

Do relaxed trading hours for bars and clubs mean more relaxed drinking? A review of international research on the impacts of changes to permitted hours of drinking

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Abstract

Trading hours of licensed premises have been progressively relaxed since World War II across much of the English-speaking world as part of a global trend towards liquor deregulation. This review was informed by a systematic search of studies published in the English language since 1965 which sought to evaluate the public health and safety impacts of changes to liquor trading hours for on premise consumption - namely "pubs" and clubs in the UK, hotels and taverns in Australia and New Zealand and bars in North America. The systematic search was supplemented by materials identified from the "grey literature", mostly government reports. A total of 49 unique studies met our inclusion criteria of which only 14 included baseline and control measures and were peer-reviewed. Among these, 11 reported at least one significant outcome indicating adverse effects of increased hours or benefits from

reduced hours. Controlled studies with fewer methodological problems were also most likely to report such effects. It is suggested that differences between findings from Australia and the UK following the 2003 Licensing Act are most likely due to differences in methodological approach. It is concluded that the balance of reliable evidence from the available international literature suggests that extended late-night trading hours lead to increased consumption and related harms. Further well-controlled studies are required to confirm this conclusion.

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