

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cutting down on alcohol related violence

Police around Australia are starting to focus on offences by licensed premises rather than just the unruly intoxicated individual, to control drunken public behaviour, according to a University of Tasmania study.

But this is not a problem that can be dealt with by police alone; it requires a multi-disciplinary approach working with several organisations.

Professor Jenny Fleming of the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) travelled the country in 2008 investigating the ways different police forces tackle anti-social behaviour and alcohol-related violence in and around licensed premises.

Prof. Fleming said that while police were still managing anti-social behaviour on the street by the conventional means of caution and arrest, there was a stronger emphasis now on the licensing premise as a focus for enforcement.

“High visibility on the street and public safety tend to drive front line strategies such as task forces or ‘grog squads’ but there has been a shift from the patron to the premise in recent months and the monitoring and regulation of licensed premises has become a priority for many police organisations,” she said.

“They’re no longer focusing primarily on the person in the street who is misbehaving, more resources and training are going into what is happening in the premises themselves,” she said.

The report (funded and published by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research) identifies a centralisation of resources to deal with the regulation of licensed premises as an effective strategy to better address alcohol related problems.

“Some police organisations are actively establishing units to focus strategy and intelligence in a more effective way,” Prof. Fleming said.

“These units have resulted in a better concentration of expertise, better training opportunities for police officers and more effective communication with the liquor industry, licensing authorities and other relevant agencies.”

Professor Fleming describes the policing of alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour as a ‘wicked problem’ – a problem that cannot be addressed in the long term by any one organisation or policy and requires a coordinated, partnership approach.

The report notes that partnership work to address alcohol-related activity on the street between police and others has improved dramatically in the past few years with many police organisations forming task groups (‘grog squads’) and collaborating with others to develop alcohol management plans and accords.

However, the report notes that the most difficult partnership to manage is between the police and licensing authorities.

“There is considerable overlap between police and licensing authorities in terms of their activities and there is some unease between the two organisations. This is probably one of the most challenging aspects of liquor licensing enforcement. There are some good news stories and some do it better than others but there is more work to be done in that particular partnership,” she said.

The report identifies a number of other challenges to policing alcohol-related activity in public places.

As Prof. Fleming argues: “it’s not just about the police, it’s about how governments think about legislation and regulation and how they manage the whole balancing act between acknowledging the economic contribution made by the liquor industry and the well-documented harms and costs that have been associated with alcohol consumption.”

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