



Violence in public places

Explanations and solutions

Australia21

Shaping the Future

A report on an expert roundtable for Victoria Police.
Richard Eckersley and Lynne Reeder. December 2008

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The logo for Australia21, featuring a large, stylized letter 'O' that is partially filled with a dark grey color. The text 'Australia21' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font across the middle of the 'O'.

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and solutions**

A report on an expert roundtable for Victoria Police
Richard Eckersley and Lynne Reeder
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About Australia21

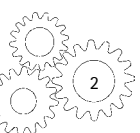
Australia 21 is a non-profit company whose core business is multidisciplinary research and development on issues of strategic importance to Australia in the 21st century.

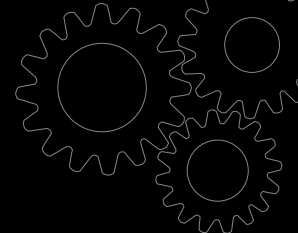
The company's charter commits it to:

- Promoting interdisciplinary and inter-institutional discussion to germinate new research on topics of significance to Australia's future;
- Building networks between researchers, community and business leaders and policy makers;
- Improving community understanding of the factors that will contribute to a better future for our children.

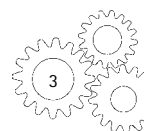
Acknowledgment

Australia21 would like to thank Victoria Police for their assistance in planning and convening this roundtable





PARTICIPANTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	7
THE PROBLEM	8
Definitions	8
Rising Violence	8
Increasing Severity and Costs	9
THE EXPLANATION	11
Alcohol and drug use	11
The night-time economy	11
Social, economic and cultural drivers	13
Developmental issues: growing up today	15
Young people's health and wellbeing	16
Research and implementation	17
Ways forward: different emphasis, but broad consensus	19
THE SOLUTION	20
Business regulation	20
Law enforcement	21
Medical services	21
Judicial system	22
Education	22
Technology and media	23
Community and culture	24
CONCLUSION	25
FURTHER READING	26



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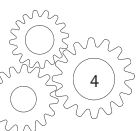
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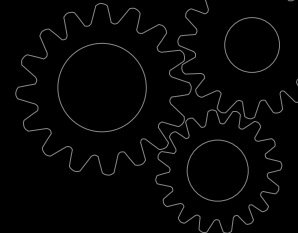
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* Senior officers from five Victorian government departments also participated in the roundtable.





Australian States, including Victoria, have seen a recent upsurge in antisocial behaviour, including violence, in public places. Victoria Police commissioned Australia 21 to conduct a roundtable and prepare a report on the issue. The roundtable participants came from a range of relevant scientific disciplines and Victorian Government departments and agencies with responsibility for policy development and implementation.

The problem

There was agreement across all jurisdictions – police, ambulance, hospitals, courts and education – that there had been, in the past few years, a pronounced increase, not only in the incidence of violence, but also in its severity.

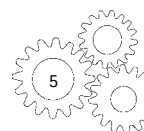
Melbourne metropolitan ambulance records show cases of assault have roughly doubled since 1999 to over 600 a month, with cases involving stabbings and gunshots jumping from about 50 to 100 a month. According to police, recorded assaults in the public domain in Victoria have increased by over 20% in the past five years to almost 14,000 a year; most of the increase is in night-time assaults. Much, but not all, of this violence is alcohol- and drug-related, and involves young people as both offenders and victims. The rise is part of a long-term trend of increasing rates of violent crime (excluding homicide) in Australia.

The explanation

The upsurge in public violence is not readily explained. It is possible Australian society has reached a tipping point, where the confluence or conjunction of many social changes and developments – short-term and long-term, specific and broad – has produced social conditions conducive to violence.

Explanations include: changes in alcohol and drug use; the huge growth of the night-time economy; a 24/7 lifestyle; broad social changes relating to poverty and disadvantage, the family and parenting, communications technology and the media, and an individualistic, consumer culture; young people's biological and social development; links between antisocial behaviour and other aspects of young people's health and wellbeing; and the lack of sustained action to address the problem, coupled with a dearth of good research evidence in key areas.

More specific issues include: industry deregulation and promotion of economic considerations over social goals; the failure of accords between licensees and authorities; inadequate public transport in entertainment precincts; parental over-protection or neglect; increased social expectations and pressures or social exclusion and alienation; a perception of violence as the norm, even fun; a lack of respect and empathy; and a sense of invulnerability and ignorance of human fragility.

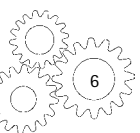


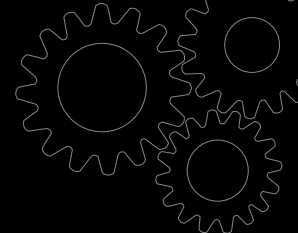
The solution

When it came to proposing solutions, some participants focused on more immediate, direct interventions to address public violence, others emphasised a broader, social-development perspective. Nevertheless, most, if not all, participants agreed on the need for a multi-dimensional strategy spanning timeframes, social scales and government jurisdictions.

Key responses included:

- Developing a clearer 'typology' of violence, which clearly identifies types of violence, the victims, the offenders, localities, and backgrounds.
- Achieving a better mix of regulatory strategies that balance economic and social goals and objectives, combine informal and formal regulation, and can be adapted to suit different localities. This mix should include stronger and enforceable regulation of licensed premises.
- Providing the necessary focus, support and resources to tackle violence, as has been done successfully with road safety.
- Increased policing of randomly selected premises at random times, and more targeted policing of problem premises.
- Training bar staff in managing all aggressive behaviours, not just drunkenness.
- Holding organisers of public events more responsible and accountable for the social and health costs of these events.
- Exploring the use of a 'peer court' to involve young people in the court process.
- Broadening the focus of the education system beyond academic achievement and vocational qualifications to make the curriculum more relevant to young people's lives and passions.
- Introducing specific programs in schools to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of students.
- Investing in increased parent education on parenting from birth to adolescence.
- Recognising the contribution of the media and communications technologies to violence, and acting to minimise these impacts.
- Making more use of public-education campaigns to promote notions like 'look after your mates', 'one punch can kill', or 'weapons are for wimps'.
- Encouraging local communities to become more involved in crime prevention.





Victoria, like other States in Australia and some other countries, has experienced in the past few years a marked increase in the frequency and severity of violence in public places. Victoria Police has identified the triggers and precursors to public-safety-related crime to include or involve: large public gatherings (protests, sporting events), 24-hour lifestyle, transport, entertainment precincts, alcohol, illicit drugs, young people, contested public domain, culture, gender, crowd dynamics, technology and the role of the media.

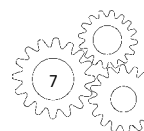
However, Victoria Police decided there remained a need to gain a deeper understanding of these drivers and the links between them. Accordingly, it commissioned Australia 21 to conduct a roundtable on antisocial behaviour and public safety and to prepare a report on the discussions and outcomes. The roundtable addressed the question: What are the precursors and triggers of antisocial behaviour and the options for improved policy intervention to reduce such activity in public spaces?

The roundtable was held in Melbourne on 7 October 2008. The 23 participants were drawn mainly from a range of relevant scientific disciplines and Victorian Government departments and agencies with responsibility for policy development and implementation. There were also about 15 observers present. Participants were asked to prepare a page of dot points on key issues and responses, which were circulated beforehand.

The roundtable was conducted under the Chatham House Rule: that is, what participants said could be used in the resulting report, but they would not be identified by name or affiliation. This was to encourage a frank and open exchange of views and information. It included three sessions: an opening, free-ranging discussion with participants each given several minutes to outline their views, and other participants then allowed to comment or ask questions; a more general discussion of the main issues and themes that emerged; and a final round in which participants were asked to nominate their 'best buys' for policy responses.

The proceedings were recorded and transcribed. This report draws largely on the discussion, transcript and the dot points. Participants and the commissioning officers at Victoria Police were given the opportunity to comment on a draft of the report. However, the report does not necessarily represent a consensus view. Neither the participants nor Victoria Police were asked to endorse or approve the final report, the responsibility for which rests with Australia 21 and the authors.

Australia 21 is a non-profit, public-interest company committed to creating cross-institutional and multidisciplinary networks to develop new frameworks for understanding and addressing important challenges facing Australia and the world this century. This project is a fitting demonstration of that mission.



THE PROBLEM

Definitions

Antisocial behaviour covers a large range of activities. Public surveys identify antisocial behaviour with not only public violence, but also: 'hoon' driving, graffiti, drunkenness and illicit drug use, urinating in public, noise, minor property damage; even young people

gathering in shopping malls and public transport hubs is seen by some as antisocial behaviour. The British Government has identified over 50 types

All jurisdictions agreed there had been a pronounced increase in the incidence and severity of violence.

of antisocial behaviour under four categories: misuse of public space, disregard for community/personal wellbeing, acts directed at people, and environmental damage.

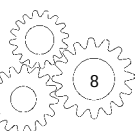
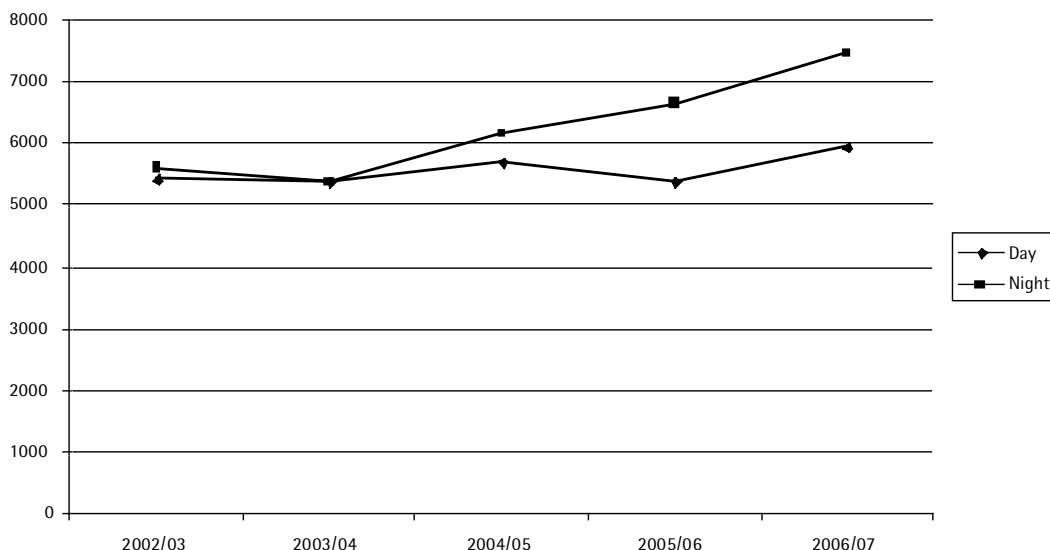
As already noted, the roundtable focused on violence in relation to public safety, and excluding other forms of violence such as that within families and between neighbours (which is also rising). And while terrorism is public violence, it was not included in the discussion (although it was mentioned).

However, even within the target category, a 'typology of violence' exists that needs to be acknowledged: organised and spontaneous; individual or group; gang violence and non-gang violence; alcohol- or drug-related; racially or ethnically motivated.

Rising Violence

There was agreement across all jurisdictions – police, ambulance, hospitals, courts and education – that there had been, in the past few years, a pronounced increase, not only in the incidence of violence, but also in its severity. According to police, recorded assaults in the public domain in Victoria have increased by over 20% in the past five years to almost 14,000 a year; most of the increase is in night-time assaults (*Figure 1*). Melbourne metropolitan ambulance records show cases for assault have roughly doubled since 1999 to over 600 a month, with cases involving stabbings and gunshots jumping from about 50 to 100 a month (*Figure 2*). Convictions for 'offences against the person' in the Victorian Children's Court (which adjudicates cases involving those aged 17 and under) have also risen sharply in the past few years.

Figure 1. Recorded assaults in the public domain, by day and night, Victoria (source: Victoria Police).



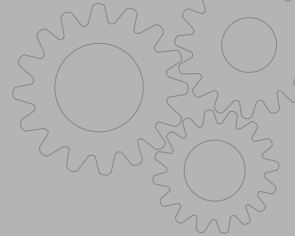
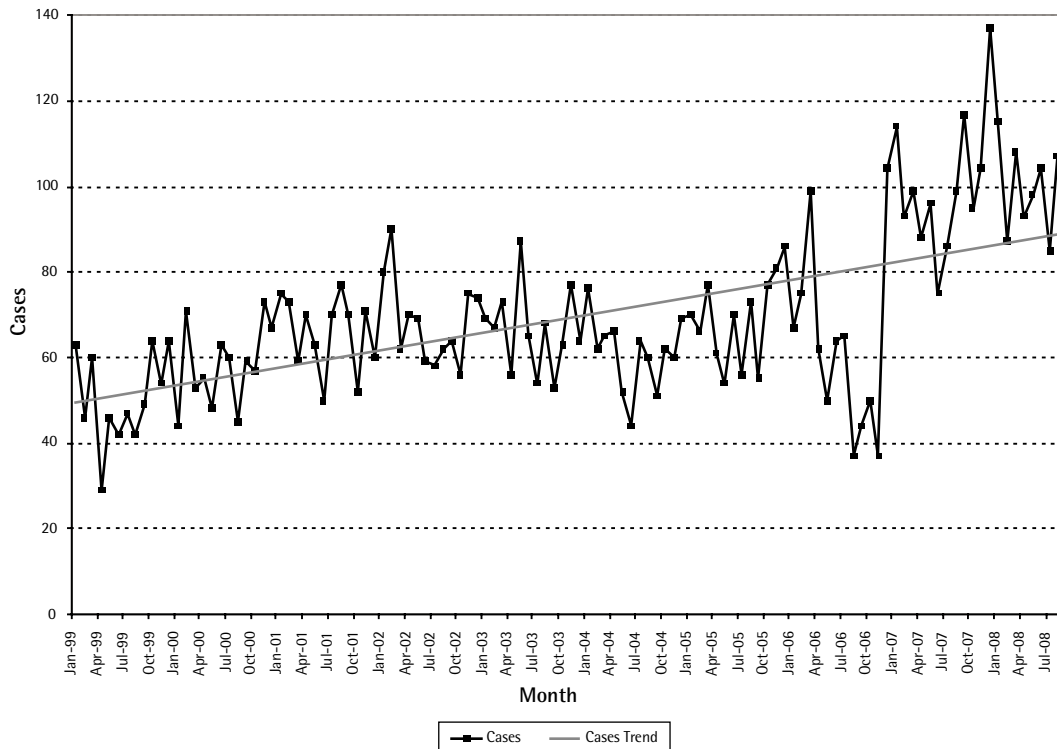


Figure 2. Monthly number of cases attended by Ambulance Victoria in metropolitan Melbourne classified at point of call to 000 as involving stabbings and gunshots (source: Ambulance Victoria).



The recent surge in violence is part of a long-term trend of rising rates of violent crime in Australia. With the exception of the homicide rate, which has been fairly stable since the 1970s, reported rates of violent crime are now higher than the rising rates recorded in the 1970s and 1980s. While rates of property crimes and robbery peaked in about 2001 and have since fallen (although robbery now appears to be rising again), assault rates increased 47% between 1995 and 2006. This increase was mainly due to a rise in more serious, aggravated assault, which increased by 46% between 1999 and 2006, compared to only 7% for non-aggravated assault. Rates of sexual assault have also increased.

It is not clear to what extent these increases are real or a result of greater awareness and reporting. However, it is improbable that a sustained rise in reported violent crime over

several decades would be wholly a statistical artefact. Supporting the view that the rise is at least partly real, hospitalisations due to assault among those aged 12-24 increased by 27% in Australia between 1996 and 2006.

Increasing Severity and Costs

What is particularly concerning police and other authorities is an apparent rise in the severity of violence.

Police officers... people who've been around a long time, [are] seeing a level of violence they have never seen before... It wasn't just that [people] punched someone, it was they were punched and kicked and people would come around and they would all be part of it as well.

[Before,] you got called to a pub brawl, and it was just a brawl... The worst thing that might have happened might have been a billiard cue around... now it's gone beyond that. It's the king hit, it's the glassing, the stabbings, the things that you didn't really see in the past.

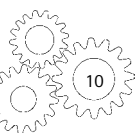
There does seem to have been something that's happened over the last couple of years... whereby we are seeing more young people coming into court for more serious offences of violence, and the age group seems to be dropping... we now seem to be dealing with 14 and 15-year-olds for very serious cases of violence.

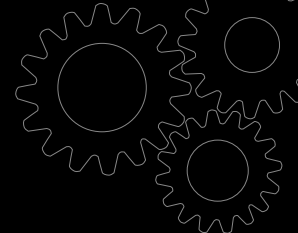
Much, but not all, of the violence is associated with alcohol and drug abuse (itself a form of antisocial behaviour) and involves young people in their teens and twenties (as both perpetrators and victims). Apart from the associated harm and suffering, antisocial behaviour is also putting a severe strain on services such as ambulances and hospitals. For example, the spring racing carnival attracts over 100,000 people to the races every day. Ambulances have to attend to up to 50 young people who are severely intoxicated and need treatment.

If you imagine 40 to 50 young people intoxicated who all need to go to hospital, that's 40 or 50 ambulances tied up for a period of time... that's 40 to 50 additional hospital beds need to be taken up in hospital... to look after these young people and let them sober up or whatever.

Handling violence in hospital emergency departments is very resource intensive: a third of the staff can be occupied with a violent patient. The changes over the last few years in the illicit substances people are using are also having an impact. Although the vast majority of aggressive presentations are alcohol-related, the ones that involve substances such as ice are qualitatively very different. Alcohol-related aggression is generally resolved in a matter of hours; the drug-induced problems can often take several days.

The level and nature of aggression in terms of the intensity of violence, the targeting of staff, the amount of resources that it requires to effectively manage, both in terms of the back-up security resources, sometimes involving the police, intensity of medical intervention and subsequent intensity of nursing observation and medical monitoring required and the duration of intervention, has indeed changed.





The recent upsurge in public brutality is hard to explain. It is possible Australian society has reached a tipping point, where the confluence or conjunction of many social changes and developments – short-term and long-term, specific and broad – has produced social conditions conducive to violence.

Specific factors involved include: alcohol and drug abuse; the growth of the night-time economy; the lack of sustained action to address the problem, coupled with a lack of good research evidence, at least in some key areas; links between antisocial behaviour and young people's health and

wellbeing; and broad social characteristics and changes in these, including poverty and disadvantage, the family and parenting, communications technology and the media, and an individualistic, consumer culture; and young people's biological and social development.

Australia may have reached a tipping point, where the conjunction of many social changes has produced social conditions conducive to violence.

These issues are discussed in this section. Some of the associations with increasing violence have a good evidence base; others are more speculative and conjectural.

Alcohol and drug use

It is widely acknowledged that much of the violence in public places is alcohol-related. There has been much political and media attention on binge drinking in the past year. However, it is not a new phenomenon: research was noting its growth at least 20 years ago. Evidence of whether it is continuing to worsen is mixed, depending on how it is measured.

However, it is possible that extreme binge drinking – well above the level used in surveys – has increased, associated with growth of the club scene and 24/7 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) lifestyles, and the shift from beer and wine to more intoxicating spirits and spirit-based drinks. Another possible factor in the recent rise in brutal crime is the shift in illicit-drug use over the past decade or so from cannabis and heroin to amphetamines such as ice, which can cause extremely aggressive behaviour.

The night-time economy

The marked growth of what is referred to as the night-time economy and the adoption of 24/7 lifestyles were a major focus of discussion. Some 300,000 people come into the Central Business District (CBD) of Melbourne on Friday and Saturday nights. The number of licensed venues has increased to the point where Melbourne now has 1,000 in a relatively small area. The number of licensed venues that operate after 3am in greater Melbourne has increased from 55 to 156 in three years. There has also been an increase in large public gathering such as sporting events and concerts (not all of them at night, of course).

This rapid growth has raised specific concerns such as the management of venues and the training of staff, not just in relation to serving drinks but also handling aggression. Another factor is the lack of public transport out of the CBD in the early morning, leaving thousands of people milling around the streets as clubs close. However, it was also noted that the problems of antisocial behaviour and violence were not limited to the Melbourne CBD. It is spread throughout the State and the community.

The problem of aggression and violence is not just a consequence of binge drinking or other forms of inappropriate alcohol consumption... the problem must [also] be understood in terms of patron and staff characteristics and interactions, and especially... aspects of the social and physical environments inside and outside venues.

The development is linked to the era of deregulation, which was designed to encourage competition in the market. This came out of the Federal Government's competition policy of the 1990s, and led to a policy environment in which the goal of all State governments is to reduce the regulatory burden. This also means commercial development takes precedence over public health and harm-minimisation.

The growth of the night-time economy is linked to economic deregulation, with commercial development taking precedence over public health.

The aim might have been to create a civilised, European environment of boutique bars and clubs, so enhancing, in Melbourne's case, the reputation it already has in this respect; but

the reality is rather different – a 'seething pit', one participant said. In Britain, the growth of the night-time economy has been described as the biggest single threat to public order and health and safety today. As one person observed, 'Yeah, well, actually it is a real European environment out there, but a bit less like Paris and more like the Somme'.

Prevailing strategies for the management of violence and disorder in Australia are primarily symbolic and they're not actually intended to affect industry profitability or to disturb... the slumber of ineffectual regulatory institutions.

The same story is in every State. We have emasculated people, emasculated organisations... doing their best, within a totally inadequate set of laws and procedures, actually to try to minimise harm... but with very few resources [and] with little political back-up.

Why are we surprised that, if we've handed alcohol over into a night-time economy and made the economic imperative so strong, our health imperative has suffered?

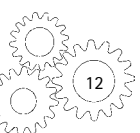
There is no evidence, or very limited evidence, in favour of alcohol or licensing accords (such as codes of practice or partnerships between licensees and formal regulators – police or licensing and local government agencies). This is because of a lack of a strong regulatory back-up, or an unwillingness to enforce it. One participant said licensees had used accords to 'suck in' or 'buy off' regulators to avoid stricter regulations. There is also a lack of evidence showing that 2am or 3am lockouts, traditional reactive policing (after-the-event investigations), and responsible server training (RST) programs reduce violence.

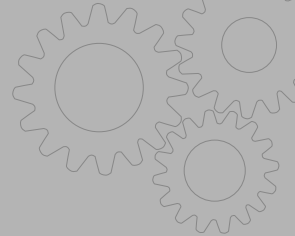
The regulatory pendulum may now be swinging the other way – mirroring the developments arising from the global credit crisis. The answer lies in striking a better balance between economic and health objectives and between formal regulation, informal agreements and community mobilisation.

It's not coming in again with a prohibitionist agenda... Part of the challenge is to develop a mix of regulatory strategies founded on evidence, which are sustainable and which actually reduce the problem over time.

I think that whole continuum of regulation from something that can be quite minor, on the ground at a local level, with local community collaboration, through to that big stick, is the framework we've got to have a look at.

The aim was to create European environment, but it's 'a bit less like Paris and more like the Somme'.





Social, economic and cultural drivers

The roundtable considered a range of broader social, economic and cultural changes that have been associated with long-term trends in young people's wellbeing and which could be linked to the recent rise in public violence. Some of these were discussed at length; others were raised only briefly.

Many children today don't get exposure to 'graduated risk' and don't learn to handle risk or failure.

Socio-economic status and disadvantage are important. These include very specific impacts: young men who 'look like the kind of person who might cause trouble' being excluded from venues, while the

girls they know are let in. Other considerations are much broader: the existence of a 'second world of adolescent health', which, in contrast to the mainstream of young people who are doing well, comprises those who are in protective care, leave school early, find themselves in the juvenile justice system, and are increasingly likely to be from immigrant groups.

The families who appear in the family division of the Children's Court, and whose children often end up in the criminal division charged with serious offences, often come from circumstances of poverty, social isolation, family violence, high drug and alcohol use, and mental-health problems.

If you are from an Aboriginal family you are ten times more likely to be in our family division, and if you are a child in a single-parent family you are four times as likely to be in our family division.

However, it is not clear that most violence comes from people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most of those who flock to the Melbourne CBD on weekends are not short of money. While most studies of youth problems show higher levels in poor and single-parent or blended families, this is not

always the case. Recent Australian research shows rates of antisocial behaviour are similar in disadvantaged and advantaged areas and across metropolitan, regional and rural localities. The large study cited below of student social and emotional wellbeing found, at most, only weak associations with socio-economic status.

Furthermore, international research suggests socio-economic factors are not the drivers of the increases in problems over time; they have occurred across all social classes and family types. Similarly, it is not certain that most violence is caused by a small group of repeat offenders rather than a larger group of 'one-off' or 'two-off' perpetrators.

We're talking about really dysfunctional kids all the way through... and my experience... is that on a street level, on a friendship level, there are people who are doing these dysfunctional behaviours who are not actually dysfunctional people.

Changes in *parenting* – both too much and too little – are also implicated. At the one end are 'helicopter parents', who are over-protective, over-concerned about their children's happiness and safety, so that the children don't get exposure to 'graduated risk' and don't learn to handle risk or failure, or to negotiate public spaces in acceptable ways. At the other end are the negligent parents who fail to provide what children need to flourish. As a recent report by primary-school principals noted, 'We ask people to do simple things like taking their kid to the doctor and it doesn't happen.'

Communications technology and the media are another major social and cultural influence, implicated in everything from marketing excessive drinking, allowing 'swarming' (the rapid gathering of large numbers of young people) and the amplification of peer pressure, to the commodification of young people's lives, the promotion of an individualistic and materialistic consumer culture, and the depiction of a world threatened by climate change and other global perils.

With respect to recent trends in serious violence, technological developments may have contributed to young people's perceptions of violence as the norm, a lack of respect and empathy, and an unawareness of how fragile the human body can be – that 'one punch can kill.' These and other attitudes are, however, also rooted in broader and deeper social changes going back decades, even centuries. In a sense, the media's role is that of a powerful, distorting, cultural lens through which people see the world and which shapes how they engage with it.

We regulate tightly our behaviour and choices when it comes to physical hazard — whether it's on the road, with speed limits or drink driving, or whether it's limiting chemical contaminants to products... But we don't do much around moral hazard or cultural hazard, and I think that's something that's crying out for more work.

People are surprised when they see they are much more fragile than they expected.

The rapid growth in communications technologies and media such as the internet (including YouTube, MySpace and

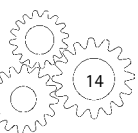
Facebook), computer and internet games, and mobile phones have transformed the images young people are exposed to, altering their perceptions of what is normal, including with respect to violence and its consequences. This effect is heightened by adolescents' sense of invulnerability, a degree of denial that is hard to pierce. One participant noted the 'genuine surprise' people get when, either as perpetrators or victims, they see they are much more fragile than they expected to be.

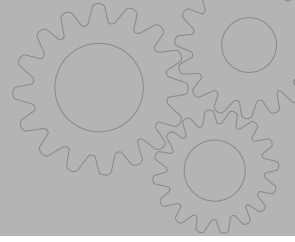
The example I use is the drunk 21-year-old who puts his fist through a pub window, and then, rather than... [seeing it as it is] when the sugar glass shatters on the movie, his forearm is in a million pieces and is going to require multiple plastic-surgery operations... On one occasion I remember saying to someone, 'you're going to have to have this amputated'.

The media may also be partly to blame for a decline in respect and empathy, although this may also be associated with increasing individualism, in which the self is construed as independent and separate from others. The lack of respect extends to police and paramedics. Violence against paramedics has increased; there are now situations where paramedics are not sent in unless police are in attendance, and their union has called for paramedics to be equipped with capsicum sprays.

It's just a lack of respect in a general sense... lack of respect for other people, other people's space, other people's property, other people's rights... to enjoy themselves, or whatever they do, or even be employed in those sorts of environments.

The other thing we're noticing in all the reports we're reading is that there is, in fact, no victim. The victim got it. The victim deserved it... Why didn't the victim stick up for him or herself. It's not my fault, I was just out there looking after myself. So there's no sense that someone here has suffered a significant harm as a result of this act.





The experience of growing up has changed enormously.

Violence saturates our culture, making it routine, and one consequence is the attractions of violence: violence can be fun.

Football players are used to the physicality of violence; they like 'the biff'. Parliamentary debate is often verbally violent or aggressive. Another consequence of both the real increase in violence and the media's focus on it is a culture of fear. While most people believe their own neighbourhoods are safe – even St Kilda – and the violence is happening somewhere else, this culture contributes to greater social isolation and over-protective parenting, which has its own dangers, as noted above.

Broad social changes help to explain why young people binge drink. As a participant said, some young people drink to escape the future, others to escape having no future.

There's more pressure to work harder, but also to party harder at the same time. But for this group, they still want to be able to function on Monday, and that makes a big difference [from] other people who are trying to escape basically not having an option and being excluded.

Beyond individual pressures and prospects, social changes and their consequences exert a more diffuse influence, shaping people's worldview and the general spirit or mood of the times. An American writer identified an 'apocalyptic nihilism' infecting young people today, citing a prison teacher who said that the young inmates he taught came from all sorts of backgrounds, but what united them were their apocalyptic suspicions, their belief that it was 'a late hour in the day and nothing much mattered any more'.

In a world stripped of meaning and self-identity, adolescents can come to understand violence itself as a morally grounded gesture, a kind of purifying attempt to intervene against the nothingness.

Developmental issues: growing up today

The biological and social development of young people is an important part of the equation explaining antisocial behaviour. There is a profound shift in patterns of antisocial behaviour across puberty, a complex biological event. It is more than growing bigger and maturing sexually. Stress-response systems mature and people begin to adapt to emotional and physical stresses in a way that is likely to last – a form of biological embedding. Social-affiliation systems are also changing.

It's the reason why adolescents become far more oriented to their peer group and to the media world, to the global world, to the internet, and these are important influences on the younger adolescent, and they are acutely sensitive to it in a way unlike any other point in life.

The brain also changes and develops, through adolescence right through the twenties, particularly those parts to do with emotional control, judgement and planning. The social learning that take place in these years becomes an important part of what gets embedded in brain development.

The experience of growing up has changed enormously. At one end, biological processes such as increasing weight and social processes such as the commodification or commercialisation of youth are propelling children into early adolescence. At the other end, adolescence is being extended into the late 20s and early 30s, at least by the traditional markers of maturity and adulthood – the three Ms of marriage, mortgage and maternity. However, this view is contested in that young people are also making adult choices about their lives, careers and futures at a quite early age – just not in the traditional, linear order.

Similarly, it is argued that the social changes discussed above have given young people an enormous amount of autonomy and control, as exemplified by the youthful crowds in the city on weekends, without what one participant called the 'wrap around of other social forces' such as multiple generations that help to frame what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Yet, as noted earlier, by some standards children and adolescents today have less autonomy today than previous generations. They are often engaged in supervised activities, and parents, on average, spend more time monitoring them today than in the past, with the result that healthy learning experiences – the opportunities to experiment, to make mistakes – are stifled.

About 30% of young Australians have low levels of social and emotional wellbeing.

These biological and social developmental processes are reflected in the patterns of antisocial and other offending

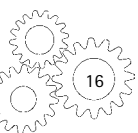
behaviour. Generally speaking, those who start young offend more often and for longer. Shoplifting in early adolescence becomes property crime and violence by the early 20s. Teens tend to offend in groups, those in their 20s as individuals. Younger offenders cite a variety of reasons – to get material goods, for revenge, excitement, or out of anger. Crimes by older offenders tend to be planned and utilitarian rather than spontaneous or for enjoyment. The age when offending is most prevalent is 15 to 19, and most offenders stop by their late 20s as they accept and comply with norms of acceptable social behaviour.

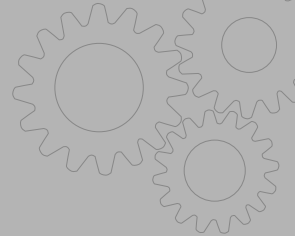
Young people's health and wellbeing

All of the factors considered above – social, economic and cultural, biological and psychological – are implicated in the rise in social violence. However, they also impact more broadly on young people's health and wellbeing, and these effects also form part of the causal pathways to violence.

Most mental illness is not associated with violence, and most violence is not associated with mental illness. While there may be some overlap, we need to be cautious about making any link between what's happening in the city on weekends with alcohol and drug intoxication and full-blown alcohol and drug disorders, or with psychological distress and mental illness. However, aggression, alcohol and drug abuse and other forms of antisocial behaviour are included in, and related to, wider constructs of social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing. These need to be considered in thinking about the precursors or drivers of violence.

A recent study of over 10,000 children and adolescents across Australia found that about 30% of the young people had low levels of social and emotional wellbeing, and that these people were much more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. They also exhibited many other negative emotions and behaviours, including feeling stressed, angry and lonely, and underachieving in school. They tended to bully more, feel they didn't belong, not get along with their classmates, were less likely to volunteer and help others, and to feel disconnected from home, school and community. They had significant developmental delays in social and emotional skills and values, and in attitudes and coping skills.





In other words, antisocial behaviour is part of, and related to, a wider category of problems affecting young people, which require a multi-prong approach, focusing on protective factors, to build young people’s social and emotional wellbeing.

Participants were frustrated by the absence of sustained research and implementation.

From a broader perspective, research suggests 20-30% of adolescents and young adults today are suffering significant psychological distress at any one time, with less severe stress-

related symptoms such as frequent headaches, stomach-aches and insomnia affecting as many as 50%. Mental disorders are the largest contributor to the burden of disease in young Australians, measured as both death and disability, accounting for almost half the burden. The weight of international evidence suggests that the prevalence of psychological problems has increased over successive generations of young people over the past fifty years or more.

Research and implementation

So far the discussion of explanations for rising antisocial behaviour and violence has focused on social, economic and cultural changes, both specific and general, direct and indirect, short term and long term. However another dimension of the explanation concerns why we have had such little success in arresting and reversing the trends.

The roundtable discussion around this failure focused on the absence of sustained research into what works and sustained implementation of promising interventions. 'I'm sick of pilot programs that go nowhere,' a participant said. While the concerns applied to most sectors or jurisdictions, they were articulated most forcefully in relation to the regulation of the night-time economy and actions to reduce alcohol-related violence in entertainment precincts.

There are no best buys — because there is no evidence about what works to reduce aggression and violence. There are a few promising strategies... Nowhere in the world has there been an adequate investment in the long-term research and intervention-action research which would produce a body of knowledge which could be a foundation for rational, social policy.

Even promising programs have proved impossible to sustain. Two major factors are: the lack of 'a big stick', a strong regulatory framework, to enforce compliance; and the loss of key people from programs, so that the programs cease or arrangements breakdown.

Another issue, at least as seen by some in the community, is the need for tougher sentences to deter people from behaving violently. However, the reasons for violence are complex and varied; there is no simply connection between 'locking them up' and stopping violent acts. For example, the perceived risk of detection appears to be more important to deterrence than the severity of penalties.

In education, in areas such as parenting and student-wellbeing programs, there appears to be better research evidence of what works. However, there is still a perceived need in these areas for more substantial research, monitoring, data collection and intelligence gathering. And even if the evidence is there, it isn't being implemented. There is a sense of frustration over the delays and hurdles in introducing early intervention, prevention and parenting programs on the scales needed to be effective. A decentralised education system is one hindrance.

With respect to research, the importance of a multidisciplinary approach goes beyond research into issues of specific relevance to violence; it also stems from broad, conceptual contributions. For example, epidemiology shows that the primary determinants of health are mainly social, economic, cultural and environmental, and so need to be addressed

at these levels. There is a relation between the mean of a characteristic in a population and the prevalence of deviance. The causes of cases can differ from the causes of incidence (in other words, what explains differences between individuals can be different from the explanations for differences between populations). A small reduction in risk in a large, low-risk population will usually produce bigger benefits than a large reduction in a small, high-risk group.

Violence cannot be understood by studying its precursors or triggers in isolation.

So while we do need to explain why some individuals, or some groups in the community, are more violent than others, if we just focus on

these explanations, we risk overlooking the things that affect the whole society – that change the 'mean' expression of the qualities that define it – and increase the risk or probability of some people becoming violent. This is especially important in understanding the impact of broad social changes such as increasing materialism and individualism, and the role of media and other technologies.

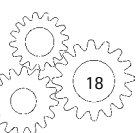
Systems research also offers important insights into the subject of this report. It shows that if we try to optimise one aspect of a system without paying attention to the rest, we will sub-optimize overall. Tampering with systems without understanding them often produces unanticipated side-effects. Systems are defined by the purpose they are designed to serve; change that purpose and the system changes. These points are relevant to understanding the impacts of the economic and commercial imperatives that define the 'night-time economy', and society more widely.

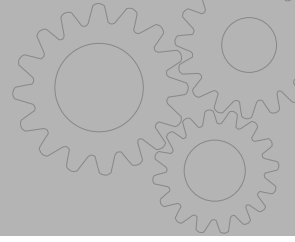
Complexity science is a related field that helps the understanding of the subtleties and complexities behind patterns and trends in antisocial behaviour. Societies are complex adaptive systems which are characterised by many different entities, most of which interact in ways that are often weak, diffuse and non-linear. These systems show openness, fuzziness, messiness, individuality, novelty, learning and adaptation, and blur distinctions between object and environment. In other words, we cannot understand a phenomenon like violence by studying its precursors or triggers in isolation; we need to study whole systems across several scales: venues, precincts, cities, societies.

Similarly, resilience research shows that the pressures of change can push systems, whether natural ecosystems or human societies, into new states. Such a shift is rarely gradual, but happens as pressures build until a threshold or tipping point is reached, when the system reaches a point of no return and changes in its state or 'identity' become inevitable. Such a change in state is associated with a different way of functioning and sometimes, as it occurs, the system can unravel, losing complexity and 'bleeding capital'. However, this destructive phase also offers the opportunity for creativity and innovation.

Understanding the resilience of a system – its ability to maintain its identity, its general structure and function – requires studying it at scales above and below the level of the system in question. As noted above, the discussion raised the possibility that the surge in public violence could signal a social tipping point. Understanding rising violence means understanding higher-order social changes and pressures as well as lower-order phenomena such as gangs and crowds, drinking behaviour, etc.

These insights help to explain why, as a society, we have a problem with violence and antisocial behaviour, and why it is not being solved.





Ways forward: different emphasis, but broad consensus

Individual participants emphasised different levels of prevention and intervention. However, there was general agreement that the full spectrum of sectors, scales and timespans needed to be considered. It was also recognised that governments needed to act quickly on the problem of violence, even in the absence of clear evidence on what works best. These aspects of the discussion are illustrated by these quotations:

The campaign can't be a 'one size fits all'. It has to be specifically targeted... it's an argument coming back to specific causes, specific situations, specific people, if we're going to develop our strategies.

I'm fully supportive of the social development model and perspective that's been proposed by some of the speakers... I do, however, think that's only important as context... in terms of immediate solutions to the knotty problem, we need to focus at a different end of the prevention spectrum, which is the management of venues and of public spaces and the issues around regulation and governance.

If we continue to focus on what's happening at that individual level, you miss the significance of these major changes that have occurred relatively rapidly and in relatively recent times, [and]... that I would suggest contribute to some of the ways people behave in society today.

We've found that it's the characteristics of the individual adolescents themselves that are important, so things like emotional control, whether or not they're female... family conflict, who they're hanging out with — so if they're hanging around with peers who are violent. How the community responds to that behaviour — so things like school suspensions and arrests. And also community attitudes as well around drugs and other antisocial behaviour... There's no magic solution, no magic bullet to this issue.

Crime prevention fundamentally is about encouraging the adoption and practice of socially normative behaviour... It's not just about individuals, it's about our culture, our community.

When you're just at the sort of 2.00 am end of it, with ambulance officers responding to incidents and police responding to incidents, you're at the behaviour end, and you're trying to manage the consequential behaviours of, I think, a more complicated relationship between markets and... how they drive people to behave in certain ways... I do think it's important to think about it from the point of view of markets and culture and behaviour, and how those things are related in particular generations, and they do tend to change from generation to generation.

The approach we take needs to be a community approach to solving problems that focuses, on the one hand, on the individual psychological factors of these young people and, on the other hand, on their school, home and community in helping to strengthen their connectedness... and building up their inner strengths.

THE SOLUTION

Towards the end of the roundtable discussion, participants were asked to identify some key recommendations – 'best buys' – to address antisocial behaviour. These recommendations reflect a range of interventions, actions and policies, from immediate steps to try to curb public violence through to longer-term strategies to tackle some of the more fundamental drivers in this area.

We need a better mix of regulatory strategies that balance open markets with harm minimisation.

It is clear that the issue of antisocial behaviour is a multi-faceted problem requiring multi-faceted responses. In keeping with this, it was

generally agreed that responses to antisocial behaviour couldn't be the sole domain of any one department; it needed an integrated strategy. It is therefore important that a whole-of-government approach is developed to achieve consistency on enforcement and preventative models.

The recommendations and policy responses are listed under headings: business regulation, law enforcement, medical services, the judicial system, education, technology and media, and community and culture. There may be some overlap between recommendations.

Business regulation

The challenge here is to develop a better mix of regulatory strategies that balance open markets and competition with harm minimisation, combine informal and formal regulation, and can be adapted to suit different localities.

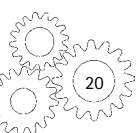
Stronger and enforceable regulatory mechanisms around licensed premises and other contested public spaces should be developed. Partnerships with industry need to be improved, but self-regulation should be underpinned by formal compliance and enforcement procedures.

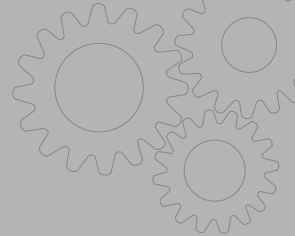
A whole of State Government / Local Government / NGO blueprint needs to be developed to model collaborative partnerships across agencies, communities, and health and educational experts.

A body or process should be established to provide the necessary leadership, coordination and funding support to address antisocial behaviour and violence. This has already been done successfully with road safety.

Lessons could be drawn from the successful public-health campaigns conducted on road safety and tobacco control, which had multiple elements or components.

Currently, liquor licensing is regulated in a piecemeal fashion, so that States and Territories respond largely independently. Mechanisms for regulating the industry at a national level need to be improved.





At the Commonwealth level, there is now a willingness to review national competition policy specifically in relation to alcohol. This should benefit any attempts to improve consistency and to better balance regulation for open competition with regulation for wellbeing and public safety.

Solid Australian evidence should be generated around the most promising strategies for the reduction of aggression and violence in the licensed environment and in public spaces, entertainment districts and night-time economy generally. A good example is the *Alcohol Linking Project* in NSW where data is collected regularly.

Policing of randomly selected premises at random times, and targeted policing of problem venues, should be introduced.

Current mandatory training programs focus on serving alcohol rather than understanding and controlling the dynamics and precursors of aggression and violence. *The Ontario Safer Bars Training Program* is one of the only staff training programs in the world with a focus on

aggressive behaviour. An equivalent program should be introduced, and should be run regularly to deal with the large turnover in staff in the hospitality industry.

As a result of changes to competition policy in 1996, data on drinking patterns have become difficult to collect. It is important that regulators have access to data about how much liquor is consumed, when and by whom.

Improvements should be made to environmental design in public areas (for example, lighting, CCTV), which can reduce crime and violence.

Law enforcement

Policing of randomly selected premises at random times by highly visible, uniformed police for periods of at least 20 to 30 minutes should be introduced. There should also be targeted policing of premises identified as a problem on the basis of accurate, last-drinks data (as with the *Alcohol Linking Program* in NSW).

A new set of indicators for antisocial behaviour should be established to better define what is being sought. Is it a reduction in violence, in severity, the type and number of offences within public places, a lowering in the involvement of young people, etc?

Responses to violence need to be tailored according to a better-developed typology of violence, which identifies where and what types of violence, the victims, the offenders, the impacts of the backgrounds, and geographical location. This typology should then be related to crime-prevention modelling.

Medical services

New street drugs and changing clinical presentations are challenging medical services at all levels. Therefore improved responses between police, ambulance and hospital services should be developed, in particular, to co-ordinate communications so that high-risk cases can be identified and responded to appropriately and quickly.

The ways in which hospitals respond to people presenting with aggressive behaviour need to be managed more effectively and strategically. One practical example is the safe-assessment or behavioural-assessment room in emergency departments. There are others and these should be investigated to better assess staffing requirements, equipment, co-ordination of resources, etc.

Organisers of public events should be held more responsible and accountable for events, including factoring in the potential costs to all aspects of the health system. This should be a consideration in granting permission and event planning.

If children are taught the necessary skills they become more responsible, better motivated and less inclined to engage in antisocial behaviour.

The best research and evidence arises from collaboration between the clinician at the coalface and the researcher in universities. Research collaborations, particularly

those at the intersections between the law enforcement and health areas, should be better identified and facilitated.

Gathering useful evidence for policy development requires effective evaluation tools and knowledge-transfer mechanisms. These also need to be developed in collaborative ways.

Judicial system

The development of a peer court to allow young people to be involved in the court process is worth looking at. This should include an evaluation of the peer courts in Canada and USA, to review whether they are being used for violent offenders.

An integrated approach is required across all agencies to co-ordinate responses in relation to housing, employment, mental health, and drugs and alcohol for young people in the juvenile justice system. This approach must include better support for young people with mental-health problems who, if they get into serious trouble, often end up in remand or sentenced to youth detention. We should consider establishing a secure therapeutic facility for these young people.

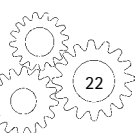
Young people who are in the care of the Department of Human Services and who have been placed in residential units should be offered a more therapeutic type of care so as to better support them within the community.

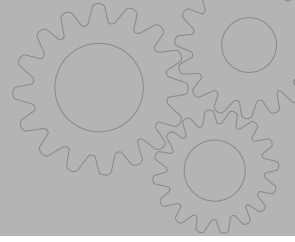
Education

The education system should broaden its focus beyond academic achievement and vocational skills and qualifications, to make the curriculum more relevant to young people's lives and passions. This should include more emphasis on individual health and wellbeing and, more generally, on educating young people about themselves and their world, which is important to enhancing population health and wellbeing.

More specifically, targeted programs to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of all students need to be more widely developed and used in schools. These include conflict management skills, developing empathy, and managing students' own emotional needs.

Research shows if children are taught the necessary skills they become more responsible, more self-managing, successful, better motivated, and are disinclined to engage in antisocial behaviour. For example, the *You Can Do It* program and the *Gatehouse Project* have proved effective in reducing antisocial behaviour and other problems among students. Resources should be provided to allow more schools to introduce programs like these, incorporating an evaluation component.





Strategies to reduce antisocial behaviour should distinguish between experimental and persistent behaviour. Interventions should also focus on the key times of risk, such as early primary years (5–8 years), the transition from primary to secondary school (12–14 years), and the transition from adolescence to adulthood, when antisocial behaviour is more likely to develop or increase.

We need to develop the capacity of staff within schools to work with other professionals and with a knowledge base they don't yet have, particularly with respect to mental health issues. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is well placed to progress this, in conjunction with the current restructure of student support services.

Anti-violence campaigns should not sensationalise, nor demonise young people.

Strong school cultures need to be developed and maintained, including management and leadership, climate, good communication, positively addressing attendance and behavioural issues,

building design and physical security, and using schools as community centres.

Bullying in school settings requires active management, including the use of restorative-justice approaches to prevent recurrence. Parents also need to be involved in these programs.

Because the family context is so important to development, there needs to be a greater investment in parent education, covering birth and childhood to adolescence.

Technology and media

The role and contribution of the media and communications technologies to antisocial behaviour, including violence, need greater recognition, and greater regulation to minimise adverse effects, where they exist.

A better understanding and response to antisocial behaviour in the cyber-environment are also required. This includes cyber-bullying, harassment, distribution of inappropriate materials, etc

On the positive side, there is scope for more media-based, public-education campaigns to address issues of violence, promoting notions like 'look after your mates', 'one punch can kill', or 'weapons are for wimps'. However, care needs to be taken not to exaggerate or sensationalise; using humour might help. Nor should they appear to demonise all young people over the acts of a few. The campaigns must also be just one small part of a larger set of activities, including regulation.

Youth antiviolence groups such as *Step Back Think* should be promoted through popular youth media like Facebook. Better use could be made of websites such as *Rate Your Venue*, an initiative that aims to make licensed venues accountable for what happens in and around them and which gives patrons a voice.

Community and culture

The changes in transitions from adolescence to adulthood have implications for the social dimensions of antisocial behaviour. Further research should be undertaken to explore the impacts of the broader social changes on the increase in antisocial behaviour.

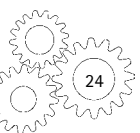
A much deeper and better understanding is required of a normative culture that has much fewer limits than previously existed. Much of the present evidence does not reflect the complexity of current social situations. For example, young people party in a different way to previous generations, which increases the level of risk they are exposed to.

The development of something like a 'social greening movement', drawing on sustainability principles, could help to engage young people more in the community and society. Such a movement would highlight our interrelatedness and provide a space to inquire into how we want to share public spaces together, and how we want to function as a community. We need to replace the traditional ways of passing down social norms from generation to generation, which have been eroded.

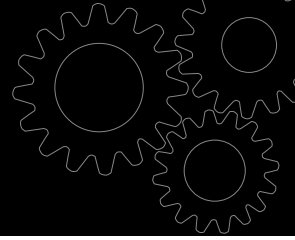
There is a need for youth leadership on the issue of antisocial behaviour. Instead of regulation from an external source, community regulation could be applied in ways that allow young consumers to make choices about where they want to go, and the social situations and circumstances they choose to be in.

Communities should be more involved in crime prevention. Programs such as *Communities That Care* encourage use of data to inform action plans, select policies, develop programs that are based on evidence, and evaluate strategies.

We require a better understanding of the ecology of the environments we are concerned with: the motivations, fears and preferences of all the people who congregate at different times for different reasons. We have to look for the common norm. Situations work well when negotiated agreements exist about acceptable boundaries.



CONCLUSION

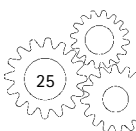


Participants agreed on the need for a multi-dimensional strategy spanning timeframes, social scales and government jurisdictions.

This report represents a wide-ranging, informed discussion on antisocial behavior and violence in public places. It should not be regarded as definitive or authoritative on every matter canvassed. Participants did not necessarily agree on all issues or recommended

It is clear that ad hoc, piecemeal responses to complex social problems such as antisocial behaviour in general, and public violence in particular, don't work. The key ingredients to successful action include strong leadership, effective partnerships between all relevant parties, a long timeframe for development and implementation, and an explicit attention to the sustainability of programs.

actions. While some participants focused on more immediate, direct interventions to address public violence, others emphasized a broader, social-development perspective. Nevertheless, most, if not all, participants agreed on the need for a multi-dimensional strategy spanning timeframes, social scales and government jurisdictions.



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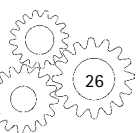
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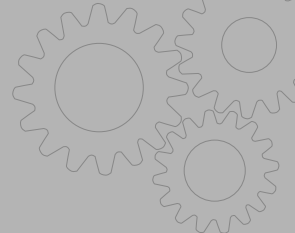
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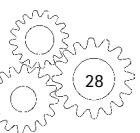
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