

## Moving Violations: A Study of Incivility and Violence against Urban Bus Drivers in Australia

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### Abstract

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*International research suggests that transport workers are at significantly higher risk of being assaulted than those in most other job categories. For drivers of urban buses the potential for passenger violence is exacerbated because of proximity to the public, availability of cash and lack of guardianship. There is a paucity of data, however, about the prevalence, incidence and nature of assaults against drivers, which is further hampered by the claim that less than ten percent of violent incidents are reported. This article presents preliminary findings from a multi-method study conducted in southeast Queensland, Australia, into the extent of violence and antisocial behaviour against bus drivers. It recommends improvements in three areas: civil society to elevate awareness of the important role of bus drivers; expansion of driver training to enhance conflict resolution and the customer service experience; and crime reduction measures to protect drivers and mechanical features of the bus environment.*

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**Keywords:** workplace violence; public transport; bus driver; transit crime

### 1. Introduction

Understanding workplace violence has received considerable attention in recent years, especially in the health and welfare sectors (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Mayhew & Chappell, 2007). Yet, international research suggests that compared to the average worker, public transport staff, particularly bus drivers, face a much higher risk of violence (Duffy & McGoldrick, 1990; Morgan & Smith, 2006a). This is due to a suite of factors inherent to their occupational role, including low levels of guardianship, overcrowding, immediate proximity to passengers, cash-handling and service delays (Kompier & Di Martino, 1995; Essenberg, 2003; Tse, Flin, & Mearns, 2006; Mayhew & Chappell, 2007; Couto, Lawoko, & Svanstrom, 2009). These problematic elements create flashpoints on buses where lower levels of conflict can escalate into proscribed criminal behaviour in a volatile manner (Cornish & Smith, 2006). Nevertheless, it is purported that less than ten percent of attacks from passengers are reported by drivers in any official capacity (Bishop, Cassell, & Hoel, 2009).

While some Australian studies have considered occupational stress for bus drivers (Shapiro, Western, Jones, & Makkai, 1983), crime prevention in the transport sector (Easteal & Wilson, 1991) and assaults on taxi drivers (Mayhew, 2000b, 2000c), research specifically focused on violence against drivers on-board remains virtually non-existent. Clearly, this has significant implications for the design and implementation of prevention strategies aimed at reducing the problem. Without such data, it is not only difficult to appropriately tailor responses to the scope and features of violence on buses, but also impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented schemes (Easteal & Wilson, 1991).

The present study sought to provide, for the first time in Australia, a comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of on-board violence and incivility against urban bus drivers. It was based in southeast Queensland and commenced in January 2013 under the Australian Government's Enterprise Connect Researchers in Business scheme. These federal grants endeavour to utilise synergies between the academy and enterprise to foster relationships and on-site problem solving (Enterprise Connect, 2014). The project involved working with five industry partners: a trade union representing over 80,000 transport workers across Australia; the peak representative industry body for bus and coach operators throughout Queensland; the state department responsible for coordinating all passenger transport services; and the largest privately owned company that operates the bus services for the local region.

The study adopted a multi-method research design including focus group sessions with drivers to gather qualitative data on general workplace and service issues, crime and disorder problems and prevention options. There was also a series of observations on buses using a specially designed web application, and a survey of drivers to elicit responses on the frequency and nature of victimisation, reporting behaviours, and perceptions about contributory factors and prevention measures. There was analysis of official incident reports and CCTV footage of violent incidents against drivers gathered by operational staff at the bus company. In addition, interviews were conducted with key industry and associated stakeholders to shed light on the pragmatic, political and policy background issues concerning transport crime. The final strategy was to obtain official police data through a Right to Information application for documents about deployments regarding bus crime in the region. Importantly, the project adopted an overarching ethnographic approach, where the research team was immersed in the bus operation culture and had regular informal discussions with a range of stakeholders over its eighteen months duration.

## 2. Overview of Workplace Violence

Although not a new phenomenon, workplace violence has received increased attention from researchers in recent years (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Mayhew & Chappell, 2007). Awareness is growing that violence in the workplace represents a significant social problem which holds a range of emotional, legal and social implications for both organisations and their employees (Kerr, 2010). This contrasts to the once widely espoused view, particularly in the service sector, that threats and aggression in the workplace should be tolerated as simply "part of the job" (Perrone, 1999).

Any attempt to define workplace violence is fraught with difficulty. There are a wide range of behaviours which may be included and perceptions of what constitutes violence vary across different cultures and contexts (Bowie, 2000). For example, while some conceptualisations focus on acts of physical violence, such as assault and homicide, others recognise the importance of incorporating acts of psychological violence, such as threats and verbal abuse (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). Similarly, while some definitions make mention of bullying and sexual harassment, others treat these as distinct constructs (Barling, Duprè, & Kelloway, 2009).

There is also lack of agreement regarding the limits of the term "workplace" (Perrone, 1999; Bowie, 2000). Debate surrounds whether or not this term should cover acts perpetrated against employees on their journey to and from work, or only those that occur at the workplace (Beech & Leather, 2006). This has implications for employees in occupations that are of a geographically mobile nature, such as social work, law enforcement, journalism, and public transport (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). For the purposes of this study workplace violence was operationalised as any attempt by another to threaten, humiliate and/or harm, physically or psychologically, a person as a direct result of carrying out their professional duty and covers any perceived potential for psychological, emotional and physical violence (International Labour Organization, 2002; Vickers, 2010).

As well as taking a number of different forms, workplace violence can emerge from a variety of sources (Mayhew, 2000a; Kerr, 2010). Researchers distinguish between four broad categories of workplace violence based on the relationship of the perpetrator to the organisation. The "Criminal Intruder" category occurs when a perpetrator with no legitimate relationship to the organisation enters the workplace to commit a criminal act such as armed robbery (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006; Mayhew & Chappell, 2007). The "Client or Customer" type refers to violence initiated by a perpetrator who is being served, cared for, or taught by an employee of the organisation being a client, customer, patient or student (Neuman & Baron, 1998; Yagil, 2008).

The “Worker to Worker” category concerns violence committed by current or former employees of the organisation such as supervisors or subordinates as in hierarchical or military contexts (Barling et al., 2009; Mayhew & Chappell, 2007). The “Personal Relationship” category comprises incidents perpetrated by people who have no legitimate relationship with the organisation, but do have a relationship with the intended victim for example a current or former spouse or friend (Barling et al., 2009; Chappell & Di Martino, 2006).

Although most workplace violence research has focused on organisational insiders as both the source and target of abuse, a growing number of studies recognise customers as a prime threat for many workers (Yagil, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). This recognition has proven to be important in two ways. First, research suggests that abuse from organisational outsiders occurs more frequently than insider-initiated abuse (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002). Secondly, the outcomes of workplace violence vary depending on whether the perpetrator is an organisational insider or outsider. This underscores the fact that the risk of abuse is particularly high in the service sector where regular interaction with the public is a core occupational role. Customer sovereignty, manifest in the basic market philosophy that “the customer is always right” demands that service workers “serve with a smile” regardless of customer actions and this has a tendency to sanction unruly behaviour.

Incidents of client-initiated violence can involve either a one-off act of physical violence or some form of threat or verbal abuse, with the latter being more common (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Incidents may fall along a severity continuum from verbal abuse, to covert threats, overt intimidation, and up to physical assault (Mayhew, 2000a). Two types of perpetrators of customer violence can be distinguished: those who have a violent history and can be expected to act in an aggressive manner, such as prison inmates or people with certain mental illnesses, and those who are situationally violent when frustrated or dissatisfied with a service.

In Australia, it is proposed that the majority of customer violence occurs in the healthcare sector (Mayhew & Chappell, 2003). Accordingly, much of the available literature on customer violence is concerned with providing evidence-based guidance to employers of nursing and welfare staff on the risk factors and prevention strategies associated with violence perpetrated by patients and visitors (see, for example Farrell, Bobrowski, & Bobrowski, 2006). An unintended consequence of this has been a scarcity of research investigating customer violence in other sectors which may have a unique profile of abuse (e.g. nature, extent and risk factors).

### **3. Public Transit Crime**

Little attention has been paid to the public transport sector, where unlike the healthcare sector in which relationships can be established, there is daily interaction with strangers and thus potential offenders (Couto et al., 2009). Public transport workers are required to carry out their duties in many of the circumstances which characterise dangerous workplaces. They work alone, engage in cash-handling procedures, work irregular hours, routinely come into contact with members of the public who may be intoxicated or have a history of mental illness and must carry groups who can present special problems, such as school children or large groups of event attendees (Essenberg, 2003; Morgan & Smith, 2006b). What is more, public transport workers are easy targets of blame for any inadequacies regarding the standard of transport provided (Smith & Clarke, 2000). It is therefore no surprise that compared to the average worker, public transport employees are four times more likely to face threats of violence at work (Transport and General Workers’ Union, 2003).

Research suggests that disputes over fares precede the majority of assaults against public transport workers (Morgan & Smith, 2006a). These precipitating events may surround refusal to pay a fare, disagreement over the cost of a fare, providing incorrect change, the validity of passes, or overriding. Employees who challenge fare evaders face the highest risk of assault (Summerell, Shorrocks, & Mitchell, 2002). It has been found that fare structure plays an important role, with systems having large differences between child and adult fares or ambiguous travel zones being more likely to foster confrontation (Gallagher, 1999).

The second most common factor preceding assaults is intoxication. Alcohol is implicated in up to one-third of assaults on transport workers (Jochelson, 1994), particularly those assaults that occur on Friday or Saturday nights in the late evening or early morning (Morgan & Smith, 2006b). The problems associated with intoxication increase when large groups of intoxicated passengers travel together, such as to or from night-time economy precincts and sporting events (Boyd, 2002).

There are three other key factors integral to assaults against transport staff. First there are “service problems” where surveys of rail staff indicate that poor quality environments, such as dirty or non-air-conditioned trains, often contribute to assaults (Boyd, 2002). Service delays frustrate passengers and increase the risk of confrontation, even if delays are outside the driver’s control, for example traffic congestion (Morgan & Smith, 2006a). A second factor is that involving “traffic accidents” where research on bus drivers suggests that the need to make frequent stops to pick up passengers can lead to hazardous driving that angers other road users (Oxley, 1985), which in turn increases the risk of confrontation. A final set is under the heading of “hooliganism” where rowdy, loitering and disorderly behaviour are deemed to underlie some assaults on public transport workers, particularly bus drivers (Morgan & Smith, 2006a). These assaults occur when employees intervene in an attempt to prevent passenger disputes, or when they are in the process of removing them from vehicles or stations (Poyner, Warne, Webb, Woodall, & Meakin, 1988).

While some Australian research has examined customer violence in the transport sector, the focus has been on taxi drivers, rail staff and flight attendants. Three broad trends are apparent from these inquiries (Easteal & Wilson, 1991; Mayhew, 2000b; Essenberg, 2003): the number of incidents is rising; the levels of violence per incident are mounting; and many incidents show similar patterns of risk and behaviour. Even though parallels can be drawn across these occupational groups and the settings in which they work, there are also clear differences which warrant more specific research on bus drivers. Consequently, what is known about the extent of passenger violence against bus drivers is confined to the international arena, and reflected in the following.

- Burrell (2007) examined patterns of offending on and around public transport hubs in the UK and found that the majority of transit related violence is linked to buses (73%), with offences predominantly of a serious and violent nature (83%), such as robbery and wounding.
- The DfT analysed their annual data for road-based public transport in Great Britain and found that, of all public transport workers, most physical assaults were reported by bus drivers (see Morgan & Smith, 2006a).
- Duffy and McGoldrick (1990), in another British study of drivers, revealed that the highest reported stressor was the risk of physical assault by passengers.
- Glaso, Bele, Nielsen and Einarsen (2007) explored Norwegian bus drivers’ exposure to bullying at work and found that seventy percent of drivers had experienced workplace bullying within the last six months, with passengers being the perpetrators in over a third of these incidents.
- Couto and colleagues (2009) examined workplace violence among bus, minibus and taxi drivers in Mozambique and found that more than three-quarters of drivers had been a victim of workplace violence in their lifetime, and almost two-thirds in the past twelve months, with passengers comprising the majority of attackers.

In terms of the nature of passenger violence against bus drivers, Couto and colleagues (2009) found that the most frequent types of violence reported were verbal abuse (47%), pushing (20%) and unpleasant experiences (21%). Other reported violence took the form of physical assaults with objects such as guns and bottles (17%). Incidents predominantly occurred at bus stops (46%), followed by when the vehicle was in motion (22%). In a similar vein, Morgan and Smith (2006a) surveyed British bus drivers on their experiences of abuse and found that many events were triggered by fare evasion, passenger frustration, hooliganism, or were drug and alcohol-fuelled. Two high risk periods for violence were identified: late afternoon, when passenger density is high due to children returning home from school, and late evening, when passenger density is low but connected to the night-time economy.

The broader transit crime literature suggests that antisocial behaviour/incivility is even more widespread on public transport than violence. Cornish and Smith (2006) identified eight common antisocial behaviours aboard UK buses, namely: smashing of windows, smoking, pushing and shoving, preventing people from boarding, spitting at the driver or other passengers, throwing objects such as food or bottles at the driver or around the bus, ringing the stop bell to distract or frustrate the driver, and climbing over/standing on seats. Although many antisocial behaviours appear to have no significance beyond themselves, they can represent the early stages of what might eventuate into serious criminal behaviour where minor level incivilities on public transport initiates a spiral of decline in which informal mechanisms of control are eroded, thus promoting environmental degradation and allowing more serious crime to flourish (Cornish & Smith, 2006).

There are a number of factors contributing to the lack of research studies about violence and threats to bus drivers both in Australia and abroad. The public transport industry in Australia is highly fragmented and there are a large number of different agencies responsible for its regulation and policing. This contrasts to the UK where there are central data collection agencies and dedicated transport police forces with the remit to gather and analyse data on transit crime (Morgan & Smith, 2006b). As a result, data are scattered, based on differing definitions, and may only capture one element of each incident (Essenberg, 2003).

More specific to the bus industry, the reporting behaviour of drivers is a significant issue facing researchers. It is suggested that the number of recorded assaults against bus drivers represents only ten percent of assaults and that very few verbal threats to drivers are recorded in any official capacity (Bishop et al., 2009). Another study estimated that the reporting of public transport crime may be 25 to 30 times below actual levels (Levine & Wachs, 1986a). Research suggests that five main reasons, some of which align with the lack of reporting for violent incidents against taxi drivers (Mayhew, 2000b), contribute to this high level of underreporting (Bishop et al., 2009), including:

- *Time constraints and paperwork* – many drivers feel they cannot afford to lose the time to fill out complex incident forms given the tightly scheduled routes.
- *Hyper-masculine culture* – bus driving has traditionally been a male-dominated industry where the social constructs of masculinity determine that bus drivers deal with instances of antisocial behaviour on their own, without assistance from another.
- *Part of the job* – many drivers feel that incidents are implicit to their occupational role.
- *Inaction* – there is a perception among drivers that nothing will, or can, result from reporting incidents to management or police.
- *Avoidance* – many drivers simply do not want to get involved in the process that follows an assault, in some cases because they fear being blamed.

Another relevant factor acknowledged by Mayhew (2000b) in her work on taxi drivers is that drivers who experience incivility or less serious instances of abuse on a frequent basis may leave the sector, therefore permitting little opportunity to collect data from them. This in itself underscores the need for robust and comprehensive data collection at the national level and is part of the rationale for the current study adopting a multi-method approach to have a basis for evaluating the various research strategies.

Finally, it is imperative to acknowledge the consequences of on-board violence for drivers, passengers and transit operators. For drivers, one study found that physically assaulted drivers are more likely to develop PTSD and depressive symptoms compared to non-assaulted drivers (Duffy & McGoldrick, 1990). Another study found 44 percent of driver assaults are serious enough to require time off, which almost doubles the average rate of absenteeism following assaults for other transport workers (Morgan & Smith, 2006a). Among passengers, driver-directed violence can increase fear and anxiety about personal security while travelling on public transport which can limit patronage levels (Levine & Wachs 1986b; Newton 2004). For transit operators, violent incidents can exacerbate existing problems surrounding absenteeism, productivity, staff turnover, customer service, accidents and litigation (Chappell 1998; Winkleby et al. 1988).

#### **4. Preliminary Findings from Study**

The results from each of the seven strategies that formed the research design are only briefly reported upon here. It should be stressed that it was never envisaged to include so many different methods but these developed organically as part of the ethnographic approach adopted. Generally, across all of the methods, there is concordance on most observations or findings, but in some instances it was beneficial to have this seven-fold line of attack because some important differences were revealed. One key discrepancy is that in the initial focus groups, drivers expressed strongly negative opinions on the automated ticketing system claiming that it had caused them more work because of on-board top-ups, that the machines were often faulty, that they were now carrying more cash on their person than before and that there were greater delays caused because of breakdowns or because of the top-ups. Yet these were not the responses yielded from the driver survey, nor was it the overriding impression gleaned from the observational sessions on the buses. Thus the project will not only provide direct data about the nature and extent of violence against drivers, but will deliver an evaluation of the most appropriate methodology to adopt in the future.

## 4.1 Focus Groups

Drivers recounted a range of incidents of abuse, both verbal and physical, that had been experienced either personally or by colleagues, such as punching, name-calling, fare evasion, road rage, and vandalism. A number of factors were seen among drivers as contributing to their heightened vulnerability of abuse. These included working alone, being unprotected, fare evasion, cash handling, late running, drivers' attitudes and overcrowding. Drivers were also of the opinion that the public perception of bus drivers as "servants of the state", rather than employees of a privately owned bus company, serves as an excuse for perpetrators. Embedded within the qualitative data were five overarching characteristics that offer an understanding of the nature of bus driving.

1. Vulnerability – drivers expressed an overall sense of susceptibility, helplessness and exposure due to limited guardianship while carrying out their role.
2. Inevitability – drivers believe that incivilities and attacks against them are implicit to their role and as a result they need to "learn to just accept violence".
3. Volatility – drivers made note of the way in which violent incidents can escalate quickly, from seemingly "nothing".
4. Incongruity – some drivers conceded that they worked in an environment where the potential for aggression was ever-present, but denied or minimised direct and personal encounters with aggression.
5. Positivity (and pride) – although the majority of discussions focussed on negative aspects of driving buses, many positive experiences were recounted.

## 4.2 Survey

With respect to abuse, most drivers (89%) have experienced it. There were differences between less serious and more frequent problems (such as arguments and fare evasion) and the more serious but less common events (such as punching or robbery). Reportability rates are low overall with just over half the respondents saying that they did inform Operational Staff about incidents, but these would not be the totality of events that drivers encounter. Drivers did not report because they felt that "nothing would be done" (48%), they dealt with it themselves (44%), that the incident was "not serious enough" (41%) or that there would be no consequences (37%). With respect to the factors (averaged across three response options) that may explain why passengers and others abuse drivers, the participants said that "late running" was a major reason, followed by "fare costs" and "people's attitudes". Similarly with the prime factors that might cause elevated frustration for drivers (averaged across the three response options) it was "traffic congestion" as a major cause, then "passenger behaviour", "management, policies and equipment" and "time pressure" as minor contributors.

## 4.3 CCTV Analysis

The salience of analysing CCTV footage is that these data provide one of the most objective accounts of violent incidents that have occurred against bus drivers. This is especially the case when trying to discern the specifics of the event itself. However, this is not to deny the limitations associated with CCTV footage, most notably poor visual and audio quality. Our industry partner provided CCTV footage for a total of 158 incidents from January 2011 to December 2013, of which 72 related to attacks against drivers. In terms of the timing of incidents, these accord with what is already known (afternoons and nights) and later in the week (Thursdays and Saturdays) for example. Abusive incidents against drivers were characterised by both escalation and volatility. Our analysis suggests that a large proportion of abuse was propelled by boredom or showing off (25%), followed by disputes over fares (24%), passenger frustration (23%) and profit motive (21%), and in accordance with the extant literature, the perpetrators in these incidents tended to be groups of young males.

## 4.4 Incident Reports

Researchers were fortunate to be given access to incident data from the operations section of the bus company covering a three year period to late 2013. The sample comprised 1,070 incidents with the prime months for offending being November and October, while the key days were Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays (16.4%). The largest proportion of incidents when examining one-hour periods took place between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm (12.9%). The data indicated that the number of aggressive incidents has been decreasing since 2010, where a comparison of the months of August to October in 2010 and 2013 showed a decrease in approximately 73% of recorded incidents. Missile throwing (30%) and verbal abuse (23%) were the most common types of incidents reported.

#### **4.5 Interviews**

Stakeholder interviewees were primarily of the view that while incidents of violence and aggression against bus drivers are declining, their severity is getting worse. Violence tends to be more verbal than physical, although this is no less damaging for drivers. Their perception was that robberies in particular are declining, while rock throwing remains a significant problem, albeit aligned with school holidays. As with other methodological components of this project, respondents alluded to certain “hot times” and “hot spots” for offending, with young people perceived as being responsible for most incidents. The most significant precipitators related to fare evasion and ticketing issues, the automated system and unrealistic timetabling. Overall, there was pessimism regarding the prevention of violence with some stating that “it will never be resolved”. However, there was hope that “we can minimise it” and “create a situation where people will think twice about assaulting another person”. The general criticism was that most preventive measures (e.g. security cars, police, alarms, CCTV, inspectors, training) are largely reactive in nature or not often in place. There was a view that there should be greater emphasis on educating drivers and the public about the rights of drivers and the consequences that violence and abuse can have for both perpetrators and drivers.

#### **4.6 Observations**

This research method was seminal to the current study as it involved the development of the mobile software system to capture the observational data via smartphones or tablets on-board. Clearly, observing patterns of behaviour in physical or social settings is best undertaken by means of field research which allows such activities to be studied in their natural setting. However, given that there are over 300 buses, 13,274 urban services and 16.6 million trips each week in the study region, it required that routes and trips were selected by means of simple random sampling. Thus the only 24-hour seven days a week route was selected for observations from July to December 2013. Fare evasion was by far the most common type of incident observed (63%), but a quarter of the incidents involved passengers talking loudly or using bad language and in seventeen percent of the incidents, the passenger(s) involved was/were drunk or drugged. Thirteen percent of the incidents involved unruly behaviour and there was one incident with expression of hate or racial comments, with most of the incidents occurring in the afternoons.

#### **4.7 Police Data**

In order to obtain an external measure of the nature and extent of violence against drivers a Right To Information (RTI) application was submitted to the state police service and 97 documents were released. For 2011 to 2013 there was little change in the offences against person category which averaged 13.3 per 100,000. There were significant changes over time for offences against property which had per 100,000 rates of 191, 231 and 149 for the three years. The material included reports of 204 patrols of 22 schools underscoring a high level of liaison between the police, industry stakeholders and community groups that is largely hidden from public or media notice. There are clearly some useful strategies that have been trialled (such as walk-throughs by uniformed police or random patrols at school bus stops) but in the absence of comprehensive evaluation data it is difficult to know what impact they have.

#### **5. Conclusions**

This paper has highlighted the importance of addressing violence and antisocial behaviour against bus drivers that hints at the deleterious consequences for the driver and wider society, acute and long term. Underreporting of violent and antisocial incidents on drivers, combined with the paucity of any other effective data-collection strategy compromises industry capacity to address the problems; an unworkable situation if stakeholders are going to adequately respond to the challenges of bus driver safety in Australia.

A majority of drivers had experienced some form of passenger abuse in the last 12 months. Incidents appear to have declined from 2010 to 2013, although the severity of the most serious forms of abuse may have elevated. Incivility (namely in the form of fare evasion) is the most prevalent type of event encountered by drivers; and where physical assaults occur they are most often initiated from verbal abuse that escalates. Under-reporting of events is difficult to quantify but there are some indications that reportability may be declining (because it is “too minor”, the driver “will deal with it” or a belief that “no action” will be taken).

Fare conflict and late-running precipitate the majority of aggressive events. Such incidents cluster in the early morning and late afternoon in central beachside suburbs, with young people perceived as the most problematic group. There are five types of aggression that impact on drivers: physical abuse, verbal abuse, incivility, property damage and road rage.

There appears to be some disenchantment in the industry about prevention initiatives aimed at addressing driver-directed violence, because such aggression is seen as “white noise” or inevitable in the occupation. In particular, drivers appraised screens as “poor” but were supportive of driver training courses. They positively valued the changes resulting from the introduction of electronic ticketing, although they noted that on-board top-ups had increased their cash-handling duties.

Five key themes were found to underscore urban bus driving: vulnerability, inevitability, volatility, incongruity and positivity. This accords with the international literature about the important role that drivers play in any community but also how their occupation does carry risk. Importantly, most drivers enjoy the customer interaction aspect of their job. Observational data revealed the service-oriented nature of the bus drivers’ role and in particular how it frequently involved a tourism function especially in this holiday destination.

The project cemented strong partnerships between academy and industry; it generated a comprehensive understanding of practical and policy issues related to public transport that can inform crime prevention efforts, and it elicited a wealth of data that will continue to be analysed. Many of the findings to emanate from this pilot project are not revelatory but are rather confirmatory. However, for the first time in Australia there are now empirical data that capture some of the anecdotal impressions of aspects of the industry and the antecedents to on-board violence that can now be used as a baseline. There are three main foci for our recommendations: civil society to elevate awareness of the role of bus drivers; driver training to enhance conflict resolution and the customer service experience; and in the area of crime reduction to protect drivers and mechanical features of the bus environment.

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