



No. 169

Alcohol-Related Assault: Time and Place

Michael Teece and Paul Williams

Alcohol-related violence occurs throughout Australia. It happens between strangers, between friends and acquaintances, between relatives, and between sexual intimates. It happens in the home, in pubs and clubs, and on the street. It happens in the morning and at night. However, the incidence of alcohol-related assault is concentrated at certain times and places, predominantly where alcohol is consumed or is available nearby, more often on weekends and most often late at night or early in the morning, and more frequently from Friday to Sunday. One-third of males and over one-quarter of females were victims of alcohol-related violence in 1998. Most victims (and perpetrators) were young males.

When we control for a range of factors including how often people are away from home, what times they are away, with whom and where they consume alcohol, being young and being male still remain important risk factors for alcohol-related victimisation. In many respects, the problem is one which the young will "grow out of". A challenge remains for the alcohol industry, the community, and individual drinkers to promote and employ measures which support a safe passage for all, and more particularly young males, through the high-risk years.

Adam Graycar
Director

Violence is a widespread and serious social problem in Australia. It, and other antisocial behaviours, have been shown to be related to the consumption of alcohol, though the nature of the association is far from clear. A range of factors (apart from, or in addition to, consumption patterns) can influence the likelihood, frequency, and severity of violence (Collins and Messerschmidt 1993; White and Humeniuk 1993; White, Fagan and Pihl 1994; Graham, Schmidt and Gillis 1996; Pernanen 1991). There is no simple correlation between the level of drinking and the likelihood of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of demographic factors, especially being young, being male, and being unemployed as predictors of alcohol-related violence (see, for example, Makkai 1997). Being both young and male is often cited as the most important predictor of being a victim or a perpetrator of violence, and of being *both* a victim and a perpetrator (see, for example, Williams 2000). However, research has also identified a range of situational factors, such as how often people are out and about, as predictors of alcohol-related victimisation (see, for example, Homel and Tomsen 1993; Parker 1993).

The Present Study

The present study aims to determine the strength of a variety of socio-demographic risk factors for being a victim of alcohol-related violence, which is defined as experiencing a physical or verbal assault, or being "put in fear" by an alcohol-affected person or persons in the previous 12 months. In particular, it examines the hypothesis that *places* where alcohol is usually consumed, *times of absences* from the home, and the *frequency* of such absences are more important factors in the likelihood of experiencing alcohol-related violence than being young and male. That is, when controlling for the new factors, being male and being young cease to be

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independently associated with the likelihood of being assaulted.

Data

The data come from the 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) for the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC) as part of the National Drug Strategy¹. The 1998 survey was administered by a combination of face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires. It was the sixth survey conducted since 1985 (AIHW 1999; Williams 1999). The sample comprised 10,030 persons aged 14 and over. Respondents were drawn from a geographic stratified random sample. For the purposes of this paper, the data have been weighted to account for the resultant design effect.

A range of questions about alcohol-related violence and other social disorder were included in the survey. Respondents were asked whether, in the previous 12 months, they had experienced verbal or physical assault or had been put in fear by someone who was under the influence of alcohol, how often they had experienced these forms of violence, where victimisation had occurred, and who the perpetrators were. Respondents were asked at what time of the day and week violence had occurred. The survey also contained information on a range of other risk factors. In addition to socio-demographics, information on levels and patterns of respondents' alcohol consumption, places where alcohol was usually consumed and age of initiation into alcohol use was collected. Most importantly, the 1998 survey (unlike in previous waves) asked respondents how often they were usually away from home at different times of the week.

Results

Approximately one-third of persons aged 14 years or older

(30.6%) experienced some form of violence by a person under the influence of alcohol in the previous 12 months (Table 1).

- 27.1 per cent experienced verbal assault;
- 5.8 per cent experienced physical assault; and
- 14.5 per cent were put in fear by an alcohol-affected person or persons.

Males were significantly more likely to have suffered at least one form of alcohol-related violence, and to have suffered verbal or physical assault. Women were more likely to have been put in fear and to have experienced sexual assault. All differences by gender were statistically significant except for sexual assault. This latter result is partly a statistical artifact of the relatively small number of victims of alcohol-related sexual assault "captured" by the survey, even with a sample size of over 10,000.

About 1 in 8 persons (12.2%) experienced more than one of these forms of violence (table not shown).

- 5.5 per cent were both verbally and physically assaulted;
- 11.3 per cent were both verbally assaulted and put in fear; and
- 3.8 per cent were both physically assaulted and put in fear.

Very few Australians (3.7%) experienced all three kinds of violence.

For the combined alcohol-related violence measure (that is, any of physical, verbal, or being put in fear), persons aged 20–24 years were by far at the highest risk (Figure 1). More than 1 in 2 persons in this age group were victimised in the previous year. Persons aged 25–29 were also at a high risk, but, thereafter, rates of victimisation fell below those for 14–19 year olds and continued to fall so that the oldest age group was victimised at a rate of less than one quarter of that for 20–24 year olds.

Broadly speaking, this pattern was repeated in the three sub-categories of types of alcohol-related violence. The trend for physical assault was somewhat less age-sensitive, although those aged 50 or more were nearly 7 times less likely than 20–24 year olds to be physically assaulted by an alcohol-affected person or persons.

Place of Victimisation

When we look again at the male-female comparison of victimisation shown in Table 1 (males 33.2%, females 28.1%) and exclude persons who were victims of violence *only* in the home (that is, victims who did not experience violence outside the home), we find that female victims were still more likely than males to experience violence in the home (Table 2).

Table 1: Proportion of Persons Reporting Alcohol-Related Violence by Type and Gender, Australia, 1998

Form of Alcohol-Related Violence	All Persons	Males	Females	Chi-sq.	Sig.
At least one form	30.6	33.2	28.1	9.84	.002
Verbal	27.1	30.2	24.1	15.79	.000
Physical	5.8	7.0	4.6	9.03	<.005
Put in fear	14.5	12.8	16.2	7.35	.005
Sexual	0.4	0.2	0.6	3.61	n.s.

n.s. Not Significant.

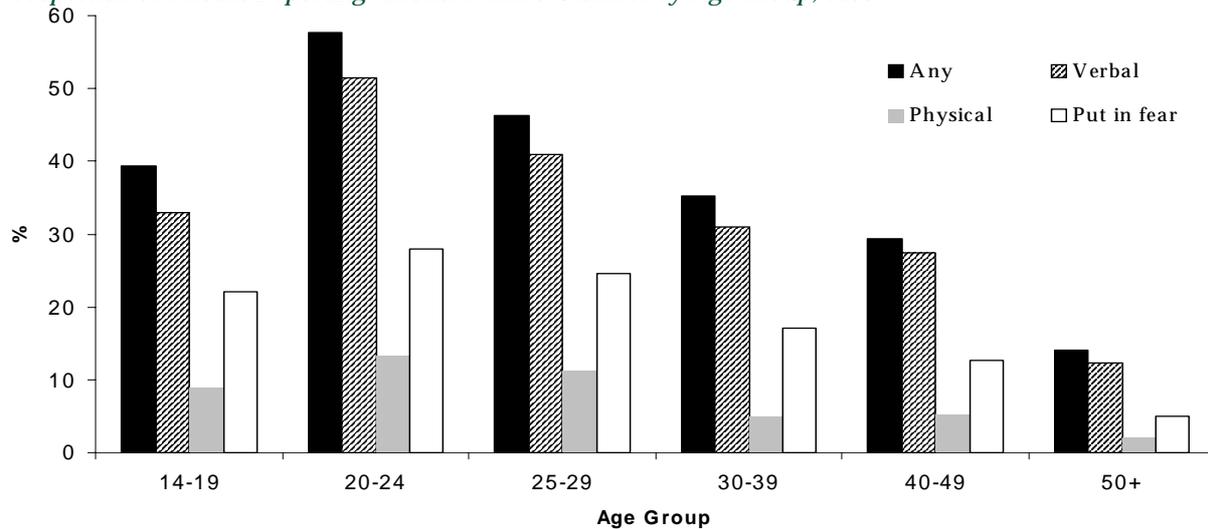
Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

Table 2: Proportion of Persons Reporting Alcohol-Related Violence, by Location and Gender, 1998

Location of Victimisation	Males (%)	Females (%)	chi sq.	sig.
All locations	33.2	28.1	9.84	.002
Outside the home	28.8	20.4	32.14	.000
Victims "outside the home" as a proportion of all victims	86.7	75.6	-	-

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

Figure 1: Proportion of Persons Reporting Alcohol-Related Violence by Age Group, 1998



Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

For most victims of alcohol-related violence in the previous 12 months, and regardless of gender, the violence occurred *outside* their homes (Table 3).

- 23.3 per cent were assaulted in their own homes;
- 36.5 per cent were assaulted in a pub or club;
- 9.3 per cent were assaulted at work;
- 1.0 per cent were assaulted at an educational institution;
- 35.5 per cent were assaulted on the street; and
- 17.4 per cent were assaulted somewhere else.

Overall, more persons were assaulted in pubs and clubs, just ahead of victimisations occurring on the street. Physical assault was the most likely form of alcohol-related violence to occur in the home, and verbal assault was most likely to occur in pubs and in the workplace. Being put in fear was the most likely form of victimisation at school, on the street, and in other locations. Williams (1999, 2000) has shown, however, that there are geographic differences between rural and metropolitan patterns of locations of violence.

Time of Victimization

Most victims experienced assaults on weekends (table not shown).

- 41.8 per cent of victims were assaulted on *weekends* only;
- 14.5 per cent of victims were assaulted on *weekdays* only; and

- 43.7 per cent were assaulted on *both* weekends and weekdays.

Most victimisation occurred at night, with just over 1 in 4 victims experiencing both day and night incidents (table not shown).

- 60.6 per cent of victims had been assaulted at night only;
- 12.2 per cent of victims had been assaulted during the day only; and
- 27.2 per cent of victims had been assaulted during both day and night.

Perpetrators of Alcohol-Related Violence

Although victims could determine that perpetrators were under the influence of alcohol, almost 3 in 5 victims (56.1%) were unable to identify the perpetrators (Table 4).

Almost 1 in 5 (17.6%) victims were assaulted by friends or acquaintances, and about 1 in 8 (11.5%) by their current spouses or partners. A further 5.6 per cent of victims were assaulted by a former spouse or partner. All

other categories of perpetrators were each identified by less than 10 per cent of victims. However, there were significant differences by gender. Female victims were more likely to be assaulted by a current spouse or partner (18.3%) or by a former spouse or partner, boyfriend, or girlfriend (7.8%) than male victims. They were less likely, however, to be assaulted by workmates, schoolmates (4.0%), or by someone unknown (47.1%).

Absence from Home and Likelihood of Victimization

The likelihood of violence increased with the frequency of absence from home (Figure 2). For example, just 26.4 per cent of those persons who were rarely away from home at night on weekends were assaulted by someone affected by alcohol, compared to 59.6 per cent of those persons who were almost always away from home at night on weekends. The effect of absence from home on the likeli-

Table 3: Proportions of Victims of all Types of Alcohol-Related Violence, by Type and Location, Australia, 1998 (row percentages)

	Home	Pub	Work	School	Street	Elsewhere
All	23.3	36.5	9.3	1.0	35.5	17.4
Verbal	24.4	41.1	10.6	0.9	34.1	16.6
Physical	31.3	35.9	8.4	0.7	28.1	12.0
Put in fear	26.3	30.0	10.0	1.4	43.1	19.1

* More than one response possible; percentages are in all cases the proportion of all victims by type and location of assault. For example, 24.4 per cent of all victims who were verbally assaulted were assaulted in the home, and 41.1 per cent of victims of verbal assault were assaulted in the pub.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

hood of being assaulted was greater on weekends, and especially weekend nights, than during the week. The only partial exception to this pattern was *weeknights*, where fewer respondents who were almost always absent from the house reported alcohol-related violence than those who said they were frequently away from the house.

Demographic and Situational Risk Factors: A Logistic Regression Model

There are both demographic and situational factors that are strongly associated with alcohol-related violence. Fitting a logistic regression model to the data enables us to examine the relative contribution of these various risk factors to the likelihood of violence. The model estimates the change in the odds of alcohol-related victimisation when a variable, for example, being male or usually drinking in a public place, controlling for the effects of the other variables.

Table 5 reports the estimated parameters for a logistic regression model which includes 23 explanatory variables, comprising both demographic and situational variables as well as self-reported drinking patterns. The dependent variable was alcohol-related violence that occurred *outside the home* (no/yes). Generally speaking, the model shows that while some situational factors (including the victim's own drinking behaviour) have a significant effect on the risk of victimisation, demographic factors, most importantly age, are stronger risk factors for alcohol-related violence.

Gender remains an important predictor of victimisation, even after controlling for all of the other variables. According to the model, males were 1.41 times (or 41%) more likely to suffer alcohol-related violence than females. Persons who held post-secondary qualifications (defined as technical and university qualifications) were 1.28 times (or

28%) more likely to have been victimised. Married persons (including those in de facto marriages) were 28 per cent *less* likely (odds ratio 0.72) to experience alcohol-related violence.

However, the strongest and most significant association was between victimisation and age, or more specifically, youth. Membership of any of the four younger age groups (14–19, 20–24, 25–29, and 30–39 years of age) was very strongly associated with victimisation. The logistic regression analysis shows that this association holds, even when patterns of drinking, socialising and absence from the home are taken into account. Youths aged 14–19 years were 1.71 times (or 71%) more likely than others to report alcohol-related violence than older persons. Persons aged 20–24 years were 3 times more likely than other persons to have been victimised. Persons in their late 20s were nearly two-and-a-third times more likely to have

been assaulted and persons in their 30s were nearly twice as likely to have suffered alcohol-related violence as other persons.

The model also includes several measures of victims' drinking behaviour. Persons who drank alcohol (defined as those who had consumed any alcohol in the past year) were 1.4 times (or 40%) more likely to have been victimised than non-drinkers. Associating with friends, most or all of whom also drink alcohol, shows the likelihood of alcohol-related violence to be 1.62 (or over 60%) higher than not associating with alcohol-consuming friends.

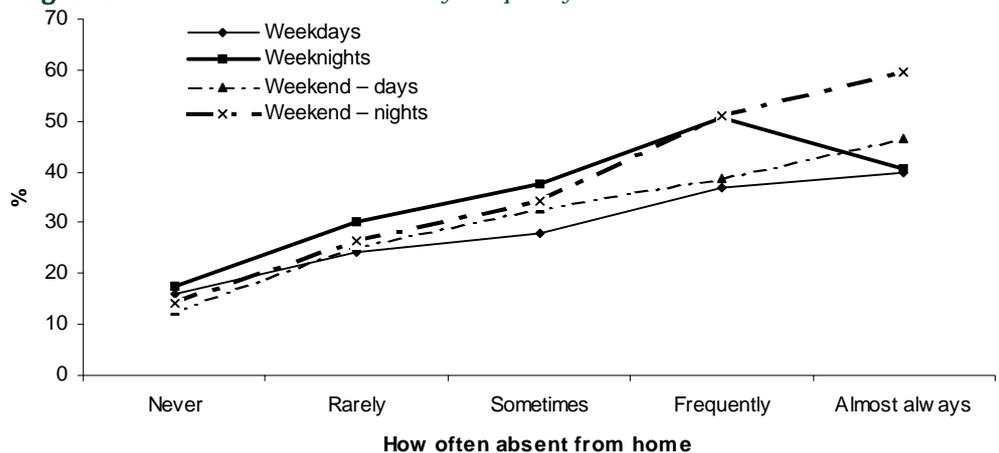
How often and how much the victim drank (that is, the victim's own drinking pattern) was, surprisingly, *not* significantly associated with risk of alcohol-related violence. Persons who usually drank more than 6 standard drinks on a drinking occasion, persons who drank more than 6 standard drinks at

Table 4: Proportion of Victims of Alcohol-Related Violence, by Perpetrator, Australia, 1998

Perpetrator	Victim		Persons (%)
	Male	Female	
Current spouse or partner	5.7	18.3 ***	11.5
Parent	2.0	3.4	2.6
Child	2.2	2.5	2.3
Sibling	3.8	2.5	3.2
Other relative	3.1	4.4	3.7
Other resident of household	4.6	2.7	3.7
Boyfriend/girlfriend	2.6	2.9	2.8
Former spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend	3.7	7.8 *	5.6
Workmate or schoolmate	7.7	4.0 **	5.9
Friend or acquaintance	17.9	17.2	17.6
Unknown person	64.0	47.1 ***	56.1

More than one response possible, *** p<.000; ** p<.01; * p<.05.
Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

Figure 2: Likelihood of Victimisation by Frequency of Absence From Home



Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

Table 5: Logistic Regression Model of Alcohol-Related Violence in Public Places

Variables Included in the Model	95% CI				
	Coeff.	s.e.	Odds ratio	Lower	Upper
Male	.3436***	.0941	1.41	1.17	1.70
Australian-born	-.1180	.1113	.89	.71	1.11
Indigenous	.5221	.2964	1.69	.94	3.01
Married	-.3268*	.1477	.72	.54	.96
Employed	-.0215	.1676	.98	.70	1.36
Annual income <\$30K	.0444	.0982	1.05	.86	1.27
Aged 14-19	.5339**	.1810	1.71	1.20	2.43
Aged 20-24	1.13***	.1649	3.08	2.23	4.26
Aged 25-29	.8463***	.1513	2.33	1.73	3.14
Aged 30-39	.6320***	.1195	1.88	1.49	2.38
Post-secondary qualifications	.2447*	.1051	1.28	1.04	1.57
Drinks alcohol	.3370**	.1295	1.40	1.09	1.81
First drank alcohol when <15 yo	.4407***	.1061	1.55	1.26	1.91
Most/all friends drink	.4806***	.1115	1.62	1.30	2.01
Usually has >6 drinks	.1377	.1507	1.15	.85	1.54
Has >6 drinks at least twice/wk	.2021	.1578	1.22	.90	1.67
Drinks daily	.3504	.2914	1.42	.80	2.51
Usually drinks in public place	.4380***	.1003	1.55	1.27	1.89
Often out on weekdays	.1474	.1039	1.16	.95	1.42
Often out on weeknights	.1354	.1489	1.15	.86	1.53
Often out on weekend days	-.1137	.1173	.89	.71	1.12
Often out on weekend nights	.6659***	.1393	1.95	1.48	2.56

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey Unit Record File, 1998.

least twice a week, and persons who drank daily, were not at significantly greater risks of alcohol-related victimisation than persons whose drinking patterns were more modest. However, age of initiation of alcohol use was significantly related to likelihood of victimisation: persons who started drinking at 14 years of age or younger were 1.55 times (or 55%) more prone to suffer alcohol-related violence.

Only two of the time and place variables were significantly associated with an increased risk of victimisation. Habitual absence from home on weekend nights was, after age, the most important predictor of alcohol-related victimisation. Being almost always or frequently away from home on weekend nights almost doubled the risk of victimisation (Odds Ratio 1.95). Persons who usually drank in public places² were 55 per cent more likely to suffer violence (Odds Ratio. 1.55) than others.

Discussion

Results of this analysis of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey data demonstrate that alcohol-related violence is quite widespread. Nearly one-third of respondents in this national survey reported suffering at least 1 alcohol-related assault in the previous 12 months. More than 1 in 4 had suffered verbal assault, 1 in 7 had been put in fear, and 1 in 20 had suffered physical assault. Younger people reported especially high levels of alcohol-related victimisation.

There were clear time and place risk factors for these assaults. Pubs and clubs appeared to be the most common location for victimisation. The street was very close behind. However, nearly a quarter of victims suffered alcohol-related violence in their own homes. For physical assault, this proportion rose to nearly one-third. These

figures are not, however, proportions of total incidents, but of victims. They say nothing about patterns of repeat victimisation, which will be the subject of a further study. Nevertheless, the results do suggest some clear patterns in alcohol-related victimisation. The data on the identity of perpetrators revealed a picture of a high level of anonymous violence related to alcohol: over half of the victims had been assaulted by strangers. Over 40 per cent of victims, however, were assaulted by persons known to them.

The results of the logistic regression model show that there is a strong relationship between the extent to which people are out and about and their likelihood of victimisation by alcohol-affected persons. Age, however, is still the most important predictor of alcohol-related victimisation, even when frequent absences from home are taken into account. The model shows that alcohol-related violence is a problem that is more likely to affect young people who go out more than young people who usually stay in. This demonstrates that young men are disproportionately affected.

Frequent absences from home on *weeknights* was not a significant predictor of alcohol-related violence. It is possible that habitual absence from home on *weeknights* is not closely linked to consumption of alcohol or that these absences do not involve frequenting places where alcohol is consumed. For example, such absences may be associated with shift work or study, rather than recreation or entertainment involving the consumption of alcohol. Another possible explanation is that heavy drinking and crowded, aggressive atmospheres, which may characterise pubs and clubs on *weekend nights*, are not features at the same venues during the week.

The failure of the linear association to hold for the step from “frequent” to “almost

always" absent on weeknights (that is, persons frequently absent on week nights were more likely to be assaulted than those almost always absent), which was illustrated in Figure 2, might also be similarly explained. Those almost always absent might be more likely to be engaged in work, study, or other commitments that did not involve drinking or visiting licensed premises, than those only frequently absent.

On the other hand, marriage was a significant protective factor. In a sense, marriage is both a demographic and a situational variable, reflecting both structural characteristics (age, earnings, job status, and residential situation) and possibly patterns of drinking and social activity as well. As Makkai also found in 1998, having post-secondary qualifications increased the risk of violence (Makkai 1998). The increasing trend in recent years for higher proportions of younger persons to possess post-secondary qualifications compared to older cohorts may be a partial explanation for this phenomenon.

The hypothesis that time and place, and frequency of absences from the home are more important risk factors for alcohol-related violence, than being male and young, was generally *not* supported by the results. Being young and male are still independent risk factors. Overall, our model describes a typical victim as a (relatively educated) young male who probably started drinking before the age 15, who usually drinks in pubs and clubs, and who is frequently or almost always away from home on weekend nights. Over half of these victims will not be able to identify the alcohol-affected person(s) who assaulted them. Other research has shown that these victims are also more likely to be perpetrators (Makkai 1998; Williams 2000).

It is clear that young people enjoy weekend social activities that involve consumption of

alcohol. They enjoy the company of their friends who also enjoy alcohol. Many young people socialise in pubs and clubs where, not surprisingly, alcohol is consumed. The level of alcohol-related disorder including violence, which sometimes accompanies these activities, has declined in the past 5 years (Williams 1999, 2000). Situational measures (Homel 1997), Community Safety Action Projects (Hauritz et al. 1998), and Industry Accords (Felson et al. 1997) have continuing roles to play in reducing the violence even further. Alcohol-related victimisation decreases with age. Most young people who are involved in violence eventually "grow out of" it. The challenge remains, however, for the alcohol industry, for the community, and for individual drinkers, to employ any and all measures which are shown to assist safe passage for youth, particularly young males, through the high-risk period.

Notes

¹ Data used in this report were made available by the Social Sciences Data Archives (SSDA), The Australian National University. Neither the collector of the data (SSDA) or DHAC bears any responsibility for analyses or interpretations presented here.

² Includes licensed premises (that is, pubs and clubs but *not* restaurants or cafes), public places such as parks, cars or other vehicles.

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