# Safer places and small bars

## Researchers

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## Summary

This study aimed to test the hypothesis that the type and size of a late night licensed premises can positively or negatively affect perceptions of safety in the public realm. This study, which was an exploratory observational study, occurred in the late night entertainment district of Adelaide and compared a range of variables in areas with predominantly small venues (under 120 patrons) to those areas with predominantly medium and large venues (with an average capacity of 450 people).

Four sites were selected, consisting of the following venue types:

* Site 1 Peel Street: small venue site, with 100 per cent small venues.
* Site 2 Waymouth Street: mixed venue site, with 50 per cent small venues and 50 per cent medium and large venues.
* Site 3 Hindley/Morphett Street: predominantly medium and large venue site, with 33 per cent small venues and 67 per cent medium and large venues.
* Site 4 Hindley/Rosina Street: predominantly medium and large venue site, with 100 per cent medium and large venues.

The method of this study draws on the work of Robert Grimshaw, which used an observational instrument to capture information across a series of Likert scales that rated both physical and social characteristics of the environment. Pairs of observers monitored the four sites in Adelaide's entertainment precincts on Saturday nights over a four-month period.

## Outcomes

The study found that Site 2 (mixed venue site on Waymouth Street) ranked as the safest of the four sites observed in this analysis. Site 2 received the best rating most frequently on both physical and behavioural variables, including site cleanliness, upkeep, crowding and mood. Site 2 (mixed venue site) also received the highest score (2.3) for its positive perceptions of safety, and had the lowest levels of perceived hostility, male roughness and bumping, male rowdiness, swearing, female intoxication and public urination and vomiting. This was closely followed by Site 1 (small venue site on Peel Street) ranked as the second safest, receiving a better rating than Sites 3 and 4 (medium and large venue sites) on all variables. Site 1 also had the second most positive perceptions of safety rating (2.9). Finally, Site 3 (medium and large venue site on Hindley/Morphett Street) ranked just ahead of Site 4 (medium and large venue site on Hindley/Rosina Street). Both Sites 3 and 4 (medium and large venue sites) received the poorest rating for an equal number of behavioural variables. However, Site 3 rated more positively than Site 4 on most physical variables, and also received a slightly better perception of safety rating than Site 4 (5.0 compared to 5.1).

In terms of the characteristics of people, Sites 1 and 2 (small and mixed venue sites) had a greater spread of people across the age groups than Sites 3 and 4 (medium and large venue sites). Sites 1 and 2 had a lower percentage in the 18-25 age group, but higher percentages in the 26-30 years, 31-39 years and 40+ years age groups. The proportion of males and females observed was approximately the same across all sites (60 per cent male and 40 per cent female).

In terms of site characteristics, Sites 1 and 2 (small and mixed venue sites) rated more positively compared to Sites 3 and 4 (medium and large venue sites) on perceptions of: cleanliness, upkeep, site attractiveness, lines of sight into venues, music and voice noise, number of people in the site and crowding, and mood.

In terms of behaviour of people within the sites, Sites 3 and 4 (medium and large venue sites) were perceived to have higher levels compared to Sites 1 and 2 (small and mixed venue sites) of both male and female hostility, roughness and bumping, rowdiness, swearing, intoxication, and sexual activity.

Other behaviours documented in this study included the incidence and severity of urination, vomiting, and aggressive incidents. Site 1 (small venue site) and Site 3 (medium and large venue site) were rated as having the highest levels of public urination and vomiting, however this was rated relatively low across all sites. A higher number of low level aggressive incidents were observed in Sites 3 and 4 (medium and large venue sites) compared to Sites 1 and 2 (small and mixed venue sites). A notably higher number of high level aggressive incidents were observed in Site 4 (medium and large venue site) than in any of the three other sites.

The mood of the site was found to be strongly correlated with people’s perceptions of safety (r = .83). A strong relationship was also found between the density of people within the site and perceptions of safety (r = .77). The attractiveness, upkeep and cleanliness of the site showed moderate correlations with perceptions of safety (r = .76, r = .72, r = .72), however when these site characteristics were grouped together, they were found to have a strong relationship to perceptions of safety (r = .80). This is consistent with Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) ‘broken window theory’ and a related theory known as ‘incivilities thesis’ (Roberts & Indermaur, 2012), both of which attempt to explain the relationship between the physical appearance of an area and perceptions of safety, risk and crime. No correlations of any strength were found between perceptions of safety and the behavioural variables measured in this study.

## Recommendations

The importance of physical site factors in relation to perceptions of safety in late night entertainment areas is useful information for Local Governments and State Government including those involved with urban design and liquor licensing decisions. Local Government acts in a spatial planning role to guide the desired character of an area and set guidelines for licensing operating hours, as well as direct involvement in licensing negotiations and approvals. Local Governments also have some influence over the number of alcohol outlets in an area, as well as land use and management, and the attractiveness, cleanliness and upkeep of the area.

Those involved in liquor licensing and spatial planning may also draw on the relationship that was observed between the density of people and perceived crowding in an area and the perceptions of safety. In addition, the combined capacity of venues within an area also appears to be relevant to perceptions of safety. This information may be of use when considering the impact of additional licensed venues in an area that already has a number of venues that have large patron capacity.

Although not the focus of this study; the entertainment offering and venue type appeared to have observable differences in factors that affect both the physical space and behaviour of people in the sites. This is a potential avenue for future research. There appeared to be observable differences in areas with predominantly smaller venues as compared to areas outside larger venues. In addition, places with a mix of venue types and entertainment offerings also showed more positive perceptions of safety. This study is of interest to Local Government and its partners in terms of place management and to provide direction in shaping city spaces that may attract a more diverse mix of people and offer different options for late night entertainment.

The results of this study appear to indicate that the areas with a higher number of smaller venues do attract a broader age range of patrons and lower levels of some of the negative alcohol-related behaviours seen in the public realm. This study also indicated that one or two small venues in an area with predominantly large or very large venues did not positively impact on perceptions of safety in the public realm, but groupings of small to medium capacity venues appear to create spaces with more positive perceptions of safety.

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