Guidance for local partnerships on alcohol-related crime and disorder data
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Home Office Development and Practice Reports draw out from research the messages for practice development, implementation and operation. They are intended as guidance for practitioners in specific fields. The recommendations explain how and why changes could be made, based on the findings from research, which would lead to better practice.

The guidance provided in this report should be viewed within the context of the Government's ongoing work on alcohol misuse, especially the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy by the Cabinet Office’s Strategy Unit, working closely with key government departments, and the Licensing Bill.

Introduction

This report provides guidance to local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) on how best to gather and utilise data on alcohol-related crime and disorder. Specifically, it focuses on the collection and analysis of alcohol-related crime and disorder data within the context of conducting audits under the terms of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. The report:

- considers how the term ‘alcohol-related crime and disorder’ may be interpreted for the purposes of auditing
- summarises a range of data sources and the types of data potentially available to CDRPs for measuring alcohol-related crime and disorder at the local level
- describes different – but complementary – approaches to the measurement of alcohol-related crime and disorder, which address the issue of linking alcohol consumption to crime and disorder
- highlights issues CDRPs and individual organisations must consider to ensure a coordinated and informed approach to auditing when collecting, analysing and sharing data.

Purpose of an audit

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act placed a statutory duty on local authorities and the police to carry out audits of local crime and disorder. Audits constitute the basis for:

- assessing the current ‘shape’ of local crime and disorder problems
- selecting local crime and disorder priorities (in consultation with other organisations and the public)
- informing crime and disorder reduction target-setting
- measuring progress made against those targets.

The importance of routine profiling

Although the 1998 Act set in place a three-yearly cycle for auditing and strategy setting, it is important that audits are not simply seen as a three-yearly compulsory exercise, but as at least annual exercises that enable CDRPs to monitor progress against their strategic plans on an ongoing basis. Routine profiling involves the regular and periodic analysis of data in order to assess the progress made by a programme. Once a common partnership planning and data sharing and strategy monitoring process is in place, CDRPs may find that quarterly is an appropriate time frame for the routine profiling of data. However, decisions regarding the frequency of profiling will be guided by local circumstances and, in some cases, the time frames used by an agency to record data.

Strategic priorities

Drawing on the results of the audit and consultation process, CDRPs are required to:

- publish a three-year strategy reflecting the local crime and disorder reduction priorities
- implement the strategy
- set outcome measures
- monitor, adjusting objectives and targets as necessary.

Because alcohol consumption as such is not a crime or a form of disorder, ‘drinking’ (apart from possibly underage drinking) will not be a strategic priority for CDRPs. However, strategic priorities are likely to consist of offences that, to a greater or lesser extent, may be linked with alcohol. Therefore, the outcomes to which auditing and routine profiling are oriented will incorporate targets based on a reduction in these alcohol-related offences.
Consumption of alcohol may be implicated in a range of crime or disorder incidents:

- violent behaviour
- anti-social behaviour
- disorderly behaviour
- acquisitive crime
- criminal damage.

Note: Although local CDRPs will identify their own strategic priorities based on local circumstances, they are also expected to make a significant contribution to meeting national crime and disorder reduction targets.

First round audits and strategies

The first round of crime and disorder audits was conducted in 1998, with further rounds occurring every three years thereafter. A Home Office evaluation of the first round audits found that over 70 per cent of audit documents mentioned alcohol as an issue. However, partnerships had not focused systematically on the issue when collecting data, and alcohol did not emerge as a clearly defined priority in subsequent strategy documents (Deehan and Saville, 2000). This illustrated the general lack of knowledge about local patterns and contexts of alcohol-related crime and disorder which may be impeding the development of appropriate criminal justice and public health interventions.

Defining alcohol-related crime and disorder

A small number of statutory offences are defined as alcohol-related. These include:

- offences where alcohol consumption by the accused party is intrinsically related to the offence (e.g. drink-driving, drunk and disorderly, aggravated drunkenness, death by careless driving while under the influence of alcohol)
- offences relating to specific circumstances where a third party has consumed alcohol, irrespective of whether the accused has done so (e.g. supplying a firearm to a drunken person).

For the purposes of CDRPs, however, defining ‘alcohol-related crime and disorder’ is difficult.

First, using only the statutory definition is problematic because, although some statutory offences are defined as alcohol-related, data are only routinely collected and published on three of these statutory alcohol-related offence types (death by careless driving whilst under the influence of alcohol, and drunkenness in charge of ships and of aircraft). The remaining statutory alcohol-related offences are summary offences, for example drunk and disorderly, and are therefore excluded from standard quantification.

Using the statutory definition is further complicated by the fact that instances of many other offence types, for example violent crime and criminal damage, as well as many forms of disorder, may be committed following or in the context of alcohol use, but do not appear in official statistics as being related to alcohol.

It is therefore important that CDRPs consider broadening the statutory definitions of alcohol-related crime to cover the full extent of alcohol-related crime and disorder and utilise all relevant data sources available locally. Other information, including local information, will be available and useful for quantifying these other types of crime and disorder.

In the present report alcohol-related crime and disorder is defined as instances of crime and disorder that occurred, and/or occurred at that level of seriousness, because alcohol consumption was a contributory factor.

Key data sources for local partnerships

A wide range of sources of data are available, or potentially available, to local CDRPs for auditing and profiling. They are not listed in order of priority because data relevance and availability will vary from one area to another. They include:

Public provider data sources

- Police
- British Transport Police
- Probation Service
- Youth Offending Teams
- NHS Accident and Emergency Departments
- Ambulance Service
- Drug Action Team.

Local authority data sources

- Social Services
- Education
- Housing
- Environmental Services
- Technical Services
- Planning
- City Centre Management.
Other data sources

- Licensed Premises
- Alcohol-Related Initiatives
- CCTV
- Bus Services
- Alcohol and Drug Advisory/Treatment Services
- Victim Support
- Domestic Violence Forums, Women’s Aid
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres
- Services for Homeless Persons
- Football Stadia
- Consultation and Surveys
- Local Research Data Collection/Analysis Facilities.

From each of the above sources more than one relevant data type may be collected. For example, alcohol-related crime and disorder data may be found in Police incident, custody and crime records (see Table 1).

Data collection and analysis

It is recommended that CDRPs use two complementary approaches to the collection and analysis of data:

- A direct approach which is based on establishing a link between alcohol consumption on the part of a specific offender and a specific offence.

- An indirect approach which does not require linking specific offences to specific offenders but relates to incidents which may be connected with alcohol consumption through their location, timing or context of occurrence.

The direct approach

The direct approach can be used to collect and analyse data relating to ‘offenders’ who are judged to have been drinking prior to the ‘offence’. Police are the most obvious source of direct data, but there are others, including the Probation Service, Youth Offending Teams and CCTV operators.

In a minority of offence types, the measurable presence of alcohol defines the offence (for example, drink-driving offences) and are for that reason intrinsically alcohol-related. In the vast majority of cases, however, alcohol is not a pre-defining feature of a criminal or disorderly act, nor will its presence be ‘tested’ as such. The presence of alcohol will therefore be based on subjective judgement. It is both necessary and reasonable that CDRPs collect data from sources where subjective judgements have been made; otherwise little or no direct data would be collected.

If a subjective decision has been made about the involvement of alcohol, it is not possible to be certain that the incident would not have occurred anyway or would have been as serious if the offender had not been drinking. However, CDRPs cannot realistically conform to a standard of proof that would satisfy the scientific community, and are not expected to do so. The data collected have to be seen as indicative of the contribution of alcohol to an act of crime or disorder.

All crime and disorder data are to some extent flawed. Some offences, such as domestic violence and racial harassment, remain relatively ‘hidden’. This does not mean that because something cannot be measured, or measured to a high degree of accuracy, it is not a problem. This is important when considering alcohol-related crime and disorder.

The indirect approach

The indirect approach is potentially the more productive approach for CDRPs in the collection and analysis of local data; it can also be used to complement data provided from a direct approach.

According to this approach, a decision does not need to be made – subjective or otherwise – about the involvement of alcohol in specific cases. Instead, the indirect approach looks at incidents known to be commonly linked to alcohol misuse.

In the indirect approach, data are collected relating to, on the one hand, incidents/offences and victimisation and, on the other, spatial, temporal and contextual data. For example, data on the incidence of assaults or disorderly behaviour (using police incident data), or data on facial injuries caused by a weapon (using A&E data) can be examined for location and time of occurrence, enabling the identification of likely alcohol-related crime and disorder hotspots.

Data on the incidence of violent or disorderly behaviour might also be linked with other data such as changes to transport or licensing to more fully understand the effect they may have on prevalence and patterns of alcohol-related crime and disorder.

Data sources and their utility: a summary

A great deal of research in this country and elsewhere has examined the link between alcohol consumption and various types of crime and disorder using the direct and indirect approaches. CDRPs need to access local research of this type. Table 1 summarises the utility of a number of sources of data likely to be available at the local level for monitoring and auditing alcohol-related crime and disorder, and indicates whether the information provided is relevant to the direct or indirect approach.
Table 1: Summary of valuable data sources for auditing and profiling local alcohol-related crime and disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Utility</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police incident data</td>
<td>‘Final’ codes provide a crude indicator of the presence of alcohol in a specific incident of crime or disorder. Times and locations of incidents provide indicators of alcohol-related crime and disorder.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police crime data</td>
<td>Crime report forms may include ‘interest markers’ that indicate alcohol as a factor relevant to the offence in some way. Times and locations of crime, especially violent crime, provide indicators of alcohol-related crime and disorder.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police custody data</td>
<td>Custody records provide information on an arrestee’s condition including signs of intoxication.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Offending Team data</td>
<td>Data may provide an indication of whether alcohol use is regarded an influencing factor in offending in individual cases (especially data supplied by police in the first instance).</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS Hospital A&amp;E case notes</td>
<td>Various case note information categories provide indicators of alcohol use, involvement in crime and disorder or both.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance Service patient record form</td>
<td>Key data fields enable data relating to types and severity of injuries to be linked to spatial and temporal data.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services care assessment files</td>
<td>Care Assessment files contain, where relevant and disclosed, information relating to alcohol misuse and either victimisation or offending.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities/Police/Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs); Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs)</td>
<td>ASBOs are available to local authorities, the police and RSLs to help curtail persistent anti-social behaviour. ABCs can also be used to curb disorder. Information relevant to ASBOs or ABCs may be stored on a database held by the responsible authority which can be searched to determine if alcohol has been recorded as a relevant factor in antisocial behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing departments’ homelessness case records</td>
<td>Alcohol may be disclosed as being a relevant issue for someone who is homeless or is about to become homeless due to a violent relationship. Where recorded this may provide useful information on incidence of alcohol-related domestic violence.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Services street cleansing records</td>
<td>If formal recording practices were introduced, street cleansing data could provide spatial and temporal data on problems associated with alcohol-related disorder.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTV Incident Log database</td>
<td>Logs can record details of incidents of crime and disorder as well as operators’ judgements about intoxication in the participants. As with police incident data, times and locations of incidents logged provide indicators of alcohol-related crime and disorder.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus (and Taxi) Services incident forms</td>
<td>Records of incidents of crime and disorder may make reference to alcohol if relevant. Some databases enable the mapping of incidents of crime and disorder spatially and temporally.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault Referral Centre case files</td>
<td>Case files record whether the victim or perpetrator (according to the victim) is intoxicated at the time of an alleged offence.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The importance of context

The context in which incidents occur is of central importance for making the link between alcohol misuse and crime and disorder within the indirect approach. Context is also key to understanding how or why patterns of alcohol-related crime and disorder – as determined in the direct approach – change over time. CDRPs might therefore seek to understand the backdrop to trends in alcohol-related crime and disorder by examining sources of contextual data.

Contextual data relate to broader aspects of life within a locality and have a bearing on the amount and type of crime and disorder. Examples of such contextual data include:

- demographic change
- unemployment rates
- truancy rates
- location and density of licensed premises
- developments in the night-time economy.

An important context is the night-time economy. Data relating to the night-time economy are likely to be of particular interest to CDRPs because, though not exclusively, it is a setting in which alcohol-related crime and disorder is likely to occur. Intoxication, at least in places, is the norm and significant levels of violence and disorder have been shown to exist in this context. It is also one of the most likely contexts to be amenable to intervention. The night-time economy has expanded significantly in recent years. Consequently, CDRPs might collect data on:

- public entertainment licences issued
- where and when drink promotions are run
- licence extensions issued and utilised
- the general ‘shape’ of the night-time economy.

Co-ordination

The process of auditing is intended to be ‘joined up’ as part of an holistic approach to problems of crime and disorder. The following issues relate to this wider function of CDRPs and not just to the auditing or profiling of alcohol-related crime and disorder, although some are likely to be more acute in relation to alcohol.

Consistency

The most effective way of examining trends is for agencies to establish data measurement tools that are used repeatedly and consistently over time. CDRPs should encourage consistency of data collection methods over time wherever possible. Periodically, however, improved methods of data collection may be identified and it is important that the implications of any definitional or methodological changes are identified and communicated to others who use and interpret the data.

Partnerships should note the impact the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), introduced in April 2002, will have on recorded crime figures in their locality. Taking a victim-oriented approach to crime recording, the NCRS promotes greater consistency of crime recording between police forces, but will in some areas result in apparently increased crime rates.

Mainstreaming

CDRPs should encourage the ‘mainstreaming’ of data. This is the collection and analysis of data as part of routine working practices by participant organisations.

A difficult issue is encouraging a non-statutory organisation or service to invest in data mainstreaming resources when it has not done so traditionally. Addressing alcohol-related crime and disorder data adds another dimension to this. However, the costs of ongoing monitoring and feeding into the crime and disorder audit and strategy process is likely to be offset by the rewards it brings in crime reduction and appropriate targeting of resources for initiatives.

Data sharing

Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act gives public bodies the power to share information if it is aimed at reducing crime and disorder in accordance with the provisions of the Act. As a result of this, many CDRPs have local, generic data-sharing protocols in place, although these vary in detail and there are some problems regarding the extent of data sharing. A primary concern relates to confidentiality of patient records within health services. To overcome this, when sharing information personal data should be anonymised, thereby removing the potential for the identification of individuals. Any additional concerns may be allayed by the aggregation of data; a Partnership should not require any greater level of detail than this for the purposes of monitoring, data auditing or routine profiling.

Some Partnership members, such as licensees, may collect relevant data but, being non-public organisations, are under no obligation to share this with CDRPs. CDRPs will need to build relations with such members to create a culture in which information can be shared without inviting criticism on those organisations. Development of protocols may facilitate this.
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Good practice recommendations for CDRPs

- Police data from incident, crime and custody reports should be seen as core data and sources of both direct and indirect data. Such data are collected routinely and can easily be collated for CDRP purposes.
- A&E departments and ambulance services are also likely to provide useful sources of indirect data, providing victimisation, spatial (to identify ‘hotspots’) and temporal (to identify peak periods) data.
- Developments in the night-time leisure market oriented towards drinking and entertainment provide useful contextual data. Planning departments and local environmental services (responsible for processing public entertainment licence applications) can yield significant, relevant data.
- Partnerships should make clear precisely what data are required from contributing agencies and organisations, and encourage them to collect and analyse these data.
- Data should be collected and analysed as part of normal working practices. Data management systems that encourage and facilitate the mainstreaming of data by local partners and other relevant organisations should be developed. If data can contribute to reductions in crime and disorder, this is likely to have a positive impact on an organisation’s primary function.
- Generally, routine profiling should take place quarterly.
- Using data to make meaningful comparisons over time requires a degree of uniformity and consistency in data collection.
  - It is important that organisations collect and analyse data consistently over time as far as possible.
  - Where this is not possible, the effect of inconsistency in data collection methods should be clearly acknowledged when reporting and sharing data.
  - CDRPs should be aware of the impact the recent introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard and local policing policy and organisation will have on police crime data.
- CDRPs will need to take local circumstances, including available expertise and resources, into consideration. Where possible, relevant local research projects should be carried out. CDRPs might also look to specialised departments or individual researchers within local academic institutions for relevant research or assistance.

Specific data development recommendations

- The police should inform CCTV control rooms of reported incidents that are officially recorded. This will allow non-recorded incidents to be filtered out. A further recommendation is that police and CCTV controllers use the same incident coding system.
- Ambulance Service location codes should be specific wherever possible: e.g. ‘licensed premises’ rather than ‘public space’.
- Environmental Services departments, in relation to the night-time economy, could provide annual reports for CDRPs on current policies and public entertainment licences issued or denied.

Conclusions

- Alcohol consumption is a significant contributory factor with respect to a wide range of offences, in particular, violence and disorderly and anti-social behaviour.
- CDRPs are expected to play a role in developing strategies that will minimise the crime and disorder risks, including those posed by alcohol consumption.
- Building up a picture of local crime and disorder problems through a properly conducted audit is the basis for development of appropriate strategies.
- CDRPs are expected to take the views of the community into consideration via processes of consultation.
- A range of relevant and useful alcohol-related crime and disorder data is available, at least potentially.
- Auditing crime and disorder is complex and there are problems associated with all data sources. However, these problems are not intractable.
- Progress for understanding local alcohol-related crime and disorder problems can only be based on what data are available, and CDRPs are only expected to work to a realistic, rather than scientific, standard of proof.
There is a key distinction between the ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ approach to data collection and interpretation.

Developments in the night-time economy are of key importance for understanding one context in which crime and disorder often occur.

CDRPs should inform partner agencies and others precisely what is required of them and encourage organisations to collect and analyse data that are, in most cases, readily available.

Background

This guidance is based on the findings from research carried out at four sites: City A, a major urban centre with a youthful age structure and a rapidly growing city centre population; City B, with a population half that of City A, but one of the most densely populated parts of England; Town A, with a population one third of City B, a large market town in a mixed urban and rural area; Town B, with only one fifth of the population of Town A, but a market town with a large rural hinterland.

The research was conducted through interviews with primary statutory providers and other relevant bodies and organisations and interviews and more informal discussions to find out how agencies came into contact with alcohol and crime and disorder issues and in what ways, if at all, it impacted on their work.

Recording methods, the formats in which data were kept, and any software available for data analysis were examined. Periodically, formal meetings were held with key personnel from community safety/crime reduction partnerships. People working in the retail trade, leisure industry and the night-time economy were also interviewed. The researchers were able to attend, as observers, meetings of various local groups and organisations and also observed operational policing and recording techniques and CCTV system operation.
The Home Office Passport to Evaluation a new distance learning package looking at the basic techniques used to evaluate crime reduction projects. See especially Part 3, pages 64-78 on principles of data gathering and analysis: www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/evaluation.htm

The Home Office Using Intelligence & Information toolkit, covering analytical techniques and products for effective intelligence/information, and processes for effective information processing: www.crimereduction.co.uk/toolkits/uti01.htm

References

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