

The Yobb culture

The assault and death last month of Sydney teenager Thomas Kelly shocked very many people across Australia, especially in Sydney. His senseless death was a tragedy, and it must be devastating for his family and all who knew him.

Thomas Kelly was in Kings Cross, looking for a good night out amid the excitement of being where lots of young people gathered. Unfortunately, instead his path crossed his alleged assailant's. It is alleged that he was only one of four people attacked that evening by this same person.

His death set off an Australia-wide search for explanations, and strong demands by Sydneysiders and King Cross residents to solve the problem that is 'the Cross'. However, the problems are spread across Australia, not just in Kings Cross.

Many rushed to instant judgement that the problem was alcohol and the nightclubs, pure and simple. Some commentators did mention illicit drugs as being a part of the problem, not just determined drunkenness.

Some alcohol researchers did not miss the opportunity to push for an advertising ban, increased taxes, and to reduce availability everywhere by having fewer bars closing much earlier. Never mind the lack of known facts. No one knows whether or not the alleged assailant had been drinking as he has not yet faced Court. Thomas Kelly's assault took place at 10pm, well before even most restaurants shut, let alone nightclubs. Or that there is no violence or bad behaviour shown in any advertising.

Amid the national head-scratching, the Queensland Health Minister publicly summed it up the best: Australia has developed a Yobboism culture amongst some of its young people, where they deliberately set out to get drunk and then to assault others.

DSICA agrees wholeheartedly that a very ugly and violent culture has developed amongst some young men and women. Senior Police officers in several states have expressed exactly the same thing over recent years.

This is an entrenched and very difficult problem to solve, being based on "a new breed of extremely narcissistic, under-fathered adolescent male" as one prominent psychologist puts it. Making the Yobb culture worse is that the violence it leads to has changed, becoming far more vicious and deadly. Victims are now fair game on the ground for a head-stomping or a good kicking.

Let's not forget that young women are also becoming more violent, or that there is plenty of anti-social behaviour that doesn't attract the same media attention as the king-hits. There is simply the absence of any concern about bad behaviour affecting others. Nor is there any idea about how to behave in public with any sense of restraint or self-control.

These cultural problems are complex and take a very long time to solve. The solutions are often confronting to voters. Unfortunately, the public and the politicians want instant answers and instant action. Like lock outs, banned drinker registers, or product bans.

But these solutions are simply band-aids. Permanent and effective solutions are from changing peoples' attitudes and beliefs about violence and drunkenness, not bars' hours and regulations.