



REVEALED: THE REASONS WHY ADULTS FAIL TO COMPLY WITH SECONDARY SUPPLY LAWS

10 November 2015: Australians continue to break the law and supply alcohol to underage drinkers in the belief that there is little risk of detection or punishment.

A new study examining the reasons why adults aren't complying with secondary supply laws has recommended raising awareness of the penalties, together with greater enforcement measures, and effective public education campaigns that challenge social norms and the assumption that 'everyone else does it'.

The report, *Why don't friends and relatives of underage drinkers comply with secondary supply laws in NSW*, was commissioned by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and produced by the Australian Catholic University's Centre for Health and Social Research (CHaSR).

Tapping into extensive literature examining the reasons for why people do or don't obey traffic laws, the study explored the similarities and differences in perceptions of secondary supply, speeding and drink driving offences.

In Australia, almost 60 per cent of alcohol consumed by 12 to 17 year olds is supplied by adult friends, relatives or strangers, despite the fact that the provision of alcohol to young people under the age of 18 by someone other than their parent or guardian is in fact illegal in most Australian jurisdictions.

The study took place in New South Wales, with 413 participants completing a survey which explored their attitudes and behaviours towards secondary supply, speeding and drink driving laws using projective interviewing techniques.

They also responded to questions relating to the five key motivational factors identified as being predictive of compliance or non-compliance with the law: personal morality, social norms, perceived legitimacy, procedural fairness and deterrence.

When presented with a hypothetical scenario of a parent providing alcohol to someone else's teenage children, and then asked what those adults might be thinking about afterwards, few respondents focused on the illegal behaviour itself.

Instead, most focused on other aspects of the scenario including the parents' relief that the evening was a success or enjoyment of the activity. Only 17 per cent of respondents made any reference to the decision to provide alcohol.

However, when presented with a drink driving scenario, the illegal behaviour and the risk of being caught was the focus of the majority of responses.

Lead researcher, Professor Sandra Jones said the responses to these attitudinal questions highlighted some consistencies between secondary supply and speeding, but also clear differences between secondary supply and the two driving behaviours including the perceived likelihood of getting caught.

“The big difference that separates people’s attitudes to secondary supply laws from speeding or drink driving is the deterrence factor. People perceive that they are substantially less likely to be caught or punished for supplying alcohol to underage drinkers than they are for speeding or drink driving,” Professor Jones said.

The study also found that the main motivators for complying with secondary supply laws were personal morality and social norms, which have a powerful influence on behaviour.

“People are influenced by their personal sense of what’s right and wrong, and their perceptions of what friends and peers consider to be an accepted behaviour. Our research shows that people substantially overestimate the social acceptability of underage drinking and are often concerned that their values are too conservative. To counter this, we need effective public campaigns and tools that will educate and empower parents and other adults who aren’t comfortable giving alcohol to young people to stand firm in their decision,” says Professor Jones.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn notes that while the prevalence of underage drinking in Australia has recently decreased, the proportion of risky drinking among those who do is on the rise. He says it is important that Australian governments take steps to strengthen secondary supply measures, and says the latest research contains important policy implications.

“There are a number of steps that state and territory governments can, and should be taking, to ensure that secondary supply laws are effective. Governments must do more to raise awareness of secondary supply laws and associated penalties, to ensure these laws are being enforced, and that more parents, community members and other adults understand the health risks associated with drinking alcohol under the age of 18 when a young person’s brain is still developing,” Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) and Professor Sandra Jones are available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time, FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.