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Alcohol Related Crime and Disorder

Aims and learning outcomes

This chapter introduces the areas central to reducing alcohol related crime and disorder. After reading, you should be able to:

- Establish the interrelated factors which encourage some individuals to engage in disorderly behaviours around drinking venues.
- Identify appropriate interventions to improve public safety and to discourage alcohol related disorderly behaviours.
- Outline the challenges involved for policy makers and individual establishments in reducing alcohol related conflict and violence.
- Use the appropriate techniques and skills adopted by effective managers and door staff to prevent disorderly conduct and violence in drinking environments.

7.0 Introduction

Employers across the tourism, hospitality and retail industries have a duty to sell alcohol in a lawful and responsible manner. Millions of individuals enjoy consuming alcohol with few, if any, negative effects, but alcohol abuse by a small minority causes crime, anti-social behaviour and harm to the safety and security of employees, customers and society. Although the origins of these disruptive behaviours are complex, some of the interconnected factors can include the age of customers, their social class, and the environment and culture surrounding the establishment in question. In this chapter we will explore how in recent years businesses have adopted community partnerships, strategies and training schemes to enhance safety and discourage alcohol related disorderly behaviours. Policy makers and individual establishments can encounter specific challenges and cultural differences which drive

the local drinking patterns, but governments, the police, local authorities and businesses have joined forces to enforce existing laws and to reduce alcohol related crime and disorder. The skills and style of managers and door staff are also crucial when dealing with alcohol related disorder. These skills include the use of appropriate aggression reduction techniques and control strategies to minimise the potential for conflict and crime arising.

7.1 Disorder and disruptive behaviour around drinking venues

Reynolds et al (1997) suggest that increased alcohol availability can lead to increased consumption, which in turn creates a greater risk that individuals will engage in public disorder behaviours. The more extreme and disruptive behaviours can include noise and disturbances, public vomiting and urination, damage and destruction of property, offensive behaviour, assaults and violence. Research studies conducted by Reid et al (2003) and Wechsler et al (2002) support this contention in linking alcohol sales and the number of premises to public disorder and negative outcomes. This association between alcohol and availability appears to be a simple challenge to overcome, but the relationship is much more complex and there are other inter-related factors which must be taken into account.

MCM Research Ltd discovered that in the United Kingdom very different levels of violence were found in pubs according to the social class of customers for which they cater. Fights among males and attacks on managers and staff are considerably higher in the working class pubs than in those which cater for a predominantly middle-class population. Those with a mixed social class customer profile experience intermediate levels of violence (MCM, 1990). Quigley et al (2003) point to drinking outcomes, which they believe are also related to the prevailing cultural norms and attitudes of particular establishments and areas, which attract individuals seeking to take part in heavy drinking patterns and anti-social behaviour. Tomsen (1997) adds that disruptive behaviours, which include vandalism and violence, in the drinking environment can also occur from individuals who have been ejected from bars which strictly enforce rules on behaviour. Individuals interested in anti-social and risky behaviours appear to tend to gather in establishments where heavy drinking patterns are tolerated as they believe that these behaviours will be accepted in there. Moore (1990) explored one of these environments and reported that after analysing skinhead drinking culture in Australia, that casual sexual activities, rowdy behaviour and heavy drinking were a natural expectation of a night out with fellow skinheads.

Some establishments target young people, and in some locations where the ratio of young males is very high there is a tendency for disruptive behaviour. Felson (1997) contends that young men who attend these venues and engage in nightlife activities are more likely to encounter violence. Drinking environments that cater predominantly for the 18-30 years age group have been reported to experience far higher numbers of fights than do those which are used mainly by older customers. The levels of attacks on managers and staff, however, are highest in those pubs which also cater for customers who are rather older – the ‘mixed’ age category. The frequency of both fights and attacks on managers is lowest in those pubs which attract very few young people. Campbell (2000) attributes this behaviour to the need of some men to demonstrate their masculinity in keeping up their end. In a research study from Australia, Tomsen (1997) reported that young men got real pleasure from engaging in aggressive behaviour while drinking. Females are not immune to these behaviours. Parks & Miller (1997) reported that half of all frequent females drinkers were affected by aggression and one third experienced a sexual assault linked to consuming alcohol in a bar.

The design and management of drinking establishments can impact on their vulnerability to disorderly behaviour (Quigley et al, 2003). These include over-crowding, improper ventilation or lighting or permitting illegal activities. A further consideration relates to aggressive or anti-social behaviour; Tomsen (1997) states that individuals may become involved if it appears to be the thing to do. It is reasonable to suggest that not all aggressive and anti-social behaviour is linked to intoxication, but research from hospitality establishments has shown that changes in the design of drinking environments and in management practices can help to decrease violence and other public offences.

7.2 Strategies to discourage alcohol related disorderly behaviours

Homel et al (2004), ICAP (2002) and Sloan et al (2000) report that most countries adopt a mixture of targeted interventions and regulations to improve the safety of the public and to discourage alcohol related disorderly behaviours. These strategies can range from restricting the concentration levels of large drinking establishments and training schemes for security and serving staff, to strict enforcement of alcohol licensing laws (Burns et al 2003; Graham et al, 2004). In this section we will explore some of these strategies.

Community interventions

Community interventions that include all the relevant stakeholders (i.e. community steering groups, local government, tourism, hospitality and retail establishments) which are aimed at creating codes of practice and responsible drinking practices at a local level can deliver impressive results. The research of Homel et al (1997) indicated that these initiatives can result in significant decreases in physical and non-physical altercations. Secure, reasonably priced and convenient private and public transport systems contribute to reducing drink driving and public disorderly behaviour. Stimson et al (2007) highlight one such scheme which operates in Brazil during their major festivals and carnivals, where they offer free taxis and public transport to get people home safely. Community approaches to limit or restrict the time periods for the sale and service of alcohol are also effective. Norstom (2000) talks about limiting the number of establishments (especially bars and nightclubs) within specific areas, and this approach has reduced alcohol-related violent crime. HMSO (2003) propose an alternative approach, suggesting that by extending the officially regulated hours of service (allowing staggered closing times for bars, etc.) can help to reduce the impact of closing time when mass crowds spill onto the streets and anti-social behaviour takes place. Community interventions which include local agreements can work. Carvolth (1983) points to these community efforts and offers the local accords which are used in Australia and New Zealand as an excellent example. These accords involve all the stakeholders who develop agreements to deliver secure drinking environments and good transport systems (New South Wales Department of Gaming and Racing, 2004).

Changing the consumption environment

Interventions adopted by many countries have been targeted at changing the consumption environment to create secure drinking experiences. Portman Group (2000) and Deeham (1999) give examples of these interventions, which include maintaining high levels of house-keeping, strategic space allocation to reduce over-crowding, providing keenly priced foods and non-alcoholic drinks and limiting drink promotions.

Clever design, with a strong emphasis on the colour schemes, and the layout of establishments can discourage alcohol related disorder.

Colour

The use of colour in both domestic and commercial environments has received a lot of attention in psychological literature; Carl Jung is the most prominently associated with the pioneering stages of colour psychology.