There is an obligation on the Irish Government to target alcohol consumption, particularly binge drinking, and alcohol-related attitudes that are facilitative of rape.

Over the course of 2012, the RCNI Calling Time on Sexual Violence series has examined the involvement of alcohol in sexual violence. Given the prevalence of alcohol consumption by perpetrators and victims in incidences of rape and sexual violence in Ireland, there is a clear need for government to target alcohol consumption and attitudes towards alcohol and sex as significant aspects of the efforts to protect and ensure human rights in Ireland and to meet their human rights obligations.

Areas of Concern Regarding Human Rights in Ireland:

Under International Human Rights obligations the Irish State’s performance in vindicating women’s human rights has been reviewed. In 2005 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Violence Against Women raised several areas of concern including obligations regarding sexual violence, harmful gender roles and cultural practices.

a) ‘the prevalence of violence against women and girls, low prosecution and conviction rates of perpetrators, high withdrawal rates of complaints’ in Ireland.

These concerns are highly impacted by alcohol consumption and expectancies in Ireland. The Rape and Justice in Ireland study found:

- Evidence that a minority of rape complainants felt that their reports of rape were taken less seriously because they had been drinking alcohol.
Rape complainants with a history of alcoholism were more likely to have their cases discontinued by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), most likely as they are deemed to be poor witnesses.\(^5\) 21% of rape complainants in RAJI who withdrew their complaint suffered from substance abuse or dependency, primarily alcohol use.\(^6\)

Additionally,

- Studies from outside Ireland have found that juries are less likely to convict when the complainant or the defendant was intoxicated.\(^7\)

b) ‘considering the important role of the media in regard to cultural change, the Committee furthermore recommends that the State party encourage the media to project a positive image of women’.\(^8\) The Committee further noted the problematic ‘persistence of stereotypical views of gender roles’.

- Alcohol marketing often links consumption of alcohol to the sexual success and availability of women.\(^9\) This is of considerable concern given the evidence of the influence of sex-related alcohol expectancies on attitudes towards sexual consent and acceptance of harmful rape myths.\(^10\)
In addition to the specific concerns raised by CEDAW’s periodic review, Article 5 of CEDAW states that government agrees to:

‘modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women’.

As attitudes towards women, sex and alcohol demonstrate a relationship to the commission of acts of sexual violence, there is an obligation on the Irish government to target alcohol consumption, particularly binge drinking, and alcohol-related attitudes that are facilitative of rape.

Recommendations:

To ensure a responsive and fair legal system, the state should:

- **Ensure complainants of incidents of sexual violence should have full recourse to the law.** Test cases of rape complainants with a history of alcohol dependency should be brought to trial.
- **As juries are formed through the general public, education programmes and broad media campaigns aimed at dispelling alcohol related victim blaming attitudes** should be funded and rolled out.
- **On-going training of Gardai and other service providers** should be funded to ensure that inaccurate expectations of the effects of alcohol do not prejudice the treatment of victims of sexual violence who are intoxicated.

Following World Health Organisation recommendations, the state should:\footnote{11}

- **Limit availability of alcohol**: including the number and location of premises which sell alcohol, the hours during which alcohol can be sold, and enforcing the minimum drinking age.
- **Regulate marketing for alcohol**: in Ireland, alcohol marketing should be restricted from suggesting that alcohol consumption leads to sexual success and from portraying women in a negative fashion. A specialised statutory body should be tasked with monitoring alcohol marketing to ensure that it does not impinge in these manners on women's rights.
- **Pricing policies**: increased alcohol prices have been shown to reduce alcohol consumption, particularly among heavy drinkers and young people. RCNI support minimum pricing for alcohol, and the banning of price promotions, discount sales and sales below cost.

Education and awareness raising are important tools in addressing alcohol involvement in sexual violence. This should include:

- **Training** for staff in premises that serve alcohol. This training should explicitly recognise sexual violence as an alcohol harm and incorporate bystander programmes and awareness raising for sexual violence prevention for staff of pubs, clubs and other venues that serve alcohol or that cater to those who are intoxicated, such as fast-food outlets, taxis and so forth.
- **Developing quality education programmes** within the school’s curriculum that address harmful, culturally held attitudes towards alcohol consumption, sexual behaviour and gender roles.
- **Rolling out broad marketing campaigns** that aim to dispel incorrect information about the effect of alcohol, and to challenge rape supportive attitudes including combating alcohol-involved-rape, denial and minimisation, and victim blaming.
References:


3 UN-CEDAW, ibid.

4 Hanly et.al. :160

5 Hanly et.al. 251

6 Hanly et.al. 2009: 244


8 UN-CEDAW, ibid.


10 See, for instance, Briefing 3 of this series, Sex Related Alcohol Expectancies: mediating rape and alcohol consumption? http://rcni.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/sex-related-alcohol-expectancies-mediating-rape-and-alcohol-consumption/


About Rape Crisis Ireland:

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is a specialist information and resource centre on rape and all forms of sexual violence with a proven capacity in strategic leadership. The RCNI role includes the development and coordination of national projects such as expert data collection, strategic services development, supporting Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) to reach best practice standards, using our expertise to influence national policy and social change, and supporting and facilitating multi-agency partnerships. We are the representative, umbrella body for our member Rape Crisis Centres who provide free advice, counselling and support for survivors of sexual violence in Ireland.

The national coordination role delivered by RCNI across management, governance, data collection, data reporting, the design and delivery of a range of training courses and administration, facilities frontline services to direct resources at meeting survivor needs, service delivery and local multi-agency partnerships.