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Young adults' experience of responsible service practice in NSW: An update

Licensed premises in NSW have shown greater responsibility in the service of alcohol over the last five years according to new research released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Following the NSW Alcohol Summit in 2003, the NSW Government amended the Liquor Act to require mandatory training for all licensed premises staff in an accredited responsible service of alcohol (RSA) course. The NSW Police also introduced the 'Linking Project', which enabled them to track alcohol-related crimes back to specific licensed premises.

The Bureau's evaluation of these initiatives was conducted in 2006 and funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AERF). The evaluation involved interviews with a representative sample of 2,427 young NSW adults. Respondents were asked a number of questions about their last drinking occasion at licensed premises.

Respondents were first asked whether on their last drinking occasion they showed any of five common signs of intoxication (staggering/falling over, slurred speech, loss of coordination, loud/quarrelsome, spilling drinks).

If they reported showing any of these five signs they were then asked whether they had experienced one or more of seven different responsible service (RSA) initiatives (refused another drink, asked to stop drinking, asked to leave the premises, called the police, suggested patron buy low or non-alcoholic drinks, suggested that the patron buy food, advised on/organized transport home).

A similar survey was conducted by the Bureau back in 2002. When the Bureau compared results from the 2002 and 2006 surveys, it found licensed premises in 2006 were taking a tougher line toward those showing three or more signs of intoxication.

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In the 2002 survey, only 12 per cent of respondents who reported showing three or more signs of intoxication said they had experienced some form of RSA intervention. By 2006, this percentage had more than doubled; to 28 per cent. The Bureau also found significant increases in the percentage of respondents showing three or more signs of intoxication that were either:

- refused service (up from 3.8 per cent to 11.7 per cent),
- asked to stop drinking (up from 3.8 per cent to 15.0 per cent) or
- had transport home arranged for them (up from 6.4 per cent to 9.2 per cent)

The percentage of intoxicated respondents who reported that they continued to be served alcoholic drinks fell (from 65 per cent to 54 per cent) but the difference was not statistically significant.

The Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn said that the findings were very encouraging and showed that Government, police and industry efforts since the Alcohol Summit to promote more responsible service of alcohol were beginning to pay off. However he cautioned against any complacency.

“Alcohol-related violence may have stabilized over the last few years (after rising sharply during the 1990s) but it remains a major problem. The 2006 survey shows that, despite the improvements in RSA, the single most common response by bar staff to young people showing three or more signs of intoxication on licensed premises is to continue serving them alcohol.”

“It is critical that this response be changed,” he said.

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