

Drunk and disorganised: relationships between bar characteristics and customer intoxication in European drinking environments

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Published

2012

Publisher

International journal of environmental research and public health

Type

Journal article

Volume

9

Issue

11

Page(s)

4068-82

Abstract

Preventing alcohol-related harm in drinking environments is a growing international priority. Factors relating to the physical, social and staffing environments in bars can contribute to increased alcohol consumption and harm. Understanding the relationships between such factors and intoxication in European drinking environments is critical to developing appropriate interventions. We undertook a quantitative observational study in 60 bars in four European cities, in The Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and the UK (n = 237 observational visits). Using a structured observational schedule, researchers recorded characteristics of the bar environment and rated customer intoxication levels. All physical bar characteristics showed associations with intoxication before interactions between them were controlled for. Hierarchical modelling found significant independent associations between intoxication and use of plastic glassware, promotion of non-alcoholic drinks (often energy drinks), permissive environments, poor washroom facilities, the presence of a dance floor, customer sexual activity/competitiveness and later observational time. Findings suggest that prevention efforts should focus on raising and enforcing managerial standards in bars. While harm reduction measures such as plastic glassware are often promoted for high risk bars, such measures are inadequate to address public health concerns and insufficient to demonstrate social responsibility.

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