

Change in Bar Closing Time Cuts Murder Rate in Brazilian Town

The town of Diadema in Brazil has reduced its murder rate by almost half in the last few years –mostly by establishing 11 PM as the closing hour for bars and other places that sell alcohol for on-premises consumption. This action resulted in the saving of about 273 lives in the two years following the change in policy. The finding is reported by researchers at the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in Berkeley, California who worked with government officials from Diadema to document the effects of the policy change.

Diadema is a low-income city of over 350,000 people located south of São Paulo. The community had high rates of homicides, assaults, vehicle crashes and gang violence. When officials studied police records, they noted that many of these crimes occurred late at night and involved people who had been drinking. A July, 2002 municipal law prohibited on-premise alcohol sales between the hours of 11:00 pm and 6:00 am; previously, there was no legally mandated closing time.

Statistical analysis of murder rates from January 1995 to July 2004 showed a reduction in the per capita homicide rate of more than 46%. In addition, assaults against women dropped by more than 25%, though this reduction was not statistically significant.

Political leaders in Diadema worked vigorously both before and after the policy change to ensure that it had broad public support and was well enforced. A public opinion poll carried out before the policy change showed a community approval rate of 83%. Following adoption of the municipal law, colorful brochures were distributed and local news media were used to publicize the law. Recent surveys reveal that 98% of Diadema residents know about the law, and 93% support the new alcohol policy.

Six months prior to scheduled adoption of the new alcohol policy the municipal civil guard visited most alcohol retailers and discussed with the owners the proposed new law and its application to alcohol sales. Later, the owners were asked to sign a declaration that they were aware of the law and the legal consequences of violations. Enforcement operations are carried out each evening. An important component of the enforcement strategy includes regular meetings and reports to officers of the municipal civil guard on the effectiveness of enforcement in reducing community violence and informing officers directly of the survey data documenting citizen support for their enforcement efforts.

One study author, Dr. Joel Grube of the Prevention Research Center, said, “A wealth of research shows that policies that change how alcohol is sold can be highly effective in preventing alcohol related problems. This is another example of how those policies can work.”

Another study author, Robert Reynolds of the Pacific Institute in Calverton, Maryland, stated, “Research has shown over and over that alcohol and violence are inextricably linked. The results of Diadema’s efforts provide important evidence that this relationship

need not be accepted passively. Local communities have it within their power to prevent alcohol-related violence.”