

Measuring 'alcohol related' crime and disorder: Examining the impact of extended licensing hours in England.

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1. Introduction

The recent introduction of extended licensing hours in England (Licensing Act, 2003) occurred in November 2005, amidst increasing concerns about rising levels of violence and disorder in urban centres, particularly during the late evening/night-time. This paper describes the difficulties inherent in measuring 'alcohol related' crime and disorder, and evaluating a change in policy that is county wide (as it is difficult to generate a control area). This research uses GIS to implement a multi level analysis approach to examine changes at the micro, meso and macro level, and discusses the difficulties in generating policy change data for the purposes of analysis and evaluation. As a result of this, quantitative crime analysis was supplemented with qualitative fieldwork (participant observation and semi-structured interviews) to assess the impact of the new Act.

2. Research Questions

The overall aims of the research were to provide a baseline indicator of levels of crime and disorder in and around licensed premises, and to examine the impact of the Act on patterns of crime and disorder in and around licensed premises, in each of the five case study areas. A number of specific research questions were formulated to guide this research. These were as follows:

- What patterns of crime and disorder exist in and around licensed premises?
- What other local factors may explain the prevalence of crime and disorder in and around licensed premises?
- Has the introduction of the Act, and the granting of additional opening hours to licensed premises, led to a change in violence and disorder at these licensed premises?
- Have overall levels of crime and disorder within town and city centres changed following the Act?
- Have the peaks of crime and disorder displaced to later or earlier periods?
- Has the profile of crime and disorder in and around licensed premises and associated 'hot spots' changed in relation to venues with additional opening hours?
- Has the Act resulted in unintended consequences such as geographical displacement or diffusion of benefits to surrounding areas?

3. Data and Methodology

There are inherent difficulties in measuring 'alcohol related' crime and disorder, due to the subjective nature of determining whether alcohol was a cause of crime, and this relates to both the victim(s) and or the offender(s). An additional difficulty is that traditional evaluation methodologies could not be

employed, as the change in licensing represented a policy change that occurred across the whole country, thus no 'control' area could readily be generated.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to answer these questions. Baseline conditions were identified in each of the areas using data on recorded crime, police calls for service for disorder, and data on assaults obtained from Accident and Emergency (A&E) units and from the ambulance service. Much of this covered a period of up to two years baseline and one year post implementation of the Act. The baseline conditions and changes in these offences/incidents following the implementation of the Act were analysed using a range of quantitative techniques. These included:

- Calculating monthly and yearly crime and disorder counts and rates and percentage change;
- Analysing crime and disorder by time of day and day of week;
- Analysis of domestic violence and alcohol 'flags';
- Analysing the age and gender of victims;
- The use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to map licensed premises and crime and disorder incidents in each area;
- The identification of clusters of licensed premises (i.e. areas of concentrated drinking) and their coalescence with crime and disorder 'hot spots';
- Analysis of crime and disorder in areas close to licensed premises (50m buffer zones);
- Proportional change analysis of crime and disorder;
- GIS analysis to test for evidence of spatial and temporal changes in crime and disorder;
- Benchmarking changes in crime and disorder in premise clusters against the remainder of the town centres;
- Constructing Resource Targeting Tables (RTTs) to identify the concentration of violence in licensed premises;
- Analysis of accident and emergency data.

One of the key difficulties presented to the research team was capturing accurate information on the capacity of licensed premises (bars and nightclubs), and the current and former opening hours of premises (to generate additional hours), and some of the approaches adopted to address this are discussed in this paper. Qualitative research was used to supplement the quantitative analysis and this involved both participant observation of licensed premises and key drinking areas and face-to-face interviews with bar, door staff and door supervisors. This was informed by the GIS crime analysis.

The data sets used in the research included:

- Police recorded crime data for violence against the person, criminal damage and sexual offences;
- Police calls for service data (disorder incidents only);
- Licensed premises data;
- A&E data;
- Ambulance data;
- Ordnance Survey AddressPoint®;
- Ordnance Survey 1:10 000 scale raster;
- UKBORDERS digital boundaries;
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-2005 population estimates;
- ACORN 2006 population estimates.

5. Key Findings

A number of findings stem from this research, but some of the key findings of the changes to violence against the person are highlighted below.

- Overall, there was a 3% reduction in violence against the person post Act.
- On weekdays, the overall reduction was 4.3% but only 1.2% during weekends.
- Different patterns emerged at individual case study-level.
- The timing of violence shifted forward in time. The timing of this reflected the local areas' policy in granting extended hours.
- The evidence for temporal displacement was stronger when analysis was restricted to violence occurring within 50 metres of any licensed premises, suggesting an association with licence changes. The changes were most marked during the weekends, again suggesting a relationship with the Act.
- In all five case study areas, the concentration of violence increased among high crime licensed premises that actually used six or more additional hours per week but decreased amongst the remainder. This pattern of findings was not found when examining hours applied for.
- An examination of changes in the peaks of violence against the person suggested that post implementation there was a flattening out of peaks in two areas, no observable change in two areas, and a shift in the peak to later in the early morning in one area.
- Most licensed premises falling into the top 15 premises (i.e. the worst performing premises) for violence against the person offences within the baseline period, also occupied this position in the post implementation period.
- A new technique of synthesis mapping (where the change over time between baseline and post-implementation hot spot maps is summarised on a single map) revealed that most of the reductions and increases in violence against the person corresponded with the location of licensed premises concentrated in the key drinking areas.

6. Acknowledgements

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(note these publications are expected in February 2008)

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Biography

Dr. Newton is a senior research fellow at the Applied Criminology Centre (ACC), University of Huddersfield (UK). He joined the ACC in January 2005. Previously he worked for 2 years as a research associate at the Environmental Criminology Research Unit (ECRU), University of Liverpool. He received his PhD from the University of Liverpool in 2004. Prior to this attained a BSc in geography from the University of Sheffield, and an MSc in Geographical Information Science (GIS) from the University of Edinburgh. His research interests include environmental criminology, the geography of crime/place of crime, GIS, crime mapping and crime analysis, quantitative and qualitative research methods, policy analysis and evaluation, crime and disorder on public transport, crime and youths, acquisitive crime, and violence and disorder in the night-time economy.