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In reply please quote:

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MEDIA RELEASE

The impact of alcohol sales on violent crime, property destruction and public disorder

The more beer sold in a postcode the higher its assault rate, according to a study released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

In fact the volume of alcohol sold in a postcode exerts a strong effect not only its rate of assault but also on its recorded rate of malicious damage to property and offensive behaviour.

These effects exist even when controlling for other factors which influence the commission of crime, such as the number of young people resident in a postcode and its socioeconomic status.

The Bureau study is the most comprehensive analysis of the relationship between alcohol and crime ever undertaken in New South Wales and is one of the most comprehensive analyses of the relationship ever undertaken in Australia.

It was made possible only because the NSW Department of Gaming and Racing provided the Bureau with previously unreleased data on the volume of different types of alcohol sold in every postcode in New South Wales.

This data was combined with the Bureau's crime data to examine the relationship between alcohol and crime.

Apart from the specific effect of beer sales on the rate of assault, there were few other specific effects.

Postcodes with high sales of alcohol, whether it be in the form of beer, low alcohol beer, wine or spirits, tended to have higher rates of assault, malicious damage to property and offensive behaviour.

The Bureau estimates that, if the top 50 New South Wales postcodes in terms of alcohol sales had their sales reduced to the Statewide mean, they would experience at least a 22 per cent reduction in offensive behaviour, a nine per cent reduction in malicious damage to property and a six per cent reduction in assault.

However the study suggests that the true magnitude of the reduction in crime would probably be higher than this, because a reduction in alcohol consumption would exert downward pressure on crime not normally reported to police.

Commenting on the study findings, the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that they confirmed what most experienced police officers in New South Wales had known for a very long time.

'Up until now, evidence on the importance of alcohol in criminal violence, property destruction and offensive behaviour, although compelling, has essentially been circumstantial'.

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‘For example, homicide and assault rates tend to peak at times (e.g. Christmas) when large amounts of alcohol are being consumed. Many offenders apprehended for acts of violence, offensive behaviour and damage to property are also found to be intoxicated by alcohol’. Unfortunately these sorts of observations do not prove that crime rates in New South Wales are linked to levels of alcohol consumption’.

‘The present study has now settled this issue by showing beyond reasonable doubt that the amount of alcohol sold in an area does exert a potent effect on its crime rate’.

‘This shows that policies designed to encourage more responsible drinking deserve a central place in the State’s crime prevention strategy’.

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