

Experts call for immediate action on alcohol to contribute to the prevention of violence against women and children

NATIONAL: Community organisations and researchers working in violence prevention and alcohol harm reduction are meeting this week to discuss the role of alcohol in violence against women and children and the policy and program responses needed to address this.

A review study¹ published this month on the impact on women from men's alcohol use, led by Dr Ingrid Wilson, will be the focus of a roundtable discussion hosted by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) in Perth on Wednesday 29th May.

Community organisations and researchers are advocating for changes to alcohol laws to prioritise the prevention of violence against women and children, increased funding for women's services and alcohol and drug services, and targeted perpetrator programs that involve addressing alcohol and other drug use.

The study identified that globally, men's high-risk alcohol use contributes to intimate partner violence, yet interventions that target alcohol-related harms to women are scarce.¹

Caterina Giorgi, CEO of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), said, *"We know that alcohol is a significant contributor to violence, and addressing the role of alcohol is one of the levers that we can use to help keep women and children safe."*

She continued, *"This is why this week, a range of researchers from across the world and community sector organisations who are working on the ground, are coming together at this moment of crisis. We will talk about what more can be done to help to keep women and children safe and to reduce the impact that alcohol has in increasing this violence."*

More than one in three intimate partner violence incidents in Australia involves alcohol.²

Almost one in five (18 per cent) women reported experiencing alcohol-related verbal abuse, 15 per cent reported feeling fearful due to a partner's alcohol use, and 5 per cent reported physical abuse.³

In 2021-22, an estimated 348,300 women who experienced sexual assault by a man in the past ten years believed that alcohol or another substance contributed to their most recent incident of assault.⁴

According to Ms Giorgi, a hurdle to overcome is alcohol companies that continue to hamper policy progress on the commercial drivers of violence.

She said, *"There are alcohol lobby groups, large alcohol retailers, and large alcohol companies who do all they can to try and undermine any policy development. There are groups that have actively been trying to stop state and territory governments from updating their laws to include common sense measures to reduce the harm from the delivery of alcohol."*

The experts are urging governments to consider the link between alcohol accessibility and violence when developing liquor laws, and to prioritise the safety of women and children.

Lorraine Keane, CEO of Holyoake, a non-profit organisation that provides alcohol and other drug, mental health counselling, and support services, said, *“A strong and consistent relationship between alcohol use and violence against women has been clearly established in research conducted over the last three decades.”*

She added, *“We are calling on the government to acknowledge the significant impact alcohol has on family violence and to put more of a spotlight on alcohol policy change that fosters harm minimisation.”*

Dr Ingrid Wilson is an Assistant Professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology and Adjunct Research Fellow at the Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University. She refers to global alcohol-driven partner violence as *“endemic” and mostly hidden.*

“Our review of global research shows us that women are affected severely by the physical violence that they experience from an alcohol-affected partner.

But what is less well-known is women’s experience of other forms of violence and control from an intimate partner who has been drinking, including economic abuse, reproductive harm and mental ill health. The impacts are devastating and far reaching”, Dr Wilson said.

According to the study led by Dr Wilson, alcohol-related actions by alcohol-affected men include harm to women in the form of:

1. **General aggression and violence** (e.g. use of weapons, verbal aggression)
2. **Sexual coercion/violence** (e.g. forced sex, refusal to use a condom)
3. **Alcohol-related economic abuse and related behaviour** (e.g. diversion of household spending on alcohol)
4. **Alcohol-related controlling actions** (e.g. jealousy, restricting activity)
5. **Physical health** (e.g. death, STI infection, injury)
6. **Reproductive harm** (e.g. unwanted pregnancy)
7. **Mental ill health** (e.g. fear, anxiety)
8. **Relationship and family** (e.g. harm to children)
9. **Social harm** (e.g. humiliation, social isolation)

The roundtable will facilitate a discussion among researchers and community organisations regarding the link between alcohol and violence against women and children, as well as the necessary policy and program responses to prevent this violence.

The speakers at the roundtable include:

1. **Dr Ingrid Wilson**, Assistant Professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology and Adjunct Research Fellow at the Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University
2. **Associate Professor Anne-Marie Laslett**, NHMRC Emerging Leadership Fellow at the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University

3. **Kym Valentine**, Family violence survivor-advocate and former Chair of Victoria's Victim Survivors' Advisory Council.

This will be followed by a discussion facilitated by Caterina Giorgi, Chief Executive Officer at FARE.

Ends

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Available for interview

1. Caterina Giorgi, CEO, Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)
2. Dr Ingrid Wilson, Assistant Professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology and Adjunct Research Fellow at the Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University
3. Lorraine Keane, CEO, Holyoake

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3. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey/contents/about>
4. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>