

A New Zealand study has come the closest yet to establishing the **degree to which alcohol abuse actually causes crime**.

Though the correlation between the two is clear, evidence on whether alcohol actually *causes* crime rather than just being associated with it (perhaps because they share some common causes) is complex rather than convincing. Attempts to clarify the issue have all suffered from the limitation that they can only eliminate 'confounding' factors which researchers think in advance are relevant and which can be measured. Other factors may play a part and some (such as a possible genetic predisposition to both crime and drinking) are not susceptible to measurement. The study based on a follow-up of 1265 people born in 1977 in Christchurch, New Zealand developed a statistical technique to cater for both measured and unmeasured confounding factors, a major advance. From age 15 to 21, the sample were regularly interviewed to establish their involvement in crime and the extent (if any) of alcohol abuse/dependence symptoms; data from earlier years and continuing measures taken from age 15 to 21 were drawn on for factors likely to be related to both. As in previous studies, these shared causes largely accounted for the link between alcohol and crime. But even when measured *and* unmeasured confounding factors were eliminated, there remained a highly significant link; on a scale from 0 to 11, a one point increase in alcohol abuse/dependence was associated with a 15% increase in the rate of violent crime and 10% in property crime.

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Featured studies Fergusson D.M., *et al.* "Alcohol abuse and crime: a fixed-effects regression analysis." *Addiction*: 2000, 95(10), p. 1525–1536. Copies: apply Alcohol Concern.

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