



A – Z Introductory Guide to Health and Social Care

Alcohol Problems

Brief description

Alcohol problems include the short-term consequences of binge drinking, such as acute intoxication and social disorder, and long-term consequences such as liver disease and alcohol-related death.

Background

There are many positive aspects to the use of alcohol within Scottish culture. The industry and associated trades benefit the economy in a number of ways. Drinking small amounts is compatible with a healthy lifestyle.

However, when alcohol is misused, there can be serious problems for individuals, those around them and for society as a whole. Concerns include: the range of effects on physical and mental health; accidents and injuries; harmful effects on others, for example, because of violence and crime; drink driving; harmful patterns of drinking, especially binge drinking; and particular problems experienced by groups such as children and young people, people in rural areas, equality groups and homeless people.

Recent research estimates that alcohol problems cost Scotland at least £1 billion each year. Much of this is accounted for by reduced productivity and human costs. The rest results from costs to NHSScotland and social work and criminal justice services.

National Policy and Key Developments

A Plan for Action on alcohol problems was published in January 2002. The key priorities in the Plan are to reduce binge drinking, because of the harmful social and individual consequences, and to reduce harmful drinking by children and young people, because of the particular health and social risks.

Mind the Gaps : the Report of a Joint Working Group on meeting the needs of people with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health problems (2002).

Alcohol Problems Support and Treatment Services Framework : This framework is aimed at all who plan, commission and manage support and treatment services for people with alcohol problems in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors (2002).

Anti-Social Behaviour (Scotland) Act introduced in Autumn 2004. Anti-social behaviour encompasses a wide range of behaviour including street drinking, noisy pubs and clubs and drunken behaviour.

Key recent/current issues and developments

- £10m has been allocated to alcohol treatment services in 2005/6, fulfilling a commitment made in the Partnership Agreement to double resources in this area;
- Communication campaigns are intended to raise awareness about the specific risks to women from harmful alcohol consumption and start to tackle Scotland's binge drinking culture;
- The Plan for Action on Alcohol Problems is due to be updated in Autumn 2005. This will restate the Executive's commitment to long term culture change and propose a number of new actions to reduce alcohol-related harm;
- A review of Alcohol Action Teams is scheduled to take place during 2005/6;
- The Licensing Bill gives new powers to local Licensing Boards to tackle over-provision and irresponsible promotions.

Indication of volume/costs/trends

In 1999, almost two thirds (72%) of victims of assault, who could tell, thought the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol.¹

In 2000, 41% of men, aged 16-74, were drinking at levels hazardous to their health (as measured by an AUDIT score of 8 or more). 15% of women, aged 16-74, were drinking hazardously.²

In 2002, for those aged 16 and over, the average weekly alcohol consumption was 17.7 units for men and 6.7 units for women.³

In 2002, an estimated 820 accidents involving 1,270 non-fatal and 50 fatal casualties in Scotland were estimated to result from drunk driving.⁴

In 2002/03 the estimated costs of alcohol for Scotland were: health service (£110.5 million); social work (£96.7 million); criminal justice (£276.7 million); wider economic costs (£417.8 million) and human costs (£223.8 million).⁵

In 2003, 73% of men and 59% of women aged 16 and over reported having had a drink on at least one day during the previous week.⁶

In 2003, alcohol abuse was viewed as the third most serious social issue in Scotland, with 79% of respondents feeling alcohol abuse was an 'extremely' or 'quite' serious issue

¹ MVA (2002) Violence in Scotland: Findings from the 2000 Scottish Crime Survey

² Singleton, N. et al (2001) Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000 [Internet] ONS

³ General Household Survey 2003

⁴ Scottish Executive (2004) Road Accidents Scotland 2003

⁵ Scottish Executive (2004) Recorded Crime in Scotland 2003

⁶ General Household Survey 2003

compared with 91% concerned about drug abuse and 83% concerned about crime. The proportion concerned about alcohol abuse had risen from 70% in 2000.⁷

In 2003, there were 11,566 recorded offences of drunk driving; this was 6% higher than the 1993 figure of 10,905 offences.⁸

Pressures on services

The problems resulting from alcohol misuse are not solely the remit of specialist alcohol teams but are to be found right across the health and social care services. The indirect spend across health, social work and criminal justice services is around £500 million per year.

Implications for Joint Working

The Plan for Action on Alcohol Problems states that tackling alcohol [problems] is the responsibility of everyone in Scotland and emphasizes the need for joint working, communication, co-operation and collaboration at national and local level.

Local implementation of the Plan is the responsibility of local Alcohol and Drug Action Teams (ADATs). Their remit is to bring together local delivery agencies, voluntary sector, industry, community and service user interests, draw up local strategies to address alcohol problems and to implement these strategies.

ADATs will work within the community planning framework. Their strategies will need to join up with other relevant local plans including those for health services, children's services, drugs and community care.

Relevant legislation and statutory guidance

The Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 (as amended): This governs the sale and supply of alcohol. The Act places controls on the circumstances in which alcohol can be sold and the people who sell it. The Laws are structured to allow provisions to be applied locally to reduce the social problems associated with alcohol misuse. There is a separate licensing board in each local authority area and these boards have sole responsibility for all licensing matters within their area. The Scottish Executive has no locus to intervene in their decisions.

The Licensing (Scotland) Bill published in March 2005 will introduce a new licensing regime based on the five principles of preventing crime and disorder, securing public safety, preventing public nuisance, protecting and improving public health and protecting children from harm. The Bill ensures that communities will have an active role in helping to develop local policies and provides a platform for local Licensing Boards to tackle "binge drinking" and under-age drinking.

⁷ Scottish Crime Survey 2003

⁸ Scottish Executive (2004) Recorded Crime in Scotland 2003

The Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997: Section 61 of this Act provides police with powers to confiscate alcohol from underage drinkers in public places, and from those over 18 who are suspected of supplying alcohol to underage drinkers. This is a practical measure which can reduce the local impact and nuisance which results from underage drinking.

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973: Under this Act local authorities have the power to introduce byelaws for the prevention and suppression of nuisances in any part of their area. Many local authorities have used this power to make byelaws prohibiting drinking in public, in areas where there had previously been problems.

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980: Designated places where the police can take drunk and incapable people - thus keeping them out of the criminal justice system - were introduced under section 5 of the 1980 Act. The legislation was introduced as part of a policy for decriminalisation of drunkenness and followed the growing awareness of the futility of the cycle of drunks being arrested, tried, probably fined and, more often than not, being sent to prison for non-payment of fines. It was, and still is, inappropriate to use criminal sanctions in an attempt to deal with public drunkenness.

The Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995: Section 18 of this Act empowers the Scottish Ministers to designate, by statutory instrument, the sports grounds and sporting events which are to be subject to restrictions relating to the carriage and consumption of alcohol. The power has been exercised through the Sports Grounds and Sporting Events (Designation) (Scotland) order 1998 - updated as and when required - which designates international and domestic football matches and international rugby union matches and the grounds at which these are played.

Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995: This Act covers matters such as Social Enquiry Reports and other social work reports; probation orders, deferred sentence and Supervised Attendance Orders.

Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993: This Act covers such measures as Parole Licence, Non-Parole Licence, Life Licence (mandatory), and Life Licence (discretionary)

The Road Traffic Act 1988-reserved: This Act sets the blood alcohol limit – currently 80mg per 100ml of blood – and the penalties for offenders.

National Policy and Guidance

Getting our Priorities Right: Good Practice Guidance for working with Children and Families affected by Substance Misuse. [Scottish Executive 2003]

The aim is to provide guidance for everyone who has an interest in the well-being of children and families including staff in drug and alcohol services, children's services and criminal justice agencies.

Monitoring and addressing waiting times to drug treatment and care services [Scottish Executive 2003]

This document outlines specific action for Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs) and statutory and voluntary sector drugs agencies to improve access to, and reduce waiting times for, drug treatment and care services in their areas; and to improve local data collection and monitoring arrangements for drug treatment waiting times, within a national information framework.

Alcohol problems support and treatment services framework. [Scottish Executive 2002]

This framework is for all who plan, commission and manage support and treatment services for people with alcohol problems in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors.

Alcohol in the Workplace: a simple guide. [Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) 2001]

Brief guide explaining why having an alcohol policy in the workplace policy is useful, legal duties and obligations, the process of creating and key elements of a policy. Also contains list of agencies that can provide expert help in developing a policy

Other relevant material

Prevention of Relapse in Alcohol Dependence: Health Technology Assessment Report 3 [NHS Quality Improvement Scotland 2002]

This advice from the Health Technology Board for Scotland (HTBS) is the outcome of a HTBS Health Technology Assessment (HTA) of interventions to prevent relapse in people with alcohol dependence. NHS Boards and Alcohol Action Teams should take account of this advice when preparing local strategies for those with alcohol dependence.

The Management of Harmful Drinking and Alcohol Dependence in Primary Care [Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network 2003]

New clinical guidelines for GPs throughout Scotland, designed to improve the quality of treatment for patients suffering from alcohol dependence. The guideline also provides advice on the management of detoxification (the withdrawal of alcohol) in different patient groups and on how to deal with patients who present in crisis.

How can I find out more?

Alcohol Information Scotland

<http://www.alcoholinformation.isdscotland.org/>

Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>

Alcohol Concern

<http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/>

Scottish Association of Alcohol Action Teams

<http://www.saaat.org/>

The Portman Group
<http://www.portman-group.org.uk/>

Health Scotland
<http://www.healthscotland.com/>

Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network
<http://www.sign.ac.uk/>