

A rapid narrative review of the evidence

The impact of on-premise trading hours on alcohol use and related harms

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Executive Summary

Background

On-premise alcohol trading hours are a key policy lever used to regulate alcohol availability and reduce alcohol-related harm. Changes to trading hours have been widely implemented across Australia and comparable jurisdictions, raising questions about their impact on alcohol use and related harms. A rapid narrative review was undertaken to examine the relationship between on-premise trading hour policies, alcohol use and alcohol-related harms.

Methods

A systematic search was conducted across four databases for systematic and narrative reviews published from 2005 to 2025, to identify eligible reviews. Single studies and government or research reports were also identified through manual searching. Together, these publications assessed the outcomes of key policy interventions across Australia, the UK, NZ, US, Canada and Norway that involved changes to trading hours. Data were extracted using Covidence, and a narrative synthesis was undertaken. The review is presented in two parts: i) the development, consistency and strength of the evidence as reported by review studies, and ii) findings from key interventions that have extended trading hours, reduced trading hours, or included trading hours restrictions alongside other policies.

Findings

Across the evidence base, several clear patterns emerged:

- **Extensions to trading hours are linked to increased harm, particularly when they involve late-night trading.** The most consistent evidence relates to extensions that permit alcohol service after midnight, when alcohol-related violence and injury are most concentrated. Even small increases in trading hours – often as little as one hour extended into the late night or early morning period – are consistently associated with increases in alcohol-related harms, particularly violent crime and injuries. This relationship is strongest in studies using quasi-experimental designs with appropriate comparison sites. For example, in Perth (WA), a longitudinal study found that each additional late trading venue was associated with a 4.6% increase in night-time emergency department presentations, compared with a 0.6% increase for venues trading standard hours. Internationally, a quasi-experimental study across 18 Norwegian cities found a 16% increase in police-reported violent crime for each one-hour extension to bar closing times.
- **Road safety outcomes linked to trading hours are variable.** The impact of extended trading hours on alcohol-related crashes is less consistent, largely reflecting the influence of local conditions such as transport availability, traffic flow, and concurrent road safety initiatives. For example, in Perth (WA), extended hotel trading hours were associated with increases in alcohol-related road crashes, particularly those involving impaired drivers following late-night alcohol sales. Internationally, a one-hour extension in closing times in Ontario, Canada was associated with increases in alcohol-related traffic injuries in early-morning hours, alongside no overall change in traffic fatalities. The authors attributed this to concurrent road-safety initiatives such as graduated licensing and licence suspension policies.

- **Reductions in trading hours reliably decrease alcohol-related harms.** Studies evaluating early closing times report immediate and sometimes substantial reductions in violence, including serious assaults and homicides. In Newcastle (NSW), reducing on-premise trading hours from 5am to 3.30am was associated with a 37% reduction in night-time assaults, with effects sustained for at least five years. Subsequent analyses indicate that the largest reductions occurred after the earlier closing time, rather than the lockdown, reinforcing the central role of trading hour restrictions. Internationally, Norwegian municipalities that reduced bar closing times experienced an estimated 20% reduction in assaults for each hour of reduced trading.
- **Multi-component interventions** that include trading hour restrictions tend to produce the largest and most sustained reductions in harm. These interventions also illustrate the challenge of isolating individual policy effects, yet they reinforce the central role of trading hours as a key lever within broader regulatory packages. For example, in Sydney's CBD and Kings Cross, a package of measures that included a 3am cessation of alcohol service was associated with 13–40% reductions in assaults in the CBD and 22–49% reductions in Kings Cross, alongside a 24% reduction in serious alcohol-related injury emergency department presentations.
- **Context matters.** The magnitude of effects may vary by neighbourhood characteristics, patron mix, outlet density and the degree to which venues adopt new trading hours. However, the direction of effects remains largely consistent across settings and jurisdictions. For example, in Queensland, precinct-level analyses showed that higher densities of late-trading on-premise venues were associated with significantly higher rates of serious assault, while precincts dominated by earlier-closing venues experienced fewer assaults. In the United Kingdom, studies evaluating the *Licensing Act 2003* found little overall change in levels of violence in some locations and shifts in alcohol-related offences to later hours, likely reflecting low uptake of extended hours by venues and preexisting late-night trading.

Conclusion

Evidence across multiple jurisdictions is largely consistent that extensions are associated with increased alcohol-related harms. Meanwhile, there is good evidence that reductions in trading hours of even one hour, can significantly reduce alcohol-related harms. Evidence suggests trading hours should be considered as a foundational component of alcohol harm minimisation strategies, particularly when designing or evaluating multi-component interventions.

Declarations

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