

3 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AT MAJOR OUTDOOR EVENTS

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Abstract

There is much confusion around the topic of anti-social behaviour at events, and there is no one single definition of this behaviour. This exploratory study provides an opportunity to gain insight into how anti-social behaviour is perceived at major outdoor events in Sydney. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in an attempt to obtain an understanding of this phenomenon and to suggest ways of minimising its impacts. Although the survey's findings showed no clear definition or perception of what constitutes anti-social behaviour; 'aggression', 'rudeness' and 'idiots' were mentioned as examples of anti-social behaviour; and alcohol and drugs were perceived as the major causes of this behaviour. The stakeholders who were interviewed suggested that anti-social behaviour was not a new phenomenon, and that what changed was community perception of, and media interest in, the phenomenon. They cited intoxication, assaults, urination, fence jumping and ticket scalping as forms of this behaviour.

Introduction

Over the past few years the number of reported anti-social incidents has increased. Headlines such as "Mayor of Gosford City takes action against anti-social behaviour on Australia Day" in the Gosford City Council News and The Sydney Morning Herald's "600 Music fans caught in wild brawl" highlight not only the impact of anti-social behaviour (ABS) but also the media interest in this topic. According to the 2006-2009 National Alcohol Strategy, Australia has moved from a 'drinking' culture to a 'drunken' culture. Drinking to get drunk is increasingly seen as a normal activity with Australians aged 20-29 who are most likely to participate in 'binge' drinking.

In addition to the new liquor laws that came into effect on 1 July 2008, a further crackdown on "trouble spots" associated with alcohol related violence and anti-social behaviour saw additional licensing conditions regarding the Liquor Amendment (Special Licence Conditions) Regulation 2008, come into effect on 1 December 2008. Forty-eight liquor licensing venues came under new restrictions on the service of alcohol, such as, lockouts from 2am to 5am and no shots after midnight.

There is a debate as to whether these control strategies are reducing or in fact encouraging binge drinking. ASB is still part of Australian society despite new legislation and Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) program being implemented. ASB can impact not only the individual but also the community, and is also having a greater impact on the way events, both ticketed and public, are being delivered in Sydney.



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ABS is not a new phenomenon, and its presence in the event industry may be considered as an extension of the culture witnessed in pubs and clubs.

Kemp et al. (2007) identified alcohol and drugs as a major factor in determining crowd behaviour in Europe. A study undertaken by Ireland (1993) revealed that 77% of street violence, such as, assault, offensive behaviour or language, was alcohol related. However, alcohol and drugs are not the only factors responsible for ASB. As suggested by Berlonghi (1990) there are also a number of areas that need to be considered in crowd management, such as, the timing of the event, transport, audience demographics, capacity, and concessions. Miller (1997) suggests other factors, such as toilets, egress and site design. Insufficient transport to and from the venue can result in boredom, which can lead to vandalism and assault; insufficient facilities can result in urinating in public; poor sightlines may cause crowd agitation and disorder. Allen et al. (2005) noted that there are both positive and negative impacts associated with events; whilst events play a role in maintaining social cohesion, confidence and pride, which can go beyond the values of tangible and economic benefits, they can also act as an attraction for ASB.

Additional resources such as increase in security and 'user pay policing', secondary perimeter fencing and stricter liquor licensing conditions are becoming the norm. It has yet to be determined if these control strategies assist in the reduction of ASB or if they can inadvertently lead to ASB. ASB at events, whether ticketed or public, is a crowd safety management issue for all key stakeholders involved, not only the behaviour of the crowd but also the behaviour of the organisers, police, security and landowners. The main purpose of this exploratory study is to provide insight into how key event stakeholders perceive anti-social behaviour at major outdoor events in Sydney. The study provides the opportunity to obtain an understanding of ASB; it also offers potential areas for further research, which may result in greater understanding of ASB and assist in reducing it.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to obtain descriptive and explanatory accounts (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of anti-social behaviour. The focus of the study derives from the researcher's personal and professional experience (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Over the past few years, empirical data was gathered from attendance at various ticketed and non-ticketed events and from discussions with industry colleagues. This data, along with an increase in media interest, formed the basis for the study.

Initially, informal discussions with work colleagues took place to introduce the idea of the research and to seek their participation. This process assisted in defining the questions for this study.



Qualitative research is recognised as more suitable in seeking the perspectives of key stakeholders in the industry. Two representatives from each of the following stakeholders were invited to participate in informal interviews: Event promoters, landowners, police, security, local government councils and work colleagues. A list of questions, some pre-specified and some open-ended, was developed and issued along with an introductory email explaining the aim of the research. The list also helped to guide the interviewees and obtain relevant data that lends itself to interpretation.

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Sampling for quantitative analysis, also known as 'people sampling' (Miles and Huberman, 1994), was undertaken. A questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 20 event patrons at two events in Sydney. Permission via email was sought and obtained beforehand from each of the event promoters to conduct the research on their event site. Event 1 was a one-day dance festival and Event 2 was a one-day rock festival. The purpose of conducting surveys at two ticket events was to ascertain if there are any contrasting views in relation to ASB.

Audience members from both events were approached and provided with the purpose and context of the research being undertaken. In administering the questionnaire in Event 1, it was discovered that a couple of the survey questions were inappropriate because of the young age of the crowd and their limited exposure to those types of events. These questions were removed from the survey questionnaire in Event 2.

Various newspaper articles were also examined and searches on websites undertaken to obtain further knowledge on the subject. This sampling strategy was designed to allow a credible understanding of ASB within the event industry to be formed. As such, this study can be seen as one of theory generation rather than theory verification.

Responses received from the questionnaire survey were analysed using a spreadsheet, and some descriptive statistics were produced.

In analysing the qualitative data, coding as a method of analysing data was considered impractical, as it is too complex for the purpose of this study. Instead, interpretation in the form of narrative was adopted for its ease of use. Also, time constraints had a large impact; interviews were postponed thus pushing all deadlines back leaving less time for analysis.

Findings and conclusions

In their study of visitors' motivation to attend festivals, Uysal et al. (1993) find that socialisation, escape, excitement, novelty, and family togetherness, as the main motivators. This study found that 40% of event patrons attended Event 1 because of the music line up; the remaining 60% attended for a day out experience.



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The corresponding figures of patrons attending Event 2 were 65% and 35% respectively.

There is much confusion around the topic of ASB at events, not only in Australia but also overseas and from the outset it became evident that ASB was quite elusive; for example, under the NSW Crimes Act 1900, there is no definition of anti-social behaviour. There is also insufficient published data on the effectiveness of various strategies within the event industry to combat ASB, and insufficient published data on the perceptions of ASB (Patterson, DeBaryseh, Ramsey 1990).

Similarly, the event patrons of this study did not have a clear idea of ASB. The audience surveyed at Event 1 came with the following words as a first example of ASB: 'aggression' (45%), 'rudeness' (20%), and 'idiots' (20%). It should also be noted that 30% of respondents could not provide a second example of ASB. The average age of patrons questioned was 22 years old, 70% of whom were aged 18 to 24 years and 5% aged 31 to 39. Those surveyed at Event 2 mentioned 'aggression' (30%) and 'drugs' (30%) as examples of ASB; their average age was 28 years, 35% were aged 18 to 24 and 30% were aged 31 to 39. Their second example was more concerned about 'idiots' (45%), followed equally by 'drugs' (15%), 'drunkenness' (15%) and 'aggression' (15%).

The above findings show that, regardless of the level of exposure to major outdoor events or the age of the audience, 'aggression' and 'idiots' rates high as examples of ASB. It is also evident from the findings that there is no clear definition or perception of what constitutes ASB.

The majority (60%) of respondents from Event 1 and 65% from Event 2 saw alcohol as the major cause of anti-social behaviour. The other cause, respondents (40% at Event 1 and 50% at Event 2) felt, was illicit drugs. Although alcohol and drugs were perceived as the major causes of ASB, the stakeholders who were interviewed noted that ASB, especially related to drugs and alcohol, is a complex model and there is no one single cause. The majority of these stakeholders believed that ASB had not increased over the past few years. They gave examples of ASB, such as: intoxication, assaults, urination, fence jumping and ticket scalping. ASB is not seen as a new phenomenon; what seems to have changed, they argued, is the perception of ASB in the community and an increase in media interest. Nixon et al. (2003) view ASB as subjective, based on a number of factors, such as: location, life experiences and expectations and the level of community tolerance.

The perception of ASB being linked to any one particular demographic varied amongst the stakeholders. This was largely dependent on the type of event, ticketed or public, alcohol license or alcohol free, duration of event, location, and the programming content.

However, what was consistent in the responses was the importance of conducting risk assessments to evaluate the level of risk associated with each event.

60% of those who attended Event 2 thought there were too many police at the event compared to 35% at Event 1. The difference may be explained by the music genre at these events and the fact that older crowd were at Event 2, the rock festival, than at Event 1, the dance festival. Event organisers felt vulnerable and exposed regarding safety due to the escalating presence of police at events, especially User Pay Police, and the role they undertake. While they all agreed police advice and guidance are required and taken seriously, there are many inconsistencies and a lack of event industry standardisation in its management and roll out. Many saw the increase of police on site, from a safety perspective, as high risk. Goldbatt (1990) argued that the lack of standardisation within the event industry could result in distrust, speciousness and lack of creditability. The concern of event organisers was the perception that the police working on site do not have event experience and may be unfamiliar with the crowd management strategies implemented to ensure safety. In relation to event site safety, 32.5% of patrons considered event sites to be very safe compared to 7.5% who rated it at 2 on a scale of 1 to 5. Furthermore, in requiring help or advice, 62.5% of respondents said they would approach security, 17.5% would approach friends, and 12.5% would approach the police. This suggests that security have a greater role in liaising with event patrons with regards to their wellbeing.

This exploratory study shows that there is no one single definition of ASB. Millie et al. (2005 p. vii) looked into the concept and perceptions of ASB in the UK; their aim was to strike “a balance between enforcement and prevention”; they suggest that “more care is needed in defining ASB and in deciding the limits on the use of civil remedies”. The main concern surrounding ASB is not the actual control strategies but how decisions are reached and the lack of consistency in these decisions between events.

Those who attend events perceive them to be in safe environments, and those working in the event environment continually strive to improve and develop strategies to ensure a safe environment is maintained for all.

As the reason for developing a better understanding of ASB is to minimise its negative impacts, further more comprehensive research into ASB at events is required.

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