Managing Crowds at Sporting Events and Concerts: A Global Perspective

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Little research exists about crowd experiences at sports and music events (Kendrick, Haslam, & Waterson, 2012). Data indicates a variety of elements impact a fan’s experience especially those relating to crowd induced stress and personal space preference. Issues impacting crowd satisfaction include logistics, temperature, facility signage and personal space (Kendrick et al., 2012). Interestingly enough, crowd density does not necessarily impact whether someone feels comfortable in a crowd; the biggest factor is inappropriate closeness (Worchel & Teddie, 1976). The limited amount of space around a person reduces their level of control which could lead to stress and arousal triggering the feeling of being crowded. Research data tends to show crowd situations can be threatening and foreboding to some fans causing additional stress (Dion, 1999; Evans & McCoy, 1998). Data has also indicated people in crowds do not act irrationally or erratically. Instead individuals are generally motivated by specific goals; therefore their actions are generally rationale and predictable (Lee & Hughes, 2007). Thus, fans feeling threatened might act defensively in a predictable manner which may escalate potential confrontations. Such actions can be significantly enhanced when fan loyalty or alcohol are added to the mix.

In 2012, similar crowd management studies were conducted in both Brazil and the United States. Unlike most previous studies, fans were asked a series of questions regarding their conduct and observations at both sport and non-sport events. The results indicate at some events fans are somewhat fearful of their environment, have preconceptions as to the safety of certain events, and sometimes engage in conduct that may in fact increase the risk of physical harm. In addition, fans at some events have a much greater perception of potential safety issues, while fans at other events do not maintain similar concerns. For example, in the United States approximately 25% of the respondents felt threatened or intimidated at concerts and sporting events. However, in Brazil that number jumped to 53.2% at sporting events and 64.5% at concerts. The results of these studies indicate fans in general feel safe, but are concerned about their safety. Fans have faced verbal and physical altercations, have requested assistance, drink regularly before and during events, and have had issues with intoxicated fans. While alcohol plays a major role in confrontation and safety, it is not the only reason why individual engage in conduct that compromises the safety of themselves and other fans.

References