# Research Project 42/88
# Situational Factors in the Relationship between Violence and the Public Use of Alcohol

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## SUMMARY OF METHODS AND RESULTS

This research, which was funded jointly by the Criminology Research Council and the NSW Directorate of the Drug Offensive and supported by the NSW Police Service, had two major purposes: to document the nature of the "apparent statistical association" between alcohol use and violence through an examination of police incident reports and police recording practices; and to explore, through detailed observations of clubs, pubs, and discos, ways in which the association between alcohol consumption and violence may be produced in the specific context of public drinking locations. The results of the statistical analyses have not yet been released, and this abstract summarises some aspects of the observational study.

The observers visited 17 establishments in Sydney during 1989, making a total of 55 visits to 23 separate sites in the 17 establishments (many pubs and clubs have more than one bar, plus a disco). Most visits were of at least two hours duration, and total observation time exceeded 300 hours. The licensed premises selected for study included some with a longstanding reputation for violence, as well as some with a reputation for handling violence in an effective way. The method used was qualitative and relatively unstructured, but was focused around features of the management of the establishment and the physical and social environment. *The key question was: what aspects of management, security staff, the patrons, or the drinking environment tend to promote or to prevent the occurrence of violence?*

### Major Findings

* There is a substantial link between public drinking and publicly occurring violence. This link is possibly far greater than previously thought by researchers, especially in certain types of drinking locations.

* The majority of incidents of violence occurring in and around drinking establishments are not reported or recorded, and so official crime statistics understate the true incidence of such offences.

* Partly because it is often difficult for police to identify a victim, assaults taking place in and around drinking establishments are probably less likely to be officially recorded than other kinds of assaults.

* It seems likely that the *majority* of assaults occurring in public places in NSW (and elsewhere) are alcohol-related.

* Much unreported violence derives from specific premises that are "regularly violent". There are at least several dozen such venues in the Sydney area and many have been regularly violent for years. We observed 30 assaults during our observational study. Police were called to three of these incidents and took action in only one case.

* Our research confirms the work of others that public violence is centred on drinking/entertainment areas and follows a pattern corresponding to busy times and opening/closing hours, with peaks at weekends and late nights/early mornings.

* The problem premises regularly visited in our study usually had a late closing license and provided music (band or disco) which drew a large number of young patrons from a dispersed area. They all employ bouncers, and include several clubs as well as pubs. Clubs, at least in NSW, can be as big a problem as pubs.

* Although many violent establishments attract a "rough" clientele, especially groups of young men who are strangers to each other, many of the factors in the

generation of violence in these premises are environmental variables within the control of management.

* Important factors include:

- A boring atmosphere, often generated by low quality bands
- Lack of comfort (very loud music, crowding, limited seating, and lack of ventilation);
- High levels of drunkenness, often deliberately and irresponsibly promoted by discount drinks costing in some cases as little as 11 cents each;
- The unavailability of substantial amounts of food (hotdogs notwithstanding), especially after midnight;
- Aggressive and unreasonable bouncers.

* The prominence of environmental factors suggests that licensees should no longer be able to argue that regular violence is caused solely by individual patrons, and is not management's responsibility.

* About one quarter of assaults we observed were unwarranted attacks by bouncers on patrons.

* The majority of victims are "legitimate" victims. Despite common beliefs about pub "brawls", most attacks we observed were not victim-precipitated. Attacks were usually directed at male victims who were disadvantaged by their drunkenness, youth, small size, or lack of companions. Most victims do not report attacks.

* Due to problems with police resources, finding independent witnesses and obtaining reliable evidence, as well as the general societal prejudice against young working class men (who are regarded as unattractive in value terms and are often classed as irresponsible "hoons"), legitimate victims of violence in drinking locations currently have a very slim chance of getting adequate satisfaction from the legal system. They are usually blamed for their misfortune.

* Even though most assaults are not reported and many are not recorded and followed up, alcohol-related violence already represents a major drain on police time and resources in NSW, and no doubt in all other jurisdictions in Australia. There are not sufficient resources to deal with all cases, and there would be a massive workload increase were it ever to be attempted.

**Further Reading**

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### Policy Implications

Liquor policy in NSW and elsewhere has hitherto been focused on general aspects of alcohol availability (minimum drinking age, opening hours etc.), and on details of licensing, standards, and operations of drinking establishments (fire and safety standards, regulation of amusement devices and poker machines, training of staff and standards of service, collection of licensing fees, etc.). Concern with the social effects of types and forms of access and service have traditionally been limited to underage drinking and the "public nuisance" created by many patrons at closing times, as well as in more recent years the problem of drinking and driving. Regular violence at certain locations seems never to have been uppermost in the minds of policy makers and legislators. To the extent to which the existence of the problem has been recognised, it has been regarded as a job for the police.

There is a clear need for stricter regulation of regularly violent locations. Due to the high incidence of violence in and around drinking locations, the problem has to be dealt with using *preventive measures* rather than just reactive policing. A liaison process should begin between police, licensing officials and industry bodies to develop and adopt measures intended to minimise the criminal behaviour and social problems which can attend drinking in pubs and clubs. These would include measures to reduce levels of violence in and deriving from licensed premises, by such means as:

- stricter licensing, regulation and training of bouncers;
- closer cooperation between management and police to control violence;
- elimination of all discount drinks and drink promotions (including "happy hours", 11 cent drink nights, two for one promotions etc.) which have the effect of promoting high levels of drunkenness over a night;
- bar staff training to identify and defuse potentially violent situations;
- bar staff training in "server intervention techniques" to limit consumption in bars with fewer than 100 patrons (it won't work as well in discos);
- the mandatory provision of substantial amounts of good quality food when trade is outside of 'normal' food outlet times;
- improving comfort by:
  * the provision of more seating in discos;
  * more strict limitations on crowd size, so that the numbers of patrons are more appropriate to the number of staff and the size of the premises;
  * reductions in noise levels to a maximum of 90 db (the long term health of staff is a related issue here - at the very least they should use ear plugs which still allow them to hear patrons).

Whatever the exact causal role of alcohol consumption in leading to violence, our study leaves us in no doubt that violence is a regular occurrence in many public drinking establishments, and that the incidence of violence could be reduced by the kinds of modifications to management practices and to the drinking environment outlined above. The liquor industry is aware of the problem, and is keen to work with researchers and health professionals to improve the quality of life for patrons of licensed premises. Now is the time for constructive dialogue and cooperation.

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# PUBLIC DRINKING AND VIOLENCE: NOT JUST AN ALCOHOL PROBLEM

Ross Homel
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*Three hundred hours of unstructured observation by pairs of observers in twenty-three licensed premises in Sydney allowed the identification through qualitative analysis of situational factors and management practices that increase the risk of physical violence. Four high-risk and two low-risk premises were particularly contrasted, as were violent and non-violent occasions in the same venues. Violence was concentrated in specific places at specific times. It was related to complex interactions between aspects of patron mix, levels of comfort, boredom, and intoxication, and the behaviour of bouncers. Violence is perpetuated by poor management, lax police surveillance, and inappropriate bureaucratic controls and legislation. The authors conclude that regularly violent venues should have their licenses cancelled, and police should enforce laws regulating bouncers. Promotions which cause mass intoxication should be banned, but responsible serving practices on their own may not greatly influence levels of violence.*

Violence has become a matter of major public concern in Australia in recent years. Two separate massacres in Melbourne in 1987 and one in Sydney in 1991, each by a lone gunman, horrified the nation and reinforced the view of many that Australia is becoming a more violent and lawless country. Fear of random,

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unprovoked violence from strangers now has a major effect on the lives of many ordinary Australians.

In response to the 1987 shootings, the federal government established the National Committee on Violence, which in 1990 published a report that assembled much of the available evidence on trends in violent crime, summarized current theories on what causes people to commit such offences, and set out policy initiatives which have the potential to reduce violent crime (National Committee on Violence 1990). The data in the report generally confirm what criminologists and police have always known: most acts of interpersonal violence are not the result of random attacks by madmen on complete strangers, but involve ordinary people as both attackers and victims who frequently know each other and who, for one reason or another, come into conflict in the home, street, work place, or place of recreation.

Indeed, even a quick perusal of the statistics on homicides and assaults leads one to a conclusion, which may be banal, but is of fundamental importance — the places in which most acts of interpersonal violence occur, and the times at which they occur, mirror, at least roughly, the rhythms and routines of daily life (e.g., Robb 1988). A majority of homicides involve intimates within the family home because those are the circumstances in which many people spend much of their lives. A higher proportion of non-fatal assaults than of homicides take place outside the home and involve strangers, but these events are also highly patterned, being more common late at night and on weekends, when social life and interaction is at its most intense. As Cohen and Felson (1979:605) put it:

> Rather than assuming that predatory crime is simply an indicator of social breakdown, one might take it as a by-product of freedom and prosperity as they manifest themselves in the routine activities of everyday life.

There are few activities as routine in Australian culture as the imbibing of alcoholic beverages. According to a 1988 survey of four Australian states (Berger et al. 1990), three-quarters of all adults drink at least occasionally and one in ten can be classified as a "heavy drinker." Half the population drink at least once or twice a week, and especially for men under the age of twenty-five, this drinking is often done at hotels or licensed clubs. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that assaults and homicides frequently involve the presence of alcohol in the offender, victim, or both.

Collins (1989) cites evidence that as many as 80% of those arrested in the United States for cutting, concealed weapons, other assaults, murder, and shooting had measurable levels of alcohol in their urine, while Robb (1988) in a study of serious assaults recorded by police in New South Wales found that 40% were nominated by police as involving alcohol. Moreover, assaults coming to police notice and recorded by them frequently occur after midnight around pub closing times, and at least 20% take place in or around licensed premises (Ministry for Police and Emergency Services, Victoria Police 1989; Robb 1988).

However, police statistics greatly understate the extent of alcohol-related violent crime, because most assaults are not reported and because police often seem to be more reluctant to record reported alcohol-related assaults than reported non alcohol-related assaults.[1] Surveys of injured persons presenting at hospital for treatment permit a clearer picture of the true incidence of pub- and club-related violence, since assault victims are more likely to seek medical than police assistance. One recent hospital survey in Sydney suggests that each year in New South Wales many thousands of people, mostly young men, are injured (sometimes quite seriously) as a result of assaults occurring in or around licensed premises (Cuthbert 1990).

Statistical associations do not prove that alcohol consumption actually causes violence. After all, if drinking is common behaviour, and if violent incidents can be thought of as "routine activities which share many attributes of, and are interdependent with, other routine activities" (Cohen and Felson 1979:589), then it would be surprising *not* to find alcohol implicated in many instances of assault. The question is whether alcohol consumption itself contributes in some way to the likelihood of violence, or whether aspects of the drinkers or of the drinking settings are the critical factors. It is quite possible, for example, that male attitudes which legitimise the physical maltreatment of women, or environmental factors like crowding, discomfort, and aggressive bouncers in pubs and clubs, are the real causes of much alcohol-related violence (McGregor 1990; Victorian Community Council Against Violence 1990).[2]

The purpose of this article is to report briefly the method, results, and implications of some observational research into pubs and clubs which we conducted in Sydney in 1989.[3] The study was the first systematic attempt in Australia to examine possible links between aspects of the environment of public drinking and the occurrence of violence. A key assumption was that there is a complex (but nevertheless real) relation between violence and public drinking (not the mere ingestion of ethanol), which is imbedded in Australian history and culture and reproduced in institutional arrangements and regulatory and police practices regarding drinking. In our research we aimed to transcend the narrow debate about the effects of ethanol *the substance* by focusing on the *total environment* of drinking and its regulation (or lack of regulation) by management, police, and other public officials. Thus, we considered features of the external regulation of licensed premises, as well as more directly observable characteristics such as physical layout, patron mix, and social atmosphere.

We argue that the regulatory system is undergirded by notions of the deserved misfortune of victims of pub violence. This belief is partly responsible for the historic failure in Australia to recognise violence in and around licensed premises as a major societal problem, and has led directly to inadequate legislation and police regulation. The failure of formal regulation has helped to entrench a range of

negative environmental factors that make some establishments bloodhouses year after year and many more establishments violent on a less predictable basis.

### Observational Studies of Violence in Licensed Premises

Studies of drinking in public places have been conducted for many years (Fisher 1985). One of the earliest studies was an ethnographic analysis of the public house in the context of life in an English industrial town, based largely on direct observations (Mass Observation 1943). This tradition of ethnographic and observational research has continued to the present day. However, very few of these studies have been focused specifically on violence; indeed, all the problems associated with public drinking are often quite peripheral to the major concerns of the researchers (e.g., Fairweather and Campbell 1990). As the anthropologist Dyck (1980) has commented, the failure in the ethnographic literature to acknowledge commonplace instances of violence and the associated lack of first-hand accounts of violent behaviour is remarkable in and of itself.

Outside of anthropology, the situation is not much better. For example, quantitative observational studies have had more of a problem focus than the ethnographic studies, but often the major dependent variable is consumption rates, with violence being noted in an anecdotal rather than systematic fashion (e.g., Cutler and Storm 1975).

Two studies of violence that were based on systematic observation of drinking environments and patron characteristics influenced the design of our study. A New Zealand study by Graves, Graves, Semu and Sam (1981) used records kept by security officers employed in twelve pubs in Auckland to examine factors associated with the frequency and seriousness of pub violence. The research confirmed the common view that Polynesian patrons drink more and are involved in more violence than Europeans, and suggested that these ethnic differences can be explained by the preference of Polynesians for drinking for longer periods in larger groups and by their tendency to engage in group rather than individual activities. Thus, this research highlighted the importance of patron mix, group sizes, consumption, and time spent drinking.

A study by Graham and her colleagues (1980) in Vancouver was especially valuable as a guide for our research, since data were obtained for a large number of situational variables, as well as for instances of aggression and physical violence. Four observers (working in male-female pairs) noted 160 incidents of aggression (forty-seven involving physical violence) in 633 hours of observation in 185 drinking establishments. Many variables were positively correlated with aggression, including the percentage of drunk patrons, the percentage of American Indians, poor ventilation, the amount of sexual body contact, lack of cleanliness, and a hostile atmosphere. The authors stressed however that the barroom environment is best viewed as "an ecological system," and implied that the overall influence of this ecology on aggression may be greater than the sum of the effects of individual variables. Through factor analysis and qualitative analysis they



identified one distinct type of bar, "The Skid Row Aggressive Bar," which was characterized by high levels of aggression, extreme intoxication, down-and-out patrons not accepted anywhere else, and a "bizarre atmosphere" in which deviant and unusual behaviours were tolerated, even encouraged. The extent to which skid row bars constitute a major part of the problem of violence in other localities is a matter for further research.

## The Sydney Study

### *Method*

We used many of the variables and insights from the Vancouver research as a starting point for our own study. We were particularly influenced by these authors' suggestions that future research concentrate on places where alcohol-related aggression most often occurs, and that within this context more details be collected on the *processes* of aggression. This immediately raised two related questions: the method of sampling (how were "high risk" venues to be identified?) and the method of data collection (how best could "ecological processes" be studied?).

An early decision was taken to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods, relying heavily on unstructured observations in licensed premises and, to a lesser extent, on semi-structured interviews with licensing and general duties police, chamber magistrates, and security industry personnel. There were several reasons for the decision to use a qualitative approach. While the Vancouver research identified many potentially relevant situational factors, it was obvious reading the results that there were a large number of differences between drinking settings in Sydney in the late 1980s and in Vancouver in the late 1970s, and that many more variables would have to be generated. More importantly, we judged that the reduction of the problem to "variable analysis," even after extensive piloting, would hinder attempts to explore the complex interactions and subtle processes which, we hypothesized, led to violence. In addition, the absence of any objective data base in New South Wales identifying licensed premises as more or less violent necessitated a "theoretical sampling" strategy based on the best available qualitative judgements concerning premises' standings in terms of violence and/or poor management (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Being unable to stratify the population of premises, unweighted probability sampling would have yielded too few high-risk premises to allow detailed analysis of the relevant environmental factors.

Our aim was to contrast situational variables and management practices in a small number of premises known to have been regularly violent over a long period of time with the same factors in a sample of establishments noted for their lack of violence or for their ability to defuse violent incidents when they occurred. Using this design, even if little violence was actually observed in the study, it would be possible to explore aspects of drinking settings that were associated with violence.[4] Eventually four high-risk and two low-risk premises were identified, on the basis

of first-hand knowledge, police information, and exploratory visits. Each of these premises was visited by pairs of observers at least five times, each observation period being between two and six hours in duration. A further sixteen sites were visited at least once, making a total of fifty-five visits to twenty-three sites in seventeen establishments. Total observation time was nearly three hundred hours.[5]

All the premises studied intensively were in suburban locations. This was not because it was thought that there is more drinking-related violence in the suburbs — police statistics and research suggest the contrary — but because the problems in city locations such as Kings Cross in Sydney or West End in Melbourne are often dispersed across a number of violent venues. It is easier to plausibly link public violence and the characteristics of particular premises in suburban locations. One consequence of this sampling strategy was that "skid row" premises did not figure as prominently as in the Vancouver study, although some were visited, particularly during the exploratory phases.

One type of problem location studied intensively was licensed clubs. Licensed clubs have often been credited with being more orderly than hotels and having good control over their patrons, but it appears that financial pressures have led many to develop forms of entertainment, principally late night discos or live music for young people, which create problems not anticipated by management. In fact, all the violent mainstream premises chosen for full study, whether in pubs or clubs, traded after midnight and were popular with young people because they provided live music or a disco.

The control sites were studied for the features that distinguish them from the violent. However, during field research it soon became apparent that the violent premises are for most of the time not violent. Violent occasions in these places seemed to have characteristics that clearly marked them out from non-violent times. In effect, these locations were acting as controls for themselves. This unexpectedly helped us refine our ideas about the relevant situational variables, and to some extent reduced the importance of comparisons with the premises selected as controls. We could eventually note which variables regularly prevailed and linked up with each other during violent or peaceful periods.

*This method was actually an extension of the theoretical sampling approach,* from the choice of physical sites to the choice of times and days for observation. For example, one site was very violent on a night that had discount drinks and a punk band. The observers returned on a similar night with full-priced drinks and a similar band, so as to discern any differences and hoping that other aspects of the drinking environment were essentially unchanged. By this comparative means *hypotheses about key variables and their relations were being tested out during* observation and to some extent were directing its pattern.

In broad terms, the method of data collection and analysis was based on Miles and Huberman (1984). After leaving a site, notes were made and information written onto an observation sheet listing a large number of variables. The visits were then written up as separate narrative accounts by each observer. These



narratives were cross-checked and later coded at group meetings. Early and often clumsy efforts to code narratives signalled whether or not various codes were meaningful and linked to the data. Indeed, the real thinking about the research questions took the form of regularly revising the codes, a process that was more productive than premature speculation about the "real" causes of violence. After at least a dozen revisions, almost two hundred coded items were settled upon, grouped under a small number of broad headings: physical and social atmosphere, drinking, patrons, staff, and violence. To simplify analysis, summary sheets for each narrative were also prepared, classified according to the degree of violence observed.

*Results*

In total, thirty-two assaults involving some degree of physical violence were observed during the course of the study. Excluding nine rough ejections, which were borderline assaults, the thirty-two incidents represent a rate of about eleven per one hundred hours observation, 50% higher than the rate of 7.4 in the Vancouver study. The higher rate is not surprising, since we over-sampled violent premises and also sampled late at night when violence is more likely. Graham and associates (1980) report that they witnessed no brawls and no incidents involving serious physical injury. By contrast, four of the thirty-two incidents in our study were "brawls," and a number of assaults were rated as "serious" by observers. For example, in one case an ejected patron was held by three bouncers who repeatedly bashed his head against a steel garbage crate, while on another occasion a floor manager apparently confused a young man with another patron who had been in a fight, lost his temper, and began to throttle this very small and young drinker who choked for several minutes.[6]

In contrast to findings from the limited amount of anthropological research, such as Dyck's (1980) analysis of "scrapping" in barrooms in the small western Canadian city of Parklund, most of the incidents in our study could not be characterised as "fights," in the sense of being equal conflicts freely entered into by the participants.[7] In at most a quarter of cases could the victim be said to have actually or possibly invited the attack. Assailants — whether patrons or staff — who deliberately seek out a violent encounter, appear to pick their mark. These are most often fewer in number, younger, and smaller. Assailants also appear to focus on victims who they see are quite drunk, or at least far more intoxicated than they are. When more than two parties are involved, pub assaults are often further trivialised as "brawls," with the equal responsibility of all parties — assailants and victims — implied by this. By our reckoning, *equal responsibility is usually not* the case.

The data analysis suggests that much of the violence we observed is not due to anything inherent in public drinking or in the typical patrons of these venues. The key variables suggested by our "constant comparative" and empirically grounded

form of analysis were aspects of the patron type, the social atmosphere, drinking patterns, and the behaviour of doormen.

*Patron type*

The typical patrons in violent premises are young, working class men. However, the social class of patrons cannot explain the differences between these violent sites and more peaceful venues with patrons from a similar social background, nor can it explain why the violent venues are at other times peaceful, although the patrons present are much the same. Moreover, there is no clear causal connection between the young age of regular patrons and levels of violence. The single venue with the greatest number of young drinkers was in fact one of the non-violent locations selected as a control.

The gender ratio in venues, together with the social links between the males present, seem more critical than age or class. The proportion of males, and presence of male groups, in any venue seem to exacerbate feelings of rivalry and group loyalty, and can result in arguments and fights. Males in groups, especially as strangers to each other, were seen to come into conflict more readily. The venues we studied drew a larger number of these groups of strangers than others, attracting people from a fairly wide area.

Solo males and males with female partners or in mixed groups appear to be less inclined to enter into conflicts. However, it should not be assumed that the presence of women always has a pacifying effect on social atmosphere, or that it is rare for women to become involved in conflict and violence. Women were victims of male violence in two incidents, and arguments, challenges, mock fights and fights between females were observed regularly at most of the violent locations — the worst of these involving women bouncers. A surprisingly high number of women patrons spoken to also followed the male path in being apparently indifferent to acts of violence, and several took pleasure in watching fights and brawls.

*Social Atmosphere*

Although we could find no direct connection between physical attractiveness and violence, attractive, renovated, and well-designed surroundings commonly mean that a venue also has a responsible management and positive staff who relate well to patrons. Not surprisingly, unattractive, neglected, and dirty venues also tended to be among the least comfortable and to have poorly supervised, aggressive, and abrasive staff. However, despite all the myths, rough pubs with plenty of rowdy behaviour (which would include the local workingmen's pubs celebrated in Australian folklore) are not necessarily violent.

The two most relevant aspects of atmosphere seem to be *comfort* and *boredom* Comfortable premises are not necessarily the most attractive, renovated places. The most important aspects seem to be roominess, ventilation, and, especially if it is from music of poor quality, only moderate noise. Big crowds in most sites usually mean discomfort for many patrons, a problem exacerbated by a lack of



seating and by crowded corridors, stairs, and doorways. Patrons in these situations tend to alleviate their discomfort by more rapid drinking, which causes higher levels of drunkenness, and eventually aggressive reactions to discomfort directed at individuals or property. Overcrowding on dance floors appeared to be linked to several arguments and at least one of the severe assaults observed.

Levels of comfort interact with levels of boredom. Entertained crowds are less hostile, drink more slowly, and seem to be less bothered by uncomfortable surroundings. In some venues, levels of boredom and aggression directed at other patrons were reduced by entertainment in such forms as television, videos, and game and card machines. Stage entertainment, including dancing and quizzes, were also noted to reduce levels of boredom and aggression, sometimes at a critical point during the night when the form of patron interaction suggested that conflict was likely.

Of the many aspects of entertainment and boredom, bands and music are perhaps of greatest importance. While violent and non-violent occasions do not follow a simple bands/no bands dichotomy, quality bands that entertain an audience generate a positive social atmosphere that has been observed to counteract other negative variables. A smaller crowd with a bad band seems more likely to present trouble than a large crowd entertained by quality musicians.

*Drinking Patterns*

High levels of intoxication are an obvious feature of many violent occasions. This is worsened by discount drinks, with prices in some venues being as low as 10c or 11c. More commonly they are set at around $1 on specific discount nights. On these occasions many patrons who have paid a high cover charge (e.g., $10) in order to see an inferior band or just to enter a disco, seem to decide that they should become quite drunk in order to get their "moneys worth." In fact, the most violent visit of all, with very high levels of intoxication and seven assaults observed in a few hours, was an 11c discount night with an $11 cover charge. In some clubs, cheaper drink prices (e.g., $1.30 for a strong mixed drink) can also serve to bring on very high levels of drunkenness, and resulting violence. This was obviously the case in the licensed club we included among our group of four most violent premises. As already noted, it is important that these rates of drinking can also be artificially raised by high discomfort and boredom.

Many patrons appear to pass through stages of drunkenness — with aggression coming later. Substantial amounts of food that can lower levels of drunkenness were generally not available in the violent premises we studied, especially later at night when patrons are more intoxicated. Some locations had a small range of hot food available, but more often snacks were limited to hotdogs. Hotdog stands often appear to have the adverse effect of encouraging patrons to mill around outside venues. Both of the non-violent control locations we studied operated substantial restaurants.

*Doormen*

The behaviour of barstaff does not figure as highly as expected in the creation of an aggressive or violent atmosphere. Edgy and aggressive bouncers are another matter. They have been observed to initiate fights or further encourage them on several occasions. Some were even observed to leave premises while they were on duty in order to continue a fight with departing patrons. More often, they have been seen to show a good measure of indifference to violence. They regularly asked conflicting patrons to leave premises, and then virtually arranged a fight that they and departing patrons could watch immediately outside the location. The unprofessional view that assaults occurring just outside the premises where they are employed are not their business, appears to be commonplace.

Many bouncers seem poorly trained, obsessed with their own machismo (relating badly to groups of male strangers), and some of them appear to regard their employment as giving them a licence to assault people. This may be encouraged by management adherence to a repressive model of supervision of patrons ("if they play up, thump em"), which despite their belief does not reduce trouble and adds further to a hostile and aggressive atmosphere. But in practice many bouncers are not well managed in their work, and appear to be given a job autonomy and discretion that they cannot handle well.

The bad relations of many male bouncers with male patrons led some of our informants to suggest that women should be employed on pub and club doors. Although in one club the use of a well-spoken female on the door seemed to appease groups of males who were refused entry for non-membership, it is simplistic to suggest that these sorts of conciliatory skills are held by all females and no males. Some male doorstaff were observed to have these qualities, and took the role of restraining other bouncers from excessive violence. The most relevant factors seem to be training and experience, rather than gender. Unfortunately, bouncing is still an occupation with a high rate of turnover. Younger bouncers may be leaving this sort of work just as they are beginning to acquire the sort of experience and work maturity that their job requires.

*Summary*

These findings can be summarised as follows. Violent incidents in public drinking locations do not occur simply because of the presence of young or rough patrons or because of rock bands, or any other single variable. Violent occasions are characterised by subtle interactions of several variables. Chief among these are groups of male strangers, low comfort, high boredom, high drunkenness, as well as aggressive and unreasonable bouncers and floorstaff.

## Discussion

Our research confirms the work of Graham and associates (1979) and others that a great deal of violence occurs in and around licensed premises. While some of the violence we observed did not result in serious injury, many of the incidents



would be classified as serious assaults by any reasonable criterion. In this respect, the research findings reflect everyday experience that violence is a routine aspect of interactions in many pubs and clubs.

However, it is important to recall that our sample of Sydney drinking places was biased toward times and places where prior knowledge indicated that violence was likely to occur, and that even in the worst places many visits were "uneventful" in the sense that no violence was observed. This is consistent with the finding of Graham and her colleagues (1979) that a small number of premises, chiefly of the "skid row" variety, accounted for a high proportion of all observed instances of aggression. It is also consistent with the results of a recent observational study of a representative sample of thirty-four Sydney clubs and pubs which found that 16% of all premises accounted for three-quarters of all observed incidents of physical violence.[8]

*Routine Activities Theory and the Role of Intoxication*

The existence of "hot spots" of predatory crime has been the subject of some recent criminological research. Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger (1989) analysed calls to police in Minneapolis over one year, and showed that all recorded domestic disturbances occurred at 9% of all possible addresses, while all recorded assaults occurred in only 7% of all possible locations in the city. These authors build on a popular sociological theory of crime, "routine activities theory," which attempts to account for the nonrandom distribution of crime by proposing that the rate at which such events occur in collectivities is affected by "the convergence in space and time of the three minimal elements of direct-contact predatory violations: 1) motivated offenders, 2) suitable targets, and 3) the absence of capable guardians against a violation" (Cohen and Felson 1979:589). Sherman and his colleagues extend the ideas of routine activities theory from collectivity to "place," arguing that places, like persons, can be seen to have routine activities subject to both formal and informal regulation.

One advantage of applying the routine activities perspective is that it becomes immediately apparent that single variable theories of violence (e.g., "He did it because he was drunk") are unlikely to have much explanatory power. This is because the critical factors are not those to do with offenders, victims, or guardians alone, but those affecting their *convergence* in time and space. Thus, high rates of intoxication do not on their own guarantee that violence will break out, since it is not clear that intoxication will inevitably increase the supply of motivated offenders and suitable victims, or that it will have any effect on the presence of capable guardians. However, in interaction with other factors, intoxication may be a potent explanatory factor — as our analysis suggests.

Laboratory research has generally failed to find any direct connection between the ingestion of alcohol and the incidence of aggression (e.g., Gustafson 1986a; Taylor and Gammon 1976), but has highlighted the importance of interactions of alcohol consumption with factors like frustration (Gustafson 1986b). Violence

may therefore occur (as it did in our study) when some patrons are vulnerable to attack due to their extreme intoxication, when formal or informal controls are not sufficient to deter violence, and when potential offenders are drunk *and* frustrated, frustration perhaps being promoted by poor quality entertainment or by crowding. In a well-managed club or pub employing skilled doormen and floorstaff who can detect problem situations before they get out of hand, or who have good communication skills and can defuse aggression before it leads to violence, there may rarely be any connection between levels of intoxication and violence. Alternatively, aspects of patron mix may amplify or reduce the risk of violence when rates of intoxication are high, by affecting the processes of informal guardianship or by influencing the motivations of offenders and the supply of victims. Drunk males on their own often make good victims; informal controls on aggression may work far better in groups consisting of both men and women, even if everyone is drunk, than in all-male groups.

Our focus on the role of intoxication to illustrate the limitations of single variable theories is deliberate, given the tendency in some of the alcohol studies literature to assume that controls on consumption should be the first priority in dealing with alcohol-related problems (Moskowitz 1989). While acknowledging that there is an important place for such approaches, the results of our research suggest that if violence around licensed premises is to be reduced in the short to medium term, policies need to be developed which confront the problem directly by addressing the manifest inadequacies of management and external regulation. Although in theory responsible serving practices involving policies like server intervention should help to reduce levels of violence by lowering consumption and eliminating gross intoxication, there does not appear to be any scientifically persuasive evidence that any program implemented to date has actually achieved this goal. Of course, this might simply be because most programs have not been implemented very effectively (Carvolth 1991), but it might also be because server programs focus too much on consumption and not enough on the broad control of problem situations.[9] In other words, they are based on the assumption that problems in licensed premises are due primarily to the ingestion of a drug — alcohol — when in fact situational factors and poor management are, from our analysis, of more fundamental importance, at least with respect to violence.

This is not to say that we reject the need for some controls on intoxication. One striking aspect of poor management is the way in which some licensees promote high levels of drunkenness by various kinds of drinks promotions, such as cheap drinks combined with high cover charges. For this reason, we advocate an immediate and direct legislative assault on all practices involving discount drinks, "two-for-one" promotions, happy hours, and any other serving practices that have the effect of producing high levels of drunkenness in a short period. While one might debate the rights of individual patrons to choose to drink to intoxication, our findings concerning the destructive effects of mass binge drinking resulting from



deliberate and irresponsible price discounting and drinks promotions leaves us in no doubt that such practices should be banned.

*The Regulation of Licensed Premises*

Although there are moves in some parts of the world, including Australia, to deregulate the operations of licensed premises, extensive controls still operate at the levels of legislation, government bureaucracy, and police surveillance. In New South Wales, the *Liquor Act 1982 (Amended 1989)* and the *Registered Clubs Act 1976* are the major legislative instruments, supported by other acts, such as the *Gaming and Betting (Poker Machines) Taxation Act 1956*, and the *N.S.W. Security Industry (Amendment) Act 1985*. These acts are administered by the Liquor Administration Board, an organisation which has its counterparts in the other states, and by the police (Liquor Administration Board 1988). The problem is that while an enormous amount of effort goes into such issues as the regulation of amusement devices and poker machines, fire and safety standards, training of staff and standards of service, and the collection of license fees, relatively little effort is put into administering licensed premises so that social problems like violence (or drinking and driving) are prevented. It is clear from our research that violence could be much reduced by changes to the management and regulation of licensed premises, but for historical reasons the regulatory paths pursued have tended to ignore or worsen the problem (Homel and Tomsen 1991).

The typical patrons in high violence establishments are young working class males. The low social status and power of this group has effects at all levels in the criminal justice system, which deploys enormous resources towards the surveillance and control of young men. Very often the misfortunes incurred by these young victims are seen as deserved, and criminal assaults on them are thought of as essentially victimless incidents. The real victim in such cases is regarded as being a more abstract and subjective notion termed the "public order."

It is paradoxical that although rowdy drinking is regulated with consideration to the "public order," instances of violence are conceived by politicians, bureaucrats, and police as individualised disputes between different patrons. Assaults on individual victims are the responsibility of those victims, and are not thought of as contravening the public interest in that citizens should be free from unreasonable violence. This indicates a major flaw in the current form of the *N.S.W. Liquor Act*, which directly mentions violence in only two places: in S.103(1)(a), where a licensee or his employee is permitted to turn out any person "who is then intoxicated, violent, quarrelsome or disorderly"; and S.125(1)(b), where it is stated that a licensee shall not "permit intoxication, or any indecent, violent or quarrelsome conduct, on his licensed premises."

There is an urgent need for amendments to S.125, so that the continuous operation of a violent venue is an offence under the act that will lead to the cancellation of a license. Action to close down at least five regularly violent discos in the West End area of Melbourne has been taken in the past two years, on the

initiative of the Liquor Licensing Commission and the Victorian Community Council Against Violence, but appears never to have been contemplated in New South Wales and other states.[10]

A further policy priority to emerge from our research was the need for better regulation and training of bouncers. Bouncers are required under the *Security Act* to both hold a valid and current security license and to carry related identification on the job, such as a photo identification card. One aim of this legislative provision is to discourage aggressive and violent individuals from becoming bouncers. However, it is obvious from our research that despite the intentions of the legislators, a significant number of working (and licensed) doormen are still prone to violence. This suggests that there is a need to mandate training for security staff in human interaction skills, crowd control, and non-violent conflict resolution. In addition, it is essential that the existing legislation be enforced in line with the intentions of Parliament. Without a greater overall police effort to implement the *Security Act*, it has little more than symbolic value and will do nothing to reduce actual levels of violence.

**Conclusion**

Regular violence in public drinking locations cannot simply be blamed on rowdy patrons or excused as something natural and unstoppable. Nor can it simply be blamed on the irresponsible ingestion of a legal drug. The drinking environment is an evolving historical and cultural product, which can be left unchanged or altered for the better. It is clear from our research that continuous patterns of violence in these locations are strongly related to local situational variables, which in turn reflect management practices and government legislation and regulation.

While it is difficult, and perhaps not even desirable, to attempt to modify the routine activities of pub and club goers, it is far easier, and surely consistent with broad considerations of the public good, to regulate the routine activities of the premises they frequent (Sherman et al. 1989). The most extreme way of doing this is to incapacitate the activities of the worst "hot spots" by license cancellation. Short of this, the other reforms in regulatory practices that we have outlined briefly in this article have the potential to improve greatly the safety of licensed premises for the tens of thousands of young people who rely on these places to provide most of their entertainment.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## NOTES

1. One reason why police may be reluctant to process assaults involving drunk offenders is the fear that in court the defendant may invoke the common law plea of "diminished responsibility" (Howard 1970).

2. Evidence on the alcohol-violence link comes from six streams of enquiry: trend studies in populations; studies using drinking locations as the unit of analysis; natural experiments; individual coincidence estimates; experimental studies; and observational studies of drinking in natural settings. Observational, drinking location, and population trend studies are the least common, while those based on individual coincidence estimates are the most common, including as they do studies of injured persons treated at hospital (e.g, Cuthbert 1990); surveys of self-reported drinking and violent acts in the general population (e.g., Kantor and Strauss 1987); analysis of police crime incidence reports (e.g., Robb 1988); and studies of convicted criminals or of problem drinkers (e.g., Indermaur and Upton 1988). Despite the different approaches and widely differing quality of the data, the literature as a whole does support the thesis that under some circumstances there is a causal link between alcohol consumption and violence, but specifying the exact nature of "the circumstances" has proven to be a problem of extreme difficulty (Collins 1989).

3. Restrictions on length prevent us from presenting more than a summary of our methods and results. Readers interested in further details of the study are referred to Tomsen, Homel and Thommeny (1990) and to Homel and Thommeny (1991).

4. In contrast to Graham and associates (1980) we took physical violence as our major dependent variable, using an aggressive atmosphere as one of the predictors.

5. Most hotels and licensed clubs in Sydney contain more than one "site" for drinking. These include public bars, lounge bars, restaurants, nightclubs, and discos. Depending on reputation and on the results of exploratory visits, one or more sites within a pub or club were selected for further study. For purposes of analysis, two sites on the same premises were treated as separate drinking settings. Most visits were conducted by the same two observers (Tomsen and Thommeny), sometimes operating as a pair and sometimes accompanied by a friend, work colleague, or spouse.

6. Observational research of this kind entails obvious ethical problems. In our defense, we did not look for assaults for their own sake. We sought rather to understand the dynamics of violent premises. In addition, on two occasions observers called staff who broke up incidents before they could become serious,

and on another occasion an observer ended up in a local police station during the early hours of one morning as a witness.

7. Dyck (1980) notes that although the notion of a "fair fight" was accepted both in the barrooms and in the courtroom, some incidents in Parklund bars did not fall into this category. These included fights in which weapons were used, fights initiated by bullies known as "chicken-shit bastards," and vicious assaults by men known as "rangatangs." However, the majority of incidents he describes were "scraps" in which co-participants were more or less jointly agreed upon settling their differences with their fists.

8. Supervised by Homel, this study involved 147 visits and three hundred hours of observation. It was carried out by twenty-two senior year students of Macquarie University in July and August 1991.

9. An overview of early Australian developments in responsible serving may be found in Homel and Wilson (1987). The philosophy of the main Australian program (*Patron Care*) is set out in Carvolth (1988). The results of a recent industry-federal government initiative are set out in the *National Guidelines for the Responsible Serving of Alcohol* (National Alcohol Beverage Council and National Campaign Against Drug Abuse 1990).

10. Establishments closed down in Melbourne specifically because of violence include Bojangles, the Hippodrome, the Richmond Football Club disco, the Gasometer Hotel, and the Underground (information supplied by Mr. Arch Sutton, Liquor Licensing Commission). Sherman and associates (1989) refer to two violent bars in Minneapolis that had their licenses revoked, so this practice may also be common in cities in other countries.

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# PUBS AND VIOLENCE

# Violence, Public Drinking, and Public Policy

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***Violence in and around licensed premises is a neglected problem, although every year in Australia thousands of people are injured. Sometimes the victims are killed. Research suggests that the incidence of violence is strongly influenced by levels of external regulation by police and by certain environmental variables and management practices. These include aggressive bouncers, serving practices which result in high levels of drunkenness, and lack of comfort and good entertainment.***

***One legacy of the temperance movement, with its dedication to reducing alcohol consumption, has been a public policy neglect of the regulation of drinking environments to reduce the harm associated with public drinking. To some extent this neglect could be redressed through the development of server intervention programs, which have as their aim the prevention of intoxication or, at least, of the harm which can flow from intoxication. However, the prevention of violence primarily requires legislative changes which will make the continuous operation of a violent venue an offence that will lead to the cancellation of a license. In addition, there is a need for legislative changes mandating training for security and bar staff and outlawing drinks promotions which encourage gross intoxication; bureaucratic reforms which place the prevention of violence at the centre of licensing decisions; and preventive policing practices which improve levels of comfort for patrons, regulate the behaviour of bouncers, and promote community-based strategies for the prevention of violence.***

***Since the regulatory system is undergirded by notions of the deserved misfortune of victims of pub violence, long term reform requires a transformation of attitudes paralleling that which has taken place for the victims of domestic assaults.***

*Mark and his 23 year old brother, Danny, went to a large Sydney hotel to celebrate Mark's 21st birthday. When they refused to buy drugs from a young man who approached them, they were badly beaten with cue sticks by about 12 men, known to some patrons as 'a bad bunch'. Hotel staff and patrons refused to help, and when the police arrived they didn't want to know anything about the incident. Police advised that the attack 'had nothing to do with them', and that the young men should 'not go to that hotel again'.*[1]

Based on research we have conducted in Sydney pubs and clubs, this type of incident is not isolated.[2] In 300 hours of unstructured observation, spread over 55 visits to 23 separate sites in 17 licensed establishments (pubs, clubs, and discos), we observed 32 assaults, precipitated mostly not by the victims (who were usually very drunk) but by security staff or other patrons. In only three of these cases were police called, and in only one case, when club staff had been attacked, did police take action. It became very clear during the course of the project that a great deal of quite serious violence occurs in and around licensed premises, but that the great majority of these violent incidents are of little concern to the police, legal officials, politicians, and policy makers. The silence which has historically surrounded domestic assaults extends, it seems, to assaults committed in public places, especially when the victims are young, drunk, working class, and male.

In this article we explore some of the reasons for the neglect of pub violence in Australia, and sketch some aspects of the phenomenon from the perspective of our research, the first of its kind ever carried out in Australia. We argue that much of the violence which occurs on a routine basis in and around

licensed premises is not inevitable, and that the incidence of assaults could be greatly reduced through legislative reform and through effective policing, particularly of security staff. We recognise, however, that some of our proposals are novel, at least in the Australian context, and that genuine reforms in law and police practice can be implemented only after real public debate which begins with the assumption that a serious problem actually exists.

## Drinking and temperance in Australia

As Australian sociologist and international alcohol expert Robin Room observes, a reputation for heavy drinking may be said to be part of the Australian national myth.[3] However, the reality has not always justified the reputation. The historian A.E. Dingle has shown that at particular times and in particular places Australians have been heavy drinkers in international terms, while at other times they have been relatively abstemious, at least by British standards:

> *Heavy drinking did not become a national characteristic but rather the reverse. The nation was founded by heavy drinkers but progressively less was consumed as the century progressed.*[4]

The period since World War II saw an upswing in drinking, so that by the mid-1970s alcohol consumption had climbed to the same levels as in the gold rush days of the 1850s. This increased consumption was accompanied by increases in alcohol-related diseases, crime, and road deaths. It was around this time that alcohol abuse was rediscovered as a major public health issue, with drinking and driving emerging as perhaps the major issue of concern to health and law enforcement professionals, the general public, and consequently to politicians.[5] Although an ideology of individual responsibility for self-control underpins most aspects of current alcohol policy, recent controversies concerning alcohol advertising and liberalised hotel opening hours carry faint echoes of an earlier era when the problem was seen more broadly and issues such as pub opening hours occasioned monumental debate and struggle.[6]

In the latter part of the nineteenth century in particular, alcohol consumption was the focus of the most bitter social divisions, with the forces of moral uplift in the form of the Temperance Union arrayed against the happy-go-lucky masses for whom hard drinking was an essential part of life. The temperance advocates were able to point, correctly, to the enormous economic and social costs of drinking, but were ultimately swept away before the anti-puritan tide which gathered strength from the 1880s on.

The complete rout of the forces of temperance in the years following World War II meant that alcohol problems as a public issue went underground. Treatment programs for individual abusers flourished, with Alcoholics Anonymous enjoying explosive growth in the 1950s. Only in recent years have government alcohol agencies begun to move away from a view of their role as limited to managing treatment programs to address broader issues such as licensing controls, which were the bread and butter of the earlier movement.

Predictably, one of the major products of the new health movement, the *National Health Policy on Alcohol*, has been branded a 'wowser policy' by sections of the alcohol industry.[7] Maybe this accusation has some truth in it, given that the document addresses issues like price, taxation, and availability. In contrast to the alcohol treatment movement of the last 40 years or so, which has tended to see alcohol abuse pretty much in terms of a medical condition ('alcoholism') afflicting a small minority of drinkers who are perhaps genetically prone to the problem, the wowsers were very much alive to the role of broad environmental and situational factors in promoting consumption. After all, this perception was what lay behind their attempts to limit access to the demon drink and provide alcohol-free alternatives, such as Coffee Palaces. A similar focus on environmental factors (alcohol advertising, price, availability) rather than the individual drinker informs much of the recent thinking about effective ways of reducing alcohol-related problems, although there is not the same single-minded determination to eliminate consumption.

One consequence of attending to the environment is that preventive health thinking has begun to be focused in some measure on the pub and the licensed

***Since it was assumed that many social ills, including pub brawls and wife bashing, would simply disappear when alcohol was banned, [the prohibitionists] were not interested in the development of more sophisticated policies and laws to ameliorate the negative aspects of the environment of drinking...***

1. Darren Horrigan, 'Fight Victims Say Police Didn't Care', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 23, 1989.
2. S. Tomsen, R. Homel, and J. Thommeny, 'The Causes of Public Violence: Situational and Other Factors', in D. Chappell, P. Grabosky, & H. Strang (eds), *Australian Violence: Contemporary Perspectives*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1991, pp. 177-194. This research was funded by the Criminology Research Council and the NSW Directorate of the Drug Offensive, and was also actively supported by the NSW Police Department, who seconded Constable J. Thommeny to the project to assist in data collection and analysis. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies or of the NSW Police Department.
3. R. Room, 'The Dialectic of Drinking in Australian Life: From the Rum Corps to the Wine Column', *Australian Drug and Alcohol Review*, 7, 1988, pp. 413-437.
4. A.E. Dingle, 'The "Truly Magnificent Thirst": An Historical Survey of Australian Drinking Habits', *Historical Studies*, 19, 1980, p. 244.
5. R. Room, *op. cit.*, p. 430; R. Homel, 'Random Breath Testing and Random Stopping Programs in Australia', in R. Jean Wilson & Robert E. Mann (eds), *Drinking and Driving: Advances in Research and Prevention*, The Guilford Press, New York, 1990, pp. 159-204.
6. R. Room, *op. cit.*, p. 425; A.R. Petersen, 'Alcohol Control in the Age of Advertising', *Drug Education Journal of Australia*, 3, 1989; Alcohol Advisory Council of Western Australia, Inc., *Comment on the Nieuwenhuysen Report: Review of the Liquor Control Act 1968 – Victoria*, May, 1986.
7. National Campaign Against Drug Abuse, *National Health Policy on Alcohol*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1990; Room, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

club, which is where most public drinking (and a good bit of all drinking) still goes on. However, the goal is not necessarily to reduce consumption, but rather to reduce the harmful aspects both of drinking and of the setting in which drinking takes place. This is a major departure from the philosophy of the old movement. For the wowsers alcohol itself was the major evil, justifying the ultimate goal of prohibition. Since it was assumed that many social ills, including pub brawls and wife bashing, would simply disappear when alcohol was banned, they were not interested in the development of more sophisticated policies and laws to ameliorate the negative aspects of the environment of drinking if these policies did not further the goal of prohibition. The results of policies like six o'clock closing were pubs which were frequently sterile and brutal, designed for binge drinking and easy hosing down.[8]

Despite the fundamental difference in philosophy, one of the major new approaches to modifying the drinking environment involves a repackaging of some very old temperance ideas, albeit shorn of their moralistic and sanctimonious elements. In the late nineteenth century in parts of the United States, temperance advocates succeeded in having 'dram shop liability' laws enacted. This meant that a tavern owner could be held legally responsible for the support of the families of patrons who had become 'habitual drunkards'. Although they were essentially symbolic, dram shop laws, together with the general American propensity to sue, have provided the economic engine for server intervention programs, which require managers to introduce training and serving practices which reduce the risk that patrons will drink to intoxication, or which discourage patrons from driving home while intoxicated. Such policies help protect the tavern owner from being sued if, for example, a drunken patron kills someone on the roads.[9] The prevention of other alcohol-related problems, such as violence, seems less central to the goals of server intervention programs, although methods for handling 'bar fights' are sometimes included in training programs.

Last year, the Commonwealth Department of Health and the National Alcohol Beverage Council released a document entitled *National Guidelines for the Responsible Serving of Alcohol*, but since Australia has neither dram shop laws nor any legal precedents of licensees being sued by the relatives of victims of drunken patrons, the policy lacks the teeth of its US counterparts.[10] The general and rather diffuse nature of this document, and also of the *National Health Policy on Alcohol*, is also a direct result of liquor industry lobbying. For example, an early draft of the *National Health Policy* contained a section on indicators, which if adopted would have facilitated the measurement of progress towards the goal of reducing alcohol-related harm, but this was omitted from the final document.

In summary, legal controls on alcohol use have been moulded over the years through attention to those issues temperance advocates were interested in (control of consumption) *and* through a lack of attention to those issues in which they were not much interested (less harmful, more pleasant drinking environments). Public concern for 'good order', liquor industry interests, and governments' needs for revenue, have been the other major influences. Thus liquor policy has traditionally been focused on general aspects of alcohol availability (the number of liquor licenses, the minimum drinking age, opening hours, etc.), on public drunkenness, and on details of licensing standards and the operations of drinking establishments. Licensing controls have encompassed such issues as the regulation of amusement devices and poker machines, fire and safety standards, training of staff and standards of service, and the collection of licensing fees.

Concern by governments with the social effects of types and forms of access and service have traditionally been limited to under-age drinking and any 'public nuisance' created by patrons at closing times, extending in more recent years to drinking and driving, currently the major issue of concern. Regular violence at certain locations seems never to have been uppermost in the minds of policy makers and legislators. To the extent that the problem has been recognised, it has been regarded as a job for the police or as a problem for the establishments themselves to deal with.

## Public drinking and violence

Research over many years, based mainly on incidents recorded by the police and on interviews with offenders, indicates that assaults and homicides frequently involve the presence of alcohol in the offender, the victim, or both. In NSW about 40 per cent of serious assaults are nominated by the police as involving alcohol, and it is a consistent finding from police records in many jurisdictions that assaults are more likely to occur after midnight around pub closing times. At least 20 per cent take place in or around licensed premises, which is about the same proportion that are recorded as domestic assaults.[11]

Whatever the precise size and nature of the alcohol-violence link, our research into licensed establishments leaves us in no doubt that in Sydney, and by inference in other major cities in Australia, there are drinking locations which locals know, year after year, as bloodhouses. Although some licensing police whom we interviewed in the course of the study offered the view that the real levels of drinking-related violence have dropped in recent years, it remains the case that thousands of people – mostly young, single, working-class men – are injured each year, sometimes fatally, as a result of assaults in and around pubs and clubs. Most of these incidents never end up in the official crime statistics.

Our research suggests that most pub assaults should not be characterised as 'fights', in the sense of being equal conflicts freely entered into by the participants. In at most a quarter of cases we observed could the victim be said to have actually or possibly invited the attack. Assailants – whether patrons or staff – who deliberately seek out a violent encounter, appear to pick their mark. These are most often fewer in number, younger, and smaller. Assailants also appear to focus on victims who they see are quite drunk, or at least far more intoxicated than they are. When more than two parties are involved, pub assaults are often further trivialised as 'brawls', with the equal responsibility of all parties – assailants and victims – implied by this. By our reckoning, equal responsibility is usually not the case.

Our conclusion that there is a major and ongoing problem which historically has not been adequately addressed by

*Alcohol and young men – a volatile mixture. Research has shown that thousands of people – mostly young, single, working-class men – are injured each year in violence in and around pubs and clubs.*

police and licensing authorities is supported by the findings of a recent inquiry in Victoria, and also by a study of alleged assault victims presenting to the Accident and Emergency Centre of St Vincent's General Hospital in Darlinghurst, Sydney.[12]

One of the responses of the Victorian Government to the Hoddle and Queen Street massacres was to establish the Victorian Community Council Against Violence. Its first report was an *Inquiry into Violence in and around Licensed Premises*. Although the authors deplored the shortage of reliable information, observing that 'statistical data about violence relating to licensed premises in Victoria is on the whole scarce and insubstantial' – a criticism equally true for NSW – they did confirm our view that a great deal of serious violence occurs in and around licensed premises, in comparison with the levels reported for other contexts, such as schools or work places. The St Vincent's study was based on a study of 60 per cent of all alleged assault victims reporting to the emergency section over a six month period in 1989. Most of the 512 people surveyed were young men who were victims of street violence; more than half were under the influence of alcohol. They were likely to have been in or near a hotel or club in Kings Cross at the time of the incident, which usually occurred in the late evening or early morning hours. The large number of assault victims in this study underlines the inadequacy of the official police statistics as indicators of the true level of criminal violence.[13]

In taking the view that there is a strong link between public drinking and violence, we are not committing ourselves to any particular theory of intoxicated aggression, although we do reject the 'direct-cause' paradigm, which states that consumption directly causes violence. The precise causal role of ethanol ingestion is hotly disputed by researchers, with the more sophisticated theories ranging from the 'indirect-cause' paradigms (alcohol has certain effects which contribute to violence, or certain motives may lead people to drink, and these motives, interacting with the effects of alcohol, lead to violence) to the 'predisposition-situation' paradigm (the relationship between alcohol and violence is a spurious one based on a relationship between characteristics of drinkers or the drinking situation and violence).[14] The debate among academics is paralleled by differences of opinion between community groups, with police on the one hand maintaining from their experience that offender drunkenness is a major part of the crime problem, and some feminists on the other hand arguing that at least with respect to domestic assaults the relationship with alcohol is totally spurious and distracts attention from the real culprit, which is male attitudes which legitimise the use of violence against women.[15]

Our position is that there is a com-

8. R. Room, *op cit.*, p. 424.
9. The modern American approach to server intervention is well summarised in R.F. Saltz, 'Server Intervention: Will It Work?', *Alcohol Health and Research World*, 10(4), 1986, pp. 12-19, 35.
10. National Alcohol Beverage Council & National Campaign Against Drug Abuse, *National Guidelines for the Responsible Serving of Alcohol*, AGPS, Canberra, 1990. An overview of Australian developments may be found in R. Homel & P. Wilson, *Death and Injuries on the Road: Critical Issues for Legislative Action and Law Enforcement*, Aust. Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1987. The philosophy of the main Australian program is set out in R. Carvolth, 'Patron Care – The Health/Alcohol Industry Glasnost: Criticisms and Opportunities', *Keynote Address at the First International Conference on Responsible Hospitality Practices*, 29 June-1 July 1988, Brisbane.
11. T. Robb, *Police Reports of Serious Assault in NSW*; Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research, Sydney, 1988; Ministry for Police and Emergency Services, Victoria Police, *Study of Serious Assaults on Civilians Reported to the Victoria Police*, Melbourne, July 1989, p. 7.
12. Victorian Community Council Against Violence, *Violence In and Around Licensed Premises*, Melbourne, 1990; M. Cuthbert, 'Investigation of the Incidence and Analysis of Cases of Alleged Violence Reporting to St Vincent's Hospital', in D. Chappell, P. Grabosky, & H. Strang (eds), *Australian Violence: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aust. Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1991, pp. 135-146.
13. The total number of assaults (aggravated and non-aggravated) recorded by police for the entire Sydney Police District in 1988/89 was 2020 (*NSW Police Service Crime Statistics 1988-89*, NSW Police Statistics Unit, 1989, p. 107). This is about the same as the number of alleged assault victims reporting to the emergency section of St Vincent's over a full year. Given that St Vincent's is only one hospital serving one section of the Sydney Police District, and given that many victims of assault may not seek emergency hospital treatment, it is clear that the police crime statistics grossly understate levels of assault.
14. Specific theoretical approaches within each of these orientations are discussed by Kathryn Graham, 'Theories of Intoxicated Aggression', *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, 12(2), 1980.
15. H. McGregor, 'Domestic Violence: Alcohol and Other Distractions – A Grassroots Perspective', in J. Vernon (ed.), *Alcohol and Crime*, Aust. Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1990, pp. 59-66.

plex (but nevertheless real) relation between violence and public drinking (not the mere ingestion of ethanol) which is imbedded in Australian history and culture and reproduced in institutional arrangements and regulatory and police practices regarding drinking. In our research we aimed to transcend the narrow debate about the effects of ethanol *the substance* by focusing on the *total environment* of drinking and its regulation (or lack of regulation) by management, police, and other public officials. Our research confirmed that while alcohol consumption or drunkenness cannot be ignored, it is only one ingredient in the complex mix of factors which interact to promote or discourage the occurrence of violent incidents.

The problem premises we visited in our study usually had a late closing license and provided band or disco music which drew a large number of young patrons from a dispersed area. They all employed bouncers, and included several clubs as well as pubs. We concluded that, at least in NSW, clubs can be as big a problem as pubs. Although many violent establishments attract a 'rough' and violence-prone clientele, especially groups of young men who are strangers to each other, many of the factors in the generation of violence in these premises are environmental variables within the control of management. Important factors include:

- aggressive and unreasonable bouncers;
- high levels of drunkenness, often deliberately and irresponsibly promoted by discount drinks costing in some cases as little as 11 cents each (after an $11 cover charge!);
- a boring atmosphere, often generated by low quality bands;
- lack of comfort caused by very loud music, crowding, limited seating, and lack of ventilation;
- the unavailability of substantial amounts of food, especially after midnight (the ubiquitous hotdogs not withstanding!).

The prominence of environmental factors suggests that licensees should no longer be able to argue that regular violence is caused solely by individual patrons, and is not management's responsibility.

## Regulation of licensed premises

Regulation is an unpopular word in the brave new world being fashioned by the economic rationalists. In 1988 the liquor industry was extensively deregulated in England and Wales, and also in Victoria following the review conducted by Dr John Nieuwenhuysen.[16] Soon after coming to power in 1988 the Greiner government in NSW implemented similar policies, greatly liberalising hotel trading hours, especially in designated 'tourist areas'. In October 1989 the Chief Secretary issued a discussion paper which included a further 33 proposals 'which fall into line with the Government's commitment to microeconomic reform and deregulation'.[17] Although most of these proposals were not implemented because of opposition from the Australian Hotels Association to the idea that restaurants would be allowed to sell liquor in 'reception areas' without serving meals, the paper indicates the directions a future government might take.

The effect on violence of liberalised opening hours is disputed. A study of the experience in Scotland, where opening hours were increased in 1976, suggests little impact on public disorder but big increases in consumption and in alcohol-related road accidents, while a police analysis of serious assaults in Victoria before and after deregulation showed a 118 per cent increase in recorded incidents in and around pubs and clubs, especially between 2 am and 4 am on Thursday through Sunday nights. The only other category to show any increase was domestic assaults (a 31 per cent increase).[18] These research results support the commonsense view that liberalised trading hours will lead to more problems, if only because of increased social interaction.

Proponents of deregulation emphasise economic benefits and the 'simplifications' which are achieved by cutting bureaucratic red tape, but the deleterious social effects of relaxed regulation are seldom emphasised, and of course the huge direct economic costs of alcohol abuse which have been documented recently by economists David Collins and Helen Lapsley are not mentioned at all.[19] Where a concern with the social consequences of public drinking has been enshrined in legislation, it tends to reflect the interests of influential groups in the community rather than the interests of the typical victim of pub violence. A prime example of this is Section 104 of the *NSW Liquor Act, 1982 (Amended 1989)*. This section sets out clearly the responsibilities of a licensee to manage the business in such a way that 'the quiet and good order of the neighbourhood of the licensed premises' is maintained, and includes details of action which licensing inspectors, local councils, or residents can take to bring licensees before

*Brewery workers load supplies for sale at pubs and clubs. The liquor industry is understandably keen to maintain liberal policies regarding the promotion of alcohol consumption.*

the Liquor Administration Board, and perhaps have the license varied or revoked. According to the 1987/88 Annual Report of the Board, which refers to 'intolerable problems for local residents', 'noise levels coming from licensed premises', and 'anti-social behaviour by departing patrons', this section of the Act has been receiving considerable attention.[20]

## Legislative and bureaucratic reform

It is paradoxical that although rowdy drinking is regulated with consideration to the 'public order', instances of violence are perceived by politicians, bureaucrats, and police as individualised disputes between different patrons. This indicates a major flaw in the current form of the *NSW Liquor Act*, which directly mentions violence in only two places: in Section 103(1)(a), where a licensee or his employee is permitted to turn out any person 'who is then intoxicated, violent, quarrelsome or disorderly'; and Section 125(1)(b), where it is stated that a licensee shall not 'permit intoxication, or any indecent, violent or quarrelsome conduct, on his licensed premises'.

There is an urgent need for amendments to Section 125 to make it more like Section 104, so that the continuous operation of a violent venue is an offence under the Act that will lead to the cancellation of a license. Action to close down at least five regularly violent discos in the West End area of Melbourne has been taken in the past two years, on the initiative of the Liquor Licensing Commission and the Victorian Community Council Against Violence; such action appears never to have been contemplated in New South Wales.[21]

In fact, New South Wales and other states badly need the equivalent of the Victorian Community Council or some other government body which more effectively represents the public interest in matters to do with the operations of licensed premises – not only violence, but vandalism and other problems which concern residents. Over the years the government bodies set up to regulate hotels and registered clubs, such as the NSW Liquor Administration Board, have developed such a close working relationship with the industry and have put so much emphasis on revenue raising that many broader aspects of the public interest are neglected.

Consideration should be given to the replacement of the Liquor Administration Board by a *Liquor Industry Commission* which has a more comprehensive understanding of community well-being built into its charter and operations. This Commission would have the power to grant or withdraw licenses and, in line with Recommendation 2 of the report of the Victorian Community Council Against Violence, would acknowledge in the grant and any review of licenses that the prevention of violence is of significant community interest.[22] In contrast to the present court-based system, which requires offences and convictions, a Commission approach would be based on a license with conditions, one of which would require that any establishment be free from regularly occurring violence. The burden of proof would be a balance of probabilities rather than 'beyond reasonable doubt' as for the present court-based system. The Commission would include representatives from the liquor industry, police, health professionals, social scientists, and various community groups. It would have a developed research and policy-making section, and could be financed entirely from liquor license fees.

To some extent, the Co-ordinating Council on Control of Liquor Abuse, established in Victoria under the *Liquor Control Act 1987*, is the kind of organisation we have in mind. The Co-ordinating Council is a statutory body, administered by the Liquor Licensing Commission, which provides to the Minister for Consumer Affairs advice on minimising the problems of alcohol abuse.[23] However, as a part-time body with a small staff limited to an advising and monitoring role, the Council appears to be more of an 'afterthought' on the part of the government – or perhaps something of a sop to those groups opposed to the new Act – than a powerful mechanism for making consideration of the full range of community interests an integral part of the licensing and liquor administration process. Nevertheless the existence of the Council within the Liquor Licensing Commission is important, if only to symbolise the need for problems of alcohol abuse and public drinking to be put at the centre of policy development and decision making concerning liquor licensing.

## Regulation of bouncers

Perhaps the most important management and policing issue to emerge both from our research and from the Victorian study was the regulation and training of bouncers. Bouncers are required under the *NSW Security Industry (Amendment) Act 1985* both to hold a valid and current security license and to carry related identification on the job. Some police insist that they make regular and thorough checks for this and do not, for example, tolerate situations where unlicensed staff referred to as 'glasshops' are actually employed for the principle purpose of controlling and ejecting patrons. Others give the impression that these checks are not made until an unusual

***It is paradoxical that although rowdy drinking is regulated with consideration to the 'public order', instances of violence are perceived by politicians, bureaucrats, and police as individualised disputes between different patrons.***

16. J. Nieuwenhuysen, *Review of the Liquor Control Act 1968 – Victoria*, F.D. Atkinson Government Printer, Melbourne, 1986.
17. Chief Secretary's Department, *A Review of the Liquor Laws in New South Wales: Discussion Paper*, Sydney, October, 1989.
18. Alcohol Advisory Council of Western Australia, Inc., *op cit.*; Ministry for Police and Emergency Services, Victoria Police, *op cit.*
19. David J. Collins & Helen M. Lapsley, *Estimating the Economic Costs of Drug Abuse in Australia*, National Campaign Against Drug Abuse, Monograph Series N° 15, AGPS, Canberra, 1991.
20. Liquor Administration Board, *5th Annual Report 1987-88*, Sydney.
21. Establishments closed down in Melbourne specifically because of violence include Bojangles, the Hippodrome, the Richmond Football Club disco, the Gasometer Hotel, and the Underground (information supplied by Mr Arch Sutton, Liquor Licensing Commission).
22. Victorian Community Council Against Violence, *op cit.*, p. xi.
23. Co-ordinating Council on the Control of Liquor Abuse in Victoria, *Chairperson's Status Report 1990*, Melbourne.

*The other image of drinking – a friendly crowd enjoy a drink in the sun in a beer garden.*

circumstance arises, such as a sizeable number of public complaints about violence in a particular venue.

The 1985 amendments to the NSW legislation were partly intended to discourage aggressive and violent individuals becoming bouncers, but the success of this reform is difficult to determine. It is obvious from our research that a significant number of working (and licensed) doormen are still prone to violence, suggesting that there is a need to mandate training for security staff in human interaction skills, crowd control, and non-violent conflict resolution. In addition, it is essential that the existing legislation be enforced in line with the intentions of parliament. Without a greater overall police effort to implement the *Security Act*, it has little more than symbolic value and will do nothing to reduce actual levels of violence.

## Police practices

As the experience with the regulation of bouncers indicates, the actions of police are ultimately critical to what happens in licensed premises, irrespective of bureaucratic or legislative reforms. Police regulation can be carried out by checks and agreements with licensees regarding a whole range of aspects of trading, and through the threat of sanctions under the legislation. It is very hard for an observer to assess the impact of police regulation, as most of this activity takes place at the informal level and is not public knowledge. Information gathered from interviews with police, chamber magistrates, and security personnel during the course of our research indicated that regulation may be highly varied and inconsistent – ranging from strict in some areas to quite lax in others. Licensing police were generally unfamiliar with those sections of the Liquor Act referring to violence, and in their work tended to regard assaults as a non-licensing matter for other police to investigate. As a result, management practices and environmental factors encouraging violence have been allowed to continue unchecked over many years.

Important reforms to police practices have been implemented since the time of our research. The police Licensing Squad in NSW has been almost completely decentralised, with licensing specialists now located in local police patrols and responsible to the Patrol Commander. General duties police are also giving increased attention to licensed premises, and Patrol Commanders are being encouraged to set up local Police-Liquor Industry Consultative Committees to discuss aspects of the regulation and sale of liquor in their area. These reforms have at least two aims: to break down the corruption which was characteristic of the old system based on a centralised squad, and to promote community policing practices with regard to licensed premises. It is probably too early to judge whether these aims have been achieved.

Currently police in NSW are putting some emphasis on the enforcement of aspects of the *Liquor Act* which have formerly been neglected, especially Clauses 3 and 4 of Section 125, which specify that no person shall be served liquor on licensed premises while in an intoxicated state, and that where a person is intoxicated on licensed premises the licensee shall be deemed responsible unless he proves otherwise. This last 'deeming' clause is seen by police not as a device for convicting wayward publicans of an offence which many in the community would see as archaic, but as a potentially powerful lever for the modification of serving practices and for the introduction of server intervention programs which, despite the *National Guidelines for the Responsible Serving of Alcohol*, have been totally ignored by most licensees.[24]

It is clear from our research that excessive alcohol consumption is one factor which, in interaction with other factors, can greatly increase the risk of violence. A particular problem in this connection is the promotion of cheap drinks by some establishments. For this reason, we advocate an immediate and direct legislative assault on all practices involving discount drinks, 'two-for-one' promotions, happy hours, and any other serving practices which have the effect of producing high levels of drunkenness in a short period. While one might debate the rights of individual patrons to choose to drink to intoxication, our findings concerning the destructive effects of mass binge drinking resulting from deliberate and irresponsible price discounting and drinks promotions leaves us in no doubt that such practices should be banned.[25]

However, while acknowledging the need to prevent the deliberate creation of mass intoxication, we have concerns about police attempts to control intoxication in licensed premises on a routine basis. The problem, from a social policy point of view, is that in perhaps the majority of such places a large number of drinkers are intoxicated, with some choosing to go to these venues for just this purpose. It is possible that an overemphasis on reducing consumption,

whether through the coerced introduction of server intervention programs or through direct police enforcement of the *Liquor Act*, will revive the historic conflicts between the wowsers and the libertines, and that public attention will once again be diverted from the prevention of violence to debates about Australians' rights to drink as they choose.

The failure of publicans to take to heart guidelines on responsible serving is predictable, given the history of alcohol use in this country, and it is doubtful that selective police enforcement of the intoxication sections of the *Liquor Act* will turn the tide. It might even create a backlash. We prefer therefore not to rely on police to control intoxication in pubs and clubs, but instead, given the evident failure of the 'social responsibility' model, would like to see public debate about the need for legislative changes to make staff training in responsible serving a condition of holding a liquor license.[26] Promotion of such a debate could be one of the first tasks of our proposed Liquor Industry Commission.

Although there may be need for legislative amendments as well, our research indicates that police could make a major contribution to the reduction of violence by ensuring that licensed premises, and particularly discos, comply with regulations concerning crowding, the provision of seating, and the serving of food. The goal should be to ensure that comfort is improved, that the number of patrons is more appropriate to the number of staff and the size of the premises, and that good quality food is available when trade is outside of normal food outlet times.

Policing should also be targeted not only at licensed premises but at the entire local community, and should be carried out in co-operation with other community groups. A prime example of this approach is the West End Forum, launched in Melbourne in June 1990 by the Minister for Police, following a recommendation of the report of the Community Council Against Violence.[27] The Council recognised that the concentration of late night venues in the King Street area created considerable potential for violence, and saw the forum as a mechanism for developing violence prevention strategies. Groups represented on the forum, apart from the police, include the Melbourne City Council, community representatives, and representatives of the liquor and hospitality industries. So far, five task groups have been formed to address issues such as transport in the area, street lighting, security of open space, policing strategies, and good and bad management practices.[28]

The West End Forum illustrates what can be accomplished by police in co-operation with community groups. The approach is broad-based and preventive, and recognises that violence occurs in a total social context rather than as a result of any single cause. The Forum should serve as a model for other jurisdictions.

## Conclusion

Implementation of the reforms we have proposed would, we believe, greatly reduce the incidence of violence in and around licensed premises. However, many of these reforms in legislation, bureaucratic structures, and police practices are probably not possible without changes in community and police attitudes to the victims of pub violence. The narrow way in which pub violence is viewed is inscribed into the law and reflected in the daily functioning of the legal system. Both are undergirded by notions of the lack of merit and deserved misfortune of most victims. These beliefs may not commonly be understood as perpetuating and causing violence, but this does happen, in at least two ways: assailants who are never brought to book for their acts of violence are encouraged to repeat their crimes, and the negative environmental factors which promote violence become entrenched in some establishments, making them bloodhouses year after year.

Police attitudes and practices regarding domestic assaults have improved markedly in recent years, as a result of consciousness raising and changes in training. Although pub violence entails considerable difficulties for police action, including hostile patrons, unco-operative hotel staff, and problems with finding reliable witnesses and sufficient evidence, the problems are no greater than for domestic assaults. Further reforms in police education about violence, and exposure of the popular prejudice against victims of pub assaults, would be a logical way of building on the achievements in dealing with domestic violence. ●



24. The Federal Minister for Health, Mr Staples, was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 4 July 1991, as 'rebuking' alcohol retailers for failing to fulfil an agreement with the Federal Government to help promote more responsible serving of liquor. His position is supported by the results of a detailed observational study of 50 bars, clubs, and discos recently conducted (September 1991) by students at Macquarie University. The evidence for responsible serving practices was minimal in most of the sites visited.
25. *The National Guidelines for the Responsible Serving of Alcohol* recognises the inappropriateness of happy hours and the need to promote moderate consumption, but contains merely polite suggestions about how this might be achieved. The document says nothing directly about the potentially destructive effects of binge drinking by a large group.
26. Peter Homel, 'Hazards in the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in the Community – The Example of Server Intervention in the Retail Liquor Industry in Australia and Overseas', Paper presented at the *4th National Drug Educators Workshop*, Sydney, November 1989.
27. Victorian Community Council Against Violence, *op cit.*, p. xii.
28. Melbourne City Council, West End Forum, *Interim Status Report April 1991 for The Good Neighbourhood Program, Ministry of Police and Emergency Services*, Melbourne.

# Australian Violence: Contemporary Perspectives

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# The Causes of Public Violence: Situational "versus" Other Factors in Drinking Related Assaults

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The research literature on violence gives very different accounts of the etiology of such behaviour. Some accounts place a stress upon the broader structural origins of violence, regarding it as the outcome of some general feature of our society and culture, such as inequalities of power or material well being (for example, Braithwaite 1979). Others emphasise the more immediate correlates of violence, often seeking individual or group explanations at the micro-social level (for example, Olweus 1988; Toch 1984).

Whereas wider structuralist accounts are in danger of descending into a determinism which denies volition in human behaviour, micro-social accounts may move towards a narrow empiricism. The latter can take the directly observable features of a situation or incident to be the most important or plausible factors of cause and explanation.

Single and multi-causal accounts of violence may both fall into such pitfalls of structural determinism or narrow empiricism. This can lead researchers onto a tightrope walk between reductionist perspectives which cannot address the real complexity and variation in human behaviour as lived experience, and a viewpoint that is incapable of distinguishing between the most and least important causes of a phenomenon.

Researchers who endeavour to unearth what they believe are the localised "situational variables" relating to some problematic

behaviour, may then confer an analytical privilege on them, dismissing other less apparent variables and factors as irrelevant. However, it is argued here that empirical research that explores some social phenomenon by direct observation at the local level, need not necessarily fall into this sociologically narrow position. A reflexive position can consider the effects of the observable and also the broader forces that may less obviously impinge upon the phenomenon studied.

The situational factors that appear to be tied to the occurrence of violence in our society cannot stand by themselves in grand isolation, and do not have a separate existence unrelated to broader social forces. We illustrate this point by reporting here on the early results of our current research—an observational study of violent public drinking locations in Sydney.

This study examines the situational variables in the public drinking environment which characterise occasions of violence. The data collected for this research cannot be meaningfully understood without giving due consideration to broad aspects of culture, social inequality, the state and public policy, and how these have historically shaped the response of the legal system to public violence.

Certain features of the public drinking environment owe their existence or prominence to these wider forces. It is evident from this research that there is a whole range of public violent crime in our society which is of marginal or no interest to the state. This is disregarded within an official discourse about violence, and ignored until it offends some de facto victim termed the "public order". Its denial or existence in this mutated form, cannot legitimise the considerable social injustice that proceeds from these situations.

## Alcohol and Violence

There is a vast international literature which seeks to draw out the links between alcohol and violent crime (*see* Collins 1982a). One of the present authors has elsewhere (Tomsen 1989) classified these into four major categories as follows.

Studies of convicted criminals and alcoholics: these have found a positive correlation between high alcohol use and a personal history of involvement in arguments, fights and criminal assaults. Some of them suggest a link with domestic violence, with excessive alcohol use by assailants, victims, or both in the families studied (Tomsen 1989; Collins 1982; Roslund & Larson 1979; Hamilton & Collins 1982).

Studies of past criminal acts and violent incidents: these retrospective analyses have found a high level of alcohol use by assailants, and frequently by the victim as well. They find that drinking appears to help precipitate such incidents and increase the risk of victimisation (Collins 1982; Gerson 1984; Abel & Zeidenberg



1985, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1977; 1974; Wallace 1986).

Clinical studies of aggression: these are studies by clinical and social psychologists, observing the behaviour of people who have consumed alcohol in laboratory settings. They note a general rise in aggressive feelings among subjects, particularly groups of men (Taylor 1983; Zeichner & Pihl 1980).

Studies of public drinking: these mostly comprise wider surveys of public drinking habits involving calculating the levels of consumption among different socio-demographic groups. But there is also a slowly growing number of direct observational studies of drinking in natural settings (Single 1985; Clarke 1985).

Tomsen (1989) also points out what are seen as the chief methodological flaws, limitations, and advances of these studies. In particular, studies of criminals/alcoholics and other "types", and violent criminal incidents, are open to the charge of biased samples. They study social groups and occurrences which have been subject to exceptional levels of state scrutiny and regulation. The criminal/deviant behaviour which can be linked to the drinking habits of participants in violence may be pre-existing. The supposed relationship between excessive alcohol use and violence in these groups may also be misleading if both phenomena are features of some common third factor, such as the poor or deprived social conditions from which these researched groups mostly originate.

It is worth noting that both levels of drinking and the likelihood of violent incidents rise during periods of high social interaction. Their occurrence during the same time periods may lead to the misleading belief that they are necessarily connected. This research also has to meet the problem of "deviance disavowal": these subjects may frequently cite their drinking as an excuse for their behaviour or actions. A husband may claim that his use of alcohol is the single or major cause of his mistreatment of his wife, so as to relieve his guilt or to seek leniency in the legal system.

Aggression studies in clinical settings have come to reject the notion that it is merely the pharmacological effects of alcohol that result in aggressive behaviour, acting as a disinhibitor of some innate instinct or drive (Greenberg 1982). Situational factors such as an all-male setting, group drinking and stressful surroundings are now considered important in the production of aggressive feelings (Carpenter & Armenti 1972; Boyatzis 1974; Levinson 1983). As Carpenter and Armenti put it, "the circumstances of drinking produce greater changes in behaviour than the alcohol does" (Evans 1986).

However, these studies are limited in their generalisability to natural settings, where the salient situational factors may be quite different. Some researchers have begun to theorise about drinking in these settings, with a resulting interactionist perspective which stresses the importance of patterns of social relations in these contexts, and the effects of excessive drinking upon social competence.

The "cognitive impairment" resulting from a drunken state leads to a frequent misinterpretation of social cues and a misunderstanding of the actions and intentions of others, especially in situations of group drinking (Pernanen 1982; Zeichner & Pihl 1980; Hull & van Treuben 1986). This theorising could be used to complement the small number of studies of aggression in drinking locations. The best of these is Graham's study of aggression in different bars in Vancouver (Graham 1980). This concluded that such environmental features as general atmosphere, physical appearance and staff behaviour can signal and encourage the appropriateness of aggressive behaviour.

As well as all these factors, cultural anthropologists have observed a great variation in the behaviour of different people in drinking situations, in accordance with what McAndrew and Edgerton term the "drunken comportment" of each society or culture (McAndrew & Edgerton 1969). It does not seem, however, that the link between violence and drinking, rather than alcohol, is an entirely spurious one. Certain drinking situations in our society are characterised by violence. This is regardless of whether the connection with alcohol is an indirect one, and the result of social relations and interaction rather than chemistry. These violent drinking situations merit some far more intensive study than they have so far been given.

## Studies of Public Drinking

Several studies indicate that the majority of incidents of public violence occur in settings which involve young working-class males as both assailants and victims, that they are focused around "time out" periods at night and towards or during the weekend, and are centred on entertainment areas and venues (Robb 1988; Victorian Ministry for Police and Emergency Services 1989). Principal among these are the public drinking locations where large numbers of young Australians spend their leisure time.

A 1988 (Robb) report by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research on the growing number of serious assaults in that state, found that 40.12 per cent of incidents had been marked by police as alcohol related (Robb 1988). Between 1971 and 1986-87, 19.53 per cent of these are recorded as having occurred in licensed premises. But it is noted that police are quite literal about the incident having taken place right within the premises.

Unpublished figures obtained from the New South Wales Police Department show that of the 6,103 alcohol related assaults (serious and common) recorded within the period July 1988 to February 1989, 1551 (approximately one-quarter) are recorded as occurring in licensed premises. This figure is also probably considerably understated. The data show a general correlation between assault "peaks" and hotel and licensed club closing hours.



The 1989 study from the Victorian Ministry of Police and Emergency Services, referred to above, which monitored the effect of the liberalisation of licensing hours in that state, has also led to political concern regarding the marked increase in assaults both generally and particularly in licensed premises which followed those changes. This found a sharp rise in serious assaults of 18.5 per cent between 1986-87 and 1987-88, and a further 20 per cent between 1987-88 and 1988-89. Assaults in or immediately outside pubs or clubs grew from 17.5 per cent to 27.7 per cent of the total in this latter period. This report concludes that, apart from the domestic violence category, most of the serious assaults on civilians reported to police occur between strangers, commonly in public settings, particularly in and around pubs and clubs or in the street, and on young male victims.

There is still a paucity of detailed information worldwide, and particularly in Australia, which might explain these apparent increases in levels of violence. We have attempted to begin to fill some of these gaps in our knowledge through a study of public drinking funded by the Australian Institute of Criminology and New South Wales Directorate of the Drug Offensive. This study, which is nearing completion, utilises various research methods. Data sources include police statistics, interviews with general duties and other police, and an observational study of public drinking, the tentative results of which are presented here.

## Study of Public Drinking Establishments in Sydney

This study of violent and non-violent control drinking establishments is the first of its kind in this country, and commenced in April 1989. It involved field visits by a small number of observers to different pubs, clubs and nightclubs in the Sydney region. Although premises are sometimes marked on assault records, at that time there were no central police records of the most violent locations. We attempted to overcome extensive sampling problems by gathering information from interviews with licensing police around Sydney, who by law are responsible for the regulation of these premises.

This information was supplemented by contacts with chamber magistrates, who operate an old and well known free legal service in New South Wales courts, with many assault victims coming to them for help. We also had discussions with local general duties police and officers from the security industry. Some of the research team had a first hand knowledge of violent and other drinking locations which proved useful.

The level of information obtained proved to be uneven in quality, and after several of our first field trips it was considered not feasible to study all of the emergent types of regularly violent

premises coming to our attention within the constraints of time and limited resources.

Those locations which we classified as "skid row/marginal" drinking establishments were not studied. These places were generally physically rundown. But it could also be suggested that the aggression and violence of these locations derived principally from the patron type rather than other aspects of the drinking environment—a view which needs to be tested by other researchers. This "skid row/marginal" category included places where all or the majority of patrons comprised such groups as bikies, skinheads, punks, drug addicts and dealers, certain racial minorities, and people released from prisons or mental institutions. These were distinctly territorial and the researchers felt most conspicuous and unwelcome in them.

The exclusion of these premises from more detailed study has admittedly taken many of the more violent locations in Sydney out of this research. But the aim of this study was not just to observe as much violence as possible, but to have generalisable findings through a focus on locations which although violent, are mainstream drinking venues frequented by everyday Australians.

Another type of location which we have not subjected to very detailed study, perhaps surprisingly, is the venue popularly associated with the most violent drinking occasions. This is the commonplace local workingman's pub. Police interviews and our observations would suggest that although many of these locations are "rough" and rowdy, and middle-class people feel quite out of place in them, most are not as regularly violent as is commonly believed.

Some of these are obviously trouble spots, and there is a difficulty interpreting whether or not police assurances that these places handle problems "inhouse" simply means they are little trouble to police, rather than actually non-violent. But from our own observations it seems that trouble and fights here are generally defused by the publican or groups of patrons who are often known to the parties involved, and that the violence does not seem to follow the regular patterns that we have found in other locations.

Several of these types of bars exist within the sites chosen for more intensive study, and were visited often. But this venue "type" seems to carry far less violence than the sites we focused on. This may be partly only a consequence of their generally lower number of patrons. Further research into violence in this type of location also needs to be conducted.

Our conclusions regarding the key variables which most often correlate with violence in public drinking locations, are so far based on information from 47 visits to 16 different locations. These have taken observers a total of more than 300 hours of observation. To date we have conducted more intensive observations on six premises. Four of these can be readily classified as violent. The other two were selected as non-violent control locations.



The control sites were studied for the features which distinguish them from the violent locations. However, the "violent" premises are not violent for most of the time. Violent occasions in these establishments seemed to have characteristics that clearly marked them out from the non-violent times. In effect, these locations were acting as controls for themselves. This unexpectedly helped to refine our ideas about the relevant situational variables.

All six of the premises so far studied intensively are in suburban locations as it is easier to link public violence and local police problems with a particular venue in the suburbs. Although statistics published by the Police Department of New South Wales show that the rate of "offences committed against the person" for the Sydney (city) Police District was well above that for any other area of Sydney (Police Department of NSW 1988), the problems in these areas are often dispersed.

The two control locations which have been studied intensively so far are both licensed hotels, two of the violent locations are hotels and another two are licensed clubs. Hotels have commonly been regarded as rougher places, and the more likely locations for violence. Licensed clubs have often been credited with being more orderly and having good control over their patrons. But in many cases this latter reputation is no longer deserved.

It has been suggested in interviews that clubs have become more troublesome to police in the last few decades. Financial pressures are thought to have led many of them to develop forms of entertainment—principally late night discos or live music for young people—which draw unexpected problems. Some clubs do not have the experience or staff to cope with this situation.

### *Form of the Study*

The general characteristics of the more violent mainstream premises chosen for full study, were soon rather striking. These were all popular, young persons venues with live music or a disco and with late (>12 pm) trading. However, this does not indicate straightaway the "causes" of violence and trouble in these locations. We caution against the ready acceptance of possibly spurious variables which seem to offer quick and easy explanations of drinking violence, and which fit readily into the prevailing "commonsense" ideas about it. There are plenty of venues with these characteristics which are not violent.

As already noted, observers found that these locations were violent and non-violent at different times. If we chose to, it was eventually possible to concentrate observations at the times that were regularly violent. Of course, these were usually the busy periods late at night, and towards or during the weekend. But other less obvious variables altered the patterns of violence.

The occasions that were very placid, or more interestingly seemed to have the potential for violence but it did not break out,

provided contrasting periods which demanded some sort of explanation. This sort of transition was also frequently observed within the same visit; as time passed, different variables became more prominent or weakened.

Observers usually conducted visits in pairs. Sometimes they went without other researchers, but always in the company of at least one or more friends. The observations have varied in time from thirty minutes to more than five hours. Variables noted included aspects of physical and social atmosphere such as attractiveness, cleanliness, activities available, music and entertainment, movement, crowding and comfort, friendliness, boredom, hostility, roughness and aggression. We have also recorded the details of patron types, staff and staff behaviour, drinking and any incidents of violence.

These visits were then written up as separate narrative accounts by each observer. These narratives were cross-checked and later coded (within a choice of more than 150 variables) at group meetings in search of the key variables that were recurrent during high violent, violent, potentially violent, and peaceful periods.

Useful and generally reliable information about these venues was also often obtained from informal conversations with regular patrons. As the situation allowed, they were asked about their impressions of the venue, why they came there, the type and behaviour of patrons and staff, and the regularity and timing of occasions of violence. Some thought this line of abstract questioning to be peculiar, and refused to be drawn by it. But others were willing to speak freely, and our anonymity was apparently retained.

The literature on observational studies and participant observation refers frequently to the ethical questions raised by this type of data gathering—where research subjects do not know the real identity of the researcher or why it is that their knowledge or views are being solicited (Becker 1958). However, these ethical dilemmas seem minor compared with others arising in this study. The charge of sociological voyeurism which could come from our experience of seeking out and following fights and assaults in and out of these venues, is more likely, even though we have not merely been seeking out violence of any sort and without purpose.

We have observed plenty of rowdiness, aggression and arguments. Along with this we have witnessed 25 assaults, and three brawls, some incidents being quite sickening. But observers have also been abused and challenged, and on two different occasions assaulted, though without real harm. In our defence we also confess that we have twice committed an objectivist sin—we called staff who have broken up fights before they could become very serious.

### *Situational Variables*

A tentative analysis of the data so far gathered suggests that much of the violence is not due to anything inherent in public drinking or in the typical patrons of these venues. The most recurrent and relevant



situational variables seem to be aspects of the patron type, the social atmosphere, drinking and staff behaviour outlined below.

**Patron type** The typical patrons in violent premises are young, working-class males. Violent premises do generally attract a rougher more working-class clientele than the control sites studied. But the social class of patrons cannot explain the differences between these and more peaceful venues with patrons from a similar social background. Nor can it explain why the violent venues are at other times peaceful, although the patrons present are much the same.

Youthfulness may also not have an effect in the way expected by some; that young people are by nature rowdy, impulsive, unable to accept authority, and unable to hold their drink. Older people do not come to these venues in the same numbers, and for the same time—drinking for hours and staying till late. Obviously, young drinkers devote a lot more of their leisure time to attending these sorts of places.

The proportion of males, and presence of male groups, in any venue seems to exacerbate sexual competition, which causes feelings of frustration and arguments and fights. Males in groups, especially as strangers to each other, have been seen to come into conflict more readily. The venues we have studied seem to draw a larger number of these groups of strangers than others, attracting people from a fairly wide area.

**Atmosphere** The adverse reputation of some premises cannot explain the considerable variation in levels of aggression and violence at different times. It is also noteworthy that a "rough" atmosphere, with plenty of rowdy behaviour, is not as good a predictor of the likelihood of violence as is usually thought or was first expected by the researchers.

"Roughness" is obviously not a single variable but a series of variables which may not include aggression and violence. Some sites are rough but at the same time friendly and free of hostility and aggression. There seems to be a buried assumption in many studies of aggression, per se, that it is part of a behavioural continuum ending in violent behaviour, and that therefore studies of aggression and alcohol may tell us something meaningful about the link with violence. This is doubtful: despite all the myths or expectations, rough pubs (which would include many of the local workingmen's pubs mentioned above) are not necessarily the same thing as violent pubs.

Two other relevant aspects of atmosphere are comfort and boredom. Comfortable premises are not necessarily the most attractive, renovated places. The most important aspects seem to be roominess, ventilation, and, especially if there is music of poor quality, only moderate noise. If patron movement, bumping and shoving are low, there is usually minimal aggression and violence.

Patron numbers are a relevant factor here. Big crowds tend to mean further discomfort, and a lack of seating aggravates the problem. Patrons on these occasions alleviate their discomfort by more rapid

drinking. This causes higher levels of drunkenness, and eventually aggressive reactions to discomfort directed at individuals or property.

The level of comfort also interacts with the level of boredom—possibly the key variable in social atmosphere. Entertained crowds are less hostile, moderate their drinking to a slower pace (though overall consumption may be the same), and seem to be less bothered by uncomfortable surroundings. The music/bands variable can affect boredom. Very loud music adds to the "cognitive impairment" of a drunk. But bands per se, even loud ones, do not cause aggression and violence.

Violent and non-violent occasions do not follow a simple bands/no-band dichotomy. Quality bands that entertain an audience generate a positive social atmosphere, that has been observed to counteract other negative variables. Some headbanger bands do on occasion draw aggressive style patrons to a venue, but if they are boring they also seem to have an adverse influence on regulars as well. A smaller crowd with a bad band seems more likely to present trouble than a large crowd entertained by quality musicians.

Drinking Higher levels of intoxication are an obvious feature of more violent occasions. This is worsened by discount drinks, or by rates that are artificially raised by high discomfort and boredom. Drinkers vary in their reactions to alcohol. However, it generally adds to cognitive impairment, and leads to less predictable and less rational behaviour. Many patrons appear to pass through stages of drunkenness—with aggression coming later. Substantial amounts of food that can lower levels of drunkenness are generally not available in violent premises or on violent occasions.

Doormen/bouncers The behaviour of barstaff does not appear to figure as highly as expected in the creation of an aggressive or violence prone atmosphere. However, edgy and aggressive bouncers, especially when they are arbitrary or petty in their manner, do have an adverse effect.

They have been observed to initiate fights or further encourage them on several occasions. Many seem poorly trained, obsessed with their own machismo, and relate badly to groups of male strangers. Some of them appear to regard their employment as giving them a licence to assault people. This may be encouraged by management adherence to a repressive model of supervision of patrons ("if they play up, thump 'em"), which in fact does not reduce trouble, and exacerbates an already hostile and aggressive situation. In practice many bouncers are not well managed in their work, and appear to be given a job autonomy and discretion that they cannot handle well.

### *Summary*

Violent incidents in public drinking locations are caused by an interaction of several variables. Chief among these are groups of male strangers, low comfort, high boredom, high drunkenness, and aggressive and unreasonable bouncers.



## Drinking Regulation and Social Inequality

The findings of this research to date suggest that there is nothing inherent in public drinking or in the typical patrons of working-class venues which makes violence inevitable. Violence is highly dependent upon the presence and interaction of a number of environmental variables, which may not be commonly regarded as linked to the incidence of violence. Nevertheless, they have an observable and major effect on its presence and degree in natural drinking settings.

The drinking environment is an evolving historical and cultural product, which can be left unchanged or altered for the better. Continuous patterns of violence in these locations are clearly a problem of management practices and government regulation, and a responsibility of both the liquor industry and state officials. Violence could be much reduced by changes to management and regulation, but the paths pursued so far have tended to ignore or worsen this social problem.

To explain how this untenable situation has historically come about it is necessary to consider the broader effects of structures of social inequality, on the forms and control of public drinking. As noted above, the typical patrons in the high violence establishments are young, working-class males. This social grouping have low status and low power within the two principal systems of social stratification in our society, these being the structures of social class and patriarchy. This reduced status and power has effects at all levels in the criminal justice system, which deploys enormous resources towards the surveillance and control of young men.

More widely it is also reflected in an elitist, simplistic, and unjust ideology about this social grouping which pervades our society. This widespread ideology, which is here termed the "hooligan myth", stereotypes all young working-class males as socially deviant, and reckless rule-breakers, without individual variation.

"Hooligans" are quickly recognisable by their particular appearance, and leisure activities—public drinking being principal among these. This stereotype of the young is reproduced constantly in the press and the media. It often directs the ideas and actions of politicians and state officials.

A frequent result of this hooligan myth is that the imputed deviant and immoral nature of this entire social grouping, means that it is considered reasonable to claim to know and judge their actions through this stereotype. This is despite the complexity and variation within the real circumstances of their actions and behaviour.

As with other socially deviant "types", the misfortunes incurred by these young males are seen as deserved by virtue of their very existence as "hooligans". Because the main victims of public violence in our society are young, working-class males, this has had a major effect

on how this violence is popularly conceived and the state's reaction to it. In particular, criminal assaults upon individuals who are classified as part of this "type", are thought of as deserved or as essentially victimless incidents.

The real victim in such cases, is regarded as being a more abstract and subjective notion termed the "public order". The injuries incurred by the actual victim do not match the supposed seriousness of the offence given to "decent" citizens who may have to witness or become aware of some incident of violence.

The strength and ubiquitous quality of this ideology or myth, may partly explain the great disparity between officially recorded assaults and the results found in victim surveys in this country. On occasion, assaults have been found to be far greater than the number officially recorded (New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1974).

These features of the hooligan myth have also structured official thinking, policy and actions regarding the regulation of public drinking locations in our society. There is a fairly strong tradition of rowdy drinking among Australian working-class men which is evident in these venues. But this does not mean that ongoing violence is typical of rough or rowdy occasions, or that if it eventuates it is deserved by its victims. Progressive work on "deviant" subcultures, especially of youth, has grown in the 1970s and 1980s. These stress the complexity and contradictory nature of these subcultures, and the great variation amongst their adherents. However, a pitfall of the culturalist perspective always is the unintended apparent confirmation of negative stereotypes (*see* Hall 1976).

Our analysis of the causes of public drinking violence, places a stress upon the importance of local situational variables which have been observed by our group of field researchers. However, information gathered suggests that the level of regulation of licensed premises is also a major external variable, which will have important effects on the level of violence in different premises.

Regulation means the extent to which the state, and in particular the police, effectively control premises. This can be done by checks and agreements with licensees regarding a whole range of aspects of trading, and the threat of sanctions under liquor legislation. It is difficult to measure this, as most of the different aspects of regulation exist at the informal level and are not public knowledge, apart from the obvious cases of police presence. However, the effects of regulation in particular premises are probably critical, and may determine whether or not the negative situational variables in a violent location will be allowed to prevail.

In a sociological, rather than legal sense, it could be said that the majority of assaults in public drinking locations are legal. Licensed premises may be closely regulated with regard to such matters as sales, trading hours, and possibly, underage drinking. But there is a relative lack of interest in the occurrence of violence occurring on these



premises, until it is thought to breach public order. In New South Wales police prosecutions against these premises mostly take the form of s. 104 "quiet and good order" breaches under the *New South Wales Liquor Act 1982*.

Action under the Liquor Act taken against premises on the grounds of regular violence are virtually unheard of. Such violence is usually not understood to be the direct responsibility of a licensee. The legal odds weigh very heavily against victims of violence in these locations. An extension of the hooligan myth with regard to pub assaults is the mistaken notion that these assaults are generally against victims who have no merit and who "asked for it". Our findings suggest that it is only in a minority of cases that the attack is really invited by the victim or victims. This was possibly the case in 5 of the 25 assaults we have so far observed.

Another myth is that the majority of incidents are equal conflicts freely entered into by the participants. These assaults are then classified as "fights". If more than two parties are involved they can be further trivialised as "brawls", with the equal responsibility of all parties—assailants and victims—implied by this. By our reckoning, equal responsibility is usually not the case.

Assailants—whether patrons or staff—who deliberately seek out a violent encounter, appear to pick their mark. These victims are most often fewer in number, younger, and smaller. Assailants also appear to focus on victims who are quite drunk, or at least far more intoxicated than they are. The observers on this project feel that they have been passed over by would be assailants who have seen our relative sobriety. This increased likelihood of the victimisation of drunk persons has been well established in various studies of violent crime (Collins 1982b, Gerson 1978, Abel & Zeidenberg 1985, Wallace 1986).

The great majority of legitimate victims are immediately disadvantaged by their lack of social status, a possible lack of witnesses, and their low perceived credibility. This is especially the case if they are drunk or at least partly intoxicated, as most patrons are in the busy drinking venues by late in the evening.

These difficulties are greater in cases of bouncer assault. At least six of the 25 assaults we have observed have been from a bouncer or group of bouncers, who use excessive force in breaking up arguments or fights, and often become involved as ongoing participants. We have also observed at least 10 rough ejections, that were borderline assaults, with excessive force and plenty of verbal abuse being used. In the worst cases they commence an attack on patrons (often solo) as their first response to some nuisance behaviour.

Due to the greater difficulties experienced by victims of bouncer assaults, these are probably understated in official records of drinking venue attacks. However, it is noteworthy that violence deriving from bouncers was considered a significant factor in relation to the recently recorded increases in pub and club violence, in the Victorian Police Ministry report mentioned above.

It was noted that researchers believe most public, as well as most private, violence in Australia remains unreported. Our study indicates that this pattern is similar, if not more marked, in cases of public drinking violence. Police were called and attended in only two of the assaults we have observed (once called by staff and once by a victim, with no action taken in either case).

Police appear to be generally reluctant to become involved in pub assaults that are reported by victims unless they are very serious. Most victims appear to leave the premises with bad feelings, and then perhaps seek medical attention. A common avenue taken by police is to advise victims to seek civil redress. This is a very difficult process especially as the assailant's identity is probably unknown. There is a strong need for Australian research into the reasons why victims of public violence either do not elect to report attacks, or cannot or do not proceed with any legal action.

There are great difficulties and a slim likelihood of a legitimate victim of public drinking violence getting adequate redress from the legal system. This injustice is even reflected in legislation, and the remedies available to the aggrieved. It is paradoxical that although rowdy drinking is regulated with consideration to the "public order", that instances of violence are conceived as individualised disputes between different patrons. Assaults on individual victims are the responsibility of those victims. They are not thought of as contravening the "public interest" in citizens being free from unreasonable violence.

We have not yet heard of any legal aid cases in Australia which have challenged the management of a venue because of its negligent violence-encouraging practices. If this cannot be the legal basis for a challenge, it should at least be the reason for helping different victims in assault cases. The conservative way in which public drinking violence is viewed is inscribed into the law as well as the daily functioning of the legal system. Both are overlaid with notions of the lack of merit and deserved misfortune of young victims.

These beliefs may not be commonly understood as perpetuating and perhaps causing violence. But this happens in two ways. Where the regulation to prevent regular violence as violence in different venues is minimal, this encourages assailants who may feel smug about the remote chance of being charged or sued. Secondly, this laissez-faire response to much violence allows the negative environmental variables to prevail in many locations without adequate action taken to alter the situation. This also results in a greater level of violence and its continuation.

All major cities in Australia, have drinking locations which locals know of as "bloodhouses". But official efforts to alter this situation are ad hoc and inadequate. There is a strong need for a restructuring of the system of liquor regulation, more in line with the principle that violence in public drinking locations is contrary to the public interest (deriving from the victims' interests) and is the twin responsibility of the industry and government.



## Conclusion

Accounts of the local variables which are tied to the occurrence of violent incidents need to be complemented by an analysis of how broader forces give rise to and reinforce the prominence of different variables. These forces include structures of social inequality, and the related form and effects of state policy in different periods. The existence and outcome of certain situational factors is actually dependent on the influence of these broader social elements that are not always obvious at the empirical level.

A perspective which stresses the interaction and interdependence of these different factors need not become a form of incoherent and blind eclectism. It can allow that some factors historically have become firmly embedded in our social structure and culture. Others are more readily alterable through policy measures. Support for the alteration of the local environmental variables which are linked to violence should not lead to a disregard for the wider factors which generate it—issues of inequality and injustice—and which need to be addressed.

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# ALCOHOL AND CRIME

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# Alcohol, Violent Crime and Social Power

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A causal link between the consumption of alcohol and acts of violence has long been depicted in western folklore, drama and literature. An old support for this notion can also be found in the common law plea of 'diminished responsibility' whereby defendants charged with murder, rape and various assaults, have been able to claim a lack of interest due to their drunkenness (Howard 1970). But a scientific interest in this alcohol-violence link emerged far more recently with the rise of medical, psychiatric and criminological discourse on the subject (Lombroso 1985).

The number of relevant empirical studies of violent crime and the effects of drinking upon human behaviour have increased considerably since the 1950s, but these have mostly been limited in three key ways.

Firstly, these studies have been fragmented across a wide range of disciplines, including physiology, pharmacology, epidemiology, psychiatry and psychology, as well as others held loosely together under the rubric of 'alcohol studies'. Only a minority of studies have overcome disciplinary narrowness and chauvinism and suggest a useful combination of different perspectives.

Secondly, much of the alcohol-violence literature reflects an empiricist outlook. Not 'empiricist' in the sense of the use of certain research methods and not others, but in its 'commonsense' view of social problems. This takes only the most obvious features of a social phenomenon to be 'facts', and often overlooks or dismisses the more hidden effects of important social structures.

In this view, oppressive social structures built on social difference appear only at the level of social roles, norms and conventions. 'Empiricist' studies tend to focus upon the observed behaviour of the individual subject(s) of research. From this, dubious generalised claims about entire social groups, social systems, or even 'human nature' might be made. Criminals, violent 'types' of alcoholics, are often the individuals of immediate interest to professionals in the field. But they may also be misleading categories to start with in general research on the social meaning of drinking or aggression and violence.

The third major flaw underlying this literature is a form of false objectivism which researchers confuse with 'objectivity'. A constant problem of social research which studies 'down' (particularly deviance studies), is the danger of an elitist response to those who are studied. In wishing to condemn the

violent acts which appear to be related to alcohol use, researchers may fail to attach any rationality or meaning to the beliefs or behaviour of the researched.

These acts can be dismissed too quickly as deviant, anti-social, pathological, and so on. Considering the possible importance of the subjective understanding of their own actions which these people hold is a legitimate course of scientific inquiry, which need not slip into the extremes of cultural relativism. The different symbolic meanings of drinking and much violence in different cultures are relevant to any wide-ranging objective analysis of these social phenomena.

The above imbalances in the alcohol-violence field are not the 'fault' of any individual researcher. They appear to have resulted from neglect of this area by some disciplines, especially until recently by sociologists. They also reflect the work conditions of social researchers - often separated by a wide social gulf from the researched.

There have been some studies of the relationship between alcohol use and property crime (Cordilia 1985). But most research has focused upon what is thought to be a stronger link with violent assaults, especially spontaneous violent crimes. Despite the researchers' confidence in the strength of this link, the issue of causation remains central.

Studies of alcohol, drinking, aggression and violence can be classified without too much distortion into four major categories. (For more categories *see* Pernanen 1982).

These are as follows:

- Studies of individuals and groups who have been under some form of surveillance, treatment, incarceration or punishment from state agencies. These include convicted juveniles, adult criminals and prisoners, alcoholics and problem drinkers.
- Studies of violent incidents recorded by state agencies, including records of criminal assaults.
- Clinical studies of aggression and alcohol use conducted by psychologists, usually in an experimental university setting.
- Studies of drinking in natural settings.

### Studies of Convicted Criminals and Alcoholics

These (mostly American) studies have found a positive correlation between high alcohol use or 'alcohol problems' and a personal history of involvement in arguments, fights and criminal assaults. For example, in Mayfield's study (Collins 1982) of violent assaults by prison inmates, 58 per cent of offenders claimed they were drinking just prior to, or at the time of, these attacks.

In a study of Californian inmates by Paterson and Braiker (Collins 1982), 24 per cent of subjects claimed they had attacked and injured someone while drinking in the three years before their imprisonment. Roslund and Larson's (1979) Swedish study of assaults over a four year period found alcohol use by 68 per cent of offenders just before or during attacks.

The general review of the literature by Greenberg (1982), suggests that in most studies between one-quarter and one-third of prisoners convicted of violent offences are found to have a history of chronic alcohol use. Other studies suggest this link with domestic violence. In these, excessive alcohol use by the assailant, victim, or both, has been found in as many as 67 per cent of 'troubled' families seeking counselling or divorce (Hamilton & Collins 1982).



Despite this evidence, it is difficult to claim a direct role for alcohol in these violent behaviour patterns or criminal careers. The problem of 'deviance disavowal' - the denial of responsibility for one's actions by citing alcohol as a determining cause - remains as a confounding factor. Furthermore, categories such as 'delinquent', 'problem drinkers' or 'problem families' are highly subjective. Some definitions of the 'alcoholic' or 'criminal' could be agreed upon. But the charge of 'biased samples' could be levelled if these groups, which are subject to high police and official scrutiny and over-represented in official statistics, are taken as being representative of some general social pattern.

The supposed relationship between excessive alcohol use and violence in these groups may also be misleading if both phenomena are just common features of the poor or deprived social conditions from which the researched groups mostly originate. Some other feature of this sort of social background - such as slum housing - could also be statistically linked with violent patterns of behaviours. The problem of causation would still remain unresolved.

### Studies of Criminal Acts and Violent Incidents

These studies look at reported violent crimes and incidents and have found high levels of alcohol use by assailants, and frequently, the victim as well. Drinking appears to help precipitate such incidents and increase the risk of victimisation.

Alcohol was found present in either the offender, victim, or both, in 64 per cent of cases in Wolfgang's Philadelphia homicide study, 53 per cent of cases in Voss and Hepburn's Chicago homicide study, 34 per cent of Amir's Philadelphia rape study and 36 per cent of cases in Gerson's Canadian study of domestic assaults (Collins 1982; Gerson 1978).

A study of homicides in New York by Abel and Zeidenberg (1985) found alcohol in 45 per cent of victims. Two New South Wales reports (New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1974 and 1977a/b) showed alcohol to be a factor in 48 per cent of gun and knife attacks, and in 60 per cent of recorded domestic assaults.

More recent studies (New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1986 and 1988) in that state have found alcohol present in 42 per cent of homicides committed between 1968 and 1981, and in 40 per cent of a sample of serious assaults from the years 1971 to 1986, many of which took place in or near licensed hotels or clubs. In an overview of the international literature, Pernanen notes that alcohol is usually found present in about 50 per cent of violent assaults and rapes and between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of homicides.

As impressive as these figures are in suggesting a link between alcohol use and acts of violence, these studies are also affected by confounding variables. Again, the social status of the parties involved may offset the likelihood of both the reporting of an incident and the presence of heavy drinking. The times at which these incidents commonly occur, holidays, weekends and evenings, are times at which many people are intoxicated. An increased number of arguments, brawls and violence at these times would be a partial consequence of the much higher levels of social interaction as people attempt to socialise and enjoy themselves. Furthermore, most of these 'acts' are in fact interactive disputes - a process involving both (or more) parties which may escalate into violence. Studies of official records usually cannot find many clues as to what aspects of social interaction, when combined with drinking, can lead to violence.

### Studies of Aggression

Another major source of knowledge of the alcohol and violence connection is the increasing number of studies of aggression conducted by clinical and social psychologists since the 1960s. These researchers observe the behaviour of people who have consumed alcohol, and note a general link between alcohol intake and a rise in aggressive feelings and gestures, particularly among men.

However, these studies have been moving away from the simple notion that it is just the pharmacological effects of alcohol that are the sole or direct cause of aggressive behaviour in the form of a 'disinhibition' of some innate destructive instinct or drive (Pernanen 1982; Carpenter & Armenti 1972; Taylor 1983; and Brain 1986). This disinhibition model would suggest that a lack of regulation or repression in poorly socialised or pathological individuals leads to aggressive and violent actions, not the social encouragement and reinforcement of this behaviour. But situational factors are now considered to be of major importance.

Researchers argue that such factors as an all-male setting, group drinking, and threatening or stressful surroundings, will all result in observable increases in levels of aggression (Carpenter & Armenti 1972; Taylor 1983; Boyatzis 1974; Levinson 1983). As Carpenter and Armenti (Evans 1986) put it, 'the circumstances of drinking produce greater changes in behaviour than the alcohol does'. Despite these insights, the critical question still remains as to how, when and why aggression actually becomes expressed as violent behaviour during drinking?

The growing interest in situational and environmental factors has led some researchers to theorise the form of drinking situations in natural conditions (Pernanen 1982; Zeichner & Pihl 1980; Hull & Van Treuben 1986). The resulting 'interactionist' perspective has stressed the importance of patterns of social relations in the context of drinking, and the drinking behaviour that is learnt from the example of others.

The aggression and violence that can be associated with drinking is here linked to the effects of intoxication upon social competence. Social interaction for the heavy drinker becomes a confused and fumbled process (Pernanen 1982; Zeichner & Pihl 1980; Hull & Van Treuben 1986). There is a frequent misunderstanding of social cues and the intentions of other people. This is worsened by the often crowded and uncomfortable settings in drinking establishments (Pernanen 1982).

### Studies of Public Drinking

The relationship between alcohol use, tax revenue, and the cost of the public health system, have led to the increased interest of many governments in general drinking surveys. These outline the amounts and type of alcohol consumed by different socio-demographic groups, and sometimes detail locations (Single & Storm 1985). But it is the slower growing number of observational studies of drinking, bar rooms and pubs which can provide greater detail on the effects of situational variables on drinking.

These have particularly focused upon drinking rates and their relationship to such variables as sex, age, social status, solo and group drinking, time, length of stay, interaction with bar staff, and so on (*see* Single & Storm 1985). The most typical heavy drinkers in the public bar setting are characterised as young, unmarried males in groups (Clarke 1985). The group setting and other features of the environment have been related to length of stay and amounts consumed



(Single & Storm 1985). Only a small number of observational studies have focused on the relationship of these to levels of aggression.

The most important of these is Graham's study (1980) of aggression in different types of bars in Vancouver. This concluded that some bar room environments can encourage and signal the appropriateness of aggressive behaviour through their general atmosphere, physical appearance and staff relations, independent of the particular rough and tumble clientele they attract (Graham 1980).

These findings suggest the interesting possibility of minimising the levels of aggression and violent incidents within public drinking contexts by encouraging practical changes to the drinking environment. These would include improving the design and appearance of bar rooms, as well as staff training, behaviour and attitudes to customers.

These drinking studies have considerably extended the existing knowledge of the social context of drinking, but if read in isolation, they create a danger of falling to the limited 'empiricist' perspective criticised above. Their particular methodologies lead to a focus upon the short-term observable features of the drinking environment and a search for the meaning of behaviour and the level of everyday social interaction.

If we cannot see the forest for the trees, this may neglect the importance of the historically evolving meanings of drinking in different cultures, and the impact of various beliefs and ideologies on drinking behaviour. This behaviour, particularly violent drinking behaviour, is not simply due to the social roles that attach to certain socio-demographic variables. It does reflect the form and force of social structures which are not so obvious at the level of social interaction, but which still compel much human behaviour and shape its meaning.

### Drinking, Culture and Social Power

History and comparative sociology can provide some further clues as to how the apparent link between drinking, aggression and violence arises, and the sort of social systems and social changes which encourage it. In most cultures, alcohol is drunk for its anxiety-reducing effects. But there is a great diversity in drinking behaviour, or what writers including Heath (1976), MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) term 'drunken comportment' - behaviour tied to the different attitudes, and beliefs that attach to drunkenness in different cultures.

The level of violence expressed when drinking is an important feature of this varied comportment. Cinquemani's famous study of two central American Indian tribes, contrasted the violent behaviour of one people from the relative peacefulness of another nearby tribe, when either tribe engaged in heavy drinking (Blum 1982). Other contrasts could be drawn, for example, between the placid behaviour of the Bolivian Camba during drinking festivals (Heath 1982) and the frequently fatal violence of the Finns when drinking (Collins 1983).

Why then do some cultures so closely associate drinking with aggression and violence, while others do not? Several of the psychological and observational studies discussed above have noted the link between heavy drinking, aggressive behaviour and the assertion of a strong masculine identity among many groups of drinkers (Collins 1983). McLelland maintains that intoxication reduces an individual's sense of self-identity and can provide a feeling of strength and power over the surrounding environment and people that is valued by many men (Boyatzis 1974).

These elements of a masculine identity can be experienced in a drunken state through fantasies of social control and sexual potency. A sense of mastery is acted out in what one observer has called the 'power displays' in drinking

settings (Boyatzis 1974). With boisterous and aggressive behaviour the male drinker is presenting a rather crude view of himself as a 'man'. Where this sense of power may be challenged or undermined, violent behaviour may be the only means to re-establish it.

Threats and challenges to this identity may come from the immediate environment through, for example, another male who wants to feel more powerful or a wife who wants to feel equal. But the greatest threats of all come from the whole surrounding society and the real position of the individual within it. Where indigenous cultures have been smashed by colonialism and imperialism, the resulting more diffuse social structures and undermined traditional system of ascribing status, are linked to higher rates of drunkenness and violent drinking among males seeking to recover their self-esteem (Levinson 1983).[2] As Boyatzis (1976) puts it,

> . . . consumption of alcohol can be useful to males in certain cultures. If a person is continually faced with the tension of self-assertion in a situation containing few organised supports towards maintaining a position of prestige once acquired, then alcohol can help the individual by making him feel more powerful. He can fantasise encounters in which his prowess is great and undaunted. Alcohol also helps him by reducing inhibitions and releasing more aggressive behaviour. Bolstered by alcohol, the individual can continue to face the day-to-day struggles of living in such a society.

In our own liberal-capitalist system the structures of social inequality assume a more hidden form as class achieved rather than ascribed. A masculine adult status is not conferred by formal and specific means attainable by all males. For most men, a respected status has to be struggled for. Here, the association between alcohol, aggression and violence and the attainment of a masculine status, overlaps with class divisions and class cultures.

Drunkenness and rowdy behaviour have become a form of symbolic protest against ruling groups and their world-view. The disorderly 'time-out' periods of hard drinking, express a rebellion against the bourgeois work ethic of sobriety, saving and useful leisure activity. Debates about drinking have become tied to attitudes to social inequality and working or lower class culture. For the bourgeois social reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drunkenness represented much of what they opposed in the lifestyles of the working or 'dangerous classes'.

These different forces have been evident throughout Australian history. In the convict era, drunkenness, indolence and rowdy or destructive behaviour by both men and women marked a form of rebellion against transportation, forced labour and the values of the colonial officials and a developing bourgeoisie (Sturma 1983). As the punishments for these vices were frequently brutal, this further reinforced the cultural association between drink and violence.

By the end of the nineteenth century, rowdy drinking became a common feature and expression of the 'larrikin' tradition. This involved a particular stereotype of the Australian working class male as strong, anti-intellectual, egalitarian among peers, and opposed to petty authority and the 'effete' restrained qualities of the ruling class (Ward 1978).

With the ideological strength of this tradition and stereotype, all-male drinking contexts become a forum for the rejection of bourgeois values and social order in favour of a constructed working class masculine identity. Due to an apparent lack of status and class differences, the Australian pub full of equal mates can reinforce a sense of male group identity, territoriality and cultural



resistance. Here, a heightened pride in a shared masculine identity may compensate for a low position in the society's class structure.

This sense of status may also be secured by the harsh treatment of such social inferiors as women, blacks, gays or young and weak males. But the cultural denial of class inferiority is always just a fiction. Class identity is also formed around the experience of an hierarchical and undemocratic workplace, and obvious inequalities in wealth, privilege and lifestyle. Because of this, group mateship cannot always regulate the 'power displays' during drinking which express the ideology of classless masculinity.

The external threats to this ideology from an obviously unequal society, may push its adherents to the protection and expression of their masculinity and sense of social power through the widely available means of physical destruction and violence. A constant tension between the egalitarian ideology and the reality of our society appears to underlie much of this violence.

The social structures which limit the attainment of a respected adult status in our society afflict both working class men and women. But reactions to this differ between the sexes, and in groups within this class. Many men are excluded from the above ideologies which confer a masculine identity. But the largest group who feel an allegiance to these ideologies and who, at the same time are excluded by or are marginal to them, are working class youth.

Studies of crime which emphasise the 'deviance' of youth behaviour, and regard the common high levels of crime and drinking problems among young working class men as a generational problem which they mostly 'grow out of', have been improved upon by recent accounts of working class youth subcultures (Cohen 1972; Willis 1977; and Hall et al. 1976). These analyse the relationship of subcultures to structures of inequality and social power, and note the important, but ambivalent, relationship of many youths to their 'parent' working class culture (Dorn 1983).

It may be helpful to reflect on these accounts of youth subcultures in responding to the questions as to whether and why Australian society is becoming more violent? Media sensationalism shapes much of the public perception of crime. But there is empirical evidence that some important categories of violent crime have been growing, and that alcohol use has a possible relationship to many incidents of violence. The reported number of rapes in Australia have more than doubled between 1973 and 1987, and reported rates of serious assaults have increased four times over in the same period (National Committee on Violence 1989).

A 1988 report on serious assaults by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (op. cit.) found a similar growth in the period between 1971 to 1986-87, with 40.12 per cent of incidents marked by police as alcohol related. Police reports also show a major increase in the number of common assaults recorded in New South Wales in recent years. These grew 17.66 per cent from 13,739 to 16,165 in the 12 months between 1986-87 and 1987-88 (Police Department of New South Wales 1988).

There is evidence that a large proportion of this growing number of attacks occur during drinking situations or follow alcohol use, and that the majority of assailants and a large proportion of the victims are young, working class males (New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, op. cit.).

If there has been a long tradition of rowdy drinking among Australian working class men, and there has been no recent major change in drinking levels, some explanation is needed as to this increase in the amount of aggressive drinking behaviour which apparently leads to violent acts.

As noted above, the larrikin tradition and rowdy drinking gives a compensatory masculine identity to working class men. But the attainment of this identity also has some real material basis. A possible advancement in

working life (for example, by promotion or self-employment), some trappings of affluence acquired over time, and the often contested but still substantial authority of married men within the family, may all enhance the personal status of these men. But these reinforcements of status are far less available to younger, single men in the social and economic climate of Australia in the 1980s.

The contemporary 'yobbo' culture of working class youth has evolved out of the larrikin tradition, but it may have to meet more threats to its meaning. Some of this may be due to progressive moves to social equality. In what some writers have termed a 'crisis of masculinity', the advances of the women's movement, increased female employment, and possibly greater assertiveness in sexual and social relations, have undermined some areas of male privilege (Komarovsky 1976; Connell 1987). Reported increases in domestic violence may be one result of this (National Committee on Violence 1989).

These changes are least disturbing to men with social position and power, but they more directly threaten the status of males who have neither. The attainment of a respected masculine status is now more difficult for other reasons which are not tied to any moves for greater social equality, but to their opposite. During the relative affluence of the long-boom in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, job advancement and promotion to supervisory and management positions was not uncommon for working class men. Since the downturn in the mid 1970s structural unemployment, particularly among the young, has become a permanent feature of our economy. The collapse of the manufacturing sector has reduced job prospects within the working class. Apprenticeships in skilled trades - occupations which although working class have been a source of masculine pride and identity - are less available.

Economic restructuring in favour of a technocratic economy, and the drift to a 'credential society' with an expanded middle class of professionals and experts, has meant a choice for young Australians between the continuing childhood of formal study or a lifetime in dead-end jobs. The failure of current economic policy to bring on a general recovery has heightened the competition for credentials and better jobs. Economic changes have been of benefit for some sectors (for example banking and speculative capital), but class differences and inequality have become far more marked in Australia in the 1980s (Raskall 1987).

Despite the official corporatist imagery of the shared economic struggle of a nation of 'mates' a sense of hopelessness has become more widespread among many of the poor and working class, particularly the young. The increased violence during this period of history, that is tied to the experience of powerlessness and reduced status by this social group, is certainly a serious problem for its victims (most of who are also working class or socially disadvantaged). However, it is not an entirely irrational or meaningless reaction by the powerless to an increasingly unequal society.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Of course, an empiricist viewpoint will usually lead to a preference for certain methods. But this is not a necessary connection.

[2]An example of this would be the high rates of violence in many Australian Aboriginal communities. *See* P. Wilson (1981).



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# Domestic Violence: Alcohol and Other Distractions - a Grassroots Perspective

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The subject of domestic violence is well researched and documented. Feminist researchers and academics have thoroughly examined the issue, laws have been changed, a national community education program is being launched today. Yet somehow, despite law reform, research and academic discourse, we live in a society which collectively condones violence in the home, a society where 20 per cent of people think violence is justified in some circumstances, and 33 per cent of people consider domestic violence should remain a private matter (Office of the Status of Women 1988).

That domestic violence is on the agenda of a conference about alcohol is no surprise. An estimated 80 per cent of all Australians believe alcohol to be a major cause of domestic violence (Office of the Status of Women 1988). That domestic violence is on the agenda of a conference about crime is an encouraging sign, because few people give domestic violence criminal status. This paper shall argue that domestic violence is a crime and must be responded to as a crime if social change is to occur; that domestic violence is not caused by alcohol; and finally, that the popular social construction of violence being caused by, or associated with, alcohol is a dangerous construction, which distorts far more than it clarifies and hides far more than it reveals.

Although this paper will draw on academic discourse indirectly, it will refer mainly to information and experiences and wisdom gained from listening to victims of violence through the author's experience as a grassroots worker. It is the author's belief that it is the survivors of violence in the home who are the most 'invisible' in the literature (Knight & Hatty 1987).

## Domestic Violence in the Context of Patriarchy

It is important to place domestic violence in a social context to be fully aware of the institutionalised nature of the crime (French 1986). If we take time to ponder on the state of the world about us, there are some horrifying and disturbing factors which seem out of reach, which are beyond an ordinary person's comprehension, and which render individuals powerless. Globally, we see a world full of strife, or international and inter-racial hatred and conflict, of

# The Licensed Drinking Environment: Current Research in Australia and New Zealand

*Proceedings of the National Workshop on Research into the Licensed Drinking Environment, Melbourne, May 1991*

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Chapter 2

# THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE ON LICENSED PREMISES: THE SYDNEY STUDY

Ross Homel, Steve Tomsen, Jennifer Thommeny

Our research, which was funded jointly by the Criminology Research Council and the NSW Directorate of the Drug Offensive, had two major purposes: to document the nature of the apparent statistical association between alcohol use and violence through an examination of police incident reports and police recording practices, and to explore, through detailed observations of clubs, pubs, and discos, ways in which the association between alcohol consumption and violence may be produced in the specific context of public drinking locations.

This paper summarises some aspects of two studies conducted as part of the project: the observational study of pubs, and a survey of NSW police officers which explored how they handled the reporting of alcohol-related assaults. More detailed reports of the research findings and policy implications may be found in Tomsen, Homel & Thommeny (1991), Homel & Tomsen (in press), and Homel, Tomsen & Thommeny (in preparation).

## The Observational Study

The observers visited 17 establishments in Sydney during 1989, making a total of 55 visits to 23 separate sites in the 17 establishments (many pubs and clubs have more than one bar, plus a disco). Most visits were of at least two hours duration, and total observation time exceeded 300 hours. The licensed premises selected for study included some with a long-standing reputation for violence, as well as some with a reputation for handling violence in an effective way. The method used was qualitative and relatively unstructured, but was focused around features of the management of the establishment and the physical and social environment. *The key question was: what aspects of management, security staff, the patrons, or the drinking environment tend to promote or to prevent the occurrence of violence?*

Some Findings

* There is a substantial link between public drinking and publicly occurring violence. This link is possibly far greater than previously thought by researchers, especially in certain types of drinking locations.

* The majority of incidents of violence occurring in and around drinking establishments are not reported or recorded, and so official crime statistics understate the true incidence of such offences.

* Much unreported violence derives from specific premises that are "regularly violent". There are at least several dozen such venues in the Sydney area and many have been regularly violent for years. We observed 30 assaults during our observational study. Police were called to three of these incidents and took action in only one case.

* The problem premises regularly visited in our study usually had a late closing license and provided music (band or disco) which drew a large number of young patrons from a dispersed area. They all employ bouncers, and include several clubs as well as pubs. Clubs, at least in NSW, can be as big a problem as pubs.

* Although many violent establishments attract a "rough" clientele, especially groups of young men who are strangers to each other, many of the factors in the generation of violence in these premises are environmental variables within the control of management.

* Important factors include:- A boring atmosphere, often generated by low quality bands; lack of comfort (very loud music, crowding, limited seating, and lack of ventilation); high levels of drunkenness, often deliberately and irresponsibly promoted by discount drinks costing in some cases as little as 11 cents each; the unavailability of substantial amounts of food (hotdogs notwithstanding), especially after midnight; aggressive and unreasonable bouncers.

* The prominence of environmental factors suggests that licensees should no longer be able to argue that regular violence is caused solely by individual patrons, and is not management's responsibility.

* The majority of victims are "legitimate" victims. Despite common beliefs about pub "brawls", most attacks we observed were not victim-precipitated. Attacks were usually directed at male victims who were disadvantaged by their drunkenness, youth, small size, or lack of companions. Most victims do not report attacks.

* Due to problems with police resources, finding independent witnesses and obtaining reliable evidence, as well as the general societal prejudice against young working class men (who are regarded as unattractive in value terms and are often classed as irresponsible "hoons"), legitimate victims of violence in drinking locations currently have a very slim chance of getting adequate satisfaction from the legal system. They are usually blamed for their misfortune.

Some Implications

Liquor policy in NSW and elsewhere has hitherto been focused on general aspects of alcohol availability (minimum drinking age, opening hours etc.), and on details of licensing, standards, and operations of drinking establishments (fire and safety standards, regulation of amusement devices and poker machines, training of staff and standards of service, collection of licensing fees, etc.). Concern with the social effects of types and forms of access and service have traditionally been limited to underage drinking and the "public nuisance" created by many patrons at closing times, as well as in more recent years the problem of drinking and driving. Regular violence at certain locations seems never to have been uppermost in the minds of policy makers and legislators. To the extent to which the existence of the problem has been recognised, it has been regarded as a job for the police.

There is a clear need for stricter regulation of regularly violent locations, with a greater emphasis on *preventive measures* rather than just reactive policing. Specific measures could include:

- stricter licensing, regulation and training of bouncers;
- closer cooperation between management and police to control violence;
- elimination of all discount drinks and drink promotions (including "happy hours", 11 cent drink nights, two for one

promotions etc.) which have the effect of promoting high levels of drunkenness over a night;

- bar staff training to identify and defuse potentially violent situations;
- bar staff training in "server intervention techniques" to limit consumption in bars with fewer than 100 patrons (it won't work as well in discos);
- the mandatory provision of substantial amounts of good quality food when trade is outside of 'normal' food outlet times;
- improving comfort by: the provision of more seating in discos; more strict limitations on crowd size, so that the numbers of patrons are more appropriate to the number of staff and the size of the premises; reductions in noise levels to a maximum of 90 db (the long term health of staff is a related issue here - at the very least they should use ear plugs which still allow them to hear patrons).

**Police Attitudes to Alcohol-Related Assaults**

The police survey was based on interviews with 100 police in 8 randomly selected patrols in Sydney and 2 in Newcastle. The interviews probed the following issues: (a) How many assaults the officer deals with in a typical week; (b) How they hear about assault offences; (c) What criteria they use to judge the seriousness of an assault; (d) What effect the drunkenness of the offender or victim makes to judgements of offence seriousness across a range of incidents; (e) In what situations they would record an offence as alcohol-related; (f) The effect of the offender having been drinking on the arrest decision across a range of situations.

Analysis of these data is continuing. Some results so far:

* Very few police directly observe assaults. Most assaults become known to police through radio or phone reports, and in relatively few cases are victims the direct source of a complaint.

* Extent of injuries is the main criterion police volunteer when asked how they judge the seriousness of an assault. However, other major criteria include the presence of weapons, the testimony of witnesses, and the specific circumstances of the

assault. Only 7% of respondents spontaneously mentioned the drunkenness of the offender.

* Offender or victim drunkenness can make a marked difference to the judgement of the seriousness of an incident. Often victim drunkenness reduces the perceived seriousness (e.g. in cases where the victim has a suspected fracture), but it can also increase the perceived seriousness (e.g. when the offender is known to the police as having picked fights frequently).

* Nearly half of the officers were prepared to say that an assault in a rough pub is not serious, without knowing anything else about the incident.

* The more assaults an officer sees in his or her daily work, the more likely they are to rate all kinds of assaults as not serious, particularly when the victim is seen as deserving his or her fate.

* Officers who see few assaults in their daily work are more likely to be influenced in their judgements of offence seriousness by victim drunkenness (this influence could be in either direction). In addition, older officers are less influenced by victim drunkenness. The age of an officer, rather than length of service, seems to be the critical factor, suggesting that life experience rather than socialisation into the police culture is the underlying explanation.

* If an assault offender is drunk police see the incident as alcohol-related. However, if the victim is drunk most see the assault as <u>not</u> being alcohol-related. Only half saw a fight in a pub as alcohol-related. These results highlight the unreliability of official police data on alcohol-related offences.

* Most officers claimed that judging an assault as alcohol-related would make no difference to their decision to record it officially. Internal analyses of police computer data suggest that officers' responses were not very accurate at this point.

The observational study suggested that victims of pub violence often get a raw deal from police, either directly or indirectly. The police survey data tend to support this conclusion, at least to the extent that victim drunkenness often reduces the perceived seriousness of an assault. In addition, the context of a "rough pub" appears to decrease the likelihood that an assault will be taken seriously.

## References

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DISCUSSION NOTES

THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE ON LICENSED PREMISES

Tim Stockwell

**Discussant - Steve Ireland**

Steve Ireland began by commenting that, however we would wish it the otherwise, research findings hardly ever influence policy making or politicians. He also noted the following themes: commercial interests of licensees; alcohol, violence and young men. He felt that the major issues were how managers can be persuaded to manage and regulators to regulate licensed premises. He was struck by Homel and Thommeny's finding that 84% of violent incidents are not reported to the police and noted that this implies official policies driven by false information. He commented on their finding that violence was caused by many factors and alcohol cannot be singled out as a sole cause. In regard to the recommendation that bouncers are trained, Steve noted that current training, where this exists at all, rather than concentrating on diffusing violent situations, has, in New South Wales at least, involved training in the use of fire-arms! With regard to how to introduce change into this situation, he suggested that it is a politically sensitive area to work in and as a consequence it is vital to mobilise community concerns otherwise, as an individual, it is too easy to get "picked off".

In response to a question from Jennifer Thommeny, Chris Arnold stated that it was not possible to say how well the registration system for bouncers was working.

Peter d'Abbs raised the concern that removing violence from licensed premises might in some instances drive it into private residences. He cited the example of the two kilometre law in the Northern Territory, which effectively cleared the streets of drinking Aboriginal people but at the apparent cost of increasing domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. He wondered if there might be the same pattern in urban situations. In response to this, Sally Casswell suggested that if such a shift should occur

rather than permitting violence to continue on licensed premises that different strategies should be examined to reduce domestic violence. Peter d'Abbs also cited anthropological studies which suggest that "pub fighting" can be a normal and harmless activity since the participants obey informal rules to avoid severe injury. Ross Homel disputed this since his study had found that in most instances assaults involved a victim who was younger, smaller and often drunker than the assailant. In a significant number of cases the assailants were also bouncers at the premises.

Robert Bush questioned as to how a community forum could help groups with different vested interests resolve their conflicts, e.g. the conflict between profit and safety concerns. Marg Welsh addressed the need for identifying common goals among the different groups. She also described how initially licensees felt put upon by the forum which had not been their idea. They initially had fears that they would be required, for example, to advertise their premises in a uniform way. Co-operation was improved once these unrealistic fears were dispelled. She felt that licensees would probably agree with Ross and Jennifer as to the types of risk factor in drinking settings that are conducive to violence.

Neil Mellor suggested that individual psychological states such as "frustrated aggression" be included in models of factors underlying violence in pubs. Ross suggested this could be related to the finding that boring bands were associated with violence.

The session finished with a discussion as to how useful it would be to interview injured patients in accident and emergency departments as to the types of setting in which they were drinking prior to involvement in a violent incident.