

Restriction of the hours of sale of alcohol in a small community: a beneficial impact.

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Published

1998

Publisher

Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health

Type

Journal article

Volume

22

Issue

6

Page(s)

714-9

Abstract

The population of Halls Creek, a small town in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia, is predominantly Aboriginal. After many years of high alcohol consumption, a number of measures were taken in an effort to redress its negative influence on the community. Key among these was a restriction on the trading hours when 'take-away' alcohol was available. The effects of this intervention were monitored by examining longitudinal patterns of alcohol consumption, incidence of crime and outpatient data at the local hospital. The data were compared with equivalent periods prior to the restricted trading hours. A decrease in alcohol consumption was observed for each of the two years following the intervention. Overall, incidence of crime declined. Alcohol-related presentations to the hospital and presentations resulting from domestic violence decreased relative to the equivalent quarterly period prior to the intervention. There were short-term fluctuations observed, particularly with domestic violence, where presentations (of lesser severity) became more frequent during several quarters. Emergency

evacuations as a result of injury showed a marked decrease. The consistency of trends across a variety of health and social data show a positive effect after the implementation of restricted trading hours. While a direct effect is likely, a multitude of concurrent programs which promote health in the community place limitations on this conclusion. The process in achieving change, supported by statutory measures, has, however, been successful in curbing the morbidity and mortality experienced by the community.

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