

Reporting rates of assaults at *The Star* casino by licensed premises staff

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Aim: To determine whether there has been any change in the rate of reporting of assaults at *The Star* casino by staff before and after the lockout reforms were introduced in February 2014. This paper also briefly examines the characteristics of both offenders and victims of assaults occurring at *The Star* casino.

Method: Narrative descriptions of all 278 non-domestic assaults recorded by police as having occurred at *The Star* casino from January 2012 to June 2016 were extracted from the police database (COPS).

Results: There was no statistically significant change in the proportion of reports of assaults emanating from staff or security at *The Star* casino after the introduction of the 2014 lockout reforms.

Keywords: *The Star* casino, lockout laws, assault, reporting, alcohol, violence, liquor license legislation.

Background

In November 2016 the ABC reported that "Sydney's Star Casino has been accused of hiding the full extent of violence at the venue with leaked documents showing nearly two-thirds of assaults on site are not being reported to police." (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), 1 November 2016).

In response to this article, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) announced it would undertake a review of police recorded incidents of assault occurring at *The Star* casino. The aim of this review is to determine if the inception of the 2014 lockout reforms resulted in a change in reporting rates of assaults to police by staff. While this approach only examines incidents reported to police, it will reveal whether there has been a decline in staff reporting relative to reporting by the public potentially signifying a shift to deliberate under-reporting of assaults by *The Star* after the introduction of the lockout reforms.

The specific questions addressed by the report are as follows:

1. Who are the victims of assaults at *The Star* casino?
2. Who are the offenders in assaults at *The Star* casino?
3. What proportion of assaults involves either the victim or offender being refused entry/being evicted?
4. Where at *The Star* casino did the assault occur?

5. Who reported the assault to the police?
6. Has the proportion of assaults reported by staff/security of at *The Star* casino increased or decreased after the introduction of the lockout laws?

Method

Each time police record a criminal incident they complete a narrative description of the circumstances surrounding the incident. To gain a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding the incidents of assault recorded at *The Star* casino, narrative descriptions of all 278 non-domestic assaults recorded by police as having occurred at *The Star* casino from January 2012 to June 2016 were extracted from the police database (COPS) and classified on a number of dimensions. The narrative review gives a more complete picture of the role of the casino as we are not limited to information contained in fixed fields coded by police. Full details of the classification and coding scheme are provided in Appendix 1.

After tabulation and coding, assaults were grouped into two cohorts: the 24 months prior to the introduction lockout reforms (n=92 incidents) and the 24 months after the lockout reforms were introduced (n=150 incidents). SPSS was used to analyse the data to determine the proportions of victims and offenders falling into various categories and to test for trends in reporting. Trend tests were carried out using χ^2 . The level of significance used in this analysis was 0.05.

Describing victims and offenders

Victims and offenders were classified into one of the following categories: patron, prospective patron, security guard, police, bar staff, person walking past/person unconnected to premises, taxi driver, hotel guest, unknown or other.

Individuals were recorded as patrons if the narrative indicated they were a customer of *The Star* casino at the time of, or before, the assault. Individuals were recorded as prospective patrons if the narrative indicated they intended to gain entry to the casino but were refused by security or staff. If an individual seemed unconnected to the premises in the narrative (e.g. there was no mention of having visited *The Star* casino and was just nearby) they were recorded as person walking past/unconnected to premises.

Depending on the nature of the reference in the narrative, bar staff were recorded as either bar staff or bar manager/licensee. All security staff were recorded as security. Any police officers involved were recorded as police and taxi drivers were recorded as such. Guests staying at residential apartments at the casino were recorded as hotel guests.

When it was unclear who the victim or offender was in the narrative, the status of the person was recorded as unknown. This may have been due to person reporting not seeing who the perpetrator or victim was or not being able to remember.

Any other victims or offenders were recorded as other (e.g. construction workers, DJ's or performers at the venue).

Describing the reporter

The police narratives for each assault were examined to determine who reported the assault to police or who called police to *The Star* casino premises. Reporters were classified into one of eight categories:

- staff at *The Star* casino (including bar staff, receptionists, function staff, wait-staff)
- security at *The Star* casino
- the victim of the assault (except when the victim was a member of staff or security, when this was the case the reporter was coded as staff or security respectively)
- a witness to the assault
- a member of the public not involved in the assault (e.g. a concerned family member who was not a witness to the assault)
- a police officer (where he or she was present at the time of the assault, i.e. was on patrol at *The Star* casino or was attending another incident at the casino at the time of the assault)
- any other person (including the perpetrator of the assault, ambulance officers or hospital staff)
- unknown reporter. When the reporter was not explicitly mentioned in the narrative they were coded as unknown, however when the perpetrator of the

assault was held by security 'until Police arrived', the reporter was coded as security.

The results from this study are divided into two sections. The first section describes the profile of victims and offenders involved in reported assaults. The second section examines the trends in the reporting of assaults at *The Star* casino.

Results

Who were the victims?

Table 1 shows that the majority of victims of assaults were patrons of *The Star* casino (62.2% of all incidents). Following this, the next highest victim category were security guards (21.9%), then taxi drivers (7.2%) and casino staff (2.5%). Less than two per cent of victims were unconnected to the premises or were just walking past the casino at the time of the assault (1.8%). Hotel guests (1.4%) and police officers (1.1%) were also the victims of assault in approximately one per cent of incidents. Of the total incidents reviewed, there were two cases where the victim was unknown (0.7%).

The overwhelming majority of incidents involved a single victim (89.2%). The average victim was male aged 29 years. Approximately two-fifths of victims (39.9%) were injured as a result of the assault, many requiring ambulance assistance.

Table 1. Number and per cent of victims assaulted at *The Star* casino

| Offenders | Number | % |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Patron | 173 | 62.2 |
| Security guard | 61 | 21.9 |
| Taxi driver | 20 | 7.2 |
| Casino Staff | 7 | 2.5 |
| Person walking past/person unconnected to premises | 5 | 1.8 |
| Hotel guest | 4 | 1.4 |
| Police | 3 | 1.1 |
| Unknown | 2 | .7 |
| Other | 2 | .7 |
| Person trying to enter premises (prospective patron) | 1 | .4 |
| Total | 278 | 100.0 |

Who were the offenders?

Table 2 shows that, as with victims, the largest category of offenders was patrons (75.2% of all incidents). The next highest category was an unknown offender (6.5%), followed by prospective patrons (5.4%); security guards (4.7%); taxi drivers (2.9%) and persons unconnected to premises (1.8%).

Of the 278 incidents reported to police, no offender details were recorded in just over one-third of incidents (34.5%). Where the offender details were recorded, the majority of incidents involved a single offender (89.0%). The average offender was male aged 25 years and was proceeded against by the police to court (58.8%).

Table 2. Number and per cent of offenders recorded for assaults at The Star casino

| Offenders | Number | % |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Patron | 209 | 75.2 |
| Unknown | 18 | 6.5 |
| Person trying to enter premises (prospective patron) | 15 | 5.4 |
| Security guard | 13 | 4.7 |
| Taxi driver | 8 | 2.9 |
| Person walking past/person unconnected to premises | 5 | 1.8 |
| Hotel guest | 4 | 1.4 |
| Casino Staff | 3 | 1.1 |
| Other | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | 278 | 100.0 |

Table 4. Location of assaults occurring at The Star casino

| Incident location | Number | % | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Inside Casino | Casino bar | 48 | 17.3 |
| | Marquee nightclub | 43 | 15.5 |
| | Gaming area | 42 | 15.1 |
| | Casino | 40 | 14.4 |
| | Car park | 5 | 1.8 |
| | Restaurant/Food court | 5 | 1.8 |
| | Hotel room | 5 | 1.8 |
| | Other (e.g. smoking areas, theatre) | 7 | 2.5 |
| | Total | 195 | 70.1 |
| Casino taxi rank | 33 | 11.9 | |
| At the entrance to casino | 26 | 9.4 | |
| Street outside casino | 24 | 8.6 | |
| Total assaults at The Star casino | 278 | 100.0 | |

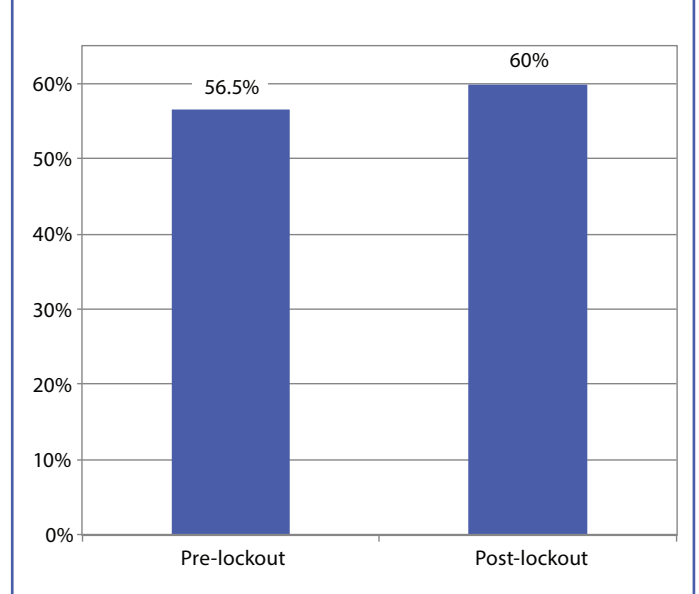
Who was refused entry or evicted from the premises?

Table 3 shows that one per cent of victims were refused entry (1.1%), while 6.8% of offenders had been refused entry. A higher proportion of reported incidents at *The Star* casino involved being evicted, with about 6 per cent (5.8%) of assaults involving the victim being evicted at some point, while 25 per cent (25.5%) of offenders were evicted.

Table 3. Per cent of victims and offenders refused entry or evicted from The Star casino

| | Yes | No |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| Victim refused entry? | 1.1% | 98.9% |
| Offender refused entry? | 6.8% | 93.2% |
| Victim ever evicted? | 5.8% | 94.2% |
| Offender ever evicted? | 25.5% | 74.5% |

Figure 1. Per cent of assaults at The Star casino reported by staff/security



Where did the assault occur?

Approximately 70 per cent of assaults reported at *The Star* casino occurred inside the casino premises, particularly at Marquee nightclub (n=43), in the gaming area (n=42) or at one of the other licensed premises within the casino (n=48). Table 4 also shows that just over 10 per cent (11.9%) of assaults occurred at the casino taxi rank. A further nine per cent of assaults occurred either at the entrance to the casino (n=26) or directly outside the casino on the street or footpath (n=24).

Who reported the assault to police?

Figure 1 shows the percentage of reports of assault made by staff/security at *The Star* casino. It shows that in the 24 months prior to the introduction of the lockout reforms approximately 57 per cent (56.5%) of incidents occurring at *The Star* were reported to the police by staff/security. In the 24 months after the introduction of the lockouts, the proportion of incidents reported by staff/security only slightly increased by three

percentage point (up to 60%). There is no indication in Figure 1 of any significant trend toward higher or lower levels of reporting by staff/security (p-value = 0.594).

Table 5 shows the percentage of assaults at *The Star* casino by who reported the incident to the police. This table also includes a breakdown by whether the assault occurred in the 24 month period before or after the lockout reforms were introduced. It shows that the most common reporter of assaults at *The Star* casino overall was staff/security (56.5% before the lockouts commenced and 60.0% after the lockouts commenced). This pattern, not surprisingly, is the same as that seen in Figure 1, with the proportion of incidents reported by staff/security remaining fairly consistent before and after the introduction of the lockout reforms.

The next highest category was the victim of the assault. Prior to the commencement of the lockouts approximately one-third of incidents were reported to police by the victim of the

Table 5. Who reported the incident to the police by time period

| Reporter | 24 months pre-lockout | | 24 months post-lockout | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Staff/Security | 52 | 56.5 | 90 | 60.0 |
| Victim | 31 | 33.7 | 32 | 21.3 |
| Police officer | 0 | 0.0 | 14 | 9.3 |
| Witness | 2 | 2.2 | 3 | 2.0 |
| Member of the public | 1 | 1.1 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Other/Unknown | 6 | 6.5 | 11 | 7.3 |
| Total | 92 | 100.0 | 150 | 100.0 |

assault (33.7%). In the post lockout period, slightly less assaults occurring at *The Star* casino were reported directly to the police by the victim (21.3%).

Interestingly, while before the lockout reforms commenced no assaults were detected by police who were present at the time of the assault. After the commencement of the reforms, almost one in ten assaults (9.3%) occurring at *The Star* casino were detected by police patrolling in or around the premises.¹

Discussion

Recent reform to liquor licensing legislation in February 2014 applied new restrictions on licensed premises to curb alcohol related violence. These new restrictions included 1.30am lockouts at hotels, registered clubs, nightclubs and karaoke bars in two designated areas: the Sydney CBD Entertainment Precinct and the Kings Cross Precinct. An earlier report by BOCSAR (Donnelly et al 2016) indicated that assaults in and around *The Star* casino (which is outside the “lockout” zones) had experienced a small increase in the number of assaults on its premises, prompting calls for *The Star* to be included in the lockout precincts.

In November 2016 *The Star* casino was accused of hiding the full extent of violence at the venue, with leaked documents purportedly showing nearly two-thirds of assaults on site are not being reported to police. The aim of this study was to determine whether there has been any change in the rate of reporting of assaults at *The Star* casino by staff. This paper also sought to gain an understanding of the characteristics of the victims and offenders. The results of this study suggest there was no significant change in the percentage of police reports of assault made by staff at *The Star* casino after the introduction of the 2014 lockout reforms.

The current study finds no evidence that staff at *The Star* have become less willing to report assaults on its premises to police. This is not to say that all assaults are being reported. Victim surveys (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) show that only about half of assaults across Australia are reported to police. Many incidents that technically constitute assaults are regarded by the victim as too trivial to report. However, if, following the liquor licensing reforms in February 2014, staff at *The Star* (or

any licensed premises) were being discouraged from reporting assaults to police, we would expect to see a decline in the percentage of reports emanating from staff. Neither the current study, or earlier similar studies by BOCSAR (Agnew-Pauley, 2014; Snowball & Spratley, 2013) have found evidence of such a decline.

The results for who reports assaults at *The Star* casino show that staff and security are the most common reporters of assaults to police. Following staff, victims are the next most common reporters of assaults. Patrons were the most common victims (62.2%) and offenders (75.2%), although a substantial number of victims of assaults were security guards (21.9%) suggesting that violence is likely to occur when security evict patrons from the premises or intervene in incidents. As well as being the victims, in around one in 20 incidents the offender involved in the assault was a security guard (4.7%). Taxi drivers were also frequently victims of assaults (7.2%), particularly at the casino taxi rank. Approximately 70 per cent of assaults reported at *The Star* casino occurred inside the casino premises. A further one in ten assaults occurred at the casino taxi rank (11.9%), at the entrance to the casino (9.4%) or directly outside the casino (8.6%).

Notes

1. The NSW Police had an onsite presence at *The Star* between February and September 2015.

References

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Appendix 1

| Variable | Description | Codes |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Casino | Did the incident happen in/at the casino? | 0=no; 1=yes |
| Casino location | Where at the casino the incident occurred | 0=inside; 1=casino taxi rank; 2=at the entrance; 3) street outside casino |
| Reporter | Who informed police? | 0 = Staff of licensed premises (including bar staff, licensee/manager of licensed premises, receptionists from clubs, and hired musical acts such as DJs); 1 = Security; 2 = Victim (except where the victim was a member of staff); 3 = Witness; 4 = Member of public not involved in the assault (e.g. a concerned family member); 5 = Police officer who was present at the time of the assault; 6 = Other (including ambulance officers, hospital staff or the perpetrator of the assault); 7 = Unknown |
| Victim | Who was the victim? | 1= patron, 2= person trying to enter premises (prospective patron), 3 = security guard, 4= police, 5=staff, 6 = bar manager/licensee, 7 = person walking past/person unconnected to premises, 8 = taxi driver, 9 = unknown, 10 = other, 11= hotel guest |
| Victim Injured | Was the victim injured as a result of the assault? | 0=no; 1=yes |
| Offender | Who was the offender? | 1= patron, 2= person trying to enter premises (prospective patron), 3 = security guard, 4= police, 5=staff, 6 = bar manager/licensee, 7 = person walking past/person unconnected to premises, 8 = taxi driver, 9 = unknown, 10 = other, 11= hotel guest |
| Victim Refused Entry | Was the victim ever refused entry to the premises? | 0=no; 1=yes |
| Offender Refused Entry | Was the offender ever refused entry to the premises? | 0=no; 1=yes |
| Victim Evicted | Was the victim ever evicted from the premises? | 0=no; 1=yes |
| Offender Evicted | Was the offender ever evicted from the premises? | 0=no; 1=yes |