

Audit of supermarket booze ads finds the law is falling short

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A study led by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington researchers has shown that legal requirements around the display of alcohol could be doing more to reduce alcohol consumption in New

Zealand.

The study, led by Dr. Karen McBride-Henry, director of the University's Health Services Research Centre, investigated supermarket compliance with the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012.

"Supermarkets are the most popular place in New Zealand to purchase alcohol, so the way alcohol is promoted and sold in supermarkets could have a significant impact on drinking in New Zealand," says Dr. McBride-Henry.

Dr. McBride-Henry and her colleagues found that the supermarkets they studied were generally compliant with the law. However, there were some breaches such as selling other products alongside alcohol and setting up temporary alcohol sales areas, which breaches the requirement under the act for a "single alcohol area."

However, their study also found that even in supermarkets that were highly compliant with the law, alcohol was still highly visible and accessible to consumers—meaning that while the letter of the law was followed, the spirit of the law, reducing [alcohol consumption](#), was not, says Dr. McBride-Henry.

Of particular concern was the level of exposure that [vulnerable populations](#), such as children, received to alcohol and alcohol-related advertising.

"A critical point of intervention in preventing life-long alcohol-related harm is in childhood," says Dr. McBride-Henry. "Twenty percent of adult New Zealanders are hazardous drinkers, and approximately a third of those drinkers starting abusing alcohol as young adults.

"The act has failed to protect consumers, including those most at

risk—like children—from alcohol promotion and marketing."

Based on their results, Dr. McBride-Henry and her colleagues have suggested potential changes to the law to help reduce alcohol purchase and consumption in New Zealand.

"Some potential solutions to reducing [alcohol abuse](#) could be extending the legislation to restrict placement of alcohol sales areas to low-traffic parts of the supermarket," says Dr. McBride-Henry. "Other possibilities would include banning the use of promotional practices like in-store samples or reducing the hours [alcohol](#) is available for purchase to hours when children, for example, are less likely to be in the supermarket."

The tool used to assess supermarkets in this study could also be used alongside legislation to ensure objective testing of [supermarket](#) compliance, making requirements easy to follow and ensuring consistency across New Zealand, Dr. McBride-Henry says.

More information: Karen McBride-Henry et al. Consumer alcohol exposure in supermarkets: legislatively adherent, but a societal problem, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.12963](#)

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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