

1.10 Alcohol-related violence cut when licensees adopt and implement codes of conduct

Findings Two reports analyse the achievements of five local 'accords' targeting alcohol-related violence in Australian town centres by manipulating the drinking environment rather than cutting drinking as such. Central to all five was the agreement – and implementation – of a code of conduct for licensees to counter competitive ploys which encourage drunkenness and travel between premises, such as happy hours, special offers, promotional 'gimmicks', topping-up glasses, ignoring age restrictions, and serving intoxicated patrons. All the accords achieved a degree of success, sometimes dramatic.

The first paper listed under *Main sources* contrasts the Geelong accord with those in Melbourne and in Surfers Paradise (a tourist town). Geelong prevented street violence by deterring late-night travel between venues without imposing a common closing time. An agreement between licensees introduced entry charges from 11pm, restricted later re-entry, and banned promotions which encouraged the hunt for alcoholic bargains. Police patrolled the area to counter underage and street drinking and informally enforced the agreement, ultimately by focusing enforcement of liquor laws on recalcitrant businesses. 'Pub-hopping' and street violence markedly declined. Community disquiet was an important motivator but community involvement was not central to the project.

The Surfers Paradise project rapidly halved attacks in nightclubs while a pre-project rise in assaults turned into a 34% drop. Improvements in targeted practices heightened confidence that the drop in violence was due to the intervention. Community involvement was critical; one group monitored adherence to the code and to liquor laws, gathering evidence which could be used in court.

Surfers Paradise was the model for three other projects in Queensland, reported in the second main source. Compared to pre-project levels, 7–14 months after the interventions aggressive and violent incidents on licensed premises had dropped by 56% and assaults by at least 75%, apparently due to changes in the practices targeted by the intervention. Underlying the drop in physical violence was a dramatic cut in male drunkenness, mainly because staff intervened firmly to prevent intoxication.

In context Local accords came to prominence in Australia because of the shortcomings of legal mechanisms to control (perceived) violence related to licensed premises – conditions seen in some UK communities. Elements of these strategies have been tried in Britain but not as comprehensively as in Australia or North America.

These reports show that lightly resourced accords incorporating codes of conduct for licensees can cut violence without displacement to other areas. Such accords are likely to be a priority where licensed premises are concentrated, but are also unstable there due to intensified competition. Self-regulation is encouraged by the fact that tactics such as banning happy hours and cut-price promotions can bolster profits, as can a general upgrading of an area's reputation.

Practice implications Where anti-social incidents related to drinking in licensed premises are a concern, 'enforced self-regulation' by licensees significantly improves community safety. Such 'benevolent cartels' are most readily achieved in circumscribed areas with no easily accessible competing attractions, when profitability is not threatened, and when a credible enforcement mechanism can deter licensees from breaking ranks. One possible framework is the Crime and Disorder Act (1998), which obliges police, local authorities and other bodies in England and Wales to establish crime-prevention partnerships.

Main sources ① Lang E., Rumbold G. "The effectiveness of community-based interventions to reduce violence in and around licensed premises: a comparison of three Australian models." *Contemporary Drug Problems*: 1997, 24, p. 805-826. Copies: apply Alcohol Concern ② Hauritz M., Homel R., McIlwain G., et al. "Reducing violence in licensed venues through community safety action projects: the Queensland experience." *Contemporary Drug Problems*: 1998, 25, p. 511–551. Copies: apply Alcohol Concern.

Secondary sources ① Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services, Queensland Health. *Support resource: guide for partnerships to reduce intoxication, violence and injury in the licensed environment*. 1998. Based on experience in several of the communities reported on in the main sources. Copies: Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services, GPO Box 48, Brisbane, QLD 4001, Australia ② St John-Brooks K. *Keeping the peace. A guide to the prevention of alcohol-related disorder*. Portman Group, 1998. Includes UK experience with similar initiatives. Copies: Portman Group, 2d Wimpole Street, London W1M 7AA.