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## Violent Crime in Bars: A Quantitative Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Research suggests that some barroom settings create a milieu conducive to the outbreak of violence. Few studies, however, use a large national dataset to investigate the nature and prevalence of violence in bars. This article attempts to help fill this research gap by examining data on bar violence from the National Incident-Based Reporting System for the years 2011–2015. Findings show that compared to other National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) locations, murder, aggravated assault, and simple assault are more likely to occur in bars. Furthermore, males, Caucasians, African Americans, and people 18–34 years old are more likely to be victims of violent crime at bars. Implications for security practices and measures within drinking establishments are also addressed.

### KEYWORDS

Barroom violence; criminal victimization; alcohol-related violence; National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

## Introduction

Voluminous research shows a strong association between violent crime and the consumption of alcohol (e.g., Collins, Quigley, & Leonard, 2007; Graham et al., 1980, 2006; Kantor & Strauss, 1990; Mayfield, 1976; Mungus, 1983; Myers, 1986; Parker, 1995). Alcohol use has been associated with homicide, assault, sex-related crimes, family violence, and persistent adult aggressiveness. Few studies, however, (e.g., Krienert & Vandiver, 2009; Savard, Kelley, & Merolla, 2017) use a national dataset or national crime survey to investigate violent crime at public locations where alcohol consumption is by far the highest—bars. This article helps fill this research gap by using data on bar violence from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) to better understand the nature of violent crime at bars.

## Literature review

The bar industry is enormous with tens of thousands of locations across the United States. The American Nightlife Association (2011) estimated that 19 million people regularly patronize bars resulting in gross earnings of around \$26 billion. The link between bars and violence has been recognized over time and across cultures. The classic “bar room brawl” is commonly depicted in popular culture and all too often people are injured, killed, or sexually assaulted in drinking establishments. However, seminal research by Cavan (1966) and LeMasters (1975) and more recent research (e.g., de Andrade, Homel & Mazerolle, 2016; Franquez, Hagala, Lim, & Bichler, 2013; Madensen & Eck, 2008) shows that aside from alcohol served in these establishments, several situational and motivational factors that follow regarding the environment, management, and security of bars appear to influence the likelihood of violent behavior in these establishments.

### ***Masculine gendered spaces***

Gendered spaces (Spain, 1992) are viewed as public locations with the following characteristics: (a) occupants (e.g., patrons and employees) are predominantly either male or female; (b) atmosphere (e.g., décor, lighting, product placement) generally reflects traditional preferences of either females or males; and (c) occupants’ (e.g., patrons and employees) behavior tends to reflect traditional masculine or feminine values. Bars appear to qualify as “masculine gendered spaces.” On average, more males than females patronize these establishments, males spend more time in bars than females, and the atmosphere in bars (e.g., décor, programs displayed on TV screens) more often reflects traditional masculine preferences.

Sex is biological. Gender, however, is socially constructed. Every society expects and reinforces conformity to certain attitudes and behaviors deemed appropriate for men and women. Masculine values of control, aggression, and dominance are expected and rewarded in many communities. Many males in these communities internalize a machismo self-view; the belief that to be a “real man” one must display characteristics such as strength, hypersexuality, and domination. These values may contribute to violence among males in certain barroom environments (DeMichele & Tewksbury, 2004; Graham & Homel, 2008). Consumption of copious amounts of alcohol can be considered evidence of these characteristics (Ross-Houle, Atkinson, & Sumnall, 2016). Thus, bars punctuated with masculine themes and décor coupled with patrons holding masculine attitudes may promote heavy drinking and, in turn, violent behavior. Research suggests that masculine gendered spaces may increase patrons’ exposure to

motivated offenders and heighten their risk of violent criminal victimization (e.g., Savard, Kelley, & Merolla, 2017; Popp & Peguero, 2011).

### ***Overcrowding***

Another factor associated with aggression and violence in bars is overcrowding. Research shows that bars that ignore capacity limits can result in overcrowding which can increase the likelihood of violent behavior (Felson, 1997). For example, if a bar requires a cover charge to enter, emphasizing cash over safety concerns can lead to overcrowding. Also, employees who use special passes or favoritism to allow certain people (e.g., friends) to enter the bar ahead of others (i.e., line cutting) can contribute to overcrowding as well as spawn resentment from less favored patrons who may become uncooperative with staff (Felson, 1997; Monaghan, 2002). An overcrowded dance floor can result in accidental bumping which, fueled by alcohol, can lead to violent behavior (Benson & Archer, 2002; Graham & Wells, 2003; Tuck, 1989). Also, crowding in high traffic areas can slow down the time it takes for staff to respond to problem situations.

### ***Physical layout***

The physical design of a bar can also impact the likelihood of violent behavior (Homel & Clark, 1994). For example, a large bar with a well thought out physical design may experience fewer violent acts than a smaller bar with a poor physical design. A facility with a well-planned layout (e.g., properly designed choke points and counter flows; adequate lighting and ventilation; strategically placed rest rooms) can better accommodate, separate, and disperse dense populations. Patrons in a bar with a poor physical layout combined with loud music, poor ventilation, excessive heat, and dimly lit rooms can become frustrated and perceive a claustrophobic atmosphere even when the bar is well below capacity (Green & Plant, 2009; Leonard, Collins & Quigley, 2003; Roberts, 1998). A bar's décor can also be an important security consideration because it contributes to the atmosphere of a drinking establishment (Graham & Homel, 2008).

### ***Theme***

Another factor that appears to relate with bar violence is the “theme” of a bar. For example, Roberts (1998) found that the type of music played in a bar may incite violence. Music with violent lyrics may attract people more likely to adhere to the “code of the streets” which posits that any perceived slight against one’s “honor” must be met with aggression

(Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003; Anderson, 1999; Mast & McAndrew, 2011). Also, some bars are known as locations for “hooking up.” This theme can foster competition regarding sexual conquests which may increase the likelihood of violence (Graham & Homel, 2008). A behavior called “mean muggin” sometimes occurs during this competition and involves one patron staring down another in an aggressive manner. This gesture can provoke a violent response from recipients who believe they must defend their honor (Waldron, 2009).

### **Risky facilities**

Some bars are known as “dives,” “pick-up joints,” or “fighting bars” (Graham et al., 2006; Homel & Clark, 1994). Police agencies have designated many such bars as “risky facilities” (Clarke & Eck, 2007) based on a disproportionate number of violent encounters that occur in and around them (Scott & Dedel, 2006; Roncek & Maier, 1991). Some bars have a reputation for fighting. Aggression in these facilities is seen as normal and expected (Clarke & Eck, 2007; Scott & Dedel, 2006). The environment in these bars provides a stage for grievances and macho concerns to be played out (Graham & Wells, 2003). Research shows that crime tends to cluster around the immediate area of these bars, many of which are in higher crime areas (Roneck & Bell, 1981; Wells, Graham & West, 1998). These facilities are more likely than their less risky counterparts to have individuals congregating outside after closing (Savard & Kennedy, 2014). These gatherings have been associated with aggression and violence particularly when they involve people of different ethnic backgrounds (Forsyth, 2006; Graham et al., 2006).

### **Sports bars**

Verbal altercations between patrons at sports bars over the results of televised sporting events can escalate to the point of violence. After a heated verbal exchange, it is not uncommon for a victim to remove him/herself from the situation by leaving the bar, whereupon the assailant follows him/her outside and attacks him/her in the parking lot. These perpetrators have been referred to as “highly-identified dysfunctional sports fans” (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). These people can become loud, obnoxious, angry, and occasionally physically aggressive toward others when displeased with their team’s progress. These patrons also tend to drink too much and are typically described as bullies (Courtney & Wann, 2010; Nelson & Wecshler, 2003; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Altercations with these excitable and aggressive people tend to escalate in somewhat predictable phases

which, at various points, may allow management and security to intervene (Luckenbill, 1977). Intervention inside the bar or after the victim leaves the bar may serve to resolve the situation and any consequent violence. On the surface, a sports bar may not appear to be a “risky facility.” However, an examination of police activity may reveal an extensive criminal history at a sports bar and/or its immediate surroundings.

### ***Happy hour***

It is not uncommon for bars to advertise drink specials during certain times of day, and/or in conjunction with special events. The term “happy hour” has colloquially become associated with reduced liquor prices. An obvious problem with encouraging drinking via low prices is the additional alcohol patrons tend to consume (Babor, Mendelson, Uhly, & Souza, 1980) and a heightened risk of alcohol-related aggression. Enticed by low drink prices, some bars become regular “hangouts” for younger patrons and increased violent crime may be a potential side effect (Miller, Furr-Holden, Voas, & Bright, 2005).

### **The present study**

This study uses crime data from the NIBRS for the years 2011–2015. The NIBRS is a secondary dataset published annually since 1991 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Unlike the Uniform Crime Reporting System (UCR) which collects aggregate level data, the NIBRS collects incident-level data from U.S. law enforcement agencies that submit monthly reports to the FBI (Addington, 2007). In 2015, for example, 6,648 law enforcement agencies covering a population of 96 million submitted crime data via the NIBRS (Fisher, 2017). Although a large sector of the population is not yet covered by the NIBRS, numerous studies have utilized NIBRS data to conduct criminological research (Savard, Kelley, & Merolla, 2017; Budd & Bierie, 2017; Drawve, Thomas, & Walker, 2014).

The NIBRS appears to be an ideal dataset for this study because it provides incident-level data which specifies crimes at particular locations. The locations specified by the NIBRS include bars. Because the major units of analysis in this study are incidents of violence, the NIBRS allows us to focus on violent crime that occurs in bars. Given that over 80% of incidents reported in the NIBRS involve only one crime, this study examines incidents involving one violent crime. Because the dependent variable in this study is dichotomous, a logistic regression model is utilized.

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations for all study variables.

	Percentage	N
Dependent variable		
Bar	1.67	3,134,182
Independent variables		
Crime type		
Simple assault <sup>a</sup>	73.92	3,134,182
Aggravated assault <sup>a</sup>	14.85	3,134,182
Robbery <sup>a</sup>	3.46	3,134,182
Sexual assault <sup>a</sup>	7.03	3,134,182
Murder <sup>a</sup>	.21	3,134,182
Victim characteristics		
Male <sup>b</sup>	36.56	3,134,182
White <sup>c</sup>	67.91	3,134,182
Black <sup>c</sup>	30.29	3,134,182
<18 <sup>d</sup>	15.72	3,134,182
18–24 <sup>d</sup>	21.70	3,134,182
25–34 <sup>d</sup>	25.98	3,134,182
Offender characteristics		
Male <sup>e</sup>	75.55	3,134,182
White <sup>f</sup>	60.88	3,134,182
Black <sup>f</sup>	37.23	3,134,182
Alcohol Use <sup>g</sup>	13.36	3,134,182
Relationship characteristics		
Intimate partner <sup>h</sup>	38.68	3,134,182
Acquaintance <sup>h</sup>	21.02	3,134,182
Stranger <sup>h</sup>	9.18	3,134,182
Ecological characteristics		
South	25.58	3,134,182
Midwest	19.39	3,134,182
East	5.00	3,134,182
Weekend <sup>i</sup>	25.70	3,134,182
Weapon type		
Personal weapon <sup>j</sup>	75.08	3,134,182
Handgun <sup>j</sup>	3.51	3,134,182
Knife <sup>j</sup>	4.48	3,134,182

<sup>a</sup>Reference Category is other crime. <sup>b</sup>Reference category is female victim. <sup>c</sup>Reference Category is other race victim. <sup>d</sup>Reference Category is >35. <sup>e</sup>Reference Category is female offender. <sup>f</sup>Reference Category is other race offender. <sup>g</sup>Reference Category is no alcohol use. <sup>h</sup>Reference Category is other relationship. <sup>i</sup>Reference Category is weekday. <sup>j</sup>Reference Category is other weapon.

## Dependent variables

One dependent variable is used to measure crime in bars. The variable is dichotomous and identifies if a violent crime occurred in a bar (1=yes, 0=no). As shown in Table 1, approximately 2% of all 2011–2015 NIBRS's violent criminal incidents occurred in bars.

## Independent variables

Table 1 provides a descriptive analysis of the independent variables used in this study.

### Crime type

Crime type variables, and their percentage of total violent crimes, are simple assault (73.92%), aggravated assault (14.85%), sexual assault (7.03%),

robbery (3.46%), and murder (.21%). Crime type was coded using five dummy variables: simple assault (1 = yes, 0 = no), aggravated assault (1 = yes, 0 = no), robbery (1 = yes, 0 = no), sexual assault (1 = yes, 0 = no), and murder (1 = yes, 0 = no).

### ***Victim characteristics***

Victim characteristics include three dichotomous variables: gender (male: 1 = yes, 0 = no), race (White: 1 = yes, 0 = no; Black: 1 = yes, 0 = no), and age (<18: 1 = yes, 0 = no; 18–24: 1 = yes, 0 = no; 25–35: 1 = yes, 0 = no). In this sample, 36.56% of crime victims were male, 67.91% were White, 30.29% were Black, 15.72% were under age 18, 21.70% were between the ages of 18–24, and 25.98% were between the ages of 25–34.

### ***Offender characteristics***

Offender characteristics are measured using three dichotomous variables: gender (male: 1 = yes, 0 = no), race (White: 1 = yes, 0 = no; Black: 1 = yes, 0 = no), under the influence of alcohol (1 = yes, 0 = no). About 76% of offenders were male, approximately 61% were Caucasian, about 37% were African American, and approximately 13% were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense.

### ***Weapon characteristics***

Weapon characteristics are measured using three dichotomous variables: handgun (1 = yes, 0 = no), knife (1 = yes, 0 = no), and personal weapon (e.g., hands, feet, teeth; 1 = yes, and 0 = no). Overall, slightly over 75% of offenses involved the use of a personal weapon. Handguns were used in about 3% of offenses and knives in approximately 4% of incidents.

### ***Victim-Perpetrator relationship***

Relationship between victim and perpetrator is measured using three dichotomous variables: intimate partner (1 = yes, 0 = no), stranger (1 = yes, 0 = no), and acquaintance (1 = yes, 0 = no). Approximately 37% of victimizations involved an intimate partner, about 21% involved an acquaintance, and about 9% involved strangers.

### ***Ecological characteristics***

Three dichotomous variables are used to measure ecological characteristics: East (1 = yes, 0 = no), Midwest (1 = yes, 0 = no), and South (1 = yes,

0 = no). About 25% of victimizations occurred in the South, around 19% in the Midwest, and 5% in the East. An additional dichotomous variable was used to measure when during the week the incident occurred: weekend (1 = yes, 0 = no). Overall, approximately 26% of victimizations occurred during weekends.

## Results

Findings from the logistic regression are presented in [Table 2](#). Regarding crime type, Model 1 shows that murder, aggravated assault, and simple assault are significantly more likely to occur at bars than at other locations. However, Model 1 also indicates that robbery is less likely to occur at bars compared to other locations. No significant difference was found for sexual assault.

Regarding victim characteristics, Model 1 shows that when a crime occurs in a bar, the incident is significantly more likely to involve males. Regarding race, when a crime takes place in a bar, these incidents are significantly more likely to involve Whites and Blacks. Furthermore, Model 1 shows that when a crime occurs in a bar, these incidents are more likely to involve people between the ages of 18–24 and 25–34.

Regarding offender characteristics, Model 1 indicates that when a criminal incident occurs at a bar, males are less likely to be the perpetrators. Regarding the interaction of male offender with relationship type, Model 2 shows that male bar patrons are significantly less likely to victimize an acquaintance, and significantly more likely to victimize a stranger.

In Model 1, the results regarding offenders' race shows that when a crime is reported in a bar setting, Caucasians are more likely to be the offenders and African Americans are less likely to be the offenders. Finally, when crime occurs in barroom environments, people are significantly more likely to be under the influence of alcohol when engaging in criminal behavior.

Regarding the use of weapons, Model 1 shows that when a weapon is used during bar violence, personal weapons (e.g., hands, feet, elbows, head, teeth) are significantly more likely to be used. Knives and handguns, on the other hand, are significantly less likely to be used as weapons in bar violence. The interaction between weapon and crime type in Model 3 shows that handguns have a positive effect for murder. Furthermore, the interaction effect in Model 3 for aggravated assault shows that personal weapons has a positive effect and handguns has a negative effect.

Regarding relationship characteristics between victim and perpetrator, Model 1 shows that when a violent act occurs in a bar, strangers and acquaintances are significantly more likely to be the perpetrators. Model 1

**Table 2.** Odds ratios from logistic regression predicting bar violence.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age of victim (0 = >35)			
<18	.127* (.035)	.127* (.035)	.127* (.035)
18–24	1.33* (.012)	1.32* (.012)	1.33* (.012)
25–34	1.58* (.011)	1.57* (.011)	1.58* (.011)
Time of crime (0 = weekday)			
Weekend	2.11* (.010)	2.11* (.010)	2.11* (.010)
Offender alcohol use (0 = no alcohol use)			
Alcohol use	4.00* (.010)	4.00* (.010)	4.00* (.010)
Weapons use (0 = other weapon)			
Handgun	.424* (.034)	.422* (.034)	.543* (.080)
Knife	.530* (.030)	.529* (.027)	.481* (.133)
Personal weapon	1.23* (.013)	1.23* (.013)	1.20* (.015)
Gender of victim (0 = female)			
Male	1.25* (.010)	1.30* (.011)	1.25* (.010)
Gender of offender (0 = female offender)			
Male offender	.789* (.011)	.835* (.024)	.788* (.011)
Race of victim (0 = other race)			
White	1.20* (.037)	1.20* (.037)	1.20* (.037)
Black	1.12* (.040)	1.12* (.040)	1.12* (.040)
Race of offender (0 = other offender)			
White offender	1.08* (.032)	1.08* (.032)	1.08* (.032)
Black offender	.715* (.034)	.717* (.034)	.715* (.034)
Victim/offender relationship (0 = other family)			
Intimate partner	.425* (.017)	.403* (.032)	.424* (.017)
Acquaintance	3.07* (.014)	3.77* (.024)	3.07* (.014)
Stranger	9.03* (.014)	8.00* (.026)	9.03* (.014)
Crime type (0 = other crime)			
Simple assault	2.50* (.100)	2.50* (.100)	2.56* (.100)
Aggravated assault	3.10* (.100)	3.10* (.100)	3.09* (.102)
Sexual assault	.919 (.103)	.951 (.103)	.942 (.103)
Robbery	.633* (.104)	.621* (.104)	.623* (.104)
Murder	2.41* (.145)	2.43* (.145)	1.33 (.208)
Region of country (0 = west)			
East	.718* (.023)	.720* (.023)	.718* (.023)
Midwest	.988 (.012)	.988 (.012)	.987 (.012)
South	.801* (.012)	.801* (.012)	.801* (.012)
Victim/offender relationship by male offender			
Intimate partner*male offender		1.07 (.039)	
Acquaintance*male offender		.734* (.029)	
Stranger*male offender		1.16* (.031)	
Crime type by weapons use			
Aggravated assault*handgun			.713* (.010)
Aggravated assault*knife			1.13 (.136)
Aggravated assault*personal weapon			1.07* (.027)
Murder*handgun			3.01* (.236)
Murder*knife			1.42 (.330)
Murder*personal weapon			1.24 (.304)

Note. Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ .

also shows that acts of violence in bars are significantly less likely to occur between intimate partners.

Regarding ecological characteristics, Model 1 shows that violent crime in bars is significantly more likely to occur on weekends than during the traditional work week. Regarding region of the United States, Model 1 shows that violent crime is significantly less likely to occur at bars located in the eastern and southern regions.

## Discussion

Findings of this study using data from the NIBRS appear to provide a deeper understanding of several dimensions of bar violence that follow.

### **Violent crime in bars**

The findings show that murder, aggravated assault, and simple assault are more likely to occur at bars than at other locations. Murder, aggravated assault, and simple assault are typically viewed as expressive crimes involving intense emotions such as anger, jealousy, and humiliation. Because alcohol impairs peoples' cognitive functioning and reduces peoples' ability to control intense emotions, these emotions are more likely to be activated and acted on at bars compared to other locations. This view appears to be supported by other national crime surveys (e.g., Uniform Crime Report) which show that murder, aggravated assault, and simple assault are generally driven by intense negative emotions. Exacerbated by alcohol, violent acts at bars are often accompanied by a strong desire of the perpetrator to "hurt" as a response to anger, frustration, and the perception that an action of the victim was wrong and/or harmful and, therefore, the victim must be punished (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Once the decision to fight or attack is made by perpetrators, their heightened emotions often make their violent behavior more severe and even lethal (Berkowitz, 1986).

The findings show that robbery, on the other hand, is less likely to occur at bars than at other locations. Robbery is typically viewed as an instrumental or opportunistic crime involving rational choices by perpetrators regarding factors such as suitable targets and capable guardians (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Robbery locations are generally not picked at random by motivated offenders. These perpetrators typically choose locations based on how familiar they are with them, how comfortable they are operating in them, the amount of guardianship present, the availability of easily accessed escape routes, and the attractiveness of potential targets (Miethe & McCorkle, 1998). It is not uncommon for robberies to occur at locations that have a high population turnover such as banks, shopping centers, and grocery stores. Robbers may be dissuaded from offending in bars because they perceive fewer suitable targets and more capable guardians present at these locations.

Furthermore, the findings show that violent crime is significantly less likely to occur in bars located in the eastern and southern regions of the United States. This finding was unexpected because research shows that southern states have a higher percentage of people who adhere to "the code of the streets" (Mast & McAndrew, 2011). Finally, and not surprisingly, the findings show that violent crime in bars is significantly more likely to occur on

weekends when bars are typically more crowded and patrons are generally more inebriated.

### ***Victims of bar violence***

The findings show that when crime occurs in bars, the victims are more likely to be males. This finding may be explained in part by the fact that the typical bar is a “masculine gendered space.” On average, more males than females are present at these facilities, more heavy drinking males than heavy drinking females tend to frequent these facilities, and males who regularly patronize bars are more likely than their female counterparts to demonstrate attitudes and behavior that reflect control, dominance, sexual prowess, and physical strength (Savard, Kelley, & Merolla, 2017; Neff, Prihoda, & Hoppe, 1991).

Also, the findings show that when criminal incidents occur at bars, people between the ages of 18–24 and 25–34 are more likely to be victimized. Certain bars cater to a younger cohort (Miller et al., 2005). The increased propensity for people in these age groups to be victimized is often exacerbated by the lure of cheap alcohol offered at many bars that are regular “hangouts” for young drinkers. Considerable research shows a positive correlation between violent offending and younger individuals (Britt, 1994; Sommers & Baskin, 1992). Problems of violence and aggression can be exacerbated when cheaply priced drinks are used as a marketing strategy to attract younger customers. Furthermore, special events promoted at these facilities can result in hundreds of young patrons drinking copious amounts of alcohol, competing for the attention of young women, and dancing on crowded dance floors (Purcell & Graham, 2005).

### ***Perpetrators of bar violence***

The findings show that males are significantly less likely to be perpetrators of violence at bars. This finding was unexpected because considerable research shows that young males are particularly at high risk for aggression in bars (Graham & Wells, 2001; Leonard, Quigley & Collins, 2002). For example, Graham and Wells (2003) found that for many young men, aggression at bars reflects a “rite of passage” or form of social conformity, allowing these males to feel strong, manly, and dominant. Alcohol can make young people think and feel more powerful and strong, more likely to overestimate their own power, and increase impulsive and risk-taking behavior. Unfortunately, people who initiate bar altercations often become unintended victims of their own aggression. In these cases, the person who initiates the aggression ends up being injured or even killed by the person on the receiving end who overreacts and responds with excessive force (Wolfgang, 1957).

Interestingly, other research (e.g., Krienert & Vandiver, 2009) shows a significant positive relationship between female offending and bar violence. Females in inebriated states may be more likely to engage in heated arguments and/or become uncharacteristically bold toward someone who makes a rude or sexually suggestive comment. When bar violence involves a female patron, however, the victim is typically another female or an acquaintance (Savard, Kelley, & Merolla, 2017). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for fights to break out at bars between people competing for the attention of other individuals or because of one person's rude or sexually suggestive comment to another person's friend or significant other. Females can be subjected to violence either indirectly or directly during such altercations.

Research also shows that females are more likely to be victims of sexual assault at bars. Viewed through the lens of masculine-gendered spaces (Savard, Kelley, & Merolla, 2017), the increased sexual assault risk for females at bars is not surprising. On average, most sexual assaults against females are perpetrated by males; more males than females are typically present at bars; traditional masculine attitudes (e.g., "machismo") and behavior (e.g., aggressive, obtrusive) are more likely to be displayed at bars than at other locations; and the consumption of alcohol (and other substances) at bars can compromise patrons' common sense and self-control, and inhibit the capacity of female patrons to recognize danger and take appropriate defensive action (Buddie & Parks, 2003). Additional research (e.g., Spradley & Mann, 1975) shows that female bar employees are at heightened risk of sexual aggression by male patrons. Conversely, Clover (2003) reported that female bar patrons are at increased risk of sexual aggression by male staff.

Finally, the results regarding ethnicity of offenders shows that when violence happens at bars, the incidents are significantly more likely to involve Caucasians.

### ***Victim-perpetrator relationship***

The findings show that when violent acts occur at a bar, strangers are significantly more likely to be the perpetrators. The findings also show that male bar patrons are significantly less likely to assault acquaintances and significantly more likely to assault strangers. This finding may be partially due to weaker social bonds that typically exist between strangers than between acquaintances. Furthermore, because alcohol can lower people's inhibitions, the likelihood of violence and aggression may be heightened when strangers occupy the same space which may be compounded by factors such as overcrowding and competition for sexual conquests.

### **Weapons in bar violence**

The findings show that for nonlethal incidents of bar violence, personal weapons (e.g., hands, feet, elbows, heads, and teeth) are significantly more likely to be used than knives and handguns. However, when a murder occurs at a bar, a handgun is more likely to be used. The findings regarding the use of personal weapons may be explained in part by the fact that bar violence is typically explosive rather than premeditated. Nevertheless, the likelihood of serious injury or death via the use of a personal weapon during bar violence should not be underestimated. It is not uncommon for an individual to be knocked unconscious at a bar when his/her head strikes the floor or a table following a shove, kick, or punch. Also, fights that occur outside a bar can result in people being knocked unconscious from a shove, kick, or punch when their heads strike the pavement or a curb.

### **Alcohol and bar violence**

The findings show that compared to other locations, people who commit crimes at a bar are more likely to be “under the influence” at the time of the offense. While this finding may seem like a “no brainer,” only 13% of crime perpetrators were judged by law enforcement responders to be “under the influence” at the time of arrest. This surprising finding is likely based on the responding officers’ perceptions of the alleged perpetrator’s demeanor, rather than Breathalyzer readings or blood test findings. It is possible, however, that situational and motivational factors other than the overconsumption of alcohol play a significant role in influencing the likelihood of bar violence.

### **Implications for bar security**

The findings of this study appear to underscore the importance of security at bars. The use of security personnel to help protect patrons and staff at bars, nightclubs, social clubs, and entertainment facilities should be a major concern for the proprietors of these establishments. Individuals responsible for providing security (e.g., screening for weapons) are themselves a potential source of concern for the establishment’s ownership and a very real and legitimate threat to serious liability and even criminal activities. Bar owners have a legal duty to provide an environment that attends to the safety and welfare of patrons (Savard & Kennedy, 2013). Liability for alcohol-related violence first emerged in the form of Dram Shop laws that held drinking establishments liable when a bartender, for example, overserves a patron to the point of inebriation and the patron subsequently drives recklessly or assaults a fellow bar patron. Since the enactment of these early

laws, many other laws have been enacted that address expected security practices and policies for bars (Graham, 1999; McManus & O'Toole, 2004; Scott & Dedel, 2006).

For example, bar managers are expected to circulate regularly throughout the establishment to insure that things are running smoothly. Employees and security personnel are expected to have clear post assignments and to wear clearly marked clothing. Employees working the doors are expected to check IDs to ensure that no inebriates or people under the legal drinking age are admitted. Having a food service available throughout the night, premeasuring alcoholic drinks, and increasing security during special events are also expected ways to deflect potential violence. The New York Nightlife Association recommends the presence of one security employee per 75 patrons. Furthermore, it is expected that bars will have a procedure in place that addresses how to expel combatants from the establishment. Security staff should be trained to first separate the combatants and then make sure they exit via different doors and/or at different times to discourage further fighting outside. The day of managers and bartenders telling combatants to “take it outside” is no longer acceptable (Savard & Kennedy, 2013).

It is not uncommon for people at bars to have heated disagreements. This can lead to an exchange of harsh words followed by a sudden explosion of shoving and punching that can result in serious injury. From a security perspective, because of the suddenness of these incidents, they are typically difficult to foresee and prevent. Within seconds, some pushing ensues and the assailant swings his/her arm toward the victim in an attempt to punch and/or stab him/her. To better understand the foreseeability of such incidents, security personnel can examine police incident reports and/or a list of Computer Aided Dispatch reports to determine if there is a history of assaults at the bar. Often, previous instances of disorderly behavior are found in a facility, particularly in “college bars” where young men are drinking and competing for the attention of young women. When examining the number of previous criminal incidents at a bar, the number of patrons the bar serves must be considered. For example, if a bar serves well over 100,000 patrons a year and the number of security incidents at the bar is small, then the ability to foresee a violent crime may be difficult. On the other hand, if the bar has suffered several similar past incidents, management will likely be held to a higher foreseeability standard. Within this context, it is also important to consider whether the establishment has a clean and attractive décor, an extensive food service, and is located in a low-crime or high-crime district.

To prevent violence, bars should also strive to meet or exceed applicable standards of care. For example, serving staff can be trained in responsible

alcohol service, and security personnel can be selected based on experience and, subsequently, receive training in crowd control techniques and perhaps additional training from local police agencies. Also, bar management should emphasize and train staff to employ positive interpersonal relationship and communication skills for crowd control and to use of physical methods only as a last resort. Furthermore, security personnel should be deployed in sufficient numbers throughout a facility, wear clearly marked clothing, and be closely supervised by a security manager. As mentioned previously, the New York Nightlife Association recommends one security person per 75 patrons. This number may vary, however, particular during special events and the expected demeanor of attendees.

Depending on the theme of a bar and the characteristics of a bar's typical patron, management may want to implement a posted dress code, limit entry points, build strong relationships with local police, and train employees to be alert for trouble. For example, if trouble develops, a DJ can be instructed to cut off music and summon security. Also, ID scanners can be used at doors to scrutinize people waiting in line for potential troublemakers. Closed-circuit cameras can be deployed throughout a bar and security personnel should be at their posts in sufficient numbers. Furthermore, to help combat problems involving employees, bar management can implement a no drinking policy where bartenders and waiters do not drink while working. Waiters can also be trained in responsible alcohol service by local alcohol beverage associations. Furthermore, bars must be concerned with security measures outside of the bar such as assuring that parking lots have adequate lighting and are free of loitering and inebriated patrons. Finally, security personnel can meet each night after closing to assess the efficacy of their practices.

Security practices during special events (e.g., concerts) held at bars can offer special challenges. For example, a bar's use of and overreliance on promoters for special events can thwart security practices. If bar management knows little about a promoter's history and then contracts with them to control the door as well as the security at an event, devastating consequences can follow. Many promoters are interested primarily in the take at the door. These promoters typically want as many people through the door as possible and to accomplish this goal often overlook age, demeanor, and bad behavior of attendees. A promoter who is more concerned with collecting money than providing effective security, may fail to thoroughly screen patrons for weapons, ignore the bar's capacity limits leading to overcrowding, use unlicensed and poorly trained security personnel, and fail to obtain a special event permit from the city. These negligent practices can contribute to fights, sexual assaults, and other mayhem. When a promoter is allowed to provide security for an event, the bar owner will be held fully

responsible for any problems that occur because security is considered a nontransferable duty. Thus, it is imperative that bar management select reputable promoters, carefully define their role, ensure the promoter's interests align with those of management, and are cautious about allowing promoters to control the door while providing security.

Another important factor in special event security is awareness of the type of "crowd" expected at the event. Different events draw different crowds that tend to display different behavior. For example, a "hip-hop" or "gangster rap" event requires different security than a "folk singer" event (Graham et al., 2006). A Billy Joel concert requires different security than a "heavy metal" concert. Regarding security, the number of attendees at an event is often less important than the behavior expected of the people who attend. Bars that expect a more unruly crowd should base security staffing on the type of event, not on the number of people expected.

In sum, the security practices employed by bars appear to contribute substantially to the likelihood of bar violence (Hobbs, Hadfield, Lister, & Winlow, 2003). There can be extremes of the bar violence/security relationship. On one hand, some bars have a "clean" environment and an attractive décor. Security personnel are selected at these bars based on past experience and are trained in crowd control techniques and receive additional training from local police. As mentioned previously, these bars emphasize interpersonal relations and communication skills for crowd control and implement use of force only as a last resort. They pay close attention to the ratio of patrons to security staff and avoid dangerous overcrowding. Serving staff are trained in responsible alcohol service. Security personnel are deployed in sufficient numbers, wear clearly marked clothing, and have violent situations under control within seconds. On the other hand, in some bars security is poor or nonexistent and the facility risks being overrun by a unruly patrons who regularly fight, insult, and manhandle staff, harass other customers, threaten battery, steal items from table tops and drinks from other customers, loiter outside and engage in fights on sidewalks outside the bar.

## **Limitations**

It is important to exercise caution when interpreting these findings because of the study's limitations. NIBRS has been criticized on many fronts, such as having a "small agency bias," resulting in a not insignificant number of police departments that report through NIBRS coming from small law enforcement agencies (Addington, 2007). Researchers have also questioned the representativeness of NIBRS based on its incomplete U.S. population coverage. Consequently, the validity of NIBRS in terms of its

generalizability to larger jurisdictions and the United States as a whole has been called into question (McCormack, Pattavina, & Tracy, 2017).

Nevertheless, NIBRS is unique in that specific types of locations can be studied, unlike other secondary sources of crime data such as the Uniform Crime Reports. Notwithstanding these limitations, NIBRS is the only large dataset devoted to criminal incidents that allows for statistical inferences to be made regarding the nature of crime in bars. Future studies might consider comparing violence in bars located in smaller jurisdictions and larger jurisdictions. Indeed, the type of clientele attracted to small “roadside” bars and large urban nightclubs may present different challenges in terms of violence and security. Extending this further, another limitation of the study is NIBRS’s inability to separate bars based on their location, history, and demographics of patrons. For example, some bars may be riskier than others even if they are located in the same immediate neighborhood. If data become available, future studies might consider using large nationally representative datasets to make statistical inferences about the risk of violence in and around bars based on their unique characteristics.

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