PSEUDO UNDERAGE LIQUOR SALES

A RESEARCH REPORT

DATE: FEBRUARY 2007

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1. Introduction and background to the research

1.1. Introduction

There has been much recent research that has indicated that underage drinking is a real issue in Western Australia. In particular, the role of retail outlets in the distribution of alcohol to minors was thought to be a significant factor.

For example, a recent study (DAO, 2004) of Western Australian school students aged 12 to 17 years found that 11% of 'current drinkers' (i.e. those who had consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey) had sourced their last alcoholic drink from retail outlets.

In fact, the propensity for 'current drinkers' to source alcohol from retail outlets increased noticeably with age, such that while very few 12-15 year olds accessed alcohol from retail outlets, one in ten (11%) of 16 year olds and one in five (19%) 17 year olds obtained alcohol from retail outlets[1]. . For 16 year old and 17 year old 'current drinkers' the type of retail premises from which alcohol was obtained included walk-in bottle shops (5% each), drive-in bottle shops (4% vs. 10% respectively), hotel/pub/tavern (0.3% vs. 2% respectively), clubs (2% vs. 3% respectively) and restaurants (0.3% vs. 0% respectively).

1.2. Background to the research

The Alcohol & Public Health Research Unit (2002) at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, conducted research to monitor the age verification practices of 200 randomly selected off-licensed premises in the greater Auckland region[2]. It was found that 'pseudo-patrons' (i.e. underage looking 18 years old attempting to purchase alcohol without ID) were able to purchase alcohol in the majority (61%) of off-license premises.

The Injury Control Council of Western Australia (ICCWA) therefore commissioned this research to replicate the Auckland project within Perth, Western Australia. The main objective of the research project was to test retail staff propensity to ask 18 year olds (who look underage) for identification to confirm legality of sale.

The details about how the research was conducted are provided in following sections.

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1 *1% of 12 yr olds; 0% of 13 yr olds; 2% of 14 yr olds; 3% of 15 yr olds; 11% of 16 yr olds; 19% of 17 yr olds.*

2 *Woolgrove, Margaret, et al. The Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project. Alcohol & Public Health Research Unit, University of Auckland. June 2002.*

2. Methodology

This research replicated (as closely as possible) the Auckland Pseudo Patron Project (2002), taking into consideration the local licensing laws and the geographic coverage of premises within the Perth metropolitan area.

These and other methodological considerations are discussed in further detail below.

Overview of the research

- eight teams of one underage-looking eighteen year old purchaser, accompanied by an older interviewer, were allocated different audit routes over the research period
- audits occurred on Fridays and Saturdays between 4:30 pm and 9:30 pm
- 110 licensed retail venues were identified for audit in the southern corridor
- each venue was to be visited twice – once by a male patron and once by a female patron
- the 18 year old purchasers were to carry no identification and were to attempt to purchase approximately $15 worth of single units of appropriate alcoholic beverages
- the main purposes of the study were to ascertain how often purchasers were challenged to verify their age and how many successful purchase attempts were able to be made

2.1. Research procedure

Prior to conducting the audits, purchasers and interviewers attended briefing sessions conducted by TNS Social Research, and were given detailed written briefing notes to ensure that everyone adopted a consistent approach to each audit.

On each journey, the interviewer and the purchaser would drive to a particular premise and then the purchaser would undertake to buy alcohol from the premise. The interviewer's role was to act as an observer and ensure that the audit was carried out correctly and uniformly from outlet to outlet and from location to location. The purchaser would walk in to each outlet, even where the premise was a drive-through, to minimise the number of extraneous factors that could impact on the staff's decision to sell the alcohol.

A research protocol sheet was developed by TNSSR to enable each purchaser and the interviewer to record their experiences (i.e. what transpired during the purchase attempt; any comments made; any actions observed; number of people in the store; sex and estimated age of the sales person; visibility of signage about age limitations; etc) and outcomes (i.e. whether the purchaser was asked for ID; whether they were given a receipt for any purchase; etc) at each outlet visited, not only to make sure the findings were standardised but also to maximise the amount of anecdotal information gathered. A copy of the protocol sheet is in Appendix A.

2.2. Research teams

Eight teams were used to complete the research with each team comprising an interviewer and a purchaser (i.e. an underage looking person of 18 years of age).

ICCWA recruited a number of 18 year olds (males and females) to conduct the research. Potential purchasers were screened by a panel consisting of ICCWA staff, a school nurse, Drug and Alcohol Office program staff (including an ex-licensed venue manager) and Police officers to ensure that they were over 18 years of age and looked underage. The number of purchasers used to complete the audits was kept to a minimum, to reduce extraneous factors that may influence purchase attempts.

Purchasers were asked to dress in smart casual clothing as they would on a 'normal' Friday or Saturday night, when going to purchase alcohol. Female purchasers were asked to use only light make-up to ensure they remained youthful in appearance.

2.3. Purchaser ID

Purchasers deliberately did not carry ID, in order to ensure that each outlet could be tested first for whether ID was requested when doubtful about the age of customers, and secondly to ascertain the number of sales that subsequently took place despite ID not being produced.

During the briefing, purchasers were told what to say when asked for ID, to ensure uniformity amongst purchasers. If purchasers were asked for ID at any time in the venue, they were told to casually reply that "I don't have it on me right now" and not to give an excuse for not having their ID nor to engage in further conversation, but if asked specifically they were to give their birth date.

2.4. Journeys

Premises in proximity were completed as one "journey" on a single evening to increase efficiency in travel time. Premises were scheduled to be completed between allocated times on each night. The final timetable of premises was determined in consultation with ICCWA.

Audits were conducted during 'peak' times at premises. All audits were conducted between 4.30pm and 9.30pm on Fridays and Saturdays – the most popular time for young people to visit liquor outlets.

Each venue was visited twice, once by a female purchaser and once by a male purchaser. Data collection took place over six successive weekends between the 22nd of September and the 28th of October. The October school holidays occurred during this period, from the 29th of September to the 17th of October.

2.5. Geographic coverage

The Auckland Pseudo Patron Project (2002) covered 200 randomly selected off-licensed premises from Auckland, Manukau, North Shore and Waitakere cities and Franklin, Papakura and Rodney districts. Within each of these areas, the proportion of licensed premises audited was not less than 79%.

In this research however, due to the larger geographic area involved, it was not practicable to replicate this research exactly across all metropolitan and regional areas. Furthermore, within the Perth metropolitan area the number and spread of premises was too great to audit a similar proportion of licensed premises. Therefore the research area within the Perth metropolitan area included 110 venues in the southern corridor, which was equivalent to around 50% of licensed premises in those areas.

A number of districts were represented in the research within southern corridor. As shown in Table 2.1a, data from the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor were used to determine the total number of premises. The data were classified by whether the retail outlets were liquor stores or drive-through / bottle shops.

Table 2.1a: Total number of premises selected by district and type

District	Liquor Stores	Drive-throughs / Bottleshops	Total venues
	N	**N**	**N**
A*	41	29	70
B*	NA	NA	38
C	40	18	58
D*	NA	NA	28
E	14	11	25
Total	-	-	**219**

* *Total number of licensed venues (including premises that only make over the counter sales).*
NA *Data were not available.*

The sample was structured to be representative of the actual number of premises in each of the districts by type of premises (i.e. liquor stores and drive-through / bottle shops). Within each district, premises were randomly selected for inclusion in the study.

2.6. Selection of alcoholic beverage for purchase

Purchasers were given AU$15, an amount based on the average cost of purchasing a small number of alcoholic beverages for personal consumption. For each venue, purchasers were given cash (one $5 note and one $10 note) for each purchase attempt. Purchasers were asked to select a product that they would typically drink with friends, such as pre-mixed drinks, beer or other types of 4-6 packs.

In the Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project (2002), purchasers attempted to purchase alcohol to the value of NZ$10.

Based on the Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project (2002) wherein it was reported that staff became suspicious when the purchaser asked for a receipt, purchasers were not required to ask for a receipt but would take them if offered.

2.7. Audits achieved

In attempting to achieve 220 audits, additional audits were included in the sample (227 audits attempted), however a number of audits were not completed due to the premise being closed (n=12) or the premise only having bar area (n=3[3]). These incomplete audits were removed from the final sample, resulting in 102 premises being audited twice (i.e. n=204 audits) and 8 premises being audited only once. The total number of completed audits by district and premise type is shown in Table 2.1b. As different results may have occurred on separate visits, each visit is reported individually[4].

Table 2.1b: Number of audits completed by district and premise type

District	Liquor Stores	Drive-throughs / Bottle shops	Total audits
	n	n	n
A	40	27	67
B	19	18	37
C	34	27	61
D	11	16	27
E	6	14	20
Total audits	**110**	**102**	**212**

[3] *These were not able to be screened out prior to the audits as data by type of premise were not available for some districts.*

[4] *This appears to be how the Auckland data were reported.*

Results

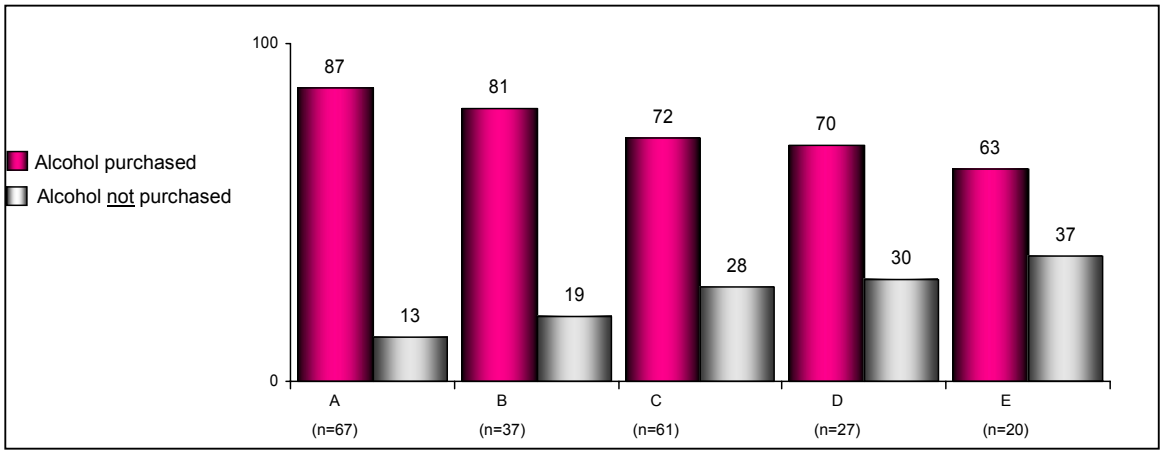
3. Liquor sales without ID

Of the total number of completed audits, 77% of premises sold alcohol to purchasers without verifying their age. The corollary of this is that less than a quarter (23%) of premises did not sell alcohol to the young looking purchasers.

This result was notably higher than that recorded in the Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project (2002), where almost two-thirds of premises (61%) of premises across all the cities and districts sold alcohol without verifying the age of the purchaser.

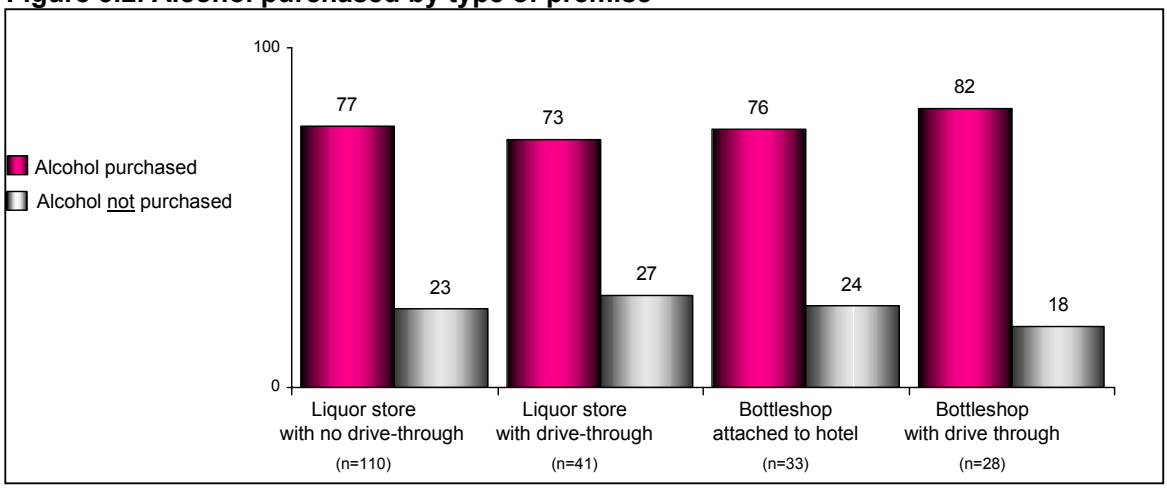
Analysis of the results by district (Figure 3.1), premise type (Figure 3.2) and gender (Figure 3.3) are discussed below.

Figure 3.1. Alcohol purchased by district



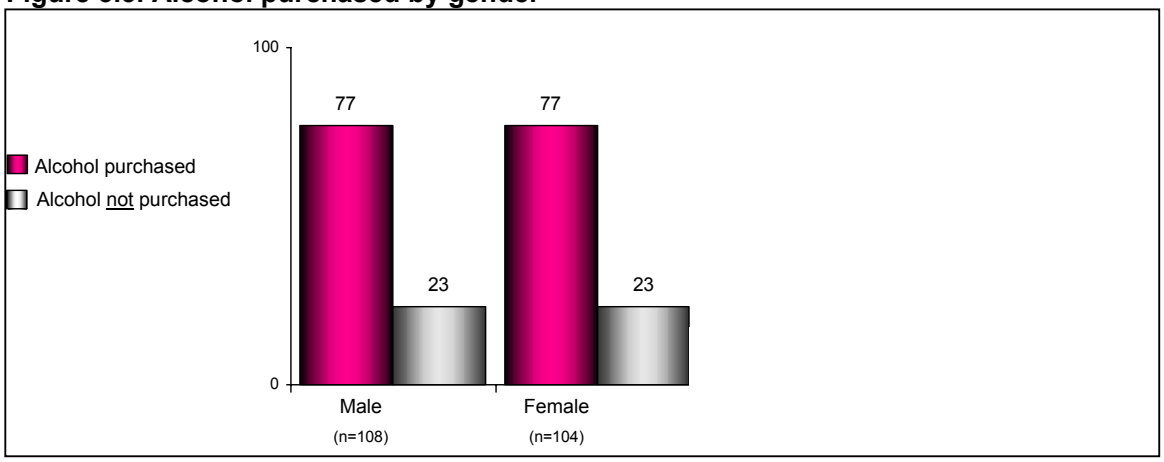
Purchasers in A (87%) and B (81%) were more likely to be able to buy alcohol without ID than were purchasers in C (72%), D (70%) and E (63%).

Figure 3.2. Alcohol purchased by type of premise



There were few variations in purchase success by the type of premise, although purchasers were most likely to make successful purchases if they went to a bottle shop with a drive through (82%), and least likely to be successful at a liquor store with a drive-through (73%).

Figure 3.3. Alcohol purchased by gender



Each premise was visited twice – once by a male purchaser and once by a female purchaser. Results show that there was no significant difference by gender in the proportion of purchasers who were able to buy alcohol without having their age verified.

In the Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project (2002) in the city areas, males were significantly more likely than females to make successful purchases of alcohol (60% vs. 40% respectively). In the district areas there were no significant differences by gender.

3.1. Age verification practices

Purchasers were asked to record whether they were asked for ID during each purchase attempt. In two audits (1%), purchasers were asked for ID upon entering the store and in both cases when no ID was shown, the purchaser left the store before they had selected an alcoholic beverage.

A further (25%) was asked for ID when attempting to purchase alcohol at the counter. Of those who were asked for ID on attempting to purchase alcohol, the majority (85%) of purchasers were not subsequently sold alcohol. However, in eight premises despite the purchaser being asked for ID and not providing it, they were still able to purchase alcohol.

There were no significant differences by gender and premise type for those who were checked for ID.

Table 3.1 records the staff responses when the purchaser was asked for ID but it was not shown.

Table 3.1. Staff response when no ID was shown

Asked of ID upon entry	Asked for ID upon purchase	Purchased alcohol	Staff response
Yes		No	Sorry we can't serve you
Yes		No	You can't be in here if you don't have ID
	Yes	No	Sorry
	Yes	No	Gave a goofy smile
	Yes	No	Sorry
	Yes	No	Sorry
	Yes	No	Asked for ID said I couldn't purchase. Needed ID
	Yes	No	Sorry I can’t sell to you
	Yes	No	Come back with ID please
	Yes	No	Come back with ID please. Sorry can't sell
	Yes	No	Sorry I can’t sell to you
	Yes	No	Sorry man come back with ID
	Yes	No	No sorry
	Yes	No	Sorry can't sell to you. Have you been here before.
	Yes	No	Sorry cannot sell unless you have ID
	Yes	No	Can't serve you without ID
	Yes	No	Sorry mate cannot sell it to you without ID
	Yes	No	Can't sell to you mate
	Yes	No	Can't serve you without ID
	Yes	No	Sorry can't help you without ID
	Yes	No	Sorry we can't serve you. Need ID
	Yes	No	Can't serve without ID
	Yes	No	Can't serve without ID
	Yes	No	Can't serve without ID

Asked of ID upon entry	Asked for ID upon purchase	Purchased alcohol	Staff response
	Yes	No	Can't serve you with ID
	Yes	No	I can't sell this to you without a ID love
	Yes	No	Sorry mate you need ID otherwise I can't help you
	Yes	No	Have you got and ID on you? Sorry mate can't serve you
	Yes	No	Sorry can't help you without ID
	Yes	No	Sorry can't help you without ID
	Yes	No	ID can't serve you without ID
	Yes	No	It's too much of a risk sorry
	Yes	No	Sorry mate no ID no service
	Yes	No	Can't serve without ID
	Yes	No	Do you have ID
	Yes	No	Can I have some ID? Can someone else get it for you?
	Yes	No	Oh, you gotta show your ID buddy
	Yes	No	Have you got some in the car. I am not suppose to sell you some without ID
	Yes	No	Sorry need to see ID. Can't sell without ID
	Yes	No	Sorry can't sell this to you
	Yes	No	Can't serve you without ID
	Yes	No	Can't sell you this the cops are busting and we get a personal fine
	Yes	No	Can't serve you without ID. If you don't have ID, don't have anything at all?
	Yes	No	Can't sell it to you mate
	Yes	No	Do you have it your car? Can't serve you
	Yes	No	Do you have any ID? Well I can't serve you sorry
	Yes	Yes	Looked at him funny then continued the sale
	Yes	Yes	Staff seemed pretty drunk or happy with Eagles win
	Yes	Yes	Asked where ID was I said it was at home. After purchase he said it was silly not to have ID, and asked how old I was – I answered just 18. He advised purchaser to bring her ID next time.
	Yes	Yes	Staff asked manager if he could sell to purchaser
	Yes	Yes	Staff member asked for DOB and then sold to purchaser
	Yes	Yes	Staff member asked for DOB and then sold to purchaser
	Yes	Yes	He said "Oh well, how old are you? I told him 18. Then he said “What year were you born?” I said “1988”. He said “Ok then I guess I believe you.”
	Yes	Yes	What’s your date of birth? I said 17/08/88. She accepted and sold me the alcohol

Purchasers who were asked for ID but sold alcohol anyway were often asked for their date of birth and this was taken as sufficient to proceed with the sale.

4. Factors influencing alcohol sales without ID

Results were analysed by other factors that could have influenced whether alcohol was sold without ID and are discussed below.

4.1. Purchase 'timing'

The audits were conducted over six successive weekends between the 22nd of September and the 28th October (see Section 2.2). Results were analysed by whether they were conducted on Friday or Saturday, or wether in the afternoon compared to later in the evening, plus any other special events that could have influenced whether alcohol was sold.

- ⇒ There was no difference in results whether the purchase attempts were made on Friday (76%) or Saturday (78%).
- ⇒ The scheduled timing of the audits between the afternoon (i.e. 4.00pm - 6.59pm) and the evening (i.e. 7.00pm - 9.30pm) did not influence whether alcohol was sold to the purchaser without ID (78% and 75% respectively).
- ⇒ The October school holidays occurred during the audit period (from the 29th of September to the 17th of October). There was no difference between the school holiday weekends (76%) and the term weekends (78%) in the number of successful purchase attempts made.
- ⇒ Another event which occurred during the audit period was the AFL football grand final however there was also no difference between purchase attempts this weekend (73%) compared to other weekends (78%) in terms of sales of alcohol.

Results show that there was no significant variation in the likely success of purchase depending on the timing the audit took place.

4.2. Selection of alcoholic beverage

Purchasers were given instructions in the briefing about the type of alcoholic product they should select (see Section 2.6). Purchasers were asked to select an alcoholic beverage that they would typically purchase with friends such as pre-mixed drinks and beer to the value of $15. Results found that there was no significant difference by the type of alcohol selected (i.e. vodka, beer, bourbon, scotch etc) or the price of the selected item in whether the purchase attempt was successful.

4.3. Premise staff visible at the time of purchase attempt

Purchasers were asked to estimate the age and gender of the staff member that served them and the number of other staff observed in the premise.

The approximate age of the staff member who served the purchaser was classified broadly. It appeared that staff members who were judged to be aged over 45 years (62%) were less likely to sell alcohol without ID than were younger staff members (80% 18-24 yrs; 81% 25-34 yrs; 79% 35-44 yrs). There was no significant difference by the gender of staff member who served the purchaser for successful purchase attempts (75% male staff; 82% female staff).

Successful purchase attempts were also analysed by the number of staff that the purchaser observed in the store when they attempted to purchase the alcohol. Results suggest that the number of staff in the premise affects the propensity of staff to sell alcohol without ID. Premises with only one staff member (i.e. the person serving) were more likely to sell alcohol without ID than were premises where more staff were evident (86% 1 staff member; 81% 2 staff members; 75% 3-4 staff members; 56% 5+ staff members including the person serving).

4.4. Number of customers present at the time of purchase attempt

Purchasers were also asked to estimate the number of other customers in the store and judge how busy or distracted the staff appeared to be when they made their attempt to purchase alcohol.

Whilst not significant, at face value it appears that as the number of customers in store increases the propensity for alcohol sales top be made without ID decreases (78% of premises where no other customers were present sold alcohol; 82% where there were between 1-2 customers; 72% where there were 3-10 customers present; and 69% where 10+ customers were present). There was no significant difference by how busy or distracted the staff appears to be and the number of sales of alcohol without ID (78% ‘nearly empty’; 74% ‘quite busy’; 77% ‘very busy’).

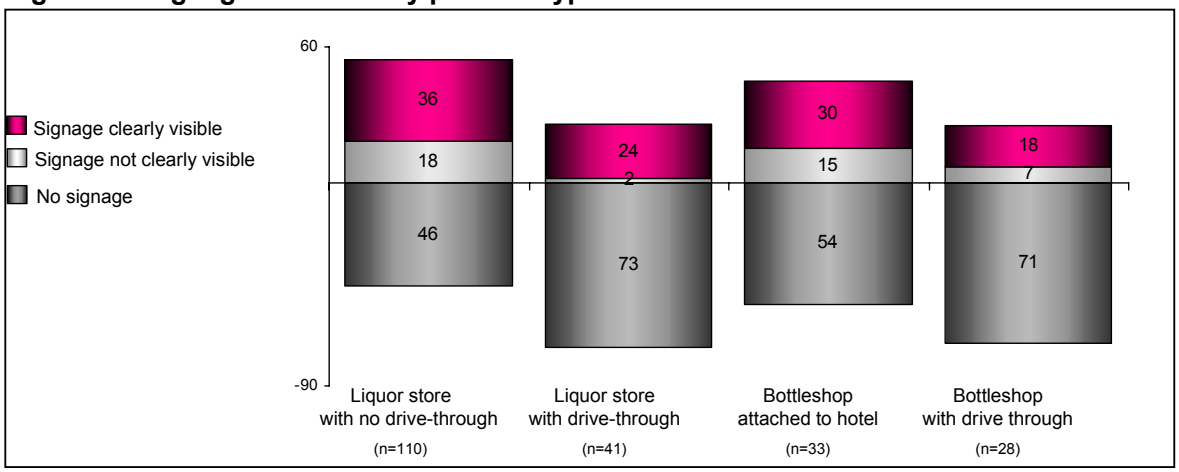
5. Signage

Purchasers were also asked to note whether signage prohibiting the sale of alcohol to underage customers was visible in the premises. There were three categories for classifying signage: signage was clearly visible, signage was present but not clearly visible, and there was no signage observed.

Overall 31% of premises were observed to have had clearly visible signage, 13% had signage but it was not clearly visible, but purchasers were not able to see signage in over half of the audited premises (56%).

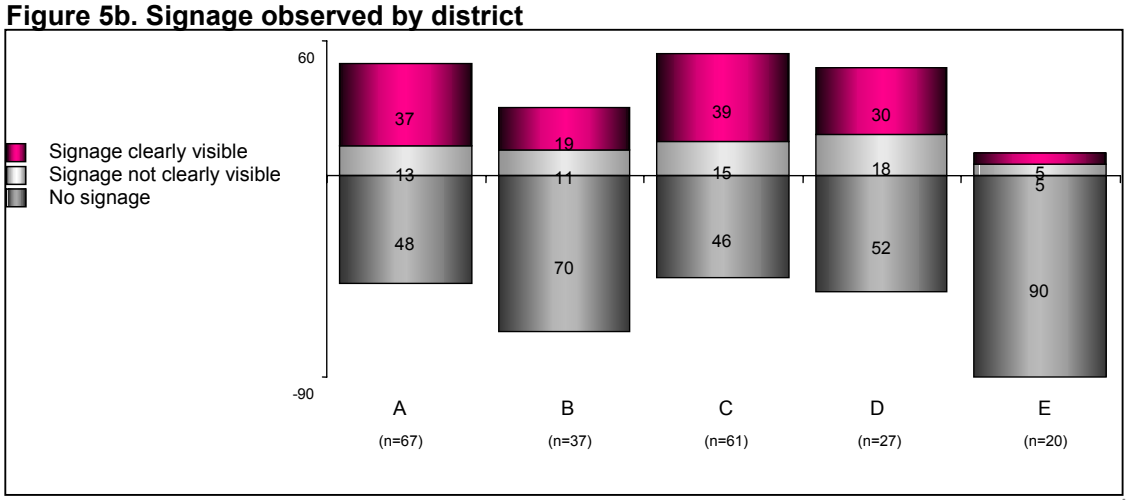
These results are analysed below by venue type (Figure 5a), district (Figure 5b) and whether alcohol was successfully purchased or not (Figure 5c).

Figure 5a. Signage observed by premise type



The results indicate that retail premises <u>without</u> a drive-through were more likely to display signage than were premises that had a drive through.

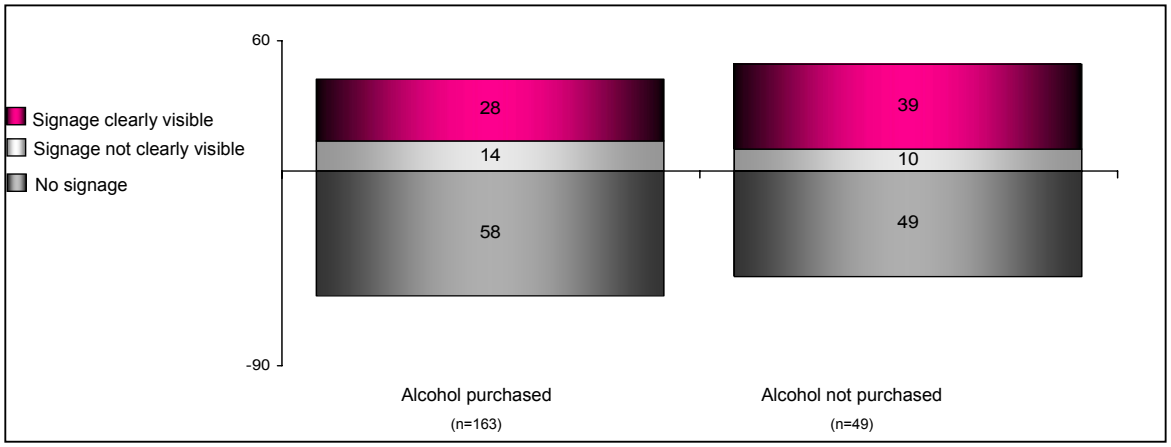
Figure 5b. Signage observed by district



There is some variation in the results by district for those who were observed to have signage present. A (50%), B (54%) and D (48%) were more likely to have signage visible than were C (30%) or E (10%) districts.

In the Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project (2002), signage varied greatly between the cities and districts with between 43% and 84% of premises in the cities, and 27% and 56% in the districts.

Figure 5c. Signage observed by purchase attempt



Interestingly, premises that had not sold alcohol without verifying the age of the purchase were more likely to have signage clearly displayed than were premises that had sold alcohol in this research.

6. Summary of findings

Overall a high proportion of premises (77%) sold liquor to underage looking 18 year olds without ID, suggesting that in many premises age verifications practices are not being undertaken.

There was some variation by district in the number of successful alcohol purchases. Purchasers in A (87%) and B (81%) were more likely to be able to buy alcohol without ID than were purchasers in C (72%), D (70%) and E (63%). There was no difference between male and female purchasers in whether their attempts to purchase alcohol were successful.

A minimal number of premises checked ID on entry (1%), and only a further quarter (25%) of premises checked ID on attempted purchase. Of some concern was that eight premises sold alcohol to the purchaser even though no ID had been produced when asked. In most of these cases the staff member asked for the purchaser's date of birth as a substitute for actual ID.

It appears that staff members who were estimated to be aged over 45 years (62%) were less likely to sell alcohol without ID than were younger staff members (80% of 18-24 year old staff members; 81% of 25-34 year old staff members; 79% of 35-44 year old staff members). Also, the more other people who are present in the store (staff and customers) appears to decrease the number of successful sales, suggesting that increased visibility of the sale to other people prompts staff members to check ID.

Scheduled timing, purchaser experience and alcoholic beverage selected appeared to have no influence on whether the purchase attempt was successful or not.

More than half of venues did not appear to have visible signage prohibiting the sale of alcohol to underage customers (56%) and a further 13% of premises had signage that was not clearly visible. Premises that did not sell alcohol without ID were more likely to have signage clearly displayed than were premises that had sold alcohol to purchasers in this study.

7. Concluding remarks

The research audited a number of premises within the southern corridor in Perth, Western Australia. **Results suggest that purchasing alcohol underage without age verification is relatively easy across all districts and store types, as ID is often not checked.**

Furthermore, venues were randomly selected within each district in order to gain a representative picture of the number of venues that verify purchaser ID. **It is suggested that this approach would underestimate how easy it is to purchase alcohol without ID, as young people might generally 'know' in their local area, which premises (and possibly which staff members) are more likely to sell them alcohol without ID.**

The alcoholic beverage selected by the purchaser was up to the value of $15, which was defined as the amount for personal consumption. **Despite the limitation on the amount of alcohol purchased at each audit, the ease of purchasing alcohol from different venues can quickly amass into a large amount of alcohol, as was evident from this project where 163 successful transactions were made <u>without ID</u>.**

8. References

'Alcohol consumption amongst 12 to 17 year old Western Australian School Students' (2004), Drug and Alcohol Office Western Australia.

'Auckland Pseudo Patrons Project' (2002), Alcohol & Public Health Research Unit, University of Auckland.

Appendix A

Research Protocol Sheet

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Q1

Name of young person: _____

Name of store: _____

Suburb: _____

Date: _____

Time of entry: _____

Q2 What was the type of outlet? **TICK ONE ONLY**

Liquor store (no drive-through)	
Bottleshop (attached to hotel)	
Drive-through liquorstore	
Drive-through bottleshop	

Q3 Were you asked for ID?

	Yes	No
upon entering the store		
upon purchase		

Other time: **WRITE IN** _____

_____

IF 'Yes' to any go to Q4, otherwise go to Q5

Q4 What did the staff member say when you didn't show ID? **PROBE FULLY**

_____

_____

_____

Q5a Did you manage to purchase alcohol? **TICK ONE ONLY**

Yes – no staff comment		**GO Q6a**
Yes – staff commented		**GO Q5b**
No		**GO Q5b**

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Q5b **IF 'No' or 'Yes - staff commented'** What was said? **PROBE FULLY**

_____

_____

_____

Q6a What type of alcohol did you purchase/attempt to purchase?

Brand of alcohol: _____

Types of alcohol: _____

Number of items: _____

Q6b How much did the alcohol cost?

$

Q6c **IF 'Yes' in Q5a** Were you given a receipt? **TICK ONE ONLY.**

Yes	☐	**IF YES, ATTACH RECEIPT**
No	☐	

Q7a In your opinion, approximately how old was the staff member who served you? **TICK ONE ONLY**

18-24 yrs	☐
25-34 yrs	☐
35-44 yrs	☐
45+ yrs	☐

Q7b What was the gender of the person who served you? **TICK ONE ONLY**

Male	☐
Female	☐

Q7c How many other staff were you able to see in the store?

Q8a Approximately how many customers were in the store when you attempted to purchase?

Q8b Would you say the store was…? **TICK ONE ONLY**

Very busy (i.e. staff distracted)	
Quite busy	
Nearly empty (i.e. staff available)	

Q9 Was signage prohiting the sale of alcohol to underage customers clearly visible? **TICK ONE ONLY**

Yes - clearly visible	
Yes - not clearly visible	
Not visible / not sure	

Other: **WRITE IN**

_____

_____

Q10 Any other comments? **PLEASE WRITE IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____