

# Creating Safer Drinking Environments

Ross Homel  
Gillian McIlwain

School of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Russell Carvolth

*In N. Heather, T.J. Peters & T. Stockwell (Eds. (2001), International Handbook of Alcohol Dependence and Problems (pp. 721-740). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.*

## Abstract

*The focus of the chapter is violence and crime in the licensed drinking environment. The central argument is that creating safer licensed environments is primarily a regulatory problem, not just an “alcohol problem”, and that formal enforcement is a necessary but not sufficient tool for creating a culture of compliance. A system of regulation that is responsive to industry conditions will rely on the interaction of formal regulation, which is the political domain; informal regulation, mobilising civil society; and self-regulation, taming the market.*

*To be effective, regulatory systems must reduce situationally specific risk factors in the licensed environment that are related primarily to management practices and to “hidden deals” between licensees and regulators. Effective regulation will ensure that the physical environment is attractive and sends a message to patrons about appropriate behaviour; that it does not irritate or frustrate people by being crowded, excessively noisy, hot or smoky; that provocation related to such games as pool or to dancing is minimised; and that non-salty food is freely available. The social environment will not be permissive, having clear limits concerning sexual and other behaviours; drinking to intoxication, especially by large numbers simultaneously, will be discouraged; trained, peace-loving security and bar staff will be employed; and people identified as regularly aggressive will be kept out.*

*There is limited evidence that formal enforcement through visible, random checks on licensees can be effective, as can undercover policing combined with warnings to managers. There is consistent evidence that mobilising local community groups and agencies through organised community action can bring about major reductions in aggression and violence in and around venues, although the effects have not been demonstrated to be permanent in any locality. Critical ingredients of community action include: strong directive leadership during the establishment period; the mobilization of community groups concerned about violence and disorder; the implementation of a multi-agency approach involving licensees, local government, police, health and other groups; the use of safety audits to engage the local community and identify risks; a focus on the way licensed venues are managed (particularly those that cater to large numbers of young people); the “re-education” of patrons concerning their role as consumers of “quality hospitality;” and attention*

*to situational factors, including serving practices, that promote intoxication and violent confrontations.*

*Approaches available to regulators include licensing provisions, policy development, cooperation with the industry to develop standards, developing formal and informal codes of practice, education, publicity and information campaigns (especially at the local level), incentives for responsible operators, and working with the community. These approaches can usefully be arranged in an enforcement pyramid, the broad base representing frequently used approaches based on suasion, cooperation, and negotiation, the sharp end representing the ultimate but infrequently used sanctions like the closure of an establishment (the business equivalent of capital punishment). However, to ensure transparency and accountability in this most difficult of regulatory arenas, a system of responsive regulation will give a central place to community empowerment and to the role of public interest groups.*