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A cohesive national regulatory approach for the night-time economy (NTE) in the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG)

There is a growing call for firms to integrate the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals within their business strategies to address solutions for society's wicked problems (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2019; UN Women, 2022). One of these problems is violence against women and girls (VAWG), which sadly remains a societal and institutional problem that places women in an inequitable position in society (Stöckl and Quigg, 2021).

An evidence-based approach to inform public policy in the prevention of VAWG

The Baroness Casey Review (2023) has flagged that cultural change in police forces is required. In the wake of Sarah Everard's murder, there have been new government measures to address the problem and reassure women and girls, *inter alia*, increasing the Safer Streets fund for street lighting and CCTV; piloting Project Vigilant (plain clothed police in bars and clubs); the introduction of the Spiking (Offence) Bill making it an offence to administer, or attempt to administer drugs or alcohol to a person without their consent; The Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill, known as the 'up-skirting bill,' bringing in custodial sentences for taking sexually intrusive photographs without permission. Nevertheless, while police reporting rates have increased by 50% for domestic violence, and 240% for rape for the period 2016-2021, outcomes remain poor and charging rates are still extremely low at 2% (Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2022).

Current over-focus on criminal justice fails to address the source of the problem

These policy initiatives suggest a reassuring prioritisation of the issue by government, however this focus does not consider the societal root causes of VAWG. Often VAWG is committed in broad daylight e.g. bullying, online violence, domestic abuse, sexual harassment. Whilst surveillance and criminalisation help to reduce fear of crime, the cultural norms and beliefs that perpetuate misogyny and victim-blaming are deep-rooted and pervasive in societal structures. Existing regulatory measures in themselves fail to challenge social behaviours often considered low-level or harmless, for example, unwanted sexual touch, indecent exposure. Such behaviours exist on a continuum of sexual violence and are the result of belief systems that justify aggression and norms of entitlement. Troublingly, they invariably precipitate incidences of more serious sexual crimes (Kelly, 1987).

The role of business, the night-time economy and VAWG

VAWG is committed mostly by men, in private and public spaces, often as a result of patriarchal structures. The night-time economy (NTE) is a key arena for the development, maintenance and disruption of the cultural norms that underpin gender discrimination. These may range from inappropriate or neglectful behaviour of door staff, to consumer-to-

consumer drink spiking (Night-Time Industries Association, 2022). A lack of staff safeguarding training in these environs, coupled with media alcohol advertising campaigns, normalise the problematic behaviours that may precipitate VAWG. However, the marketplace itself is a key location for influencing positive transformative in society (Middleton & Turnbull, 2022). For example, in relation to harmful gender stereotypes and norms, Unilever's Dove brand 'Campaign for Real Beauty' confirms the impact of marketing and advertising on society for the better (Feng et al., 2019). AB InBev's Budweiser partnership with Walk Safe + to provide a free women's personal safety app for customers, demonstrates this brand's commitment to take responsibility for VAWG.

The opportunity presented for businesses by the Home Office Safer Streets funding alongside Business Improvement District (BID) levies have already made a great difference towards the protection of NTE patrons and staff in many regions across the UK. For example Portsmouth City Council's 'We Stand Together' training and accreditation schemes for bars and nightclubs. However, accreditation schemes will be much more powerful in driving cultural change if a cohesive national regulatory approach is adopted, similar to the Food Standards Agency's food hygiene ratings. This would also allow NTE businesses to send a clear message to citizens that gender discrimination and VAWG are unacceptable.

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