

Evaluating the effects of the Licensing Act 2003 on the characteristics of drinking occasions in England & Wales: A theory of change-guided natural experiment

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Licensing Act
2003



Implemented
November 2005

Disabling the public interest: alcohol strategies and policies for England

Robin Room 

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 SECTIONS



PDF



TOOLS



SHARE

In March 2004, two important documents on alcohol policy were published by the British government. One is an Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England ([UK Cabinet Office 2004](#)). This document has received more attention, but is arguably of less import. As we shall see, what it offers is a recipe for ineffectiveness at the national level. The second document, the kind which only a lawyer could love, is entitled *Draft Guidance issued under Section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003* ([UK Ministry of Culture, Media & Sport 2004](#)). The consequences of this document are likely to be much more serious for public health and safety, as it is intended to eviscerate any possibility of effective action on alcohol issues at the local level. In

[Emerg Med J. 2005 Oct; 22\(10\): 682.](#)

doi: [10.1136/emj.2005.030049](https://doi.org/10.1136/emj.2005.030049)

The 2003 Licensing Act: an act of stupidity?

[S Goodacre](#)

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**'THE IMPOTENCE OF REASON IN THE FACE OF GREED, SELFISH
AMBITION AND MORAL COWARDICE'**

ROBIN ROOM



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International
literature

Evaluations of
the licensing
changes

My
hypotheses

Hypothesis

1 Timing

H1a. Occasions finish later, especially at the weekend

Hypothesis

1 Timing

H1b. More staggered finish times (increased standard deviation)

Hypothesis

1 Timing

H1c. Occasions started at a similar time and finished later, especially at the weekend and for those under 25 years old

Alcovision dataset

- Market research dataset using quota sampling
- Monthly cross-section of adults in Great Britain 2001-2008
- Sample size ~20,000 per year
- Demographic and usual drinking survey
- Detailed 1 week retrospective drinking diary

Methods

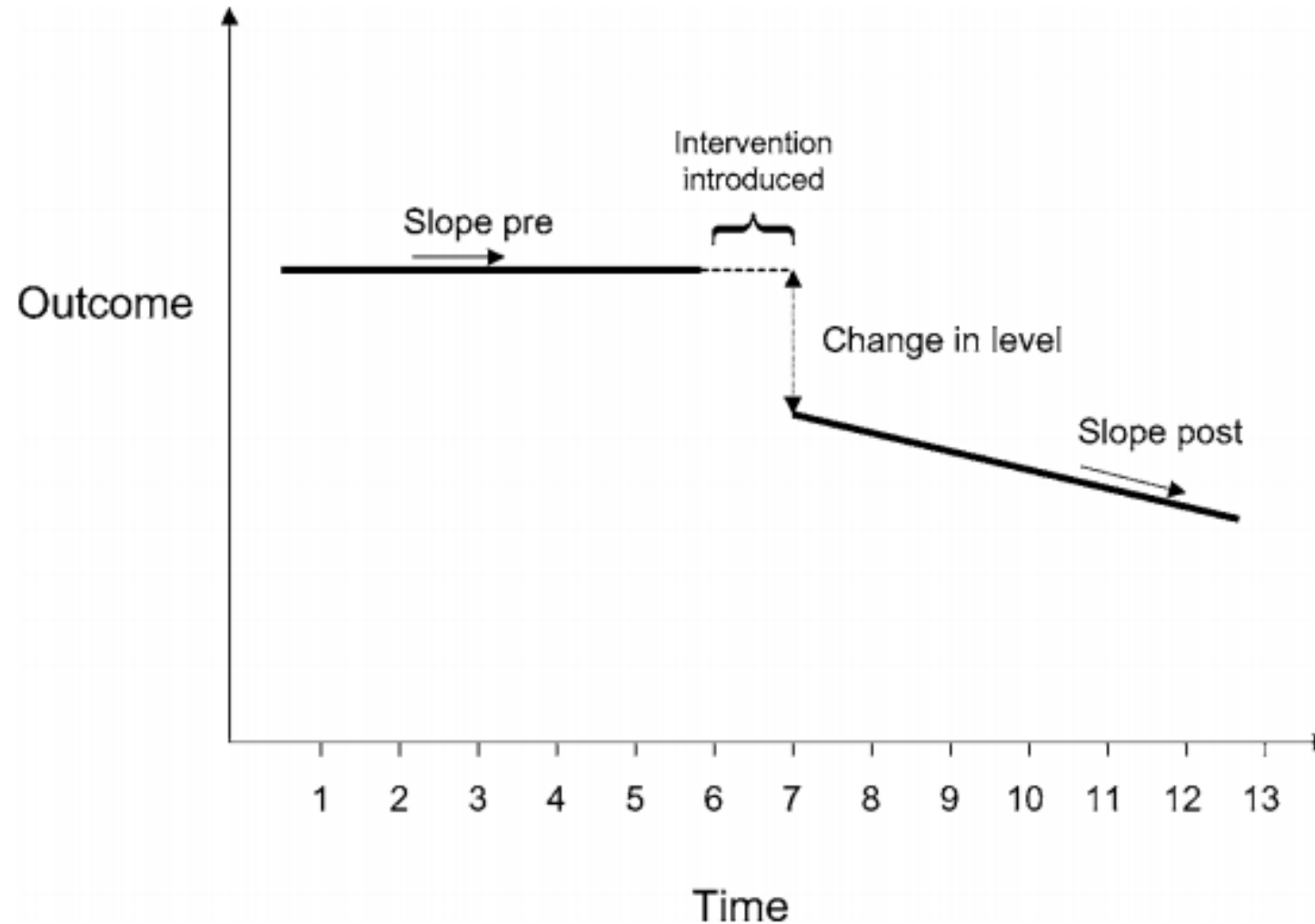


Figure from: Ramsay, C. R., Matowe, L., Grilli, R., Grimshaw, J. M., & Thomas, R. E. (2003). Interrupted time series designs in health technology assessment: Lessons from two systematic reviews of behavior change strategies. *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care*, Vol. 19, pp. 613–623.

Example results

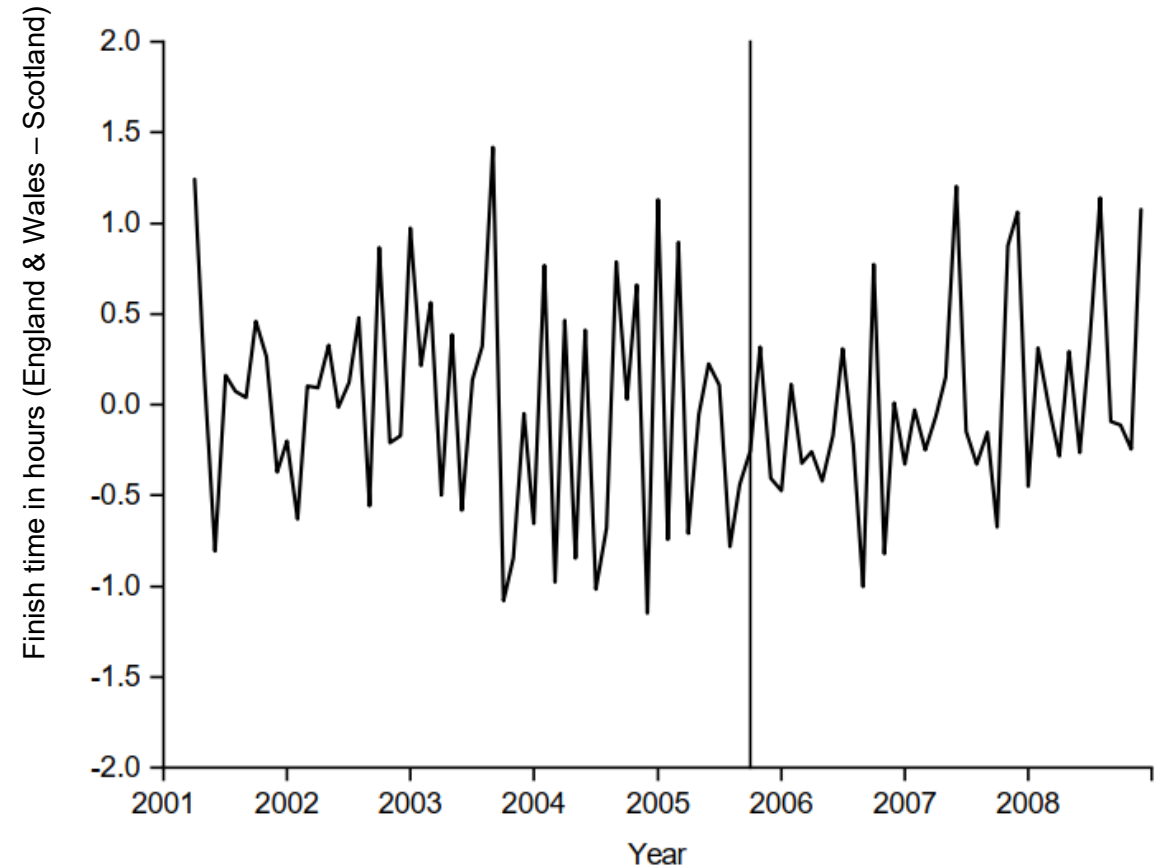
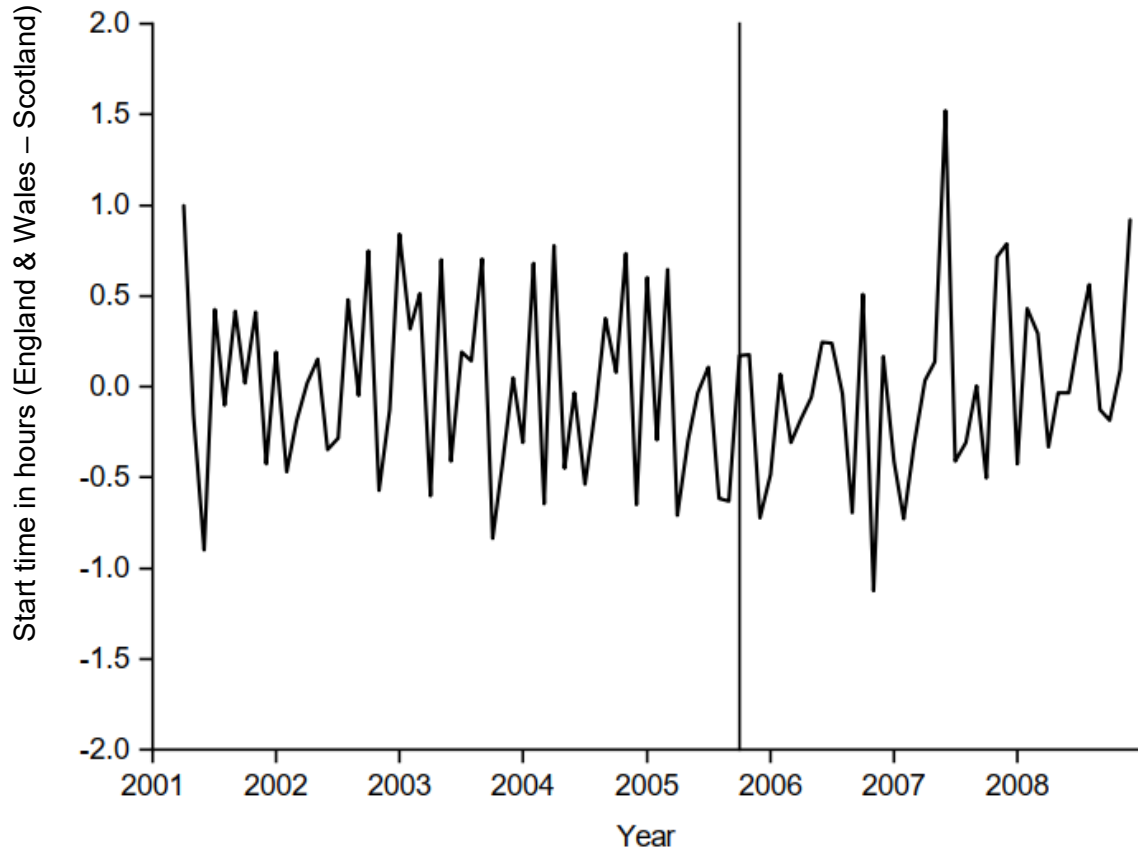
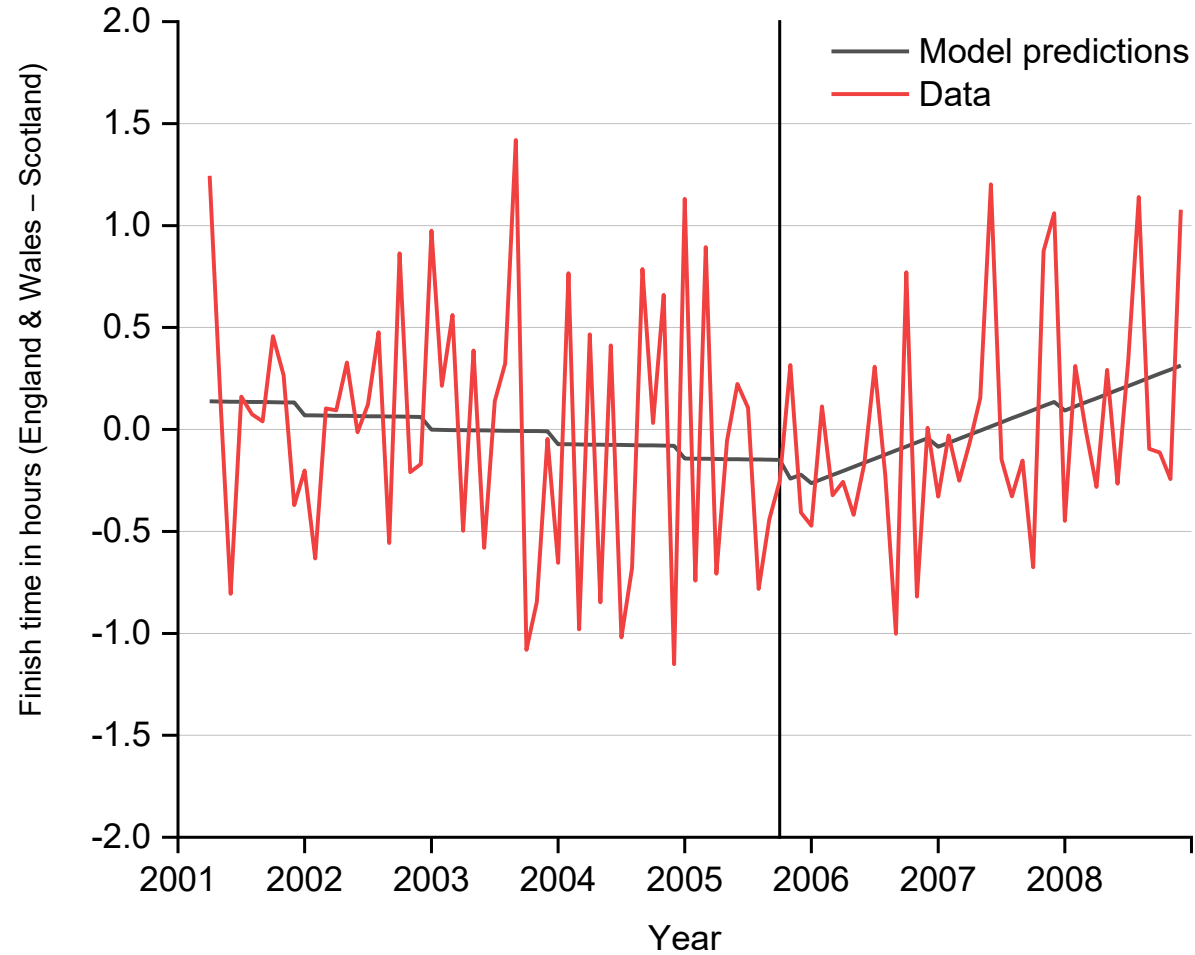


Figure 2. Monthly deseasonalised mean on-trade or mixed occasion start time and finish time, differenced England minus Scotland.

Vertical line = implementation of the Licensing Act 2003, November 2005



Monthly deseasonalised mean on-trade or mixed occasion finish time, differenced England minus Scotland.

Vertical line = implementation of the Licensing Act 2003, November 2005

Summary – **Relative to Scotland:**

- Occasions shifted slightly later at night (1.8 minutes per month) but did not get longer
- 0.02% more occasions involved pre-drinking
- No evidence of increased staggering of finish times
- No evidence of more occasions starting late at night or increased consumption

Take away messages

- Small changes shifting occasions later at night
- We have demonstrated reasons for the surprising lack of harm caused by the Licensing Act 2003
- This approach could be used in evaluating other interventions but requires more collection of occasion-level data



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Thank you

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Hypothesis	Rationale and sources	Support from results
1 Timing		
H1a. Occasions finish later, especially at the weekend	Previous evaluations hypothesised that because fewer venues closed at a standard closing time (11pm) customers may have left on-trade venues later. ^{12,15,17} This is expected to be most pronounced at the weekend, where there were greater changes in trading hours. ^{12,15} The timing of off-trade drinking occasions may also have changed as alcohol became available later at night. ¹²	Partially
H1b. More staggered finish times (increased standard deviation)	It has been hypothesised by previous evaluations that the closing times of venues became more staggered so people may have left on-trade venues at more staggered times. ^{15,17}	No
H1c. On-trade and mixed on/off-trade occasions started at a similar time and finished later (tested separately) especially at the weekend and for those under 25 years old	Drinking occasions may have continued to start at a similar time (with a possible shift towards starting in the off-trade) while ending later. ¹⁸ These changes may be more pronounced among under 25 year olds as there is evidence suggesting that their drinking occasions start at a constant time at the weekend and they are generally likely to pre-drink. ^{18,20}	Partially
2 Location sequencing		
H2a. There were more mixed location occasions which started in the off-trade and proceeded to the on-trade, especially at the weekend and for those under 25 years old	Longer opening hours of on-trade venues may have encouraged people to drink in the off-trade first (pre-drinking) since alcohol is cheaper and there would still be plenty of time to drink in the on-trade later. ¹⁹ These changes may be more pronounced among under 25 year olds as there is evidence suggesting that their drinking occasions start at a constant time at the weekend and they are generally likely to pre-drink. ^{18,20}	Partially
H2b. There were fewer mixed location occasions which started in the on-trade and finished in the off-trade	It may have become less common to move to the off-trade after on-trade drinking as on-trade drinking could continue later at night.	No

Hypothesis	Rationale and sources	Support from results
3. Alcohol consumption		
H3a. The same number of units were drunk per hour in on-trade and mixed location occasions, which led to higher mean consumption per occasion if H1c is supported	Given a stable rate of consumption, longer occasions may have led to higher overall consumption. ²⁶	No
H3b. Mean consumption per occasion in off-trade occasions increased	The Act also removed restrictions on trading hours for off-trade sales but hypothesising the effects of this is not straightforward as alcohol can be bought in the off-trade in advance of the drinking occasion. Nonetheless, we hypothesise that longer off-trade trading hours may have led to increased consumption in off-trade drinking occasions as people could buy more alcohol and continue drinking later at night. ¹	No
4. Range of venues and demographic groups involved in late night drinking		
H4a. Late night on-trade occasions took place in more diverse drinking venue types, driven by a reduction in the proportion which were in nightclubs and an increase in pubs	We hypothesised that late night drinking venues and people drinking in late night on-trade occasions may have become more diverse as nightclubs accounted for a smaller proportion of the chosen drinking venues open after 11pm and more pubs and bars extended their opening hours.	No
H4b. More drinking occasions of over 25s started after 11pm	A greater proportion of over 25s' drinking occasions may have been late night drinking due to this greater variety of available venues.	No
H4c. More drinking occasions of full-time employees started after 11pm, especially at the weekend	People in full time employment are expected to have late night drinking occasions at the weekend since they are typically working during the week.	No <input type="checkbox"/>