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Raising the Bar: Preventing aggression in and around bars, pubs and clubs

Kathryn Graham and Ross Homel

Willan Publishing

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In recent years, the night-time economy (NTE) and, particularly, violence and disorder occurring within this environment, have been of growing interest to academics across a range of disciplines; mirrored by increasing attention from the media and policy makers. One strand of this has been attempting to identify appropriate methods of crime reduction and control.

Kathryn Graham and Ross Homel have extensive experience in this field and in *Raising the Bar* they have produced a comprehensive and accessible overview of much of the key research relating to the reduction of violence and aggression associated with drinking environments; presented across a number of themes.

The authors construct many of the chapters around the findings of research projects in which they have been involved (such as the Safer Bars Evaluations in Canada and the Surfer's Paradise Interventions in Australia), plus further studies which 'included empirical data regarding the relationship between aggression and the drinking environment' (p59), and evaluations of existing interventions.

This book consists of nine chapters and a foreword by Alasdair Forsythe of the Glasgow Centre for the Study of Violence who describes it as ‘timely’ given both the relatively recent expansion of and changes in the NTE and control responses to it. Chapter One presents the authors’ explanations for writing a book about bar violence, drawing on the research evidence for crime concentrations in and around bars. This chapter also provides useful context, such as recent moves in some countries towards market deregulation. Finally, the remaining chapters are introduced and a glossary of terms is presented; essential for the international readership that is targeted.

Chapters Two and Three further contextualise the ‘problem’ of violence in the NTE through a consideration of public drinking cultures and the role of alcohol in aggression. Both chapters cover important issues, albeit rather briefly. Finally, it is here that the authors make it clear that this is a book based predominantly on what may be termed opportunity theories; that is routine activity theory, what the authors refer to as ‘situational crime prevention theory’, and other ‘environmental criminology’ concepts (p30). Additionally, responsive regulation theory is introduced, but does not reappear until the latter chapters on evaluated responses.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven deal with the key themes of the book: Patrons (4); (internal) environments (5); staff (6); and public spaces (7). A similar approach is taken across all four chapters starting with an introduction to the issues, then a tabulated summary of the research findings, followed by a discussion of the main issues identified. Finally, each chapter briefly considers aspects of prevention related to the theme under discussion.

The book is completed by a more thorough consideration of reductive interventions in Chapters Eight (evaluated approaches) and Nine (sustainable evidence-based practice). The

first of these considers a range of violence prevention programmes that have been evaluated and from which (sometimes tentative) conclusions can be drawn. In the final chapter the authors summarise the findings presented so far, and make recommendations for both successful, sustainable intervention and further research.

Whilst this book is firmly situated within environmental criminology, the authors do not apply situational crime prevention techniques in isolation. They consider also the role of other contributing factors, including the pharmacological effects of alcohol and the cultural expectations which exist in drinking environments (such as macho drinking cultures). Further, they do not get caught up in the hype around so-called 'binge drinking', nor focus on educative campaigns to alter patrons' drinking behaviour. Instead, they recognise that 'bars' contain all the necessary ingredients for displays of aggressive behaviour and concentrate on methods of manipulating and managing these environments to reduce the risk of conflicts, whilst preserving the 'time-out' and socialising functions patrons desire.

In *Raising the Bar*, the authors have provided a wide-ranging consideration of factors contributing to aggression and violence associated with the night-time economy, producing an accessible overview of key research findings and relating these to methods of reduction. Case studies and boxed examples are used throughout the book to exemplify the issues raised and provide a sense of 'reality' to the problem. The summary tables of research findings are also particularly reader-friendly. The book is written in an accessible way, avoiding jargon, and with theory clearly linked to practice throughout. However, with a clear focus on Anglophone countries, the issues and findings may be less familiar to readers from countries with different drinking cultures.

This book may also suffer from trying to cater for too broad an audience. It is somewhat superficial for the academic already experienced in this field, but it does not provide a handy list of practical recommendations for the practitioner (although the authors correctly justify this based on the limited evaluation evidence available). On a stylistic note, useful web sources are sometimes referred to, but presenting them parenthesised within the main text is rather distracting. These and other additional resources would have been better listed at the end of each chapter.

Finally, although the authors recognise the benefits of micro-analysis and observation in exploring the NTE, it is a shame they do not draw any of their conclusions from ethnographic studies of such cultures. To this end, the book is best balanced with other literature, such as Hadfield (2007) and Hobbs et al. (2004).

Overall, I would particularly recommend this book to social science, policy and leisure management students, as it provides an accessible summary of the key (criminological) research in the field. It is also a useful addition to the academic's bookshelf; although the research will be largely familiar to those with a working interest in violence in the night-time economy. Finally, policy makers and managers may find this book of interest, but its length and lack of 'concrete solutions' make it more suited to an academic market.

References

Hadfield, P. (2007), *Bar Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hobbs, D., Hadfield, P., Lister, S. and Winlow, S. (eds). (2004), *Bouncers: Violence and Governance in the Night Time Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.