



Turning Point
Alcohol & Drug Centre

THE IMPACT OF DRINKERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Claire Wilkinson
Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre



Introduction

Alcohol can negatively affect the community in a number of ways :

- litter (Midford et al., 2005)
- public disturbances (Davey et al., 2000)
- noise complaints (Ireland and Thommeny, 1993)
- public drunkenness (Donnelly et al., 2006)
- property damage (Donnelly et al., 2006)
- physical and verbal assaults (NDSHS, 2007)
- fear (NDSHS, 2007)

There is limited research exploring the Australian experience of a range of adverse effects from alcohol-related behaviour. This project is unique in that it addresses this gap and provides us with a greater understanding of how other people's drinking affects us.

Method

A questionnaire administered by telephone with a random sample of 2,649 Australians was developed.

Respondents were asked the number of times they had experienced any of the following adverse effects caused by someone else's drinking:

- verbal abuse
- being threatened
- property damage
- traffic accidents
- feeling unsafe in public places
- avoiding drunk people/places
- trouble/noise from licensed venues
- physical abuse
- serious arguments
- personal belongings damaged
- forced/pressured into sexual activity
- feeling unsafe on public transport
- being kept awake at night or disturbed
- annoyed by vomit, urination, litter

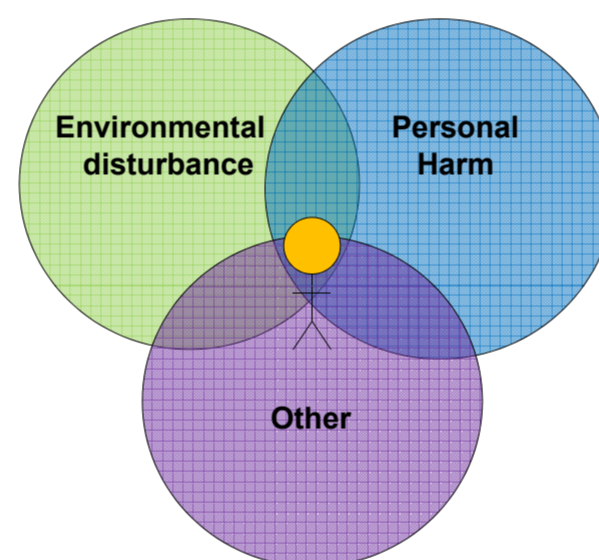
Results

70% of respondents experienced at least one harm and 8% experienced seven or more types of harms.

Who experiences the harm?

Younger respondents were much more likely than older respondents to report being adversely affected by strangers. As were people who were not partnered or married, who lived in a capital cities and close to licensed venues, and who had higher education levels and household incomes, compared to those with lower education or household incomes.

Graph 1. Three types of harms, using Principal Components Analysis to group harms



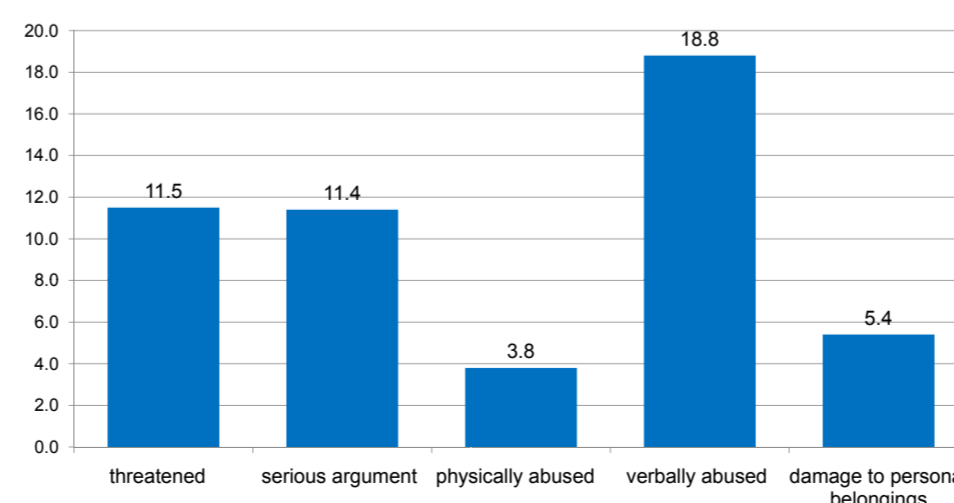
70% of respondents reported experiencing environmental disturbances such as unwanted noise from drinkers, nuisance behaviour, or avoiding drunk people or places in the past 12 months.

More serious personal harms from the drinking behaviour of strangers such as physical abuse, threats and property damage was reported by 26% of respondents.

Who experiences personal harm?

Men compared to women (30% vs. 22%), and younger people, particularly 18-24 year olds (55%).

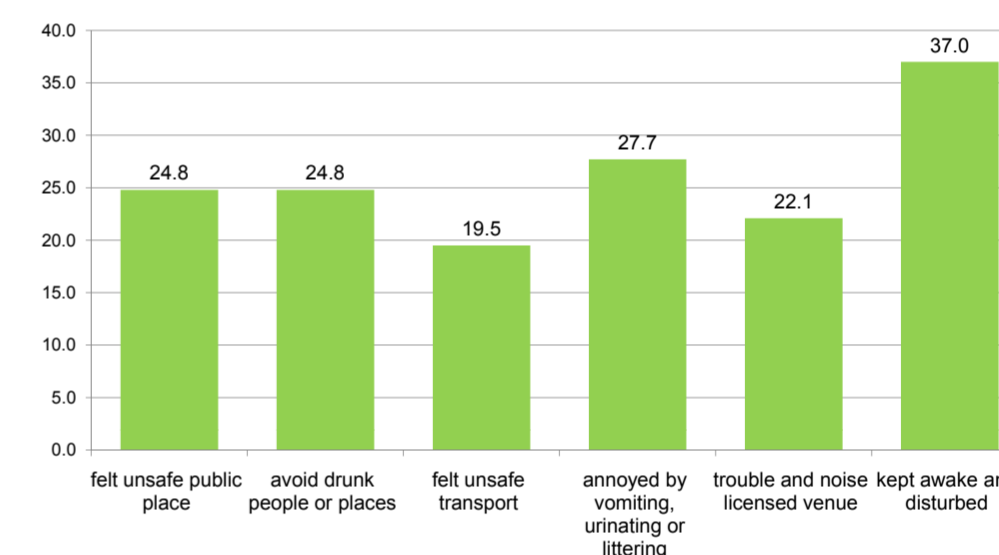
Table 1. Percentage of respondents reporting experiencing personal harm at least once



Who experiences environmental disturbance?

People living in capital cities, in neighbourhoods with high socio-economic advantage, and those living close to licensed venues.

Table 2. Percentage of respondents reporting experiencing environmental disturbances at least once



Abstainers were less likely to experience harm, but of the harm they did experience, it was more likely to be environmental harm.

Heavy drinkers were more likely to experience harm, and this was most often personal harm.

Conclusions

The majority of Australian adults report having been adversely affected by the drinking of strangers in the past year.

Excessive drinking has a much broader impact than the personal cost to the health and financial wellbeing of an individual.

Acknowledgements

Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation

AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research
Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre, Melbourne

Contact Information

clairew@turningpoint.org.au