

October 2017

Nightlife and Alcohol-Related Problems in West Hollywood: Perspectives from Local Businesses

Learning Brief

With support from the Institute for Public Strategies, Harder+Company Community Research surveyed 68 non-alcohol businesses in West Hollywood in the summer of 2017. This learning brief provides an overview of survey findings, as well as recommendations for policymakers, West Hollywood city officials, and alcohol retail business owners and managers.



While alcohol businesses can be strong assets to a community, problems associated with alcohol sales, ranging from loitering and noise to violent crime, can adversely affect neighboring businesses. In some cities, this has resulted in the loss of business diversity and a long-term decline in economic viability. Research shows that communities that have a larger number of alcohol establishments in a given geographical area, such as West Hollywood, have higher rates of drinking and drivingⁱ, assault, crime and violence.ⁱⁱ A study of 13 cities found that increased crime makes a region undesirable for other kinds of businesses, including retail and personal services businesses, resulting in a loss of business diversity.ⁱⁱⁱ

In West Hollywood, a city with one of the highest concentrations of alcohol outlets in LA County, it is important to explore the impact nightlife has on non-alcohol businesses. This is precisely what this evaluation aims to do. Harder+Company staff conducted surveys with 68 non-alcohol businesses in the West Hollywood neighborhoods of Boystown, Sunset, and Central/Eastside in July and August of 2017. A summary of findings is outlined below with more detail included in the remainder of the report.

Key Findings



Only a handful of businesses think excessive drinking and overservice are serious problems in West Hollywood, but several reported that alcohol-related problems negatively impacted their businesses. More than a quarter of respondents reported that alcohol-related problems negatively impact their business at least 1- 2 times per month. Businesses located in Boystown and businesses open after 9:00 PM reported experiencing a higher-level of negative impacts as a result of alcohol-related problems.



West Hollywood nightlife negatively impacts businesses through external or public problems that happen on the street or directly outside of a business. These problems include people drinking in public, loitering/trespassing, drug use/abuse, and excessing noise/nuisance.



Businesses have benefitted from, but have also been harmed by West Hollywood nightlife. Businesses benefit from the West Hollywood nightlife because it generates revenue and brings in new customers. However, some businesses have also experienced shoplifting and stolen or damaged property because of West Hollywood nightlife.



Many respondents are in favor of environmental policies and practices that will help increase safety in West Hollywood. Nearly half are in favor of better enforcement of ID checks at bars, and 40-43% are in favor of increased drunk driving enforcement, police doing regular compliance checks that monitor bartending practices, and the appointment of a police officer who works directly with bars.

Evaluation Questions and Methodology

This evaluation aims to better understand how businesses that do not serve or sell alcohol are impacted by nightlife and alcohol-related problems in West Hollywood. The evaluation is guided by three evaluation questions:

1. What are non-alcohol businesses’ perceptions of the retail alcohol environment’s impact in West Hollywood?
2. What nightlife-related issues most frequently impact non-alcohol business in West Hollywood?
3. What policies or practices are non-alcohol businesses likely to support in order to improve public health and safety in West Hollywood?

Teams of two Harder+Company staff conducted 5-10 minute door-to-door surveys with 68 non-alcohol businesses in the West Hollywood neighborhoods of Boystown, Sunset, and Central/Eastside over six weeks. A total of 152 businesses were visited and almost half (45%) agreed to participate in the survey.

Some businesses uniformly declined to participate (e.g., banks) and others declined for different reasons (e.g., staff were busy helping customers, staff were not interested, managers were not present, etc.).

Characteristics of Businesses Surveyed

Businesses surveyed represented a range of geographic regions in West Hollywood and various types of businesses. Most businesses were retail, service, and food businesses (see Exhibit 1). Service businesses included beauty salons, fitness centers and car services. Retail businesses included clothing and accessories, book, and nutrition stores. Food businesses were primarily fast-food or to-go shops, and included frozen yogurt and coffee shops as well. Medical businesses included an urgent care location and an optician’s office.

Exhibit 1. Most businesses surveyed were retail, service, and food (n=68)

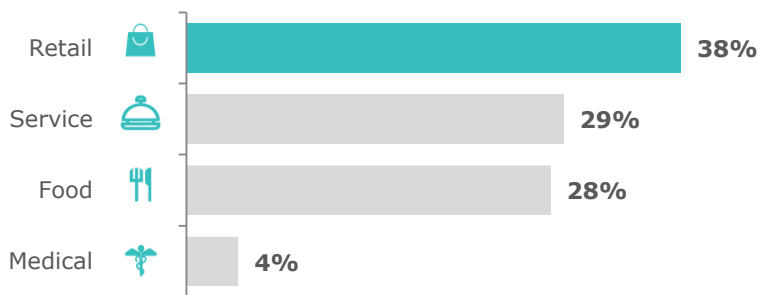
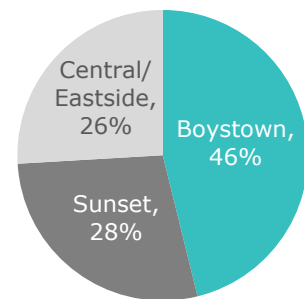


Exhibit 2. Nearly half of businesses are located in Boystown (n=68)



Nearly half of the businesses surveyed are located in Boystown (see Exhibit 2). The hours of businesses surveyed are split fairly evenly with 42% of businesses closing at 9:00 PM or later and 58% closing earlier than 9:00 PM. All businesses, with the exception of one, are open on the weekend. Businesses surveyed had an average of 9 staff members and staff size ranged from 1 to 30. About half of the survey respondents (48%) were employees and a third (33%) were managers; only 13% were business owners. Many respondents (44%) have only been working at their businesses for a year or less and more than a quarter (26%) have been working there for 2-5 years.

Nightlife-Related Issues and Safety

Businesses' Perceptions of West Hollywood Nightlife

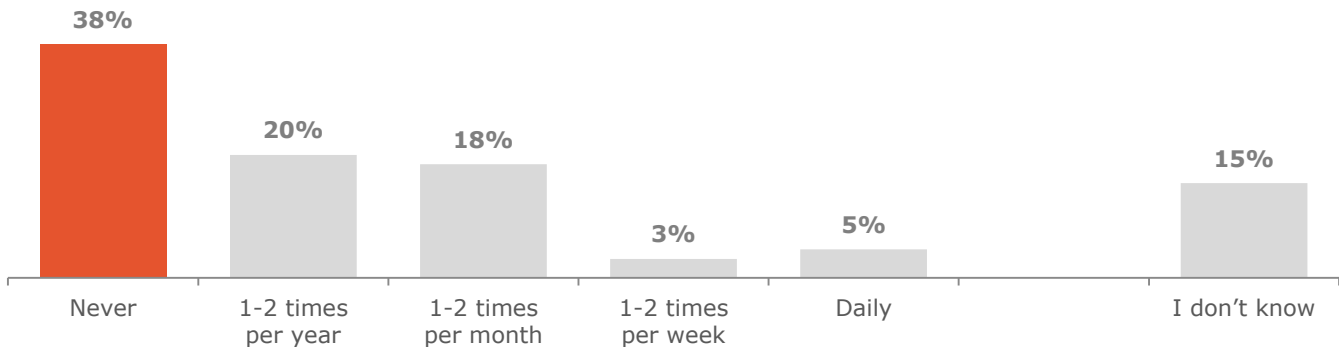
Most businesses surveyed do not see excessive drinking as a problem in West Hollywood. Only 15% of businesses think excessive drinking is a moderate or serious problem in West Hollywood. However, almost one quarter of businesses (24%) think overservice is a moderate or serious problem in West Hollywood. Overservice is the sale of alcoholic beverages to intoxicated people and, in addition to being unlawful, is a public health and safety issue. Excessive and binge drinking lead to various community harms, including accidental injuries, drinking and driving, crime, and violence.

Nightlife-Related Issues that Frequently Impact Businesses

Although few businesses view excessive drinking and overservice as serious problems in West Hollywood, businesses did report that they experience problems related to alcohol consumption. More than a quarter of businesses (26%) reported problems related to heavy drinking negatively impacting their business at least 1-2 times per month (including 1-2 times per week and daily; see Exhibit 3).

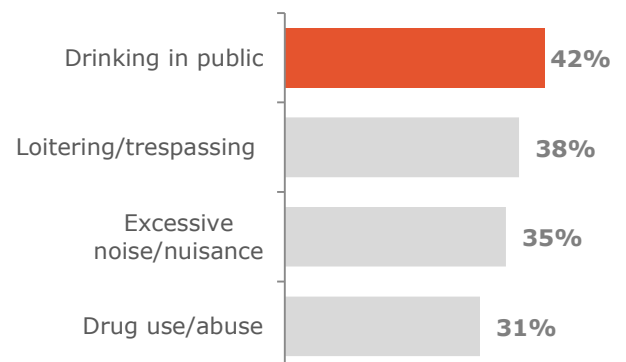
One in five businesses in West Hollywood report that public drunkenness negatively impacts their business at least once a week.

Exhibit 3. How often problems related to heavy drinking at bars, clubs and restaurants negatively impact businesses (n=65)



Survey findings show that businesses are most affected by nightlife-related problems that are external, public-facing problems that happen on the street or directly outside of their business. Specifically, drinking in public was reported as one of the primary issues businesses in West Hollywood face (see Exhibit 4). Two in five respondents (42%) said that public drunkenness impacts their business at least 1-2 times per month and one in five businesses (20%) reported that it impacts their business at least every week. Loitering, trespassing and excessive noise or nuisance follow public drunkenness as issues businesses are disproportionately impacted by, with more than one third (37%) of respondents saying their businesses are negatively impacted by loitering or trespassing at least 1-2 times per month and 35% of businesses reporting that they are affected by excessive noise or nuisance every month.

Exhibit 4. Nightlife-related issues that impact businesses at least once a month (n=68)



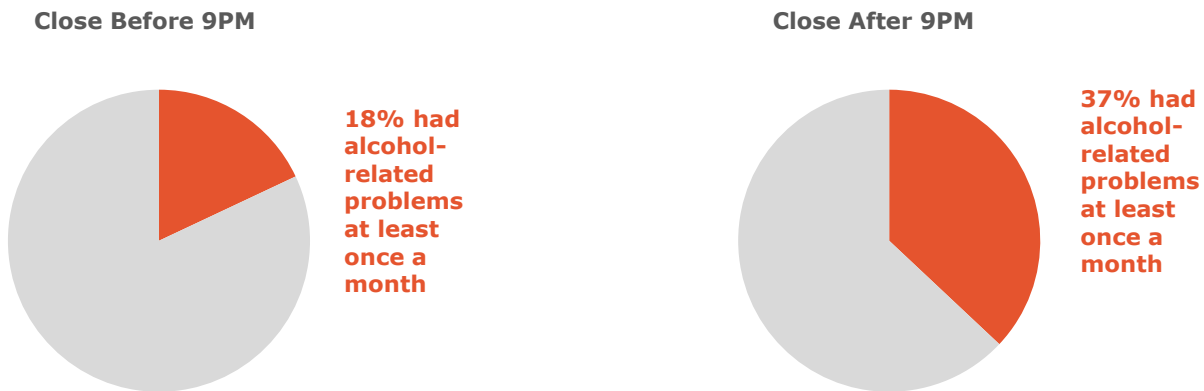
Drug use was also an issue highlighted by survey respondents, with one third reporting that it impacts their business on at least a monthly basis. More than half of businesses located in Central/Eastside reported experiencing drug use or abuse issues at least 1-2 times per month, compared to one third of businesses in Boystown and 11% of businesses in Sunset Strip. In addition to the nightlife-related problems previously mentioned, several businesses cited experiencing other issues that were not explicitly asked about in the survey, including homelessness, vomiting, and excessive trash/alcohol containers being left on their property. Nearly half of respondents did not know how issues relating to traffic, burglary, or assault impacted their business.

Business located in Boystown and businesses open past 9:00 PM are more likely to experience nightlife-related problems. A total of 40% of businesses located in Boystown reported experiencing problems related to heavy drinking at least 1-2 times per month, compared to only 11% of businesses in Sunset Strip and 17% of businesses in Central/Eastside. Businesses in Boystown are also more likely to be impacted by loitering and trespassing, with more than half of respondents (53%) from Boystown experiencing this problem at least 1-2 times per month. This is compared to only 30% of businesses in Central/Eastside and 11% of businesses in Sunset Strip.

Businesses' hours of operation also influence whether or not they are impacted by nightlife-related issues. For example, businesses open after 9:00 PM reported a higher frequency of experiencing problems related to heavy drinking compared to businesses that close before 9:00 PM (see Exhibit 5).

More than half of businesses said West Hollywood nightlife brings in new customers at least 1-2 times per month.

Exhibit 5. Businesses that stay open later experience more alcohol-related problems than those that close before 9:00 PM (n=67)



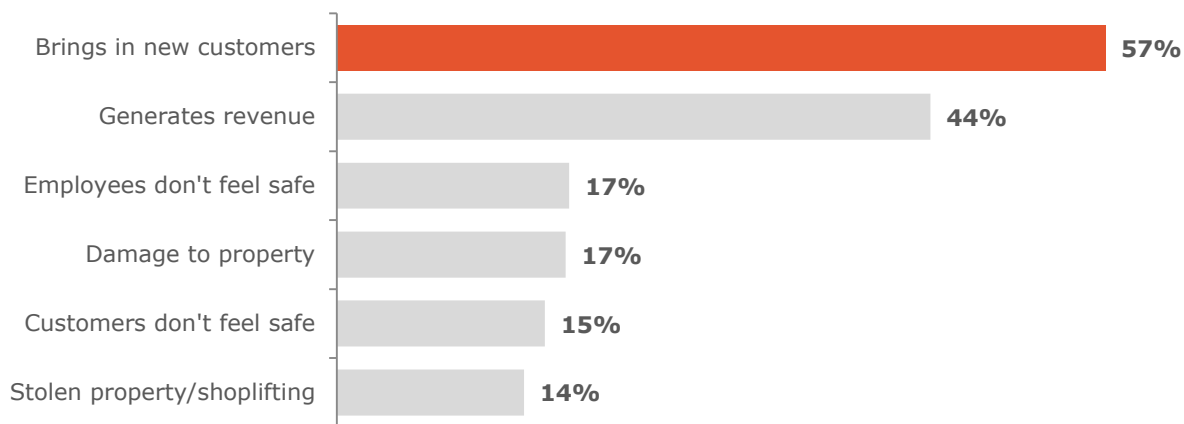
Impact of Nightlife on Non-Alcohol Businesses

West Hollywood nightlife brings in new customers and generates revenue for many non-alcohol businesses. When asked how the surrounding nightlife affects their business, many respondents reported that they experience positive impacts of West Hollywood nightlife. More than half of businesses (57%) said West Hollywood nightlife brings in new customers at least 1- 2 times per month and more than a third of businesses (34%) said the nightlife brings in new customers on a daily basis.

This impact is not unique to just one neighborhood in West Hollywood, but was reported by businesses across the three neighborhoods, with 67% of businesses in Boystown, 56% of businesses in Central/Eastside, and 44% of businesses in Sunset Strip saying nightlife brings in new customers on a monthly basis. Furthermore,

despite reporting more nightlife-related problems, 80% of businesses that are open until 9pm or later said nightlife brings in new customers at least 1-2 times per month compared to only 41% of businesses that close before 9pm. In addition to bringing in new customers, respondents said that nightlife helps generate revenue, with 44% of businesses reporting that West Hollywood nightlife generates revenue at least 1-2 times per month and 24% saying it generates revenue daily.

Exhibit 6. Activities that businesses experienced at least once a month because of West Hollywood nightlife (n=65-67)



While many businesses reported benefiting from the West Hollywood nightlife because it generated revenue and brought in new customers, some businesses have experienced shoplifting, and stolen or damaged property because of West Hollywood nightlife. A total of 17% businesses said they experience damage to property at least 1-2 times per month because of West Hollywood nightlife. Of the businesses that reported this, zero were located in Sunset Strip, revealing that businesses in Central/Eastside and Boystown experience damage to property at higher rates. In fact, almost one third (28%) of businesses in Central/Eastside and one fifth (21%) of businesses in Boystown said their property is damaged at least 1-2 times per month because of West Hollywood nightlife. In addition to property damage, a handful of businesses (14%) said they experience stolen property or shoplifting at least 1-2 times per month because of West Hollywood nightlife. Only 5% said they experience this on a weekly basis.

Nearly all respondents reported feeling safe during the day. Nearly all staff surveyed (99%) feel somewhat safe or very safe walking to their car and eighty-eight percent feel somewhat safe or very safe using public transportation during the day. Furthermore, only a few businesses said their customers and employees don't feel safe at least 1- 2 times per month because of West Hollywood nightlife.

Although daytime safety isn't an issue, several respondents do not feel safe in West Hollywood after dark. For example, about one in five (21%) respondents said they do not feel safe using public transportation after dark. Of the 31 respondents who said they do not feel safe after dark, over one third (32%) reported that the nightlife surrounding their business plays a role in making them feel unsafe. Respondents that work at businesses in the Central/Eastside neighborhood of West Hollywood are more likely to feel unsafe after dark, with 19% of respondents reporting that they do not feel safe working alone in their business or walking to their car after dark; 10% or less of respondents from businesses in Boystown or Sunset Strip reported feeling unsafe doing the same activities after dark. Nearly all respondents (97%) feel somewhat safe or very safe working alone.

Business-Supported Policies and Practices

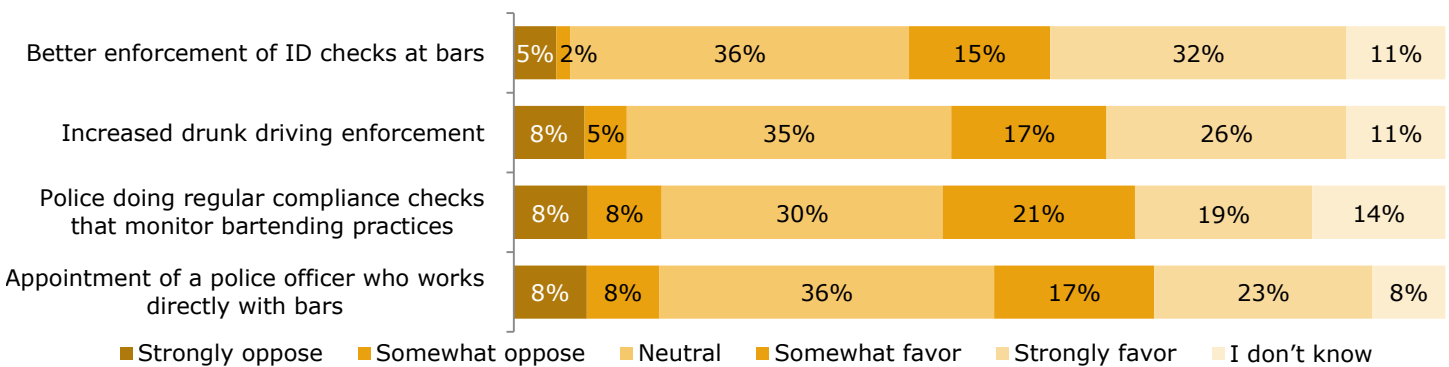
Although not all businesses think excessive drinking or overservice is a problem in West Hollywood, a high percentage of respondents reported that they support policies and practices that address nightlife-related harms in West Hollywood. As shown in Exhibit 7, many businesses support environmental policies and practices that will help increase safety in West Hollywood. Better enforcement of ID checks at bars is a policy that nearly half (47%) of respondents somewhat or strongly favor. In fact, employees and managers/owners are equally likely to support this policy, with 46% of managers/owners and 55% of employees somewhat or strongly favoring better enforcement of ID checks at bars. Increased drunk driving enforcement follows as a policy that many businesses (43%) somewhat or strongly favor implementing in West Hollywood. More than half of respondents in Boystown and Central/Eastside (55% and 50%, respectively) somewhat or strongly favor this policy, compared to about one third (33%) of respondents in Sunset Strip.

Nearly half of respondents support better enforcement of ID checks at bars in West Hollywood.

Two in five respondents support policies and practices that engage West Hollywood police to prevent night-life related harms. Specifically, 40% of those surveyed reported that they somewhat or strongly favor police doing regular compliance checks that monitor bartending practices, as well as the appointment of a police officer who works directly with the bars. A dedicated officer could serve as a liaison that would report to the West Hollywood Sheriff’s Department. Their role would be to maintain positive and proactive relationships with alcohol retailers.

Business managers and owners are more likely than employees to support policies that restrict where and how many new bars or clubs can locate in West Hollywood. Survey findings show that 44% of owners/managers somewhat or strongly favor this policy, compared to only 23% of employees.

Exhibit 7. Respondents rated their level of agreement with the following policies or laws (n=66)



Conclusion and Implications

While only a handful of businesses think excessive drinking and overservice are serious problems in West Hollywood, several reported a variety of alcohol-related problems adversely impacting their businesses, including people drinking in public, loitering and trespassing, drug use/abuse, and excessive noise and nuisance. Businesses in Boystown and those open later reported experiencing more alcohol-related problems because of West Hollywood nightlife. There is a need to support local businesses and some suggestions for how to do this are included below.

West Hollywood business owners, managers, and employees would benefit from learning more about nightlife-related issues and their potential health, safety, and economic impacts. Although many respondents said that West Hollywood nightlife helps them generate revenue or brings in more customers, many respondents were unaware of the other ways nightlife impacts or could impact their business and other businesses in West Hollywood. The Institute for Public Strategies could work with local community leaders and non-alcoholic businesses to raise awareness of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems in West Hollywood, discuss how these problems directly impact local businesses, and develop solutions together.

Strengthening the relationship between West Hollywood businesses and local officials might help address the external, public problems businesses face as a result of West Hollywood nightlife. Several businesses reported experiencing external-facing problems such as loitering, trespassing, people drinking in public, and excessive noise and nuisance. Businesses open later in the evening and those located in Boystown were particularly impacted by these problems. Local elected officials could work closely with businesses to identify areas where these problems are happening and propose community-based solutions to addressing those problems (e.g., installing more light posts to illuminate dark alleyways, etc.).

Develop a local Responsible Retailer Program for alcohol businesses that would recognize and reward businesses with responsible serving and operating practices. Interested local non-alcohol businesses should weigh in on and advocate for a Responsible Retailer Program that would benefit their business operations and the local community. The program could be implemented by the newly designated Alcohol Liaison Officer in West Hollywood as a partnership between local police and alcohol beverage establishments. In Ventura County, a Responsible Retailer Program was developed as a collaboration with the Ventura Police Department and other local agencies to improve public health and safety by increasing the compliance of alcohol businesses^{iv}.

ⁱ Treno, A., Ponicki, W., Remer, L., & Gruenewald, P. (2008). Alcohol outlets, youth drinking, and self-reported ease of access to alcohol: A constraints and opportunities approach. *Alcoholism Clinical and Experimental Research*, 32(8), 1372-1379.

ⁱⁱ Gruenewald, P. J., & Remer, L. (2006). Changes in outlet densities affect violence rates. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 30(7), 1184-1193.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hipp, John R. A Dynamic View of Neighborhoods: [The Reciprocal Relationship between Crime and Neighborhood Structural Characteristics](#). University of California, Irvine. *Social Problems*, 57(2), 12-10-2013.

^{iv} Ventura County Behavioral Health (2017). Alcohol and Drugs Programs and Resources; [Responsible Retailer Program](#).