



# Research in Practice

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## Alcohol and disorderly conduct on Friday and Saturday nights: Findings from the DUMA program

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### Key findings

- The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) interviewed 161 offenders detained for disorderly conduct offences on Friday and Saturday nights as part of the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program. Analysis of new questions about alcohol use provides valuable information to support a range of alcohol harm reduction strategies, including Operation Unite.
- Those charged with disorder on Friday and Saturday nights were more likely than those charged at other times to have consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours and attributed alcohol as a factor for their offending.
- Detainees who had consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours and were charged with disorder on a Friday and Saturday evening were nearly twice as likely as those charged at other times to have been mixing drinks on the last occasion they drank (37% versus 27%). This was particularly the case for young males aged 26 to 35 years (44%).
- Disorder offenders consumed substantial amounts of alcohol in the lead up to their arrest. The median number of standard drinks consumed was 15, although this was higher for males aged 26 to 35 years who had been mixing drinks on the last occasion they drank (29 standard drinks).
- Of those who had been drinking alcohol, 40 percent of all disorder offenders consumed their last drink at a licensed premise. Thirty-nine percent had been drinking at a private residential location. Younger males aged 18–25 years were more likely to have been drinking at a licensed premise.
- Disorder offenders charged on a Friday and Saturday night were more likely than those assault offenders charged in the same time period to have consumed their last alcoholic drink at a licensed premise.

### Introduction

In a recent paper released by the AIC, it was found that 70 percent of offenders charged with assault and detained on a Friday or Saturday night had been drinking alcohol in the 48 hours prior to their arrest (Sweeney & Payne 2011). The majority of these assault offenders were young males aged between 18 and 25 years who, on the most recent occasion they had consumed alcohol, had consumed approximately 16 standard drinks—mostly a mix of beer wine and/or spirits. The purpose of that study was to provide a detailed overview of the alcohol consumption patterns of a core group of offenders targeted through the widely publicised Operation Unite—a coordinated policing initiative by Australian and New Zealand police. Operation Unite has been implemented on three occasions since December

2009 (most recently on 17 and 18 December 2010) and uses a range of strategies including a highly concentrated and highly visible policing presence around entertainment precincts during peak trading hours on Friday and Saturday nights (SAPOL 2010b).

Operation Unite's focus on alcohol-related violence is well justified. According to the most recent National Drug Strategy Household Survey in 2007, more than 750,000 Australians aged 14 years or older (4.5% of the relevant population) reported being physically assaulted or abused at least once in 12 months by a person who had been drinking alcohol (AIHW 2008). Further, in a report released by the Australian Alcohol Education and Research Foundation, the harm to others associated with alcohol misuse was estimated at almost \$21b in both tangible and intangible costs (Laslett et al. 2010).

Yet, while assault offenders are the main focus of various policing strategies and interventions, a group that is largely overlooked by both the media and in research is alcohol-related disorderly conduct offenders whose behaviour is not necessarily physically violent, but is likely to contribute significantly to the alcohol-related workload of operational police, as well as to the community costs associated with alcohol misuse. For example:

- In a report by SA Police, almost half (47%, n=1,509) of all persons apprehended in the Adelaide Central Business District (CBD) in 2008–09 were arrested for disorderly conduct or related behaviours (including property damage, offensive behaviour and hindering police), compared with assault-related offences (including minor assault, serious assault and assault police), which represented only 18 percent of CBD apprehensions during the same period (n=591; SAPOL 2010a).
- The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reported a 25 percent increase in the level of alcohol-related offensive behaviour in the Sydney Local Government Area between 2005 and 2009 (BOCSAR 2009).
- The 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that more than four million Australians (25.4% of those aged 14 years or older) had been verbally abused and 2.2 million (13%) had been made to feel fearful by someone who was intoxicated (AIHW 2008). This was compared with only 4.5 percent of the population who reported having been abused or assaulted.

From these estimates alone, it is clear that alcohol-related disorderly conduct is likely to represent a substantial proportion of offences committed and dealt with by the police, particularly in and around entertainment districts at peak times on Friday and Saturday night. Indeed, a key aim of Operation Unite is to raise awareness and encourage the appropriate and lawful conduct of patrons at or near licensed premises. Yet, as has been argued elsewhere (CMC 2008), there is little research that focuses specifically on disorderly conduct offenders, nor information about the context of their drinking, such as the types and quantities of alcohol they consume or the location of their last drink (prior to arrest).

To fill this gap, DUMA presents a unique opportunity to examine the prevalence and nature of alcohol consumption by a sample of alleged offenders detained by the police during times consistent with those targeted through Operation Unite. Currently operating at nine sites across the country (police watch houses or stations in Bankstown, Parramatta, Kings Cross, Footscray, East Perth, Darwin, Brisbane, Southport and Adelaide), DUMA is Australia's longest running quarterly collection of self-reported drug use

and offending data from police detainees. Since mid 2009, the DUMA survey has asked a series of new questions about alcohol use, including detailed information about the type and quantity of alcohol consumed, as well as the location of last drink.

## About this study

The present study examined the nature of alcohol consumption by disorderly conduct offenders detained by the police and interviewed as part of the AIC's DUMA program. In this study, a disorderly conduct offender is any person arrested and detained for one or more disorderly conduct offences, including:

- property damage and property damage by fire;
- graffiti;
- trespass (including breach of move-on notice and refusing to leave a licensed premise);
- rioting, affray or causing a public disturbance;
- hindering or resisting police; and
- offensive or other disorderly behaviour.

Specifically, this included offenders who were detained at any one of nine DUMA interview sites between the hours of 6 pm and 6 am Friday night and 6 pm and 6 am on Saturday night. Offenders, in the context of this data, are people who have been arrested with one or more of the aforementioned offences (but not yet convicted). DUMA data collection is conducted over an eight week period each quarter. The hours used to select the sample for this analysis were chosen specifically on the basis that they reflected peak periods for alcohol-related incidents and although they did not coincide directly with Operation Unite, they nevertheless corresponded with the periods typically targeted during the Operation. Further, the data and subsequent analysis provided in this report has been restricted to the 18 months following June 2009, as this was the date at which new and more comprehensive questions on alcohol consumption were introduced into the DUMA survey.

In all, 211 detainees were arrested for disorderly conduct-related offences during the reference period and of these, 50 detainees were also arrested on a more serious assault charge. Since these 50 detainees were already classified as assault offenders and included as part of the analysis in the earlier report on alcohol and assault (Sweeney & Payne 2011), they have not been counted as disorderly conduct offenders in this study. Therefore, the final sample of disorderly conduct offenders totalled 161.

Finally, there are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting these results. First, DUMA is a voluntary self-report survey of police detainees and as with all self-report surveys, the quality of the data hinges on the truthfulness and reliability of the respondents. Second, since DUMA operates at police stations or watch houses, it is likely

that less serious disorderly conduct offenders (ie those who might otherwise receive informal cautions, warnings or summons to appear in court) are under-represented. These results on alcohol consumption are, therefore, more likely to reflect patterns of use for more serious disorderly conduct offenders, whose offences were severe enough to warrant their arrest and eventual detention by the police. Third, while it is possible to identify where the respondent consumed their last drink prior to their offence, it is not possible to identify the location where the offence actually occurred as this is not recorded on the DUMA survey. Finally, it is important to note that a number of detainees were arrested and detained for a disorderly conduct offence during the relevant DUMA interview periods, but were deemed by watch house officers to be too intoxicated or violent to be interviewed. In the absence of an interview, it was not possible to identify if any of these disorderly conduct offenders were arrested on Friday or Saturday night (although this is likely) and as a result, this paper provides a conservative estimate of the true extent of alcohol consumption by disorder offenders. See *Drug Use Monitoring in Australia: 2009 Annual Report on Drug Use Among Police Detainees* (Sweeney & Payne forthcoming) for further methodological information.

## Results

### Profile of 'weekend' disorderly conduct offenders

Between June 2009 and December 2010, 833 disorderly conduct offenders were detained by police and interviewed as part of the DUMA program. Of these, 161 were detained between the hours of 6 pm and 6 am on Friday and Saturday nights. The remaining 672 disorderly conduct offenders were detained at other times and days throughout the week. Overall, disorderly conduct offenders comprised

15 percent of the total 5,539 detainees interviewed during the period and 20 percent of those detained on Friday and Saturday nights.

In terms of basic demographics, the single largest group of offenders detained for disorderly conduct on Friday and Saturday nights were males aged between 18 and 25 years (n=69, 43%), followed by males aged between 26 and 35 years (n=45, 28%) and males aged 36 years or over (n=22, 14%). Overall, only 16 percent of those detained for a disorder charge on the weekends were female (n=25), of whom the largest group were those aged between 18 and 25 years (n=10).

In terms of alcohol consumption for disorderly conduct offenders, more than four in every five had been drinking alcohol in the 48 hours prior to their arrest on Friday or Saturday night (n=136, 85%). Almost half of all offenders charged with disorderly conduct (n=78, 49%) said that their consumption of alcohol contributed to the offence for which they were detained. This figure increased to 62 percent for those who had been drinking in the 48 hours prior to arrest.

Although the number of females arrested for disorderly conduct offences was small, there was evidence that males were more likely than females to have been drinking in the 48 hours prior to their arrest (80% males versus 44% females). Further, while the majority of male detainees across all age groups had consumed alcohol, males aged 36 years and over were the most likely to have imbibed (86%), followed by males between 26 and 35 years (80%) and males aged between 18 and 25 years (78%). Males aged 36 years and over were also the most likely to attribute alcohol as a factor contributing to their arrest.

For females, the numbers are too small to draw any reliable conclusions about recent alcohol use and

**Table 1** General profile of detainees charged with disorderly conduct

	Charged with disorderly conduct on Friday and Saturday nights <sup>a</sup>	
	n	%
Disorderly conduct charges	161	19 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	136	85
Female	25	15
<b>Age</b>		
18–25 yrs	79	49
26–35 yrs	53	33
36+ yrs	29	18
<b>Alcohol use</b>		
Drank past 48 hrs	120	75
Recent alcohol attribution	78	49

a: Charged with disorderly conduct on Friday and Saturday nights between 6 pm and 6 am

b: As a percentage of total disorderly conduct arrests during the course of a week between June 2009 and December 2010

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

**Table 2 Alcohol use and attribution, by age category and gender, of those arrested on Friday and Saturday nights**

	Male					
	18–25 yrs		26–35 yrs		36+ yrs	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age	69	51	45	33	22	16
<b>Recent alcohol use</b>						
Drank in past 48 hours	54	78	36	80	19	86
Recent alcohol attribution	31	52	21	47	14	64
	Female					
	18–25 yrs		26–35 yrs		36+ yrs	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age	10	40	8	32	7	28
<b>Recent alcohol use</b>						
Drank in past 48 hours	6	67	3	38	2	29
Recent alcohol attribution	4	40	3	38	0	0

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

its relationship with age. However, it is interesting to note that compared with older women, a much larger proportion of women aged between 18 and 25 years (67%) had been drinking in the 48 hours prior to their arrest.

### What were they drinking and how much did they drink?

Since the introduction of a new survey in June 2009, the DUMA program has collected a range of new data items relating to alcohol. Specifically, the new questionnaire asks detainees to nominate whether they had consumed beer, wine or spirits on the last occasion they were drinking and for each type of alcohol, how many units were consumed. A range of counting units is provided to differentiate between various strengths of beer and different serving volumes, making it possible to make a distinction between those who consumed six pints (570ml) of low-strength beer from those who consumed four middies (285ml) of full-strength beer and those who drank three glasses (180ml) of wine. This new system not only enables the AIC to distinguish between different types of alcohol, but also to more accurately estimate standardised drinking units (standard drinks).

Of the 109 male disorderly conduct offenders who had been drinking in the 48 hours prior to being detained on a Friday or Saturday evening, 26 percent (n=28) had been drinking beer only, while nine percent (n=10) had been drinking wine only and 28 percent (n=30) had been drinking spirits only. The remaining 41 male detainees (38%) had been drinking a mixture of beer, wine or spirits prior to the disorderly conduct for which they were detained. Female detainees were more likely than males to have been drinking spirits only (45%) and less likely to have been mixing drinks (27%).

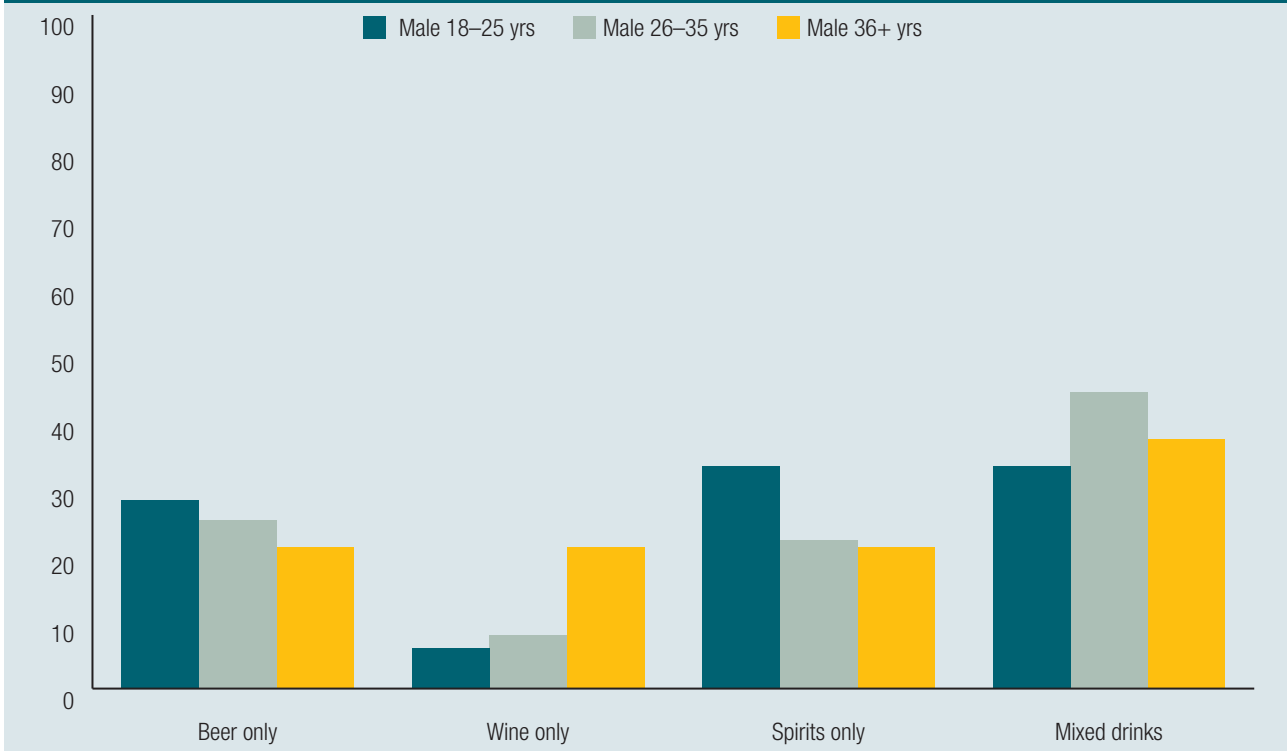
By age, males aged between 26 and 35 years were most likely to have been mixing drinks on the last occasion they consumed alcohol (44%), whereas males aged 18 to 25 years were most likely to have been drinking spirits only (33%) and least likely to have been drinking wine only (6%).

In terms of median quantities, detainees typically consumed 15 standard drinks on the last drinking occasion—equivalent to approximately 10 schooners (425ml) of full-strength beer. Males consumed a greater number of standard drinks than females (15 standard drinks versus 11 standard drinks), while male detainees aged between 26 and 35 years consumed more than their older counterparts aged 36 years and over (20 standard drinks versus 13 standard drinks). Further, those males aged between 26 and 35 years were likely, on average, to have consumed more drinks on the last occasion than those aged 18 to 25 years (20 standard drinks versus 14 standard drinks). These quantities also varied considerably by the type of alcohol consumed; for example, those who drank wine only on the last occasion drank more on average (33 standard drinks—equivalent to almost 1 cask of wine) than those who consumed a mixture of alcoholic drinks, beer only, or spirits only (23, 12 and 6 standard drinks, respectively). Combined, the results indicate the highest quantity of alcohol is typically consumed by males (26 to 35 years) who are mixing drinks (29 standard drinks—equivalent to just over three-quarters of a standard case of full-strength beer)

### Location of last drink

To give further context to the situations in which detainees had been drinking, the DUMA survey also asks detainees to identify the location where they consumed their last drink (see Figure 2). Overall, the single most common location of last drink in the 48

**Figure 1 Last drink type consumed by male detainees<sup>a</sup>, by age category (%)**



a: For those who had consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

**Table 3 Standard drinks consumed by those charged with a disorderly conduct offence<sup>a</sup>**

	Male 18–25 yrs	Male 26–35 yrs	Male 36+ yrs	Total male and female detainees <sup>b</sup>
Average drinks consumed last time	median	median	median	median
Beer only	12	15	n/a	12
Wine only	n/a	n/a	n/a	33
Spirits only	6	6	n/a	6
Mixed drinks	23	29	15	23
Total standard drinks	14	20	13	15

a: For those who had consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours

b: Total median standard drinks for both male and female detainees. For female detainees, totals by age category were too infrequent for inclusion

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

hours preceding arrest was at a licensed premise (40%)—most commonly a tavern or hotel (15%) or a nightclub (13%). Of the remaining 60 percent, 39 percent had been most recently drinking at a private residential location, including at the detainee’s own home (21%) or ‘other family or friends’ home (18%). However, a number of disorderly conduct offenders had consumed their last drink at a park or other open space (15%).

The location of last drink varied depending on the age of the offender, with a higher proportion of offenders aged 26 to 35 years drinking at a private residence (47%). Conversely, younger disorderly conduct offenders aged between 18 and 25 years were more likely to have been drinking at licensed premises (50%).

The quantity of alcohol consumed by disorderly conduct offenders varied depending on the location

of their last drink. For example, those who had their last drink at a residential location typically consumed slightly less (median 13 standard drinks) than those who had been drinking at licensed premises (median 14 standard drinks). Further, the group who consumed the highest number of drinks were those whose last drink was on the street or in a public place (median 22 standard drinks).

### How do ‘weekend’ disorderly conduct offenders compare with other disorderly conduct offenders?

Compared with those detained for disorder at times other than Friday or Saturday nights, weekend disorder offenders were more likely to be younger and to have been consuming alcohol shortly before their arrest. For

example, those offenders detained for disorderly conduct on nights over the weekend were more likely to be aged between 18 and 25 years (49% versus 41%), to have consumed alcohol in the 48 hours prior to their arrest (75% versus 52%) and to have attributed alcohol as a factor in their offending (49% versus 26%). Moreover, those detained for disorder during the night on weekends were:

- more likely to have been mixing drinks (37% versus 27%).
- more likely to have consumed a greater quantity of alcohol on the last occasion they drank (15 standard drinks versus 12 standard drinks)—a difference that was larger when examined for 26 to 35 year old males only (20 standard drinks versus 14 standard drinks).
- more likely to have consumed their last drink at a licensed premise (40% versus 22%). This difference was larger for males aged 18 to 25 years (50% versus 24%).

How do 'weekend' disorderly conduct offenders compare with 'weekend' assault offenders?

A comparative analysis of disorderly conduct and assault offenders revealed a remarkably similar offender profile. The majority in both groups were male and had a similar distribution across the age range. In terms of alcohol consumption, almost equal proportions of disorderly conduct and assault offenders had consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours (75% versus 70%). Those who were drinking consumed roughly the same quantity of alcohol (15 standard drinks versus 14 standard drinks) and were equally likely to have been mixing drinks (37% versus 39%).

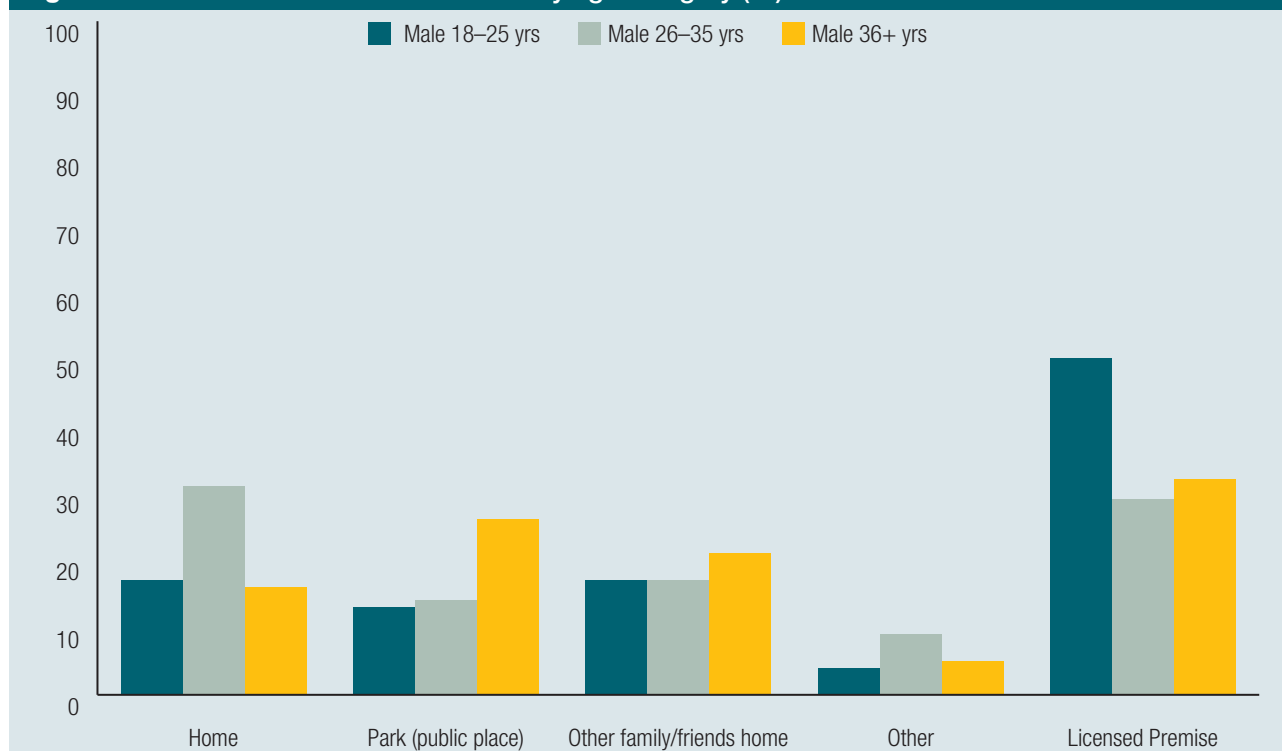
The location of last drink consumed was the only indicator with a difference, with a greater proportion of disorderly conduct offenders having consumed their last drink at a licensed premise (40% versus 30%) compared with assault offenders, who were more likely to have consumed their last drink at a residential location (53% versus 39%).

## Summary

Disorderly conduct offenders constitute a substantial proportion of offenders dealt with by the police in and around entertainment precincts, with estimates from SA Police indicating that as many as 47 percent of apprehensions in the Adelaide CBD in 2008–09 were for disorderly conduct or offensive behaviour—more than three times the number of assaults in the same period (SAPOL 2010a). Add to this evidence from New South Wales that incidents of offensive behaviour have increased by 25 percent since 2005 (BOCSAR 2009) and it becomes clear that disorderly conduct likely represents a significant burden to the community, both in terms of policing resources and costs to victims and businesses.

In this paper, an analysis is provided of new data collected from disorderly conduct offenders as part of the AIC's DUMA program, focusing specifically on offenders detained between 6 pm and 6 am on Friday or Saturday nights. DUMA is Australia's only regular collection of information about drug use and offending from police detainees. It presents a unique opportunity to examine, in detail, information that would not otherwise be available through traditional data sources.

**Figure 2** Location of last drink<sup>a</sup> for males by age category (%)



a: For those who had consumed alcohol in the 48 hours

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

The results show that detainees charged with disorderly conduct on a Friday or Saturday night are substantially different to those detainees charged at other times and on other days. In particular, disorderly conduct offenders detained over the weekend were more likely to:

- have consumed alcohol in the 48 hours prior to their arrest (75% versus 52%);

- attribute alcohol as a factor in their offending (49% versus 26%);
- be aged between 18 and 25 years (49% versus 41%);
- have last consumed alcohol at a licensed premise (40% versus 22%);
- have mixed types of alcoholic drinks (37% versus 27%); and

**Table 4 General profile of all detainees charged with disorderly conduct**

	Charged with disorderly conduct on Friday and Saturday nights <sup>a</sup>		Charged with disorderly conduct at all other times of the day	
	n	%	n	%
Those charged with disorder	161	19	672	81
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	136	85	565	84
Female	25	15	107	16
<b>Age</b>				
18–25 yrs	79	49	275	41
26–35 yrs	53	33	227	34
36+ yrs	29	18	170	25
<b>Alcohol use</b>				
Drank past 48 hrs	120	75	348	52
Recent alcohol attribution	78	49	239	26
Last drink at a licensed premise <sup>b</sup>	48	40	76	22
Last drink at residential location <sup>b</sup>	46	39	162	47
Mixed alcoholic drink types <sup>b</sup>	44	37	95	27
	n	median	n	median
Total detainees who consumed alcohol and standard drinks consumed	118	15	342	12

a: Between the hours of 6 pm and 6 am

b: For those who had consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]

**Table 5 General profile of detainees charged with disorderly conduct and assault on Friday and Saturday nights**

	Charged with disorderly conduct on Friday and Saturday nights <sup>a</sup>		Charged with assault on Friday and Saturday nights <sup>a</sup>	
	n	%	n	%
Detainees	161	19 <sup>b</sup>	170	19 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	136	85	149	88
Female	25	15	21	12
<b>Age</b>				
18–25 yrs	79	49	87	51
26–35 yrs	53	33	47	28
36+ yrs	29	18	36	21
<b>Alcohol use</b>				
Drank past 48 hrs	120	75	118	70
Recent alcohol attribution	78	49	77	45
Last drink at a licensed premise <sup>b</sup>	48	40	35	30
Last drink at residential location <sup>b</sup>	46	39	62	53
Mixed alcoholic drink types <sup>b</sup>	44	37	46	39
	n	median	n	median
Total detainees who consumed alcohol and standard drinks consumed	118	15	116	14

a: Between the hours of 6 pm and 6 am

b: For those who had consumed alcohol in the past 48 hours

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2010 [computer file]; Sweeney & Payne 2011

- consumed a greater quantity of alcohol during the most recent episode of drinking (15 versus 12 standard drinks (median)).

A comparative analysis of disorderly conduct and assault offenders revealed a remarkably similar offender profile, with the majority of both groups being male and having a similar age distribution. Other similarities between the two groups were:

- almost equal proportions of offenders who had consumed alcohol in the 48 hours prior to arrest;
- consuming a similar amount of alcohol the last time they drank (15 standard drinks versus 14 standard drinks); and
- an almost identical proportion were mixing alcohol types.

The main difference between these groups was that those arrested for disorderly conduct on the weekend were more likely to have consumed their last drink at a licensed premise (40% versus 30%) and those arrested for assault on the weekend were more likely to have consumed their last drink at a private residential location (53% versus 39%).

Overall, young males aged between 18 and 25 years comprised the single largest group of offenders detained for disorderly conduct on Friday or Saturday night (40%). However, specific analysis shows that male detainees aged between 26 and 35 years were the most likely to have consumed the greatest quantity of alcohol. Specifically males aged 26 to 35 years were more likely to have been:

- drinking a mix of alcohol types;
- drinking greater quantities of alcohol (median of 20 standard drinks, although this increased to 29 for those who were mixing alcohol types); and
- most recently drinking at a private residential location.

These findings provide a valuable insight into the alcohol consumption patterns of disorderly conduct offenders detained during periods similar to those targeted by Operation Unite, illustrating that not only had the majority of disorderly conduct offenders had been drinking

prior to their arrest, but that the quantities of alcohol they had consumed were likely to result in high levels of intoxication. Knowing the profile of disorderly conduct offenders, the amount of alcohol they have consumed and where they consumed their last drink provides a more detailed picture than previously available of the populations targeted by law enforcement agencies. In addition, these data provide important information supporting a range of complementary strategies such as regulatory controls and their enforcement (eg licensing restrictions and mandatory responsible service of alcohol provisions), social marketing campaigns targeting young people and building community awareness of the dangers associated with alcohol misuse.

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All URLs correct at April 2011

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### What is DUMA?

*DUMA is Australia's only nationwide survey of drug use and criminal offending among police detainees. Funded by the Australian Government, DUMA uses a detailed self-report survey and voluntary urinalysis to provide timely data on drug use and local drug markets. DUMA is an important source of information for local and national law enforcement agencies in the development of strategic responses to new and emerging drug/crime issues.*

*DUMA data collection occurs every quarter at eight of the nine available sites across the country and operates on a rotating basis. The program operates as a successful partnership between the AIC and state and territory police agencies.*

*For more information about DUMA, or to access DUMA data and publications, please visit: [http://www.aic.gov.au/about\\_aic/research\\_programs/nmp/duma.aspx](http://www.aic.gov.au/about_aic/research_programs/nmp/duma.aspx) or email us at: [duma@aic.gov.au](mailto:duma@aic.gov.au)*