

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION OF THE SAFER BARS PROGRAM, AN INTERVENTION TO REDUCE AGGRESSION IN BARS AND CLUBS

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I have quite a few typical incidents I am going to show you, and I am not going to read them out unless there is someone who cannot see them? (Referring to screen) This is the one I like to show because it is rather poignant. Is there anyone who cannot read this? Because I have about eight of these, they are incidents gathered from various places.

OK this is one is one that occurred in London, Ontario where I work. And the reason I like to show this one is, first of all, there is a tendency to villainize security staff and a lot of times they are just regular guys who loose their temper. In this one the member of security staff who looses his temper is actually a nursing student at a local college and working part-time. The young man who ends up in a wheel-chair was just being a stupid guy, leaving with the beer bottle, would not do what the doorman told him and now he is in a wheel chair and the doorman went to a penitentiary.

A case that you are a little more familiar with here in Melbourne, which happened while I was in New Zealand, so this article was from when I was in New Zealand, was the death of David Hawks. Again, all of the examples that I am going to show you are really things that do not have to happen. They are just a waste, just people fooling around and security staff who are not sufficiently trained to manage these situations. I am going to show you an incident that we witnessed as part of our research, which is very similar to this one. One of my research associates found this one: someone used pepper spray and then 21 people died, and that was quite recent in a Chicago Night Club.

(Referring to screen) This incident occurred on one of the licensed premises included in our research. The doorman charged at the patron and put him in a headlock, and as he drags him out the door he throws him on the ground and the patron hits his head. Now we cannot have everyone in licensed premises wearing helmets but maybe it would be an idea in some of them. The doorman said “I told you to go home”, the guy has not really done anything that bad and this was quite a risk.

(Referring to screen) Then this was another club that was in our research and it gives a pretty good example of how things can get out of control if you do not have enough security staff. In this incident there were 20 to 30 males in a brawl and this is the second brawl that night - the first one involved throwing beer bottles at each other. So they have just got that one under control then all of a sudden you have 20 or 30 males in this brawl and there are 3 security staff to try and bring this under control. The chances of getting hurt in this are fairly high and the chances of them calling the police to help out are quite nil for two reasons: one is that licensed premises do not like to come to the attention of the police so they avoid calling them if they can, and the second is that on a busy Friday or Saturday night, by the time the police are able to show up with the number of calls they have had, and this one was way out in the suburbs, it is too late. So you need to be able to handle some things, and more importantly, prevent them from happening in the first place.

(Referring to screen) Here we have an instance where the security staff are actually doing quite well, this intoxicated male is swearing at the bouncers: “What kind of bouncers are you? You goofs should not be bouncers”. Now as I understand it, in Canada at least, the worse thing that one young man can call another young man is a goof, so these are really fighting words. But the two doormen remain very calm throughout they let the guy go, they just do watch him to make sure he leaves, but they just do not react to it, they do not get violent with him.

(Referring to screen) In the next incident four staff members were seen talking into their radios - this is one of the venues that we trained, and this was after the training, but they were actually pretty good before we even did the training. So there was an incident on the floor, they have good communication through their radios, four of them go, so there are enough of them to handle the situation and they immediately separate the guys; they do it quietly so there is no big attention brought to it other than our observers trailing along trying to find out what is going on, and they quietly get them separated and they take one out of the door and they keep the other guy there until they make sure the first one is gone from the scene. Not only that, they take the second guy out of the other exit so what they are avoiding doing is taking two fighters shoving them out the door and saying: “OK go to it on the street, your not our problem”, because frankly, legally, it is their problem.

So we developed a safer bars program. We did a lot of research and observations in bars first to know characteristics of the incidents of aggression, factors that contribute, good and bad techniques by the staff, and we particularly focused on aggression among young males, because when we did the studies, that seemed to be where most of the incidents were happening, and these kinds of incidents included: insults, looking for a fight, offensive behaviour, angry reaction to bumps, and sexual reaction or dominance. I am not going to be able to get into a lot of detail on these incidents - I think most of you have been in clubs and seen some of these, although, it certainly depends on the kind of club that you go to. Fortunately the rougher slam dancing has kind of gone out of fashion, so this is not as big of a trigger as it used to be.

So we developed this program, which includes a three-hour training session with a video and a trainers guide and a participant workbook. It has a risk assessment workbook for venue owners and managers and a legal pamphlet that provides a few cases, tells people about their legal responsibilities, and makes them a bit more interested in the training. The goal of the risk assessment is to decrease environmental risks, while the goal of the training is to improve the way that staff interact with patrons and reduce the risk of aggression and especially the risk of injury.

The workbook covers 92 risk factors and five general aspects and they are organised into these different areas from entering the bar, the atmosphere, the layout – for example, we encourage them to avoid bottle necks between one section of the bar and the other, and we also to have data on the aggressive incidents that occur in different parts of the bar. These incidents do not occur randomly all over the bar or the club, they occur in high ‘traffic zones’ and near the dance floor, where there is a lot of room for people bumping into one another and various aspects.

They rate their bar on these various aspects, recording it on one side of the page, and then on the other side of the page are the explanations for it. We are not trying to turn clubs into solariums or churches, but we mainly encourage them to reduce the risks where they can whilst still making money. It is not that hard to tell people stood in a line how long they will have to wait, but it does make it a little bit easier and it makes the line a little more peaceful, because that is one of places where a lot of aggression does occur.

The training has six sections and I am going to just briefly run through these

1) We really encourage teamwork and getting involved early

(Referring to screen?) So this would be an incident that starts when someone bumps somebody else, a drink is spilled, and then it moves to insults and name calling, then challenges and threats, and pushing, and finally throwing punches. In our research we would observe door staff or security staff watching the incident, and they would not intervene until they got to the punches; if they intervene right at the beginning - at the bumps, insults and name calling, it is much safer for them to get involved, and it is much safer for the patrons. Assessing the situation, deciding how much help is needed, who is in charge, and positioning of back-up - these are all important things that are involved in intervening in a safe way. Bar owners are sued more often in Canada for door staff losing their temper and being aggressive than for any other reason, so we spend some time on 'knowing yourself' and 'keeping your cool'.

As you might have gathered from the earlier incidents, one of the things that staff tell us makes them the most angry is when people do not do what they say. So one of the things we try and encourage them to say is: "it is the law, it is the bar rules, it is not you personally, do not take it personally." One thing they really like is the use of the 'tap out' technique. When we developed the training we consulted with some staff from the Police Training College. This technique was taken from a Police Training Manual and what it involves is that, as a group of staff, you agree that if one person is getting really angry at a patron, another staff member comes by and puts their hand on the shoulder and the arm and says. "What is going on here?" In a very friendly way. The first person has been 'tapped out', so they are less likely to lose their temper with the person and, in fact, in our observations after the training, we actually saw this happen.

A male patron and a doorman were engaged in a heated argument about taking drinks from one area of the bar to the other. The agitated doorman squared off with the patron while threateningly reprimanding him, then yelling in the patron's face "This is not a joke and I am not going to tell you again." At this point another doorman approached and gently laid his hand on the arm of the angry doorman asking "Hey, what is going on?" The first doorman shrugged and replied: "This fool will not finish his drink" and then walked away from the situation because he has been 'tapped out.' The second doorman talked jovially with the patron who then decided to leave his drink behind and walk up the stairs, so the incident was resolved very peacefully.

Non-verbal techniques and non-confrontational body language are important. One of the things that we do in the training that attendees like quite a bit, is we take the biggest security staff we can find and we get them to stand apart on the stage, then walk closer and closer and people get increasingly uncomfortable as they see these

two big guys get closer and closer, face to face – and we say “that is what you do when you stick your face in the patrons face, trying to get them to do what you want, all you are doing is escalating the tension, and if you have to get close enough in a noisy club to talk, if you stand side to side rather than face to face, you can make your point without increasing the tension.”

We have a collection of techniques on dealing with problem situations, for example: allowing someone to save face means that they are not going to come back with some of their friends and beat you up. You may have seen the show with Patrick Swayze, I think it is called ‘Road House’, where they actually set up these macho doormen, then these guys want to come back and fight with them, anyway – the saving face is a big issue, and the legal issues, attendees like learning about the legal side.

(Referring to screen) These are intentions to change, as you can see, a lot think that they will change as a result of the training. What I want to show with this is that training benefits the most in-experienced staff, so the dark green on this side is their pre-test score on their testing and the lighter green is how much they improve after the training. As you can see, the pre-test score for the ones with more years in the industry is actually higher, so the training really benefits most the people who have not been doing it for a while and are not as skilled at it.

We did an outcome evaluation in Toronto; 38 large capacity bars were selected for this study, we randomly assigned 12 to the control condition, and then we tried to recruit the other 26 bars and we managed to get 18 of them, which is quite high for this type of research, but then, we did pay them. We gave them certificates and we had a pretty good participation rate. We did unobtrusive observations, conducted before and after the intervention by trained male/ female teams of observers. They were conducted between 2am on Friday and Saturday nights, and we did approximately 10 to 12 observations, pre-imposed, so that is about 24 observations per licensed premise.

The measures of aggression used for the outcome analysis were severe physical aggression and moderate physical aggression. The results showed that moderate to severe physical aggression by patrons, decreased in Experimental Bars/ Clubs whilst they increased in Control Clubs, so there was a significant effect of the intervention. The effect of intervention was strongest for those establishments with lowest turnover of managers and door staff, so this raises the issue of turnover that is involved with any kind of initiative such as this.

We contacted the bars and clubs one year later and, of the original people, 71% of the managers were still there, 50% of the door staff had left, almost as many bar attenders and even more servers had left. So the turnover in this industry is huge, and what we found was that, of course, the training would need to be repeated because of this turnover, in order for standards to be maintained.

Conclusions: Although the safer bars program did not eliminate all aggression, it did demonstrate that it is possible to reduce aggression in bars and clubs. The intervention appeared to have the greatest impact on the high-end aggression, so they were getting better at intervening early and preventing violence from happening. On-

going training may be useful because the high turnover of managers and door security staff reduces the impact of the training.

I would like to mention my colleagues on this, which I should have done at the beginning. The evaluation part of the study was funded by the US National Institute of Health, and the developmental funding was provided by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Thank You.