

Effects of restricting pub closing times on night-time assaults in an Australian city

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Abstract

Aims In March 2008 the New South Wales judiciary restricted pub closing times to 3 a.m., and later 3.30 a.m., in the central business district (CBD) of Newcastle, Australia. We sought to determine whether the restriction reduced the incidence of assault. **Design** Non-equivalent control group design with before and after observations. **Setting** Newcastle, a city of 530 000 people. **Participants** People apprehended for assault in the CBD and nearby Hamilton, an area with a similar night-time economy but where no restriction was imposed. **Measurements** Police-recorded assaults in the CBD before and after the restriction were compared with those in Hamilton. Cases were assaults occurring from 10 p.m.-6 a.m. from January 2001-March 2008, with April 2008-September 2009 as the post-restriction period. We also examined changes in assault incidence by time of night. Negative binomial regression with time, area, time-area interaction terms and terms for secular trend and seasonal effects was used to analyse the data. Autocorrelation was examined using generalized estimating equations. **Findings** In the CBD, recorded assaults fell from 99.0 per quarter before the restriction to 67.7 per quarter afterward [incidence rate ratio (IRR): 0.66, 95% confidence interval (CI): 0.55-0.80]. In the same periods in Hamilton, assault rates were 23.4 and 25.5 per quarter, respectively (IRR: 1.02, 95% CI: 0.79-1.31). The relative reduction attributable to the intervention was 37% (IRR = 0.63, 95% CI: 0.47-0.81) and approximately 33 assault incidents were prevented per quarter. **Conclusion** This study indicates that a restriction in pub closing times to 3/3.30 a.m. in Newcastle, NSW, produced a large relative reduction in assault incidence of 37% in comparison to a control locality.

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