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Reporting rates of assaults on licensed premises by licensed premises staff: 2012-2013

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Aim: *To determine whether there has been any change in the rate of reporting of assaults on licensed premises by staff in 2012-2013 in both the top 100 and unranked licensed premises for assaults. This paper also briefly examines the characteristics of both offenders and victims of assaults on licensed premises.*

Method: *A random sample of 800 assaults (400 from top 100 premises and 400 from unranked premises) from January 2012 to December 2013 were tabulated and coded for relevant information. SPSS was then used to determine proportions of victims and offenders in various categories and any trends in reporting. Trend tests were carried out using* χ^2.

Results: *There was no statistically significant trend in the proportion of reports of assaults emanating from staff on licensed premises.*

Keywords: *assault, licensed premises, reporting, top 100 licensed premises, liquor license legislation.*

Background

In the past few years in NSW, alcohol related violence and assaults on licensed premises have gained much public, media and political attention. A number of legislative reforms have been enacted in an attempt to reduce the scale of alcohol-related violence in and around licensed premises. Many of these reforms involve the imposition of trading restrictions on licensed premises that are repeatedly the site of alcohol-related violence (see Roth 2014 for a detailed discussion of the reforms).

In 2008, for example, reforms to the Liquor Act (2007) gave the Secretary of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing (OLGR) authority to impose conditions on liquor licenses, to restrict or prohibit liquor promotions and to declare 'lockouts' and 'curfews'. In December 2008 special conditions were imposed on the 48 licensed premises with the highest number of violent incidents. In 2012, the current Government introduced the 'three strikes' disciplinary scheme. This scheme targets premises and licensees that repeatedly breach the Liquor Act 2007 and gives the Secretary of the OLGR the power to suspend or cancel liquor licenses.

These reforms could be said to create a strong incentive for management/staff not to report assaults that occur on their premises. If this was to occur, trends in recorded assaults on licensed premises would give a misleading picture of the actual trends. This bureau brief updates an earlier study by the Bureau (Snowball & Spratley, 2013) designed to see whether the willingness of bar staff/managers of licensed premises to report assaults has changed.

The incentive not to report assaults is clearly stronger for staff/managers of licensed premises where a large number of assaults occur. Separate analyses were therefore carried out for the top 100 ranked licensed premises and licensed premises outside the top 100 (ie. unranked premises). Although the main focus of the study is on trends in the willingness of staff on licensed premises to report assaults, we also address a number of other questions of public interest.

The specific questions addressed by the study are as follows:

- Who are the victims of assaults on licensed premises?
- Who are the offenders in assaults on licensed premises?
- What proportion of assaults involves either the victim or offender being refused entry?
- In what proportion of assaults was the victim or offender ever evicted?
- Has the proportion of assaults reported by bar staff/ managers of licensed premises increased or decreased?
- Has the proportion of assaults reported by bar staff/ managers of licensed premises in the top 100 increased or decreased?
- Has the proportion of assaults reported by bar staff/ managers of licensed premises outside the top 100 increased or decreased?

Method

A random sample (n = 800) of records of assault incidents at licensed premises occurring between January 2012 and December 2013, was extracted from the NSW Police Force Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS). Half of these incidents (n=400) were drawn from records of assaults which occurred at licensed premises ranked in the top 100 premises in NSW for assault and the other half (n=400) were drawn from unranked licensed premises.

The assaults from each quarter between January 2012 and December 2013 were then tabulated and the police narrative for each assault was examined to identify relevant information.

Describing victims and offenders

Victims and offenders were classified into one of the following categories (patron, prospective patron, security guard, police, bar staff, bar manager/licensee, person walking past/person unconnected to premises, taxi driver, unknown or other).

Individuals were recorded as patrons if the narrative indicated they were a customer of the licensed premises at the time of, or before, the assault. Individuals were recorded as prospective patrons if the narrative indicated they intended to gain entry to the venue but were refused by security or staff. If an individual seemed unconnected to the premises in the narrative (eg. no mention of having visited the premises and was just nearby) they were recorded as person walking past/unconnected to premises.

Depending on the nature of the reference in the narrative, bar staff were recorded as either bar staff or bar manager/licensee. All security staff were recorded as security guard. Any police officers involved were recorded as police and taxi drivers were recorded as such.

When it was unclear who the victim or offender was in the narrative, the status of the person was recorded as unknown. This may have been due to person reporting not seeing who the perpetrator or victim was or not being able to remember.

Any other victims or offenders were recorded as other (eg. DJ's or performers at the venue).

Refused entry or evicted

The police narratives were used to determine whether the victim or offender were evicted from the premises by bar staff, security or police. The primary reason for eviction for both victims and offenders was becoming involved in an assault or altercation or for intoxication, however patrons were also evicted for argumentative or threatening behaviour, offensive language or because they were banned from the premises due to past behaviour.

Victims and offenders were generally refused entry either because they were intoxicated, banned from the premises, argumentative or threatening, or because the premises was closing or at capacity.

Describing the reporter

The police narratives for each assault were examined to determine who reported the assault to police or who called police to the premises. Reporters were classified into one of eight categories:

- The bar manager/owner or licensee of the licensed premises
- Staff of the licensed premises (including bar staff, security, receptionists, function staff, wait-staff)
- Victim of the assault (except when the victim was a member of staff or the manager/licensee, when this was the case the reporter was coded as staff or manager/ licensee respectively)
- A witness to the assault
- A member of the public not involved in the assault (eg. a concerned family member who was not a witness to the assault or a neighbour of the licensed premises)
- A police officer (where he or she was present at the time of the assault)
- Any other person (including the perpetrator or person of interest (POI) of the assault, ambulance officers or hospital staff)
- Unknown reporter. When the reporter was not explicitly mentioned in the narrative they were coded as unknown, however when the POI of the assault was held by security or staff 'until Police arrived', the reporter was coded as staff

In the results, bar managers/licensees and bar staff were combined, as it was not always clear whether a member of staff or manager reported the assault.

After tabulation and coding, SPSS was used to analyse the data to determine the proportions of victims and offenders falling into various categories and to test for trends in reporting. Trend tests were carried out using χ^2. The level of significance used in this analysis was 0.05. Cases where the person reporting the assault was unknown were not included in the analysis. Overall 24 per cent (24.3%) of reported incidents had an unknown reporter (21.6% unknown in Top 100 category and 26.9% in unranked category).

The results from this study are divided into two sections. The first section describes the profile of victims and offenders involved in reported assaults. The second section examines the trends in the reporting of assaults on licensed premises.

Results

Who were the victims?

Table 1 shows that the majority of victims of assaults were patrons of the licensed venue (64.4% of all incidents). Following this, the next highest victim category were security guards (14.9%), then police officers (5.1%), bar managers/licensee (5%), bar staff (3.5%) and prospective patrons (1.6%). Five per cent of victims were unconnected to the premises or were just walking past the premises at the time of the assault. Of the total incidents reviewed, there were four cases where the victim was unknown (0.5%).

Who were the offenders?

Table 2 shows that, as with victims, the largest category of offenders was patrons (71.5% of all incidents). The next highest category was an unknown offender (8.8%), followed by a person unconnected to premises (7.5%); security guards (5.9%); prospective patrons (4.4%); bar staff (0.9%); other (0.5%); police officers (0.3%) and bar managers/licensees (0.3%).

Who was refused entry or evicted from the premises?

Table 3 shows that 2.3% of victims were refused entry, while 8% of offenders had been refused entry. A high proportion of reported incidents involved being evicted, with about 17 per cent (16.5%) of assaults involving the victim being evicted at some point, while 60 per cent (59.9%) of offenders were evicted.

Trends in the reporting of assaults

Figure 1 shows the percentage of reports of assault made by staff/management of licensed premises. There is no indication in Figure 1 of any significant trend toward higher of lower levels of reporting by staff/management. This is confirmed in the results of the statistical analysis, which shows no significant difference in the percentage of assaults reported by staff/management across the two year period (χ^2 = 9.249, df = 7, *p*-value = 0.235).

Figure 2 shows the percentage of all assaults at licensed premises which were reported by staff or the licensed premises manager/licensee, broken down by whether or not the licensed premises was ranked in the top 100. The blue line represents the percentage of assaults occurring in the top 100 premises which were reported by a staff member/management. The red line represents the percentage of assaults occurring in the unranked premises which were reported by a staff member/management.

Once again, there is no sign of any significant upward or downward trend. Neither the trend in reporting by staff within the top 100 licensed premises or the trend within the unranked premises is statistically significant (χ^2 (top 100) = 5.076, df = 7, *p*-value = 0.651, χ^2 (unranked) = 13.775, df = 7, *p*-value = 0.055).

Table 1. Number and percentage of victims assaulted on licensed premises

Victims	%	Number
Patron	64.4	515
Security guard	14.9	119
Police officer	5.1	41
Bar manager/licensee	5.0	40
Person walking past/unconnected to premises	5.0	40
Bar staff	3.5	28
Person trying to enter premises (prospective patron)	1.6	13
Unknown victim	0.5	4
Total	**100**	**800**

Table 2. Number and percentage of offenders proceeded against for assaults on a licensed premise

Offenders	%	Number
Patron	71.5	572
Unknown offender	8.8	70
Person walking past/unconnected to premises	7.5	60
Security guard	5.9	47
Person trying to enter premises (prospective patron)	4.5	36
Bar staff	0.9	7
Other	0.5	4
Police officer	0.3	2
Bar manager/licensee	0.3	2
Total	**100**	**800**

Table 3. Percentage of victims and offenders refused entry or evicted from licensed premises

	Yes	No
Victim refused entry?	2.3%	97.8%
Offender refused entry?	8.0%	92.0%
Victim ever evicted?	16.5%	83.5%
Offender ever evicted?	59.9%	40.1%

Figure 1. Reporting of assaults on licensed premises by staff/managment

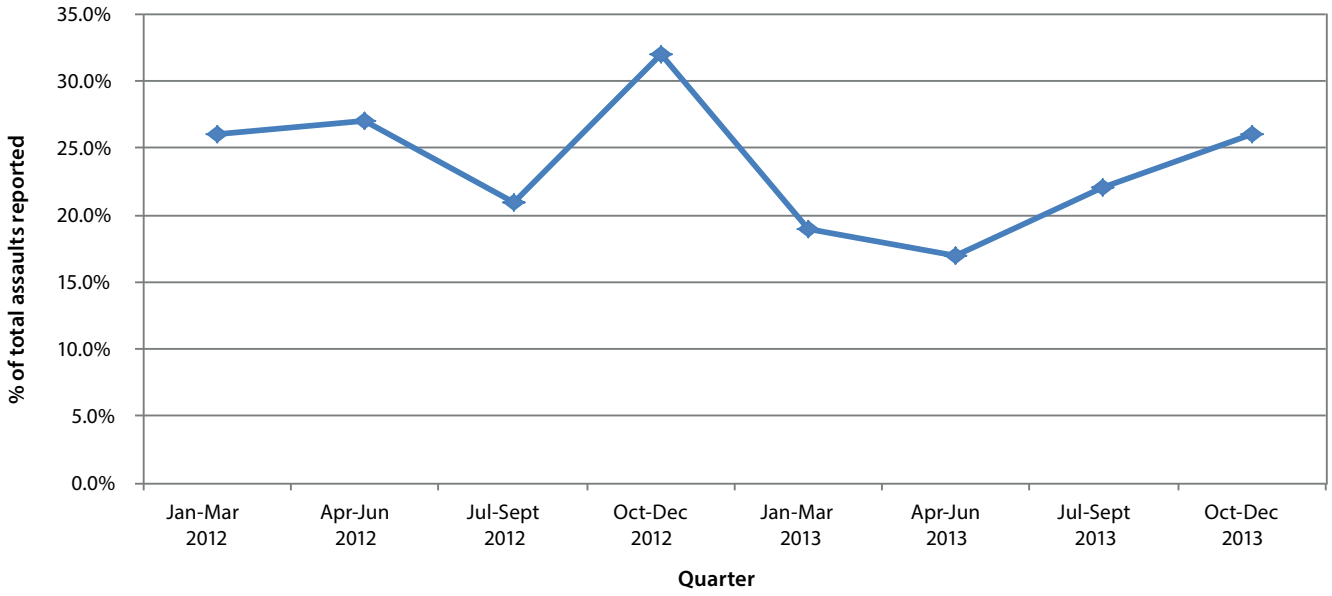

Figure 2. Reporting of assaults on licensed premises by staff/managment by rank of licensed premise

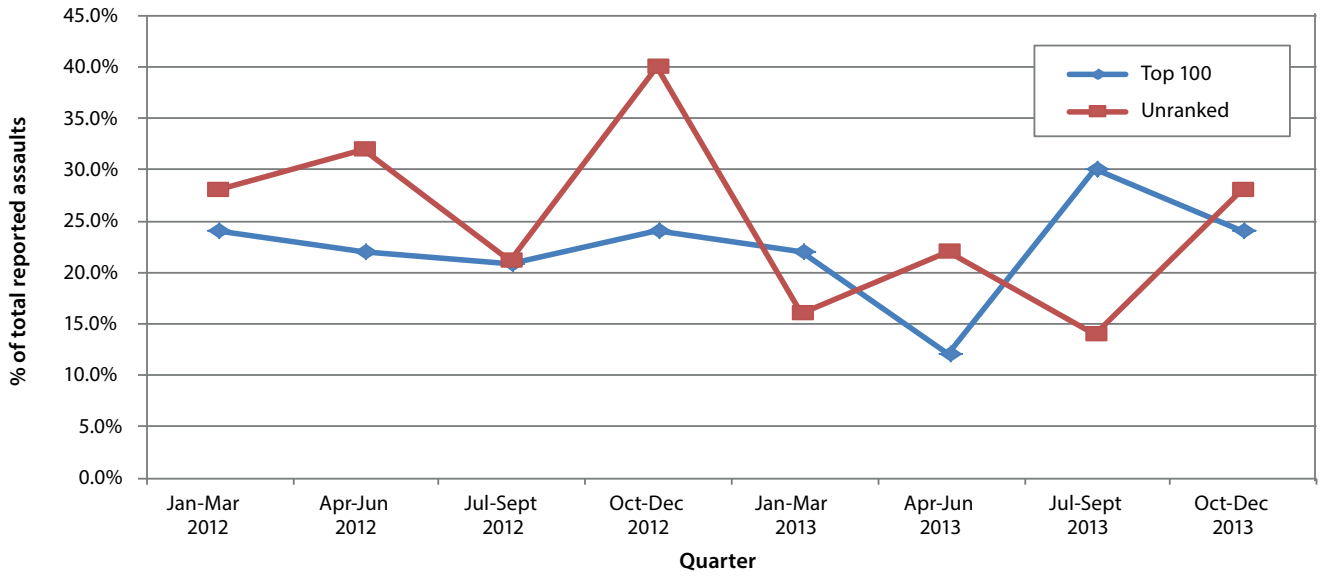

Table 4 shows that the most common reporter of assaults on licensed premises overall was the victim of the assault (42.6%). The next highest category was staff/management (31.4%); followed by police (16%); a member of the public (4%); other (3.5%); and a witness (2.6%). Table 4 also shows the percentage of who reports assaults on licensed premises broken down into the top 100 licensed premises and unranked premises. The data sets are relatively similar for the two categories; however the top 100 premises show that 20 per cent (20.2%) of assaults are reported by police, while on unranked premises only 12 per cent (11.6%) are reported by police.

Table 4. Percentage of who reports assaults on licensed premises

Reporter	Total %	Top 100 %	Unranked %
Victim	42.6	41.0	44.2
Staff/management	31.4	28.5	34.4
Police officer	16.0	20.2	11.6
Member of public	4.0	4.2	3.7
Other	3.5	4.8	2.0
Witness	2.6	1.3	4.1
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Discussion

Recent reform to liquor licensing legislation has applied trading restrictions to licensed premises that are repeatedly the site of violence. This raises the concern that staff of licensed premises may be less willing to report assaults on their premises. The aim of this study was to determine whether there has been any change in the rate of reporting of assaults on licensed premises by staff. This paper also sought to gain an understanding of the characteristics of the victims and offenders. The results of this study suggest there was no significant upward or downward trend between 2012 and 2013 in the percentage of police reports of assault made by staff on licensed premises. This was true for both the top 100 licensed premises for assaults and the unranked licensed premises.

The results for who reports assaults on licensed premises show that victims are the most common reporters (42.6%). Following victims, staff and management are the next most common reporters of assaults at 31 per cent (31.4%). This suggests that these two groups are most concerned with contacting the police and reporting assaults on licensed premises. There is a slight distinction between the top 100 premises and unranked premises reporter data for police officers; the results show slightly more police reported assaults on the top 100 licensed premises (20.2%), than the unranked premises (11.6%). This suggests that police are more likely to be present or conducting licensed premises checks on sites that are common for assaults.

In terms of the characteristics of those involved in assaults on licensed premises, patrons were the most common victims (64.4%) and offenders (71.5%). This suggests that the majority of assaults on licensed premises involve customers that are affected by alcohol. A substantial number of victims of assaults were security guards (14.9%) suggesting that violence is likely to occur when security evict patrons from the premises or intervene in incidents, particularly when alcohol is involved and patrons are intoxicated. As well as being the victims, in around one in 17 incidents the offender involved in the assault was a security guard (5.9%).

The results also show a moderate percentage of unknown offenders (8.8%). The police narratives show a possible reason for this may be the high number of assaults reported by victims (42.6%) – the victim may have either not seen the offender or could not remember who the offender was. From observation many of these 'victim reported' assaults were reported to police after the incident had occurred (i.e. the next morning when the victim had awoken with injuries or a couple of days later when the injuries had worsened), or when the victim was affected by intoxicating liquor (i.e. a statement not taken by police at the time of incident due to the victim being intoxicated) meaning the details of the incident were less specific.

Finally, the data also shows that a substantial proportion of incidents involved an offender being evicted from the licensed premises (59.9%), with a further 8.0% of offenders being refused entry. Victims were less likely than offenders to have been evicted from the premises, with 16.5% evicted at some point in the night and only 2.3% being refused entry.

References

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