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Senate Inquiry into Alcohol red tape: Question on Notice

We refer to the following section of the Hansard Transcript of our hearing before the committee on 24 Feb 2017 and the questions on notice referred to therein:

Mr Andrews : Sociologists have divided cultures in two categories based on the way they treat alcohol. There are those such as continental Europe, where it is a normal part of culture to have a glass of wine with your lunch; you have a glass of wine with your dinner; you can actually go and have, after 10 or 11 at night, a few glasses of wine and it is a normal, integrated part of the culture. These are the cultures where you do not have a problem with alcohol related violence. Then there are cultures where alcohol is viewed as something that is different from the norm, where it is treated as some sort of taboo, a prohibited item, it gives you a licence to misbehave, essentially, which is what you see in Australia and the United Kingdom. That is when you see problems with alcohol related violence. And we are happy to provide further research. I think we addressed this in our submission but we have further data on this that we submitted to the Callinan review in New South Wales. But the overwhelming evidence on the cross-cultural variations here are significant.

I think anyone here who has been to Europe and other countries would be able to attest to this. If we have a culture where we essentially give people a licence to misbehave, we excuse it by not punishing the culprit and by punishing or blaming alcohol. You essentially are mitigating it—by giving people an excuse, you create more of it, because people think: 'What do I do on a Friday night? I go out with the boys, have a few drinks and then get into some fights.' It is a psychological phenomenon that has been well established at multiple studies around the world. This is what the evidence shows and we can certainly provide the committee with further reports on that.

CHAIR: If you would. Yes. Take that on notice. I am interested in particular on what you have on this cultural aspect that you referred to earlier, and what you think should be done

about it. We would be interested in terms of your comments and about focussing on the culprit rather than the alcohol.

Mr Andrews : There are a lot of cases—they did some studies about having big burly bouncers, which everyone thinks is a very good idea; you have them to check everything. What does it do? It creates surges in testosterone, which creates this sort of fight or flight mentality, which makes people more aggressive, which means there is more chance of violence. There are all of these little cultural things that have been extensively studied; where well-meaning policies have perverse outcomes.

CHAIR: Okay. You will take that on notice. That will be good.

The ATA and MyChoice provide the following data and research in response:

Culture/Social perceptions and NOT intoxication are the primary factor behind drunken violence

[The evidence suggests that drinking has a strong effect on adolescent violence in the Nordic and Eastern European countries but has little or no effect in the Mediterranean countries](#): **The American Society of Criminology Vol. 49 Issue 3: August 2011**

[“There is enormous cross-cultural variation in the way people behave when they drink”](#); the effects of alcohol on behaviour are [primarily determined by social and cultural factors, rather than the chemical actions of ethanol](#): **Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking, A report to the European Commission. The Social Issues Research Centre. March 1998**

[“ aggressive behaviour is determined by cultural expectations rather than the chemical actions of ethanol.”](#)

[There is no direct causal relationship between alcohol and violence “ “Both comparative studies and controlled experiments have demonstrated, however, that while ethanol produces well-understood neurochemical changes, the wide variations in social and behavioural outcomes of drinking can only be explained with reference to cultural factors, and to culturally determined beliefs about the effects of drinking”](#)

“Reviews of ethnographic evidence show that the behavioural outcomes of drinking are always in accord with what people in a given culture (or sub-culture) expect to happen, and that individuals internalise such expectations during the learning process of socialisation...Experiments conducted under controlled conditions (double-blind, with placebos) in different cultures confirm that aggressive behaviour is determined by cultural expectations rather than the chemical actions of ethanol: in cultures where alcohol is believed to cause aggression, subjects become aggressive even when they have been given a placebo”

Alcohol and Violence: Cultural Factors. Social Issues Research Centre. Accessed 4 April 2016

Researchers recently attempted to ask 300 individuals in Italy their perceptions of links between alcohol consumption and disorder/aggression.: *“Their responses caused some difficulty and our translators were unable to convince many of them that there was not a ‘hidden agenda’ to the questioning. Quite simply, the vast majority of interviewees could not understand how anyone could imagine a connection between drinking alcohol and aggressive behaviour”*: **Drinking and Public Disorder: A report of research conducted for The Portman Group by MCM Research**

Experts divide countries into two categories: “integrated” cultures (think the Mediterranean, Latin America – most of the world) where societies generally hold positive beliefs and expectancies about alcohol – children often sip wine from their parents glass for example. And “non-integrated” cultures (Australia, the UK, the US, Scandanavia), where public discourse is primarily on the negative effects of drinking and there is a belief in “the disinhibiting powers of alcohol”. In these societies, alcohol is associated with aggression, promiscuity, violence and anti-social behaviour” It is the non-integrated cultures where problems arise. *“This variation cannot be attributed to different levels of consumption – most integrated drinking cultures have significantly higher per-capita alcohol consumption than the ambivalent drinking cultures. Instead the variation is clearly related to different cultural beliefs about alcohol, different expectations about the effects of alcohol, and different social rules about drunken comportment.”*: **Kate Fox, Social Anthropologist with the Social Issues Research Centre, quoted on BBC News (2011).**

“It is noted that a landmark study looking at alcohol-related aggressive behaviour across the world found that “alcohol-related aggressive behaviour—as measured by male involvement in drunken brawls—is about as likely to be present as it is to be absent” **Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and Meaning of the Link, Washington DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Research Monograph 12, 1983**

“men engaged in drunkenness in 76% of 60 small societies examined, but aggressive drunken behaviour was found in less than half “ **Alcohol and Violence :Exploring Patterns and Responses. International Centre for Alcohol Policies. 2008 p12**

Alcohol in our culture is regarded as a “license to transgress”

Our culture tells us that when people drink, they do bad things. The result of this is *“a special alcohol-stamped “license to transgress” so ingrained in society that it has, in itself, become a rule... When intoxicated, drinkers are expected to alter their behavior and to engage with the crowd in varying degrees of promiscuity, vandalism, public displays of affection, loud and boisterous behavior, dancing, sex, and other activities that are normally under fairly strict social constraint”*: **ALCOHOL AND VIOLENCE: EXPLORING PATTERNS AND RESPONSES - International Center for Alcohol Policies 2008**

Expectations not only shape drunken behaviour, they also enable subsequent rationalisation, justification and excuses: In cultures where there is an expectation that alcohol will lead to aggression, people appeal to the fact that they were drunk in order to excuse their conduct. Social Issues Research Centre – Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking

Legal Issue: The problem is reflected in our criminal law regarding intoxication as an 'excuse' rather than an aggravating factor for anti-social behaviour

The unscientific belief in alcohol *excusing* behaviour has extended to our judicial system. Defendants in court often plead for mitigation on the basis that they were intoxicated at the time of the offence. This mindset connotes a denial of personal responsibility. Conversely, in cultures where learned expectations about the effects of alcohol are very different "appeals to drunkenness as an excuse for aggressive behaviour would not only fail to be persuasive, they might actually compound the severity of the offence.": **Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking, A report to the European Commission. The Social Issues Research Centre. March 1998**

Solving the problem

"If we want to reduce the social costs of alcohol, then we ought to focus on the costs that drunks impose on other people. When we started taking drink driving seriously, we decided that drunkenness couldn't be a defence to a charge of driving while intoxicated. And drink driving rates have dropped substantially. Nevertheless, drunkenness can be taken as exculpatory at time of sentencing for other offences because it can suggest a lack of intent to have committed the offence. If we want to address the social costs of alcohol-related crime, and if we want to impose the burden where it belongs – on louts who think it fun to get drunk and inflict harms on others – then we could start by taking intoxication at the time of an offense as being an exacerbating factor at the time of sentencing. We don't try to reduce speeding by hiking petrol taxes, we do it by fining speeders. Why should we try to affect crimes committed by drunks by hiking alcohol excise taxes?":

Dr. Eric Crampton – University of Canterbury

The presence of physically large bouncers may actually encourage violence

"there are a lot of cases—they did some studies about having big burly bouncers, which everyone thinks is a very good idea; you have them to check everything. What does it do? It creates surges in testosterone, which creates this sort of fight or flight mentality, which makes people more aggressive, which means there is more chance of violence."

We're still sourcing the precise study in question.

However, in the meantime, this study from 2003 might be useful: **Tomkins, Kevin. "Occupational masculinity and bouncers." PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2003.** Link:

http://eprints.utas.edu.au/9633/2/Occupational_Masculinity_and_Bouncers_K_Tomkins.pdf

"the finding from the research conducted in Hobart indicates that the presence of physically large males at the entrance of licensed premises can also actually increase the possibility of interpersonal violence"

Thanks once again for the opportunity to present our submission to the senate inquiry.

Kind Regards,

Tim Andrews
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