

Letter to the Editor

Better Drinking Everyone's Responsibility

Dear Sir/Madam

Rebecca Williams asserts (*Alcohol vendors own share of blame for drink-related harm, NZH 28 April*) that alcohol causes violence. But in fact alcohol does not cause violence – violent people cause violence. If this were not so then we'd have riots up and down the country every Friday and Saturday night.

The fact is 80% of us enjoy a social, responsible drink regularly, the vast majority without ever turning to violence. Additionally, official health stats show that fewer of us are drinking, risky drinking amongst youth has decreased, drinking-related injuries have decreased, the age which we start drinking has increased (this is a good thing) and binge drinking has decreased.

This is no excuse for bad behaviour and overconsumption of course -but for Ms Williams to draw a link between violence, consumption and changes to opening hours is misleading. Changes to operating hours in Australia did not reduce the level of violence – just where and when it occurred. And the cited \$5 billion a year social cost of alcohol harm is an often-used figure which does not stand up to scrutiny.

But let's be clear about one thing – there are those in this country that drink to excess and cause harm. To fix this means creating a culture where having a couple is the norm and having a lot is not.

To do this means all of us taking responsibility for better drinking –the pub and bottle store owner, the parent, the workmate, the friend, the person lifting a glass right now, government and industry. It's a long term conversation which will accelerate the positive changes already happening.

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