



GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION  
CAMPAGNE MONDIALE POUR LA PREVENTION DE LA VIOLENCE

# Youth ViOlenCe, Alcohol and Nightlife

Violence Prevention Alliance Working Group on Youth Violence, Alcohol and Nightlife

## fact sheet 2

The role of door staff in violence prevention

### Introduction

Many pubs, bars and nightclubs employ security staff (referred to here as door staff) to control access to their premises, prevent patron misconduct and protect the safety of customers and staff. In busy nightlife areas, door staff can sometimes vastly outnumber police: in Manchester (UK) for example, on weekend nights there are an estimated 25 door staff working in the city per every one police officer [1]. Consequently, door staff have a key role in preventing violence in nightlife settings. Typically, the functions of door staff can include: managing entry to venues to prevent overcrowding; conducting age verification to prevent access to underage individuals; patrolling premises to deter and detect disorder; managing acts of misconduct among customers; conducting searches to prevent drugs or weapons entering the premises; and managing the movement of customers out of the premises back into the

night time environment. Such functions mean door staff can frequently be placed in aggressive situations. For example, they can be required to intervene in acts of patron aggression and violence, to escort unruly individuals from the premises, to remove customers at closing time, and to refuse access to known troublemakers or underage individuals [2]. How they perform these duties is crucial to whether door staff prevent or contribute to violence.

A range of research has examined the role of door staff in violence, and interventions have been implemented in several countries to strengthen their function in violence prevention, including through training, management and improved partnership working. This fact sheet outlines the role of door staff in violence prevention and measures being utilised to enhance this role.

## Door staff and violence

Research consistently shows that door staff are at high risk of involvement in violence.

For example:

- In England, the ability to fight has been identified as a key characteristic upon which door staff's commercial value rests [3].
- In Canada, three quarters of all bar staff involved in incidents of aggression in the night time environment were door staff [4]. Further, door staff were significantly more likely to experience physical violence than police working in the same locality [5].
- In Wales, research found door staff were three times more likely to be accused of assaulting a member of the public, than a member of the public being accused of assaulting a door man or women [6]. However, in England door staff were less likely to be convicted for an alleged assault against a member of the public (2%), than vice versa (57%) [7].
- One in seven (15%) patients presenting at a UK Accident and Emergency department with an assault injury sustained in a pub or nightclub had been injured by door staff [8].
- An Australian study found nightlife violence was more likely to occur in drinking environments employing aggressive door staff [9].

In part, the violence associated with the role of door staff and the opportunities to control, for instance, drug sales in bars and nightclubs, has resulted in individuals with violent and criminal tendencies occupying and controlling door staff positions [1,10]. However, in recognition of the central role that door staff can play in improving nightlife health and safety, a variety of

interventions aimed at training door staff, and managing and regulating their role have been developed. Key elements of these are outlined in the following sections.

## Interventions

In several countries, training programmes have been developed to provide door staff with the necessary skills to perform their role. Such programmes aim to raise awareness among door staff of how their own actions impact on customer behaviour and to develop skills in customer relations and management. Components of training programmes can include: conflict management (including de-escalation techniques); appropriate searching methods<sup>1</sup>; drug and alcohol awareness; civil and criminal law; health and safety at work; and emergency evacuation management. In Canada, the Safer Bars programme (Box 1) aimed to reduce aggression in bars in Toronto through the provision of training for bar owners and staff. The programme showed a significant effect in reducing severe and moderate aggression in bars [11]. However, this effect was modified by rapid door staff turnover, which reduced the numbers of trained staff in the intervention areas.

In the UK, use of door staff is often a condition of bar and nightclub licensing and basic door staff training is a requirement of employment. In the 1990s, concerns around the involvement of door staff in violence and other criminal activity led many local authorities<sup>2</sup> to regulate door staff through compulsory registration and training schemes. However, with individuals who lost their licence (e.g. for participation in violence) able to find work in a different local authority, a national licensing scheme covering England and Wales was implemented in 2004. Now all door staff working in England and Wales must hold a licence issued by the

<sup>1</sup>These can include: displaying a sign outside bars and nightclubs that informs customers that they may be asked to be searched for weapons or illegal drugs as a condition of entry; obtaining permission from customers before a search is carried out; explaining why the search is necessary; and if a search is to be carried out on a female customer, ensuring the search is carried out by female door staff only.

<sup>2</sup>Local authorities are administrative offices that are smaller than a state. Although local authorities have less power than the state, typically they are responsible for local governance.

## Box 1

### The Safer Bars programme

The Safer Bars programme in Toronto (Canada) was developed in consultation with police, lawyers, community health professionals, civic leaders, liquor licensing officials, bar owners and staff, and aimed to reduce aggression in bars. The programme provided: three hour training sessions for bar staff and management; a booklet for bar owners and managers to address environmental risk factors for aggression; and a pamphlet informing bar owners and staff of their legal responsibilities in preventing violence and injury in nightlife. The training focused on teamwork, communication and early intervention to prevent problems from escalating. Findings from the project evaluation indicate the programme had a significant effect in reducing severe and moderate aggression in bars [11].

national Security Industry Authority. Individuals with previous convictions for offences such as violence and drug dealing are excluded, and all licence holders must have undertaken training (Box 2). Furthermore, in a predominantly male profession, women are being encouraged to train as door staff with free training for female door staff having been provided in London by the Security Industry Authority [12]. There are currently over 75,000 licensed door staff in England and Wales [13]. However, as yet there is little information available on the effectiveness of either training or the national registration scheme.

In the absence of similar legislation in New Zealand, a voluntary code of conduct and a training programme has been established by the New Zealand Security Association (NZSA). The NZSA was created to promote professionalism in the security industry, set minimum standards for its members, and develop and provide training [14]. Elsewhere, door staff training has been incorporated into multi-component community programmes to reduce violence in nightlife. In Sweden, for

## Box 2

### The Security Industry Authority, UK: Door staff training curriculum

#### 1. Role and responsibilities of door staff

Issues covered include: introduction to door supervision; behavioural standards; civil and criminal law; searching; arrest; drugs awareness; recording incidents and crime scene preservation; licensing law; equal opportunities; health and safety at work; emergency procedures.

#### 2. Communication skills and conflict management

Issues covered include: verbal and non-verbal communication skills; identifying conflict hotspots; problem-solving skills; effective refusal and ejection skills; calming measures; incident management [13].

example, the STAD project (Box 3) incorporated door staff training into wider measures to create a safer nightlife environment in Stockholm, such as the provision of late night transport. The evaluation found a 29% reduction in violent crime following implementation of the project [15].

In the UK, communication between door staff and other agencies working in nightlife has been increased in many areas through the development of Pubwatch schemes. These schemes bring together staff in bars and nightclubs, police and other agencies (e.g. licensing officers, security personnel) within local areas and typically include the establishment of a dedicated radio network between members and a banning system to prevent persistent troublemakers from using bars and nightclubs.

Increasingly, Pubwatch schemes are utilising the Internet to rapidly share crime information, increase networking and provide bar managers and staff with access to a wide range of resources relevant to their role. In one nightlife

### **Box 3**

#### **The STAD project**

The STAD project is a ten-year multi-component programme aiming to tackle alcohol-related violence in Stockholm, Sweden. The programme focuses on community mobilisation, training in responsible beverage service for servers and stricter enforcement of licensing laws.

The programme includes a two-day training programme targeted at servers, door staff and bar owners. The training covers alcohol law, medical effects of alcohol, alcohol-related crimes, other drugs and conflict management, and concludes with a written assessment, with successful candidates receiving a diploma.

Evaluation of the programme found a 29% reduction in violent crime in the intervention area [15].

area where a Pubwatch scheme has been implemented, statistics have shown that whilst levels of violence have remained stable following initiation of the scheme, there has been an increase in the number of people visiting the town centre at night (Box 4) [16].

### **The Future**

The rapid expansion of nightlife environments in many countries and corresponding increases in alcohol-related problems such as violence has meant that the need for security in nightlife has increased. Huge demands can be placed on limited police resources during busy nightlife periods, and with door staff often outnumbering police in nightlife areas, their role in violence prevention is one that should be recognised and strengthened. By its very nature, the role of door staff means they are frequently placed in aggressive situations and without appropriate training and management, door staff may not only be ineffective at preventing violence but may actually act as a contributing factor [17, 18]. However, research has shown that door staff training programmes can be effective

### **Box 4**

#### **Burnley Against Night Time Disorder (BAND)**

BAND is a multi-agency partnership developed to tackle violence and disorder in and around Burnley's (UK) nightlife area through banning perpetrators of nightlife violence from all licensed premises and establishing a Pubwatch scheme. The Pubwatch scheme enables details of potentially violent incidents to be shared quickly and accurately and to help apprehend offenders. In addition, protocols are established between all licensed premises to prevent unruly customers from entering premises. Although levels of violence remained stable throughout the implementation of BAND, significant increases in the number of people visiting the town centre at night have been observed. BAND has been recognised as an example of best practice by the Home Office in the UK [16].

in giving individuals the skills they require to carry out their role and in preventing violence. Further, registration schemes can give authorities the power to prevent those with histories of violence and other criminal activity from working as door staff, and to require training as a condition of employment. Local police, licensing officials and other agencies should work with door staff to ensure the added resource they can bring to maintaining safety and reducing violence in the night time environment is utilised to its full potential.



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**Fact sheets are produced by the VPA Working Group on Youth Violence, Alcohol and Nightlife. Its membership includes:**

Antonia Abbey (USA), Peter Anderson (USA), Zara Anderson (UK), Mark A Bellis (UK), Jan Brown (UK), Frank Chaloupka (USA), Paul Dillon (Australia), Alasdair Forsyth (UK), Kathryn Graham (Canada), Matt Hennessey (UK), Dick Hobbs (UK), Ross Homel (Australia), K Hollemans (Netherlands), Karen Hughes (UK), Geoffrey Hunt (USA), Dirk Korf (Holland), Kenneth Leonard (USA), Will Linden (UK), Neo Morojele (South Africa), Thor Norström (Sweden), Rod Thomson (UK) and Ninette Van Hasselt (Netherlands).

**Edited by:** Zara Anderson, Karen Hughes and Mark A Bellis

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**For further information please contact:**

VPA Working Group on Youth Violence, Alcohol and Nightlife

Chair: Professor Mark A Bellis

Centre for Public Health

Faculty of Health and Applied Social Sciences

Liverpool John Moores University

Castle House, North Street, Liverpool L3 2AY, United Kingdom

Telephone: + 44 (0) 151 231 4510 Email: [m.a.bellis@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.bellis@ljmu.ac.uk)

Website: [www.who.int/violenceprevention](http://www.who.int/violenceprevention)



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