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# 'Pre-loading' new culture in alcohol

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## Melissa Davey

"PRE-LOADING" on alcohol before heading out to pubs and clubs is causing alcohol-related crime, violence, hospitalisation, assault and death.

Australia's largest study into alcohol-related nightlife crime has found people are increasingly drinking before they go out to avoid high alcohol prices in venues.

People who drank between six and 10 standard drinks before going out compared with those who did not "pre-drink" were twice as likely to get into trouble, the researchers found.

Some had drunk more than 25 standard drinks before even reaching the venue, quadrupling their risk of harm.

Police and public health experts say the drinking culture is out of control and laws must change to stop risky drinking.

Increasing the price of alcohol sold in liquor stores by introducing a levy on packaged drinks would curb the problem, said Deakin researcher and study lead author Peter Miller.

"We spent a lot of time trying to think of other ways to deal with pre-drinking and simply couldn't," Associate Professor Miller said.

"There are many people drinking around the corner from the pub, in their cars or in their homes, and it is so difficult for venues to detect that, unless someone is very obviously intoxicated when they arrive."

The study also recommended restricting trading hours across all venues rather than imposing lockouts, which Professor Miller said would stop people from drinking all night and in one place.

The "Dealing with Alcohol-related Harm and the Night-time Economy" study compared the effectiveness of alcohol-related crime prevention measures between 2005 and 2010 through licensing regulation in Newcastle and voluntary programs run in Geelong.

These included locking patrons out of clubs after 1.30am; banning alcohol shots after 10pm; limiting drink sales; and the use of ID scanners. Hospital and police data was also reviewed and almost 4000 pub and club patrons were interviewed.

Professor Miller said the number of assaults in Newcastle dropped during the study, but stayed the same in Geelong, as the measures implemented there were voluntary.

"They were more focused on reducing violent crime after people were already drunk, which is far too late," he said.

The tragic impact of alcohol was seen in one high-profile case with the death in July of 18-year-old Thomas Kelly who was king-hit in an unprovoked attack in Kings Cross.

Two weeks ago, New South Wales Police Commissioner, Andrew Scipione said he was "appalled" and "frightened" by the number of drink-related fatalities, injuries and crimes.

The chairman of the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund, Detective Superintendent Tony Cooke, said there had been a shift in drinking culture, contributing to the violence. "Culturally we have to look at why we're going out to get sauced up, rather than to enjoy the night out," he said.

"Drinking levels are clearly increasing, pre-loading is a bigger issue, venues are open later than they used to be and an issue for us all to look at is off-licence premises and the sale of packaged liquor."

A leading professor of public health and co-chairman of the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, Mike Daube, said the study provided clear measures for the government to implement. "Our society seems to accept night-time violence as inevitable, but this study shows that we can do something about it," Professor Daube said.

"The most important message is that robust approaches to alcohol licensing and control work."

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