

The Role of **Alcohol Policy** *in* **Sexual Violence Prevention**

Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention



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the impact of alcohol policies

on sexual violence and explore

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Introduction

Sexual violence is a widespread problem in Canada that has significant impact on individuals, families, communities, public institutions, and society in general. The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work.”ⁱ

Although sexual violence can be experienced or committed by anyone, females are significantly more likely to be the victims while males are more likely to be the perpetrators. The vast majority of those who commit acts of sexual violence are known to their victims. Sexual violence can cause significant short- and long-term mental, physical, and sexual health harms to the victims. An immediate consequence of sexual violence against victims of any age can be serious injury, disability, or death. Early experiences of sexual violence in childhood and adolescence are associated with poor mental health, alcohol and drug use, poor sexual health, and increased risk for suicide. Sexual violence experienced in adulthood yields similar harms; research demonstrates higher rates of mental disorders, substance use, and poor sexual health outcomes.ⁱⁱ These harms are frequently exacerbated by society’s response to sexual violence, including cultural attitudes and beliefs that foster victim-blaming, disbelief, and shaming of victims. In addition to its toll on victims, sexual violence also presents a substantial burden to communities, the health system, and the justice system. Because sexual violence is a highly under-reported crime, it is difficult to assess the full scope of its impact on individuals and society.

While substances commonly referred to as “date rape drugs” garner much attention, research and surveillance show that alcohol, consumed by the perpetrator and/or victim, is the most common substance associated with sexual violence. Estimates of the percentage of sexual assaults

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that involve alcohol range from 35-70%.ⁱⁱⁱ Alcohol is a depressant that can produce both cognitive and motor impairment. It also reduces inhibition, including sexual inhibition, and affects impulse control.^{iv} Alcohol also has an effect on psychological function that is influenced by cultural and social norms about how one should act and feel after consuming it. North American culture is known not only for associating alcohol with gender norms, sexual desire, and sexual performance, but also for encouraging the notion of “liquid courage” that empowers individuals to behave in a certain way. When people are conditioned to associate certain behaviours with cultural or social norms, the behaviour of others can be interpreted as sexual interest, which may or may not be the case.^v Research has shown that North American cultural beliefs about alcohol significantly influence behaviour.^{vi}

Atlantic Canada’s culture of alcohol use is a contributor to sexualized violence, which is also

supported and normalized by a broader societal culture. What is sometimes referred to as “rape culture” is perpetuated through such norms as misogyny, objectification of women and girls, harmful perceptions about masculinity and femininity, and the glamourization of sexual violence. Such norms are closely linked to myths about rape and victim-blaming. Rape culture interacts with alcohol culture to produce greater risk of sexual violence. Although addressing alcohol culture will not eliminate rape culture or other norms that are supportive of sexual violence, it will contribute to a reduction of sexual violence.

Efforts to prevent alcohol-facilitated sexual assault are often education and programming that are focused at the level of the individual. Although strategies such as education and bystander intervention programs have a role to play in prevention of sexual violence, they alone are inadequate in addressing the complex contributing factors. Instead of looking broadly at community and societal conditions to prevent alcohol-facilitated sexual violence, some individual-level strategies place the onus on the victim, which can result in victim-blaming or excuse the actions of perpetrators. Instead of focusing on the individual, a primary prevention approach to alcohol-facilitated sexual violence addresses the manner in which alcohol is sold and promoted in society. The World Health Organization has identified policies that determine access to alcohol as an emerging area of evidence for the prevention of sexual violence. Despite this, there has been less focus in the alcohol policy literature on the link to sexual violence than on violence in general. Similarly, sexual violence prevention literature often acknowledges alcohol as a contributing factor but rarely addresses it from a policy perspective.

In 2010 the Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention (ACIP) produced a report titled “Alcohol and injury in Atlantic Canada: Creating a culture of safer consumption”. That report assembled the evidence on the relationship between alcohol policies and injury rates, demonstrating the impact of how alcohol is sold and promoted on a range of unintentional and intentional injuries, including motor vehicle collisions, suicide, falls, and sexual violence.

Sexual Violence

The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work.”

The goal was to demonstrate the need for the injury prevention community to incorporate policy measures when working to prevent alcohol-related injuries. The purpose of this report is to examine the evidence regarding the impact of alcohol policies on sexual violence and explore more deeply how alcohol policy at an institutional level can assist sexual violence prevention. It is not the intent of ACIP to focus on individual alcohol use or perpetuate victim blaming. While recognizing that a comprehensive prevention strategy will have many approaches, this report does not address strategies that are outside its scope. Some research is specific to sexual violence, other literature addresses a range of violent acts. In this report, evidence will be presented from both types of literature. For each of the alcohol policies examined there will be an overview of the topic, evidence related to violence, and evidence that is specific to sexual violence.

Section 1: Sexual Violence in Atlantic Canada

As in other regions worldwide, sexual violence is a significant burden to individuals, families, and communities in Atlantic Canada. Beyond the personal consequences are the social costs of time and money associated with policing, the courts, health care, social agencies, and many other public interests. Despite this, statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence are not readily available.

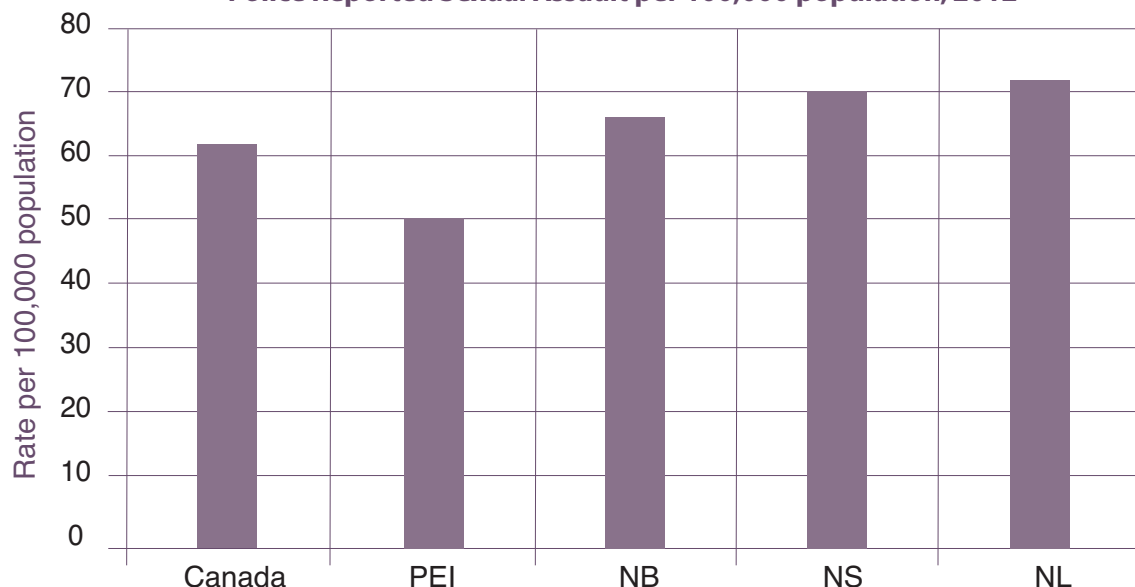
It is known that sexual assault is highly under-reported in Canada, with some sources estimating that only one in 10 sexual assaults is reported to police. The 2009 General Social Survey on Victimization in Canada found that 88% of sexual assaults in Canada went unreported, based on self-reported data.^{vii} In 2012, more than 1,200 sexual assaults were reported to police in Atlantic Canada.^{viii} However, given the rate of under-reporting, it is likely that there were several thousand more incidents that are not captured in regional police data during that same period.

The following chart depicts the rate per 100,000 population of police-reported sexual assaults in the four Atlantic Provinces in 2012. The Canadian average (62.85) is also presented. Rates in three of the four provinces are higher than the national average, with the highest in Newfoundland and Labrador (72.37)

and Nova Scotia (70.41). Only Prince Edward Island (PEI) had a rate lower than the national average (50.64). New Brunswick had the second lowest rate in the region (65.88) but was still above the national average. Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia had the fourth and fifth highest rates of police-reported sexual assault of the 10 Canadian provinces.

In addition to police reports, some data on sexual violence is also collected by the Atlantic Provinces' sexual assault crisis centres. These centres, which provide services and support to those who have experienced sexual violence, are active in each province. Although the data varies across the provinces and isn't necessarily comparable, it provides additional information about the nature of sexual violence in the region. Consistent with the literature on sexual violence, national statistics, and

Police Reported Sexual Assault per 100,000 population, 2012



supported by findings in the General Social Survey on Victimization^{ix}, the data from the sexual assault crisis centres identifies women as the majority of victims and men as the majority of perpetrators. Most perpetrators were known to their victims, with only a small percentage of sexual assaults committed by individuals unknown to the victim. It is also important to note that sexual violence can be an aspect of violence between intimate partners, commonly referred to as domestic violence.

The General Social Survey on Victimization collects data on the location of sexual assaults. Findings indicate that the majority (54%) took place in a commercial or institutional establishment, such as a restaurant or bar. In comparison, 39% of physical assaults took place in this type of establishment.^x Despite the evidence that alcohol is a common factor

in sexual violence, data on the proportion of sexual assaults that are alcohol-facilitated in Atlantic Canada is fragmented for a number of reasons, including lack of resources and time to devote to data collection, the sensitivity of the issue, the victim being underage, concerns that the information will be used against the victim in the justice system, and the desire to protect individuals from victim-blaming. The Avalon Sexual Assault Centre based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, collects some data on the involvement of alcohol in sexual assault cases that come to their attention. Over the past several years Avalon estimates that 50-70% of the cases seen in their Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program involved alcohol. The majority of victims are in the age range of 13-25 years.^{xi} Similar data was not available from New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, or PEI.

Section 2: Alcohol and Sexual Violence: How Population Consumption of Alcohol Contributes to Sexual Violence

Overview

Population consumption of alcohol refers to the frequency, amount, and patterns with which a given population consumes alcohol. These measures are important indicators of the extent to which individuals are exposed to alcohol and potential alcohol-related harms.^{xii}

Research has extensively documented the role that alcohol sales and promotion policies contribute to consumption patterns in populations. The manner in which alcohol is priced, accessed, and marketed has been consistently and reliably linked to child and youth drinking rates, overall population drinking rates, and patterns of hazardous drinking.^{xiii} These patterns

of alcohol consumption ultimately affect many aspects of society, including health care and the judicial system. Section 2 of this report briefly describes the relationship between population alcohol consumption and sexual violence; Section 3 provides an overview of specific alcohol policies.

Deregulation & Alcohol Consumption in Canada

Although the majority of alcohol policy is set at a provincial level, virtually all jurisdictions in Canada have in recent years made changes to how alcohol is sold, distributed, and promoted. This has happened through deregulation, resulting in increases to outlet

density, hours and days of sale, and marketing and promotions. In addition, pricing structures make use of discounts or sales to increase the volume of sales.^{xiv} These trends have been observed throughout Atlantic Canada. Although all four provinces and most others in

Canada control the sale of alcohol through a government monopoly model, the scope of controls is narrowly restricted and does not allow full implementation of a public health and safety lens. Messages about “responsible drinking” frequently originate from the alcohol industry as a form of corporate social responsibility. However, corporate social responsibility tends to focus on public service announcements or campaigns against impaired driving instead of policy measures to reduce consumption.^{xv} This places the onus on the individual to reduce harms and deflects attention from the responsibility of industry. These measures have been identified as industry marketing and are largely ineffective at changing behaviour.^{xvi}

Deregulation has boosted alcohol consumption in Canada. With the exception of one year, alcohol consumption has increased over the past decade.^{xvii} In addition to the quantity of alcohol consumed, patterns of consumption can exacerbate harms. Injuries and violence are more likely to result when heavy drinking occurs.^{xviii} Atlantic Canadians are more likely than other Canadians to consume alcohol in a manner that is considered hazardous. This includes being more likely than other Canadians to consume five or more drinks in one sitting^{xix}.

Alcohol use patterns among children and youth are an important indicator of societal alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms. In all four Atlantic Provinces the age at which it is legal to consume alcohol is 19 years. Despite this, many children and youth access alcohol under age, which can have harmful consequences for their health, safety, and brain development. Other harmful and troubling trends in child and youth consumption in Atlantic Canada are that the age of first drink has steadily declined with each generation, and in 2012 drinking among young females increased and now surpasses the drinking rate of their male peers. The following table provides data on alcohol consumption patterns among Atlantic Canadian youth from the Student Drug Use Survey. Results are for the most recent year available; PEI did not participate in the 2012 survey, so its results are from 2007. The surveys are done by students in grades 7, 9, 10, and 12.

The declining age of first drink, combined with patterns of heavy drinking among Atlantic Canadians of all ages, has implications for alcohol-related harms, including violence and sexual violence.

Province	Average age of first drink	Drank alcohol, at least once, past year	Alcohol use more than once/month
New Brunswick (2012) ^{xx}	13.3 years	All: 48.0% Male: 45.0% Female: 51.0%	All: 26.0% Male: 26.1% Female: 25.5%
Newfoundland & Labrador (2012) ^{xxi}	13.5 years	All: 47.4% Male: NA Female: NA	All: 28.1% Male: NA Female: NA
Nova Scotia (2012) ^{xxii}	13.4 years	All: 49.4% Male: 48.3% Female: 50.1%	All: 27.0% Male: 26.6% Female: 27.2%
Prince Edward Island (2007) ^{xxiii}	13.1 years	All: 46.0% Male: 47.0% Female: 46.0%	All: 25.0% Male: 26.0% Female: 24.0%

Alcohol Consumption Patterns & the Relationship with Violence

Population consumption of alcohol has been repeatedly linked with various types of violence worldwide. Homicide mortality rates in Ontario, Canada, between 1968 and 1991 were found to be positively related to alcohol consumption among males, specifically the consumption of beer and spirits.^{xxiv} Similar findings in relation to homicides were found in a study across five European countries.^{xxv} Non-fatal assaults also have been associated with rates of alcohol consumption. An assessment of violent crime data related to per capita alcohol consumption from 48 states in the United States (US) found that for every 10% increase in per capita consumption, assaults increased by 5.85% and robbery by 9.13%; only a minimal effect (0.87%) was found for homicide.^{xxvi} Heavy drinkers are more likely to be victims of violence^{xxvii} and episodes of heavy drinking in particular are associated with violence. The strong relationship between alcohol and violence

among intimate partners was identified in a 2008 meta-analysis, which also determined that binge drinking was especially significant as a risk factor.^{xviii}

Similar to physical violence, sexual violence has been associated with patterns of population alcohol consumption. As noted in the introduction, addressing this issue at a population level is important to avoid placing the onus for prevention on the individual victim. An analysis of per capita alcohol consumption in 48 US states concluded that a 10% increase in consumption resulted in a corresponding 6.47% increase in the incidence of rape.^{xxix} A study of 32 US colleges found that students' alcohol use was a predictor of rates of rape, both on and off campus^{xxx}. The perpetration of sexual assault has consistently been associated with drinking, especially episodes of heavy drinking.^{xxxi}

Section 3: The Impact of Alcohol Policy on Patterns of Alcohol Use and Sexual Violence

The patterns of alcohol consumption in society, including frequency and child and youth drinking, are directly associated with the strength of policies governing alcohol sales and promotions at the population level. Strong policies have consistently been found to lower rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms, including injury, suicide, violence, and chronic disease.

Alcohol policies have also been linked to rates of sexual violence in populations. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of alcohol-related harms are not attributable to heavy or alcohol-dependent drinkers but instead to those who would be classified as light or moderate drinkers.^{xxxii} This section of the report examines the effect on alcohol consumption and sexual violence of three forms of alcohol control

policy: access, pricing, and marketing. The literature identifies such policies as evidence-based measures to reduce alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms. This report also examines the evidence in relation to government-run monopolies on alcohol sales as a means to reduce the incidence of sexual violence.

Access to Alcohol

Overview

Alcohol access is a term that describes a range of policies relating to accessibility and availability, including:

- Age-based restrictions on purchase and use of alcohol
- Density of outlets where alcohol can be purchased (e.g., liquor stores, bars, and restaurants) in a given geographic area
- Hours and days at which alcohol is available for sale

Access to alcohol increases because of consumer demand and deregulation. Commonly the result is an increase in the number of sales outlets, the supply of alcohol, and the competition among retailers who use pricing and availability to attract customers. When new outlets proliferate in a given area, there is a need to expand the customer base. This demand can often be met by the development of niche markets to reach different types of customers. Stratification of the market into different segments (e.g., wine bars, microbreweries, or bars with certain types of music) prevents the market from becoming saturated and impacts consumer behaviour – so while outlets need customers to help them sustain and/or expand, the very presence of more outlets influences consumption. One researcher describes the behaviour of retailers and consumers as co-evolving.^{xxxiii}

There are consequences to increased access and availability of alcohol. They include the corresponding emergence of a wide range of health, justice, and social harms. Research from British Columbia demonstrated an increase in alcohol-related deaths of all types when partial privatization resulted in an increase in private alcohol retail outlets. Conservative estimates show that for every 20% increase in private stores in a geographic area there was a 3.25% increase in alcohol-related deaths; the increase in alcohol-related hospitalizations was 4%. Alcohol-related deaths included injuries, violence, and chronic disease.^{xxxiv} This phenomenon of increased

harms has been documented in numerous pieces of research.^{xxxv}

Conversely, the same alcohol-associated harms have been shown to decrease when there is less access and availability. Researchers suggest that the reason for this significant impact is an increase in both the time cost and the opportunity cost to obtain the product. In this case, time cost refers to the amount of time a person is required to invest to obtain alcohol. Opportunity cost refers to what alternative is surrendered when, given limited resources, one has to choose between Option A and Option B. As the time cost increases, the likelihood of making an alcohol purchase or consuming alcohol in an excessive amount is reduced. Similarly, if the effort required to acquire the alcohol means some other opportunity is lost, purchase will become a less attractive option.^{xxxvi} Although sometimes characterized as being anti-business or anti-competition, alcohol policies that restrict access and availability can help prevent harms that otherwise would result in significant direct and indirect costs to society. Numerous studies have indicated that restrictions on access to alcohol reduce not only consumption but also alcohol-related health and justice issues.^{xxxvii}

Alcohol Access & Violence

The relationship between alcohol access and consumption has long been linked to overall rates of violence in forms, including sexual, physical, domestic, and family.

Outlet Density

Alcohol outlet density, which can be defined by consumption on-premise or consumption off-premise, has consistently been linked to patterns of violent behaviour.^{xxxviii} Research from Norway using 30 years of data showed a statistically significant positive correlation between alcohol outlet density and police-investigated violent crimes.^{xxxix} Two separate studies from California yielded similar findings. One demonstrated that bar density specifically impacted

rates of physical assault.^{xi} The second found that for every 10% increase in the number of bars and off-premise outlets, the rates of violence increased by 2.06% and 1.67% respectively.^{xii} Research in the US and Australia found significant positive correlations between outlet density and male-to-female partner violence. This finding held true even after controlling for other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.^{xiii}

Hours & Days of Sale

The hours and days during which alcohol is available for sale have been shown to influence rates of violence.^{xliii} As little as a two-hour increase in the amount of time that alcohol can be purchased produces higher rates of assault.^{xliv} Based on a systematic review of studies examining outcomes of violence and other alcohol-related harms, the Centers for Disease Control Task Force on Community Preventive Services concluded that there is sufficient evidence to declare that increases in hours of sale that are equal to or greater than two hours increase harms.^{xlv} Although few studies have examined whether the reverse effect occurs with a decrease in hours, one study from Brazil showed that reducing hours of bar operation resulted in a significant decrease in homicides.^{xlvi}

Minimum Legal Drinking Age

The minimum legal drinking age has also been studied in relation to violence. Because individuals of the age of majority are able to access alcohol in more places more easily, rates of violence and other harms are higher relative to youth close in age who are still minors under the law.^{xlvii} A study from Ontario showed a 7.9% increase in physical assaults that required hospital treatment^{xlviii} among youth who had recently reached the age of majority.

Although most literature on alcohol and violence does not differentiate between types of violence, some researchers have focused specifically on the impact of outlet density on rates of rape and/or sexual assault.

Alcohol Access & Sexual Violence

High outlet density contributes to sexual violence in two ways. First, it increases population alcohol consumption, a factor that is known to increase

Sexual Violence Rates

Multiple studies, several in the United States, have specifically linked alcohol outlet density with sexual assault and/or sexual offenses in neighbourhoods and on campus settings. An analysis of campus rates of rape at 32 American colleges found that sexual violence rates were positively associated with outlet density of both on- and off-premise alcohol outlets.

sexual violence. Second, high outlet density can bring potential perpetrators and victims of sexual violence together in a high-risk setting.^{xlix} This commonly occurs in entertainment districts where alcohol outlets are clustered and many people interact. This accounts for increased incidence of sexual violence related to outlet density despite the absence of increases in alcohol consumption: even where outlet density does not significantly affect consumption rates, the risk for sexual violence may still increase.^l

Multiple studies, several in the US, have specifically linked alcohol outlet density with sexual assault and/or sexual offenses in neighbourhood and campus settings. An analysis of campus rates of rape at 32 American colleges found that sexual violence rates were positively associated with outlet density of both on- and off-premise alcohol outlets.^{li} In Washington, DC, researchers who examined alcohol-related violence and various community variables found a positive correlation between alcohol outlet density and sexual offenses as well as other violent acts.^{lii} Other research has made a distinction between the density of on- and off-site establishments. A Minnesota study of violent crime and alcohol outlets found that a 20% increase in all types of alcohol outlets resulted in a 3.9% increase in rape in the same geographic area. The analysis also found a statistically significant increase in the incidence of rape associated with higher density of outlets where alcohol could be consumed on site. Although there was also an increase in rape in relation to off-premise alcohol retail outlets, it was not statistically significant.^{liii}

Alcohol Pricing

Overview

Tax and price control measures are commonly used to regulate the use of dependence-producing substances such as alcohol and tobacco. This strategy is based on a fundamental concept in economics called the Law of Demand, which theorizes that the increasing cost of a product reduces the quantity consumed.^{liv} Controlling the affordability of alcohol has been proven to reduce both alcohol use and alcohol-related harms in a society. Affordability may be addressed in a variety of ways, including:

- Taxation
- Minimum pricing structures
- Differential price by beverage
- Volumetric pricing
- Prohibiting sales or discount pricing on alcoholic beverages.^{lv}

Pricing structures may affect the sale of alcohol in retail outlets or establishments such as bars and restaurants. Price can be a disincentive against the purchase of large quantities of alcohol or an incentive to purchase less harmful beverages. In volumetric pricing, lower prices are assigned to products with low alcohol content and higher prices to those with high alcohol content. This can be accomplished either by altering the base cost of the product or by taxation. Although current alcohol taxes and base prices may be perceived to be high, it is important to note that when adjusted for inflation alcohol has actually become cheaper over time.^{lvi}

Young drinkers, who are price sensitive, are particularly influenced by pricing policy. With less disposable income and different motivations for consuming alcohol than other age groups, youth can be easily drawn to beverages that are low in price but high in alcohol content. Most studies examining the relationship between alcohol price and underage youth drinking found that alcohol tax increases resulted in less drinking and fewer alcohol-related harms.^{lvii} The same effect has been identified in the adult population.^{lviii} Some studies have shown a difference in impact between the sexes, with women

more likely than men to alter their patterns of consumption in response to price changes.^{lix}

Systematic reviews of research literature from around the world show that evidence-based price control measures have a consistent impact and are effective at reducing a wide range of alcohol-related harms, including impaired driving, suicide, crime, sexually transmitted infections, and all types of violence.^{lx} When alcohol taxation was reduced in Finland, alcohol-related deaths increased by an estimated 17%. A review of 50 articles concluded that alcohol prices have a significant impact on violence, car crashes, and many other harms. This review estimated that doubling the alcohol tax would reduce alcohol-related mortality by an average of 35%.^{lxi}

Alcohol Pricing & Violence

Similar to alcohol access and availability, numerous studies have focused on the impact of alcohol pricing on violence. Two large systematic reviews found that decreases in alcohol prices consistently are associated with higher rates of all types of violence. The inverse also holds true: policy changes that result in price increases have been shown to be an effective violence prevention measure.^{lxii, lxiii}

Several authors have studied the impact of beer taxes on various forms of violence. Besides being the most common alcoholic beverage consumed in the US, beer is the drink of choice for young men – a demographic group that is disproportionately more likely to be involved in violent crime.^{lxiv} An American study found that beer taxes have an effect on violent crime, including homicide, assault, and robbery.^{lxv} Beer taxes have also been linked to violence against children, and severe violence specifically, in the US.^{lxvi} On US college campuses, state beer prices were found to be a predictor of fights.^{lxvii}

Alcohol Pricing & Sexual Violence

Alcohol pricing policies can influence the rate of sexual violence in a population. However, there is less research on alcohol and sexual assault than for other types of violence. While few studies identified sexual violence as a specific measure of harm, those that considered rape or sexual misconduct in relation to alcohol pricing found an association.

An American study of 32 colleges examined the impact of alcohol pricing on various types of campus violence, including the specific measures of being taken advantage of sexually or of taking sexual advantage of someone else. This act of violence was found to be inversely related to the price of beer in the

state in which the college was located – in other words, lower beer prices were related to higher rates of the crime.^{lxviii}

Another American study covering 48 states determined that state-imposed beer taxes affected the incidence of rape.^{lxix} The study authors concluded that a 10% increase in beer tax would result in a 1.32% reduction in rape. The available studies on pricing and sexual violence have focused on beer, which typically has lower alcohol content; this raises important questions about higher alcohol content beverages and sexual violence.

Alcohol Marketing

Overview

Alcohol is a heavily marketed product. Marketing encompasses a spectrum of strategies that includes advertising, promotions, sponsorships, and corporate social responsibility campaigns. The purpose of product marketing is to generate consumer demand, create brand loyalty, increase purchase frequency, and get consumers to try new items.^{lxx} Although there are restrictions placed upon alcohol marketing in Canada, it is still highly visible in outdoor venues, online, on traditional media such as television, at sporting events, and in many other settings.

Restricting the marketing of alcohol is an important part of any healthy public policy that strives to reduce alcohol-related harms, including sexual violence. Alcohol marketing has a twofold impact in this context. First, it has been shown to influence patterns of consumption, a contributing factor to sexual violence. Second, the content of alcohol advertisements and the strategies used to market alcohol are frequently hypersexualized and contain harmful messages about sexual availability and sexual success.

Alcohol Marketing & Consumption

Research has demonstrated that alcohol marketing does indeed influence drinking behaviour. Children and youth are especially vulnerable to persuasive techniques and marketing messages. A systematic review found the impact of alcohol advertising exposure on adolescent drinking was significant in 12 of the 13 studies included in the review. The studies measured advertising exposure through various media, including television and magazines, and in outdoor settings. The effect was strong even after controlling for other variables such as peer drinking and demographic characteristics. The exposure to advertising was found not only to predict initiation of drinking among non-drinkers, but also to increase consumption among current drinkers.^{lxxi} Research has demonstrated that young people's expectations related to alcohol use – including social success and sexual activity – are greatly shaped by the images and messages they receive from advertising.^{lxxii}

A concern that has emerged in recent years is the extent of youth exposure to alcohol marketing online. Many brands have moved away from traditional media advertising in favor of web-based marketing. The Internet is cheaper than traditional media; it reaches more people, more quickly; and it is a

strategic way to reach young consumers, who are very active online. In 2004 the Center on Alcohol Marketing to Youth published a report detailing the time that youth spent on alcohol product websites; researchers found that 13.1% of in-depth visits to 55 alcohol websites were by underage youth. Certain brands received more youth visitors than others, but approximately 60% of visitors to one distilled spirit site were underage. The report found that alcohol websites contain a number of features that appeal to youth, such as games, free downloadable content, and interactive elements.^{lxxiii} A study published in 2012 found that alcohol brands frequently engage with young people on Facebook with the use of status updates that encourage two-way communications.^{lxxiv}

Women and girls are increasingly a target audience for alcohol marketing. The historic gender gap in alcohol consumption presented an opportunity for profit that has resulted in targeted advertising, product development, corporate social responsibility campaigns, and other strategies to increase drinking among females. Research has shown that young girls are more exposed to alcohol advertising than either their male peers or women of other ages.^{lxxv} Products that were traditionally only marketed to men have begun to feature women in the ads, and advertisements that specifically target females have increased substantially. Product development has been a central marketing strategy for increasing consumption among females. Fruity, sweet beverages sometimes known as “alcopops” are heavily marketed to females, as are low-calorie drinks.^{lxxvi} Industry efforts have resulted in increased consumption among women and girls, so much so that in some regions and age groups, the gender gap in consumption has all but disappeared. In some cases, young girls are drinking more heavily than young boys.^{lxxvii, lxxviii}

Alcohol marketing, particularly that which associates brands with a specific lifestyle, is a proven means of increasing consumption. But since population level consumption of alcohol is associated with rates of sexual violence, the marketing of alcohol – and the explicit targeting of young people and females in particular – has implications for sexual violence.

Hypersexualization

Alcohol marketing frequently depicts sexual content, sexism, and messages intended to promote gender norms of masculinity and femininity. The increased likelihood of social and sexual success in relation to alcohol use is a common underlying theme.

Alcohol Marketing Content

In addition to its impact on consumption, the content of alcohol marketing campaigns can perpetuate a culture of sexual violence. Alcohol marketing frequently depicts sexual content, sexism, and messages intended to promote gender norms of masculinity and femininity. The increased likelihood of social and sexual success in relation to alcohol use is a common underlying theme. Although hypersexualized and gendered marketing do not cause sexual violence, they intersect with broader social and cultural norms that support sexualized violence. The effect of alcohol on psychological function can distort beliefs and expectations about the behaviour of others as well as oneself. In a culture that commonly associates alcohol consumption with sexual performance and sexual availability, alcohol use and other behaviours are more likely to be interpreted to meet the expectation. Some individuals may use alcohol in order to conform to this sexual ideal.^{lxxix}

Hypersexualization and sexual objectification across a broad range of industries, including the alcohol sector, have been shown to have a negative impact on the health and well-being of women and girls. The American Psychological Association (APA) Taskforce on the Sexualization of Girls states that sexualization occurs when sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person (e.g., a child); when a person is sexually objectified; when a person is valued only in relation to their sexual appeal; and/or when a person is considered sexy only if they conform to a narrowly defined category of physical attractiveness.^{lxxx} In addition to the harms of hypersexualization, advertising content may contribute to problematic assumptions about interest in and availability for sexual activity. Exposure to sexually objectifying

images is also associated with greater acceptance of rape myths and violence against women.^{lxxxix} As these images are frequently part of alcohol marketing, it is important to consider how this may shape public perspective about alcohol use by females and alcohol-facilitated sexual violence. The influence of hypersexualized alcohol marketing on societal norms and beliefs can perpetuate victim-blaming as well. A 2013 omnibus survey by the Canadian Women's Foundation found that 20% of Canadians think that a

Hypersexualization and sexual objectification across a broad range of industries, including alcohol, has been shown to negatively impact the health and well-being of women and girls.

woman encourages sexual assault when she is drunk.^{lxxxii}

Research has attempted to quantify sexualized advertising by assessing the prevalence of sexual connotations, sexism and/or sexual objectification.

The authors of one study on alcohol

advertising content in magazines classified sexual connotation as anytime "there is a clear implication of a sexual encounter (usually in the future) of the models in the ad or between the viewer and another person."^{lxxxiii} The authors also classified sexism/objectification as including any of the following:^{lxxxiv}

- Model(s) of one gender in unusually suggestive poses
- Model(s) of one gender wearing unusually suggestive clothing
- Model(s) of one gender depicted as the product itself or inside of a glass
- Comments about the model's appearance and/or thoughts and actions about the model

Using these definitions and criteria, these authors analyzed 2,638 alcohol advertisements in 11 magazines over a five-year period for sexism/objectification and sexual connotation. The magazines all had at minimum a 15% youth audience. Almost 20% of the ads had one or more sex-related codes assigned to them. Of the ads examined, 12.5% had sexual connotations and 8.3% had sexism/objectification. Sexism/objectification and sexual connotations were more frequent in beer ads.^{lxxxv}

In a similar study of national magazines conducted by the same research institution in the three following years, 17% of magazine ads included sex or sexual connotations.^{lxxxvi}

In addition to harmful messaging to and about women, men and boys are also targeted with alcohol marketing campaigns that promote ideals of hypermasculinity, sexual achievement, and aggression. Masculinity is linked with the ability to consume large quantities of alcohol. With young consumers, alcohol marketing has shifted from focusing on a product to promoting a brand identity. These brand identities "draw from and reinforce existing social beliefs, values, identities and lifestyles to promote a positive emotive response."^{lxxxvii} This is particularly influential on young men, who are forming masculine identities and an understanding of what it means to be in relationships. As one article notes, although the alcohol industry can't be held responsible for the existence of sexist or objectifying attitudes about women in society, it can be held responsible for perpetuating and reinforcing them.^{lxxxviii} In ads targeted at men, women are frequently portrayed as either admiring onlookers or objects of desire who exist for male consumption. The research literature has also noted that women who are featured in alcohol ads as girlfriends or wives are often cast as "bitches" who are trying to interfere with men having a good time.^{lxxxix}

The combination of sexism, hypersexualized and objectifying images, and messages linking alcohol consumption and sex supports and perpetuates a culture of sexual violence. With the failure of the industry to self-regulate, it is important for government to institute measures to reduce this form of advertising and address alcohol-facilitated sexual violence.

Government Monopoly of Alcohol Sales

In Atlantic Canada, alcohol is sold in each province through a government monopoly. With few exceptions the retail sale of alcohol only occurs in stores managed or controlled by a provincial liquor corporation that is accountable to the provincial government. Some provinces have licensed a small number of private stores to sell alcohol, with the liquor corporation acting as wholesaler. Restricted sales licenses are also available to craft breweries, farm wineries, and distilleries. The opposite of a government monopoly is privatization, which would open the alcohol market to many other retailers. Although established to control public access to alcohol and reduce alcohol-related harms, provincial liquor corporations are also in the business of generating revenue for their governments – which is

often a conflicting position. Despite this, government monopolies are best able to regulate alcohol outlet density, marketing and price while addressing the interests of consumers. There is evidence from multiple jurisdictions that deregulation and privatization result in increases in alcohol consumption, density and number of outlets, and access by minors.^{xc, xci}

Such changes to the alcohol policy environment correspond with increases in alcohol-related morbidity and mortality. The evidence shows that a government monopoly is the most effective and efficient model to establish and maintain alcohol policies that are in the best interest of public health and safety, including sexual violence prevention.

Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

Sexual violence is greatly under-reported in Canada, where it is estimated that only 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police. The available data on reported sexual assault shows that three of the four Atlantic Provinces have rates that are higher than the Canadian average.

This has implications for the lifelong health of individuals and communities. Victims of sexual violence may experience numerous harms at the time of the assault as well as poor health outcomes, including mental health issues, substance use, and increased risk for suicide, in the years that follow. Alcohol consumption, a common factor in sexual assaults, also is a significant issue in Atlantic Canada. The high percentage of sexual assaults that involve alcohol warrants attention by the injury and violence prevention communities. It is important that this issue be addressed in a manner that does not result in victim-blaming. There is strong evidence for a population health approach to preventing alcohol-facilitated sexual violence through alcohol policy.

Research literature clearly shows the effect of policies governing the sale and promotion of alcohol on a range of alcohol-related harms, including sexual violence. Policy governing the content and placement of alcohol marketing can address the objectification of women and girls and eliminate harmful messaging about alcohol and sex. Policies that address access to alcohol, the density of outlets, and pricing have been proven to reduce rates of alcohol-facilitated sexual assault. Policy can also combat the culture that normalizes sexual violence and reduce the rate of alcohol-facilitated sexual violence. Although alcohol policy measures will not prevent all incidents of sexual violence, there is persuasive evidence that it could contribute to a decrease. This has implications

not only for individuals and families but also for communities, health care, the justice system, and public institutions in Atlantic Canada.

Given the level of evidence for these policy measures, it is recommended that:

1. The injury prevention community prioritize sexual violence prevention as a serious public health and safety issue.
2. Efforts are made to enhance understanding among injury prevention practitioners of the role that alcohol policies play in alcohol-facilitated sexual violence.
3. The necessary resources and supports are put in place to improve data collection on alcohol-facilitated sexual violence.
4. Gaps in the research are identified and addressed.
5. Approaches to the prevention of alcohol-facilitated sexual violence in no way serve to re-victimize individuals through blaming and stigmatization.
6. Provincial approaches to sexual violence prevention incorporate actions that address the way in which alcohol is priced, accessed, sold, and marketed as a component of sexual violence prevention.

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