

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

Stephen Tomsen, Ross Homel, Jenny Thommeny

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 (>12pm) 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 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 eclecticism. 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.

## Select Bibliography

- Abel, E. & P. Zeidenberg 1985, "Age, alcohol and violent death: a postmortem study", *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 228-31.
- Becker, H. 1958, "Problems of inference and proof in participant observation", *American Sociological Review*, p. 652.
- Boyatzis, R.E. 1974, "The effect of alcohol consumption in the aggressive behaviour of men", *Quarterly Journal Studies on Alcohol*, vol. 35, p. 959.
- Brain, P.F. (ed.) 1986, *Alcohol and aggression*, Dover, New Hampshire & Croom Helm, London, p. 148.
- Braithwaite, J. 1979, *Inequality, Crime and Public Policy*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Carpenter, J. & N. Armenti 1972, "Some effects of ethanol on human sexual and aggressive behaviour", *The Biology of Alcoholism*, vol. 2, eds, B. Kissin & H. Beleiter, p. 509.
- Clarke, W. 1985, "Alcohol use in various settings" in *Public Drinking and Public Policy*, eds E. Single & T. Storm, Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto.

- Collins, J. (ed.) 1982a, *Drinking and Crime: perspectives on the relationship between alcohol consumption and criminal behaviour*, Tavistock, London.
- Collins, J. 1982b, "Alcohol use and criminal behaviour: an empirical, theoretical and methodological review" in J. Collins, op. cit., p. 290.
- Evans, C. 1986, "Alcohol and violence: problems relating to methodology, statistics and causation" in *Alcohol and Aggression*, ed. P. Brain, op. cit., p. 148.
- Gerson, L.W. 1978, "Alcohol related acts of violence: who was drinking and where the acts occurred", *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, vol. 39, No. 7, pp. 1294-6.
- Gottheil, E. et al. (eds) 1983, *Alcohol, drug abuse and aggression*, Based on papers presented at the fifth annual Coatesville-Jefferson Conference on Addiction Research and Treatment sponsored by the Substance Abuse Treatment Unit of the Coatesville VA Medical Center and the Jefferson Center for the Study of Alcoholism and Addiction and held at the Coatesville VA Medical Center, Coatesville, Pa in 1981.
- Graham, K. 1980, "Aggression and barroom environments", *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, vol. 41, p. 227.
- Greenberg, A. 1982, "Alcohol and crime: a methodological critique of the literature" in ed. J. Collins, op. cit., p. 75.
- Hall, S. & Jefferson T. (eds) 1976, *Resistance through rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain*, Hutchinson, London.
- Hamilton, C. & Collins, J. 1982, "The role of alcohol in wife beating and child abuse: a review of the literature" in J. Collins, op. cit., p. 285.
- Hull, J. & van Treuben, R. 1986, "Experimental social psychology and the causes and effects of alcohol consumption" in *Research Advances in Alcohol and Drug Problems*, eds H. Cappell et. al., vol. 9, p. 217.
- Kissing, B. & Begleiter, H. (eds) 1971-1972, *The Biology of Alcoholism*, vol. 1 and 2, Plenum Press, New York.
- Levinson, D. 1983, "Social setting, cultural factors and alcohol related aggression" in eds A. Gottheil et. al., op. cit., p. 45.
- MacAndrew, C. & Edgerton, R. 1969, *Drunken Comportment: a social explanation*, Aldine Pub. Co., Chicago.
- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1974a, *Domestic Assaults*, Statistical Report No. 5, Sydney.
- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1974b, *Unreported Crime*, Series 1, Statistical Report No. 12, Sydney.
- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1977, *Gun and Knife Attacks*, Statistical Report No. 9, Sydney.



**Situational "versus" Other Factors in Drinking Related Assaults 193**

- Olweus, D. 1988, "Environmental and biological factors in the development of aggressive behaviour" in *Explaining Criminal Behaviour*, eds W. Buikhuizen & S.A. Mednick, Leiden.**
- Pernanen, K. 1982, "Theoretical aspects of the relationship between alcohol and crime" in ed. J. Collins, op. cit., p. 25.**
- Police Department of NSW 1988, *New South Wales Crime Statistics - 1987/88*, Sydney.**
- Robb, T. 1988, *Police Reports of Serious Assault in New South Wales (Assault Report No. 1)*, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney.**
- Roslund, B. & Larson, C. 1979, "Crimes of violence and alcohol abuse in Sweden", *International Journal of the Addictions*, vol. 14, p. 1103.**
- Single, E. 1985, "Studies of public drinking: an overview", in *Public Drinking and Public Policy*, eds E. Single & T. Storm, Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto.**
- Taylor, L. 1983, "Alcohol and human physical aggression" in *Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Aggression*, eds E. Gottheil et. al., op. cit., p. 280.**
- Toch, H. 1984, *Violent Men* (rev. edn), Schenkman, Cambridge, Mass.**
- Tomsen, S. 1989, "Alcohol, violent crime and social power", in *Alcohol and Crime*, ed. J. Vernon, Conference Proceedings No. 1, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.**
- Victorian Ministry for Police and Emergency Services 1989, *Study of Serious Assaults on Civilians reported to the Victoria Police*, Melbourne.**
- Wallace, A. 1986, *Homicide: the Social Reality*, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney.**
- Zeichner, A. & Pihl, R. 1980, "Effects of alcohol and instigator intent on human aggression", *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 265-76.**