

# Preventing alcohol-related crime through community action: the Surfers Paradise Safety Action Project

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Published

1997

Publisher

Criminal Justice Press

Type

Book chapter

Page(s)

35-90

## **Abstract**

The Surfers Paradise Safety Action Project, the initial phase of which was implemented in 1993, was a community-based initiative designed to reduce violence in and around licensed venues in the central business district of an international tourist area on Queensland AUS's Gold Coast. This paper describes specific aspects of the implementation of the Surfers project, and presents the results of the evaluation. Findings showed marked reductions in violence and crime (inside and outside venues) and in practices that promote the irresponsible use of alcohol (such as binge drinking incentives), as well as improvements in security practices, entertainment, handling of patrons, and transport policies. Activities in 18 nightclubs were observed by teams of students using a structured observation schedule in the summers of 1993 (before the project) and of 1994 (after the major features of the project had been implemented). Police and security data showed: pre-project increases in assaults, indecent acts, stealing, and drunk and disorderly incidents; stabilization in the initial stages of the project; and sharp declines following the period in which a Code of Practice was instituted. Verbal abuse declined by 82%; arguments by 68%; and physical assaults by 52%. However, there are indications that nightclubs became more "upmarket," suggesting that displacement of problem

patrons may have been at least partly re-sponsible for the impact of the project. In addition, observational data collected over the summer of 1996 indicate that violence has returned to pre project levels, and that compliance with the Code of Practice has almost ceased. It is hypothesized that only a system of regulation that integrates self-regulation, community monitoring, and formal enforcement can ensure that the achievements of community interventions are maintained on an indefinite basis.

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