

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS



There is an obligation on the Irish Government to target alcohol consumption, particularly binge drinking, and alcohol-related attitudes that are facilitative of rape

9 Rape, Alcohol Consumption and Human Rights: Meeting obligations for a better future



Over the course of 2012, the RCNI Calling Time on Sexual Violence series has examined the involvement of alcohol in sexual violence. Given the prevalence of alcohol consumption by perpetrators and victims in incidences of rape and sexual violence in Ireland,¹ there is a clear need for government to target alcohol consumption and attitudes towards alcohol and sex as significant aspects of the efforts to protect and ensure human rights in Ireland and to meet their human rights obligations.

Areas of Concern Regarding Human Rights in Ireland:

Under International Human Rights obligations the Irish State's performance in vindicating women's human rights has been reviewed. In 2005² the UN Committee on the Elimination of Violence Against Women raised several areas of concern including obligations regarding sexual violence, harmful gender roles and cultural practices.

a) *'the prevalence of violence against women and girls, low prosecution and conviction rates of perpetrators, high withdrawal rates of complaints' in Ireland.*³

These concerns are highly impacted by alcohol consumption and expectancies in Ireland. The Rape and Justice in Ireland study found:

- Evidence that a minority of rape complainants felt that their reports of rape were taken less seriously because they had been drinking alcohol.⁴

Images in this publication are for illustrative purposes only, any person depicted in the image is a model.

more >

Rape, Alcohol Consumption and Human Rights: Meeting obligations for a better future



CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

1 The extent of the problem in Ireland

In 2010, the Rape and Justice in Ireland Report (RAJI) revealed very high levels of alcohol involvement in rape in Ireland. Although alcohol does not cause sexual violence it may be used to increase violent behaviour, to blame victims, and to incapacitate victims. Alcohol may also contribute to situations in which sexual violence is more likely to occur.

Alcohol involvement in incidences of rape:

- 70% of rape allegations in the RAJI study had been drinking at the time of the alleged rape.
- 70% of women in the RAJI study reported drinking at the time they were raped.
- Alcohol was involved in over 60% of adult women's unreported rape experiences.

Irish Drinking Habits:

- 26% of those who had consumed alcohol in a 30 day period had consumed more or more drinks compared to the average of 10.5.
- The frequency of binge drinking in Ireland is the highest in Europe. 44% of respondents who had consumed alcohol in the past 12 months indicated that they had binge drunk at least once a week.
- 74% of youth alcohol consumption in Ireland was adult pattern: 47% of boys and 44% of girls aged 15-18 reporting binge drinking during the previous month.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

2 Alcohol consumption and the relationship between Perpetrator and Victim in Irish rape cases

Differences in relationship between perpetrators and victims in rape cases and their alcohol consumption, indicate that alcohol consumption may play a particularly significant role in sexual violence committed by perpetrators in Ireland. The findings of the RAJI study found significant differences in alcohol consumption by complainants and suspects in different relationship types. These findings are as follows:

Acquaintance Rape:

- 21% of rape cases involving an acquaintance who knew each other also involved both the complainant and the perpetrator consuming alcohol on the occasion of the alleged rape.
- Suspect and complainant who were complainants in a non-relationship were the most likely to have been drinking on the occasion of the alleged rape (41% of complainants and 45% of suspects).

Intimate/Ex-Partner Rape:

- Intimate partner and ex-partner were the least likely to have been drinking on the occasion of the rape.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

3 Sex Related Alcohol Expectancies: meeting rape and alcohol consumption?

Cultural stress a role in how we behave when we consume alcohol. Studies have shown that how an individual responds to alcohol depends on what they expect to experience. Alcohol expectancies refer to the substances that one expects to experience when one is drinking alcohol, for instance: food, aggressive behaviour and fewer social inhibitions. Multiple studies have concluded that alcohol expectancies influence how individuals behave when they are intoxicated or think they are intoxicated.

Alcohol expectancies can be reinforced, such as expectations that consuming alcohol will increase sexual arousal and desire, decrease sexual inhibition, increase sexual aggressiveness in rape, increase sexual violence and decrease sexual violence. Alcohol expectancies may be reinforced through socialisation and cultural norms, a reinforced sense of entitlement, being justified in anger when faced with refusal and ultimately the committing of an act of sexual violence.

How do Alcohol Expectancies impact on sexual violence?

Alcohol expectancies, in combination with the pharmacological effects of alcohol, appear to play a particularly significant role in acquaintance rape where both perpetrator and victim are drinking. Alcohol expectancies may lead to increased sexual violence about sexual violence and consent, a reinforced sense of entitlement, being justified in anger when faced with refusal and ultimately the committing of an act of sexual violence.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

4 Alcohol Consumption and Victim Blaming

Intoxicated female victims of rape are more likely to be blamed or assigned some responsibility for the rape than sober victims. Attitudes towards alcohol consumption, gender and sexual violence exclude or increase the likelihood of a victim of rape, who had been drinking, being blamed for the rape occurring.

Why would someone blame a victim of rape?

The **Two-Way Model** The Two-Way Model indicates that individuals perceive the world as largely 'just' and therefore that 'good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people'. Individuals who subscribe to the Two-Way Model are more likely to be more likely to blame the victim for the rape. The victim's behaviour is seen as a 'bad thing' and therefore, if the victim had not been drinking, the rape would not have occurred.

Rape Myths and Alcohol Expectancies

Blame of who occurs as a 'bad' victim of rape and the typical conditions in which rape occurs, and cultural attitudes towards the perpetrator's role in sexual violence, particularly in situations of acquaintance rape, to increase victim-blaming.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

5 Alcohol, Youth and Sexual Violence

Alcohol consumption by adolescents and young adults is notably high in Ireland. While alcohol has not been shown to cause sexual violence, it is likely to contribute to the situational context in which sexual violence is more likely to occur. Given the propensity for binge drinking among youth in Ireland, coupled with lack of sexual and social awareness and the prevalence of rape-supportive attitudes noted among youth, the relationship between youth alcohol consumption and sexual violence requires consideration.

Young People and Sexual Violence:

- 74% of those who had consumed alcohol in a 30 day period had consumed more or more drinks compared to the average of 10.5.
- The frequency of binge drinking in Ireland is the highest in Europe. 44% of respondents who had consumed alcohol in the past 12 months indicated that they had binge drunk at least once a week.

Effects of Alcohol Consumption on Youth:

- Young people demonstrate an increased ability compared to other adults to consume large quantities of alcohol with little or no impairment on cognitive skills, and to recover from acute intoxication more rapidly.
- Adolescents and young people also tend towards greater impulsivity and poorer recognition of the negative outcomes for their behaviour compared to adults.
- Young people who binge drink are at a higher risk of becoming binge drinkers, engaging in risky sexual practices, and being a victim or perpetrator of crime and violence.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

6 Alcohol as a 'Date-Rape' Drug

Sex with a person who is incapacitated or so impaired as to be unable to offer consent to sex, while the use of drugs such as Rohypnol or GHB to incapacitate or impair a partner in order to facilitate sexual intercourse has been widely recognised as an illegal activity, the use of alcohol for the same reason has received much less attention. However, 'one substance that is administered to lower sexual inhibition and enhance the possibility of consensual sexual intercourse is potentially a date rape drug'.

In Ireland, there has been no evidence to suggest that drugs such as Rohypnol and GHB are used with regularity in incidents of sexual assault. Rape and Justice in Ireland did not identify conclusive evidence of the use of Rohypnol or GHB in the majority of rape complaints in Ireland.

How is alcohol used to facilitate a sexual assault or rape?

- Targeting of intoxicated people: A perpetrator may target a person who is impaired or intoxicated in order to facilitate sexual violence. This may be done by offering the perpetrator a drink, or by offering the perpetrator a drink that contains an intoxicant (such as Rohypnol or GHB). If the perpetrator is already intoxicated, they may be more likely to engage in sexual violence.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

8 Growing a body of evidence: Data on alcohol consumption and sexual violence

Service providers have an important role to play in recording data that can be used to monitor and evaluate sexual violence in Ireland. Given the prevalence of alcohol in sexual violence in Ireland, collecting data in relation to alcohol consumption and attitudes towards alcohol and sex is of considerable importance to ensure effective sexual violence reduction policies and programmes.

Why is data in relation to alcohol involvement in sexual violence important?

- Data on alcohol involvement in sexual violence in Ireland is essential to understand the scope and extent of the problem.
- Data can be used to target prevention programmes and public.
- Adequate and appropriate data collection allows service providers to monitor trends in relation to alcohol consumption in incidents of sexual violence and to take programmes and evaluate the impact of interventions.

[more >](#)

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

9 Rape, Alcohol Consumption and Human Rights: Meeting obligations for a better future

Over the course of 2013, the RAJI Calling Time on Sexual Violence series has examined the involvement of alcohol in sexual violence. Given the prevalence of alcohol consumption by perpetrators and victims in incidents of rape and sexual violence in Ireland, there is a clear need for government to target alcohol consumption and attitudes towards alcohol and sex as significant aspects of the efforts to prevent and ensure human rights in Ireland and to meet their human rights obligations.

Areas of Concern Regarding Human Rights in Ireland:

- Under international human rights obligations the Irish State's performance in undertaking women's human rights has been poor. In 2009 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed areas of concern regarding obligations regarding sexual violence, harmful gender roles and cultural practices.
- The prevalence of violence against women and girls, low prosecution and conviction rates of perpetrators, high withdrawal rates of complaints in Ireland. The RAJI and Justice in Ireland study found:
- Evidence that a majority of rape complainants felt that their reports of rape were taken less seriously. Do you feel you had been drinking?

[more >](#)

'Calling Time on Sexual Violence' Factsheet Series

- Rape complainants with a history of alcoholism were more likely to have their cases discontinued by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), most likely as they are deemed to be poor witnesses.⁵ 21% of rape complainants in RAJI who withdrew their complaint suffered from substance abuse or dependency, primarily alcohol use.⁶

Additionally,

- Studies from outside Ireland have found that juries are less likely to convict when the complainant or the defendant was intoxicated.⁷

b) 'considering the important role of the media in regard to cultural change, the Committee furthermore recommends that the State party encourage the media to project a positive image of women'.⁸ The Committee further noted the problematic 'persistence of stereotypical views of gender roles'.

- Alcohol marketing often links consumption of alcohol to the sexual success and availability of women.⁹ This is of considerable concern given the evidence of the influence of sex-related alcohol expectancies on attitudes towards sexual consent and acceptance of harmful rape myths.¹⁰

In addition to the specific concerns raised by CEDAW's periodic review, Article 5 of CEDAW states that government agrees to:

'modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women'.

As attitudes towards women, sex and alcohol demonstrate a relationship to the commission of acts of sexual violence, there is an obligation on the Irish government to target alcohol consumption, particularly binge drinking, and alcohol-related attitudes that are facilitative of rape.

Recommendations:

To ensure a responsive and fair legal system, the state should:

- **Ensure complainants of incidents of sexual violence should have full recourse to the law.** Test cases of rape complainants with a history of alcohol dependency should be brought to trial.
- As juries are formed through the general public, education programmes and **broad media campaigns aimed at dispelling alcohol related victim blaming attitudes** should be funded and rolled out.
- **On-going training of Gardai and other service providers** should be funded to ensure that inaccurate expectations of the effects of alcohol do not prejudice the treatment of victims of sexual violence who are intoxicated.

Following World Health Organisation recommendations, the state should:¹¹

- **Limit availability of alcohol:** including the number and location of premises which sell alcohol, the hours during which alcohol can be sold, and enforcing the minimum drinking age.
- **Regulate marketing for alcohol:** in Ireland, alcohol marketing should be restricted from suggesting that alcohol consumption leads to sexual success and from portraying women in a negative fashion. A specialised statutory body should be tasked with monitoring alcohol marketing to ensure that it does not impinge in these manners on women's rights.
- **Pricing policies:** Increased alcohol prices have been shown to reduce alcohol consumption, particularly among heavy drinkers and young people. RCNI support minimum pricing for alcohol, and the banning of price promotions, discount sales and sales below cost.

Education and awareness raising are important tools in addressing alcohol involvement in sexual violence. This should include:

- **Training** for staff in premises that serve alcohol. This training should explicitly recognise sexual violence as an alcohol harm and incorporate bystander programmes and awareness raising for sexual violence prevention for staff of pubs, clubs and other venues that serve alcohol or that cater to those who are intoxicated, such as fast-food outlets, taxis and so forth.
- Developing quality **education programmes** within the school's curriculum that address harmful, culturally held attitudes towards alcohol consumption, sexual behaviour and gender roles.
- Rolling out broad **marketing campaigns** that aim to dispel incorrect information about the effect of alcohol, and to challenge rape supportive attitudes including combating alcohol-involved-rape, denial and minimisation, and victim blaming.

References:

- ¹ Hanly, C., Healy, D. And Scriver, S. 2009. Rape and Justice in Ireland. Dublin: Liffey Press.
- ² United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (2005) *Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Ireland 's combined 4th and 5th periodic review* (CEDAW/C/IRL/4-5). New York: CEDAW.
- ³ UN-CEDAW, *ibid*.
- ⁴ Hanly et.al. :160
- ⁵ Hanly et.al. 251
- ⁶ Hanly et.al. 2009: 244
- ⁷ Maurer, T.W. & Robinson, D.W. 2008. Effects of Attire, Alcohol, and Gender on Perceptions of date rape. *Sex Roles*, 58:423-434: 432
- ⁸ UN-CEDAW, *ibid*.
- ⁹ See, for instance, Saidlear, C. 2012. Sexual Violence and Alcohol in Ireland: A culture? International Conference on Survivors of Rape. <http://alcoholireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/rape-crisis-network-cliona-saidlear.pdf>
- ¹⁰ See , for instance, Briefing 3 of this series, *Sex Related Alcohol Expectancies: mediating rape and alcohol consumption?* <http://rcni.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/sex-related-alcohol-expectancies-mediating-rape-and-alcohol-consumption/>
- ¹¹ World Health Organisation. 2010. Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. Geneva: WHO Press.

About Rape Crisis Ireland:

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is a specialist information and resource centre on rape and all forms of sexual violence with a proven capacity in strategic leadership. The RCNI role includes the development and coordination of national projects such as expert data collection, strategic services development, supporting Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) to reach best practice standards, using our expertise to influence national policy and social change, and supporting and facilitating multiagency partnerships. We are the representative, umbrella body for our member Rape Crisis Centres who provide free advice, counselling and support for survivors of sexual violence in Ireland.

The national coordination role delivered by RCNI across management, governance, data collection, data reporting, the design and delivery of a range of training courses and administration, facilities frontline services to direct resources at meeting survivor needs, service delivery and local multi-agency partnerships.