

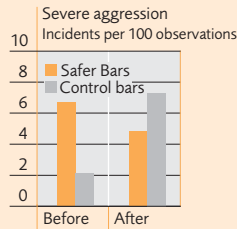
11.10 Safer Bars training could play a role under new UK licensing laws

Findings In Toronto an intervention undertaken by individual bars and nightclubs has for the first time demonstrated reductions in violence [report 1](#). In the process, lessons were learnt on how to implement such programmes [report 2](#).

For the Safer Bars programme, managers worked through a checklist of the physical and social features of bars associated with aggression and selected relevant/feasible changes to implement. Additionally, a three-hour, group training session was offered (84% completed it) to managers and to staff who interfaced with customers. Security staff ('bouncers', 'doormen') were important, because they were in the best position to spot and react to aggressive incidents. Rather than preventing intoxication through 'responsible serving', the training focused on managing aggression – recognising and responding to warning signs, keeping cool, defusing incidents, and legal issues.

Most of the original sample of 126 large, late-night venues were too peaceful for the intervention to demonstrate an effect. Others had to be eliminated for logistical reasons. Twelve of the remaining 38 were randomly chosen to act as controls and 26 were offered the Safer Bars programme. Seven refused to complete it and another was found unsuitable leaving 18 participating venues to be compared against the controls. On several Friday and Saturday nights, pairs of observers patronised each venue about 12 times before and after the intervention period and documented incidents of physical aggression ranging from pushing to severe violence.

Incidents involving aggression by customers fell in intervention but increased in control premises, most noticeably severe incidents. Per 100 observation periods, these fell from about 7 to about 5 in intervention premises but rose from 2 to 7 in control premises. An increase in severe staff-initiated incidents was seen in both sets of premises, but was significantly attenuated in intervention bars. High turnover of managers and door staff significantly reduced the impact of the intervention.



In context Previous research has shown that staff training can curb excessive drinking and disorder, but also that only the credible and well publicised threat of legal or regulatory action secures widespread management backing, without which programmes founder.

Safer Bars' applicability extends to scattered premises not clustered in an entertainment area, where area-based initiatives or collective action across licensees are impractical. But even here, the reports strongly suggest that the community context was critical. In previous sites, support from police and licensing authorities had been influential. In Toronto, these were lacking, but in the main entertainment area, other developments had already minimised violence and created a receptive

environment. Among these were the existence of adequate numbers of well-trained and supervised security staff, prompted by adverse media and police publicity. Other influences were the advent of 'rave' events where ecstasy and cannabis displaced alcohol. Compared to these forces, the training was perhaps the 'icing on the cake'. Its main effect seemed (as intended) to be to prevent minor encounters escalating to severe incidents.

LINKS Nuggets [10.9](#) [4.13](#) [1.10](#)
Just say, 'No sir', issue 9

Originally the researchers anticipated following up venues which refused the intervention but this was abandoned, partly because relatively few did refuse. It leaves the findings somewhat vulnerable to the possibility that premises less committed to tackling violence opted out, giving the remaining set an advantage compared to the controls, which were not subject this selection process.

Practice implications In England and Wales the time may be right for programmes such as Safer Bars. From 2005, a new licensing act will impose a duty to prevent crime and disorder and transfer responsibility to local authorities, which will be required to develop a voluntary code stipulating training for bar staff on managing alcohol misuse. In addition, door staff must now be licensed (which entails training), and establishments can be required to hire licensed staff as a condition of their drinks licence. At the same time, the extended licensing hours provided for by the act may increase the extent to which incidents occur inside rather than outside premises.

Safer Bars offers a way forward which does not necessarily entail years of generating media, political and police support and establishing monitoring and interagency-industry coordination mechanisms. However, ignoring these would be a mistake. Wider community organisation and advocacy measures help create the will to fund training (in one Safer Bars project, by police) and set the scene for training to be maximally effective. In turn, local action depends on national laws granting the required powers, and national policies which encourage local bodies to prioritise their enforcement.

Specific implementation tips include: using local contacts to recruit an advance guard of Safer Bars-trained premises, whose managers and staff then effectively act as recruiting agents; employing a training agency already working closely with local venues; and paying managers and staff for their time. Also, identification of higher risk premises focuses effort where it can make the most difference. The featured study used a team of observers hired for the research, but in Cardiff ([Nugget 10.9](#)) similar intelligence was gained mainly by collating and augmenting routinely collected statistics.

Featured studies [1](#) Graham K. *et al.* "The effect of the Safer Bars programme on physical aggression in bars: results of a randomized controlled trial." *Drug and Alcohol Review*: 2004, 23(1), p. 31–41 [AG](#) [2](#) Purcell J. *et al.* "Redesign on the fly: Safer Bars and the Toronto experience." *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*: 2003, 20, p. 155–160. [AG](#)

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