the hospitality industry', Charlotte Taylor states that, "along with high levels of young workers and female employees, the late-night nature of the industry which often involves alcohol, coupled with the general consensus that the 'customer is king', creates a breeding ground for sexual harassment and an industry-wide culture that normalises this behaviour.".[81] Such analysis is reinforced by a survey from Unite the Union which found that 9 in 10 hospitality workers in Britain had experience sexual harassment.[82]

Indeed, over half of those who had experienced sexual harassment said that the perpetrator was a customer. Unite highlighted that power-dynamics were also at play given that women on zero-hours contracts were significantly more likely to report that the harassment was perpetrated by a colleague (75%) than women on other types of contracts. [83]

Another piece of Australian research, the 'Not So Hospitable' report, delved into these issues in greater detail.[84] The report collected 365 testimonies from workers across the Adelaide hospitality community and aimed to highlight the prevalence, nature, and impacts of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and bullying within the sector. 87% of the testimonies of first-hand experiences of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace were provided by female employees.[85] Where information was included on whether a substance was involved, a staggering 77% of respondents indicated alcohol was involved in the incident.[86] Participants disclosed many occurrences of sexual harassment and assault where alcohol played a significant role, such as

incidents where female staff members were pressured to accept shots from male patrons, facing ridicule if they declined. Compounding such international evidence are the actions of the alcohol industry at national level. Information obtained by Alcohol Action Ireland, through Freedom of Information requests, revealed that publicans pushed back against plans to include sexual harassment as grounds for rejecting licences as part of the draft Sale of Alcohol Bill.[87] [88]

The Sale of Alcohol Bill 2022 states renewal of trading licences can be rejected on the grounds that a pub or venue “were not operated in a manner which protects

staff, patrons and performers from harassment, including sexual harassment”.

However, in meetings with the Department of Justice, the Vintners’ Federation of Ireland (VFI) questioned officials about training staff to keep up with any new guidelines that may be issued by the government because it could become a “cost burden” if new staff needed to be “continually” trained because of high turnover in the sector. [89] [90]

“ Information obtained by Alcohol Action Ireland, through Freedom of Information requests, revealed that publicans pushed back against plans to include sexual harassment as grounds for rejecting licences as part of the draft Sale of Alcohol Bill”

It is important to state that “whilst the night-time economy does not cause abuse, industries that represent the night-time economy, such as hospitality and the entertainment industry, are often associated with increased alcohol consumption, and decreased inhibitions, which can facilitate abuse”. [91] However, that also means the hospitality and other sectors, the alcohol industry, and government must be cognisant of the harms of alcohol, such as the abuse of staff and patrons in the night-time economy.

Moreover, government must accept the fact that extending licensing hours, and thereby increasing alcohol consumption, will inevitably lead to increased levels of harassment, assaults, and violence, much of which will be perpetrated against female workers.

Conclusion

The discussion around extending licensing hours to boost the night-time economy has excluded workers' voices. To date, the debate has been industry and customer centric, with little consideration of the workers who are expected to deliver the night-time economy and ancillary services. Neither has the debate focused on how the further alcoholisation of urban spaces will affect workers. This is despite the fact that a wealth of studies have demonstrated a link between the provision of alcohol and the occurrence of crime and disorder in the night-time economy, particularly in town and city centres.[92]

Much research has shown that "night-time economies, characterized by leisure zones, alcohol, and extended drinking hours, have created urban spatial hot spots of violence and anti-social behaviour." [93] The monopolisation of night-time spaces by 'alco-leisure' industries, as was predicted by public health advocates, has seen a divergence away from the cultural models promoted by early advocates of the 24-hour city.[94] These urban spaces have now, in many cases, become sites of alcohol fuelled violence and disorder.[95]



Surveys conducted in Australian and British cities show that between half to three-quarters of NTE patrons have witnessed violent encounters, with 10-17% having a direct involvement in the violence

Surveys conducted in Australian and British cities show that between half to three-quarters of NTE patrons have witnessed violent encounters, with 10–17% having a direct involvement in the violence,[96] and there is no reason to believe Irish towns and cities will escape the disorder that has characterised the NTE in other countries. International evidence, such as that from Australia, shows that extending opening hours by just one hour contributed to an increase in crime, violence and drunk driving,[97] while similar Australian research uncovered the inverse – a two-hour reduction in late-night trading hours in the New South Wales was found to reduce reports of domestic violence by 29%.[98][99]

On the environmental side, we have evidence from cities such as Barcelona, where residents in certain districts display signs outside their homes asking customers leaving bars and restaurants to leave quietly and not to urinate in the streets.[100] Caught in the middle of this are the workers who are needed to service the night-time economy. Increasing licensing hours, and thereby alcohol, puts these workers at heightened risk of violence, sexual assault, aggression, and discrimination.

The pursuit of extending licensing hours, through the Sale of Alcohol Bill and Intoxicating Liquor Bill, so soon after passing the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 which aimed to reduce alcohol consumption, shows that the alcohol industry has again captured policy making at the highest levels of government. However, what is never said by industry, and proponents of extending licensing hours, is that an expansion of alcohol-based night life threatens the overall sustainability of town and city centres through the demands placed on workers and public services.[101]

Furthermore, it is clear from the available national and international evidence that this unsustainability extends to the State, where the financial burden of dealing with the outworkings of extended licensing hours will fall on central and local government – therefore the burden will fall on taxpayers and ordinary workers.

Consequently, not only should the Sale of Alcohol Bill and Intoxicating Liquor Bill undergo a Health Impact Assessment, but they should also be assessed in terms of their social and economic sustainability due to the pressures their measures will place on workers and public services.

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