



Western Australia
alcohol home
delivery project:
Test purchasing
final report



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Summary

Expansion of online alcohol delivery is one of the largest changes in recent alcohol availability, with use of online delivery retailers markedly increasing in the past five years. To help mitigate alcohol-related harm that may stem from online alcohol delivery, in February 2022 the Western Australian (WA) Government introduced new regulations that required that same day alcohol deliveries cannot be left unattended, and the person accepting must present valid photo identification (e.g., driver's licence) as proof of being over 18 years of age.

The current study documented the use of ID checks and unattended deliveries for 34 rapid (<2 hours) and same day alcohol deliveries to young adults (<25 years of age) in Perth. Test purchases were conducted on Friday and Saturdays from 28 October to 26 November 2022.

Rapid alcohol deliveries were received, on average, within an hour after the order was placed. While all orders required the purchaser to tick a box or enter a date of birth to confirm they were aged 18 years or older at the time of placing the order, 24% of orders were delivered without an identification check at time of delivery. Additionally, one rapid delivery was left unattended at the door.

The current study provides evidence for retailer compliance with the new WA online alcohol delivery regulations. While age details were requested at point of order for all purchases, this process would be easily circumvented by underage individuals, as it only required selecting a checkbox or putting in date of birth. Approximately one quarter of the purchases in our sample were delivered without ID verification checks at the point of delivery. The lack of age verification at point of purchase, combined with inconsistent ID verification checks at delivery (with no requirement for next day delivery), may enable underage purchases of alcohol. Confusion among retailers and drivers regarding ID checks suggests that improved training is needed. The introduction of policy allowing for regulators and police to conduct compliance checks for online delivery of alcohol (i.e., 'mystery shopper' or 'test purchases') would aid in improving compliance with regulations. Further, expansion of the current regulations to all alcohol deliveries, rather than only those made within the same day only, is recommended.

Introduction

The introduction of online alcohol delivery marks one of the largest changes in alcohol availability in recent years, as it allows alcohol to be delivered to ones' door within one to two hours. Consumer use of online alcohol delivery has been steadily increasing since 2019, (1-3), and is estimated to grow 66% by 2027 (4). This expansion has created a new market, where alcohol delivery companies are promoting their ability to deliver alcohol (5) "within minutes" (6) . This uptake in alcohol delivery has changed the landscape of alcohol availability and has the potential to circumvent effective alcohol policies, such as outlet density restrictions (7). The increased alcohol availability creates an environment that may be particularly harmful for vulnerable populations, and one that poses challenges to existing Responsible Service of Alcohol policies.

A recent report from Scotland highlights cases of children as young as 14-years old being able to access alcohol through alcohol delivery (8). Qualitative responses highlight minors use online alcohol delivery as it is convenient, they are rarely asked for ID, and they are unable to purchase in-person from bottle-shops (8). As underage alcohol consumption is associated with academic problems, justice involvement, and future alcohol use disorders (9-11), there is a clear need for more regulations around online alcohol delivery, as it has the potential to erode established policies that prevent alcohol-related harm. Further, in 2019 the New South Wales (NSW) Coroners Court found that rapid alcohol delivery was linked to the death of a NSW man, who over the three years prior to his death had just under 300 orders of multiple bottles of alcohol for delivery to his house (12). Following the Coroner's report, in 2021 the NSW Government implemented new regulations to address online alcohol delivery to minors or intoxicated individuals. In NSW, deliveries must only be handed to a nominated adult, identification (ID) must be checked for those who look under 25-years or signed declaration for those that look older, and drivers are not financially penalised for non-delivery to underage or intoxicated individuals (13).

In February 2022 the Western Australian (WA) Government introduced new regulations that required that same-day deliveries of alcohol cannot be left unattended, and the person accepting must present valid photo ID (14). These regulations are due for review in October 2023, however to the authors knowledge, no evaluations of retailers' adherence to these new policies have taken place. As such, the aim of the current report is to observe the practices of

WA online alcohol delivery retailers and observe rates of ID checking and unattended deliveries during same day alcohol deliveries to young people.

Method

Sample

All alcohol retailers that offered rapid delivery and same day delivery across Perth, WA, were sampled for test purchasing. Rapid deliveries were orders estimated to arrive within two hours from purchase, while same day deliveries are orders that were placed earlier in the day for delivery later that evening. Possible retailers were compiled through both an audit report conducted by Cancer Council Western Australia (15) as well as scoping internet searches using “Perth”, and “alcohol delivery” as key words. Thirty-four rapid (n = 23) and same day (n = 11) deliveries were made over a period of five weeks (28 October 2022 to 26 November 2022) from eight separate retailers.

Observation checklist

An observation checklist was created for the current study that included items for time and day of both point of order and delivery, and postcode of delivery location. Items assessing the purchase point included whether there was a method of age checking at time of checkout, availability of “Buy-Now Pay-Later” options (e.g., Zip Pay, Afterpay), type and price of purchased alcohol, and the category of retailer (i.e., large liquor retailer, independent store). Point of delivery questions identified whether the alcohol delivery was left unattended or if ID was checked upon delivery. A free text field was also included for research assistants to document anything else of note. No identifying information of either the retailer or delivery driver was recorded.

Procedure

Ethics approval for the current study was obtained from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 2022-239). The current study employed a team of adult research assistants aged 18 – 24 years, who by consensus of the research team, appeared younger than 25 years old. Test purchasing occurred across two locations each day of data collection. Deliveries were made on Friday and Saturday nights from approximately 6pm. Young adults purchasing on a weekend night was chosen due to younger people more commonly utilising rapid delivery (16) and weekends representing high risk times for alcohol related harm (17-20).

Research assistants worked in teams of two at each location and each pair attempted approximately six purchases a night, with rapid delivery attempts staggered every 20 minutes in the evening and same day purchases ordered earlier in the day. A pre-determined list of purchases to be attempted was provided to each research assistant pair at the beginning of the night. Research assistants also alternated who made the purchase. Only one delivery was ordered from a single retailer per location each night of data collection. Using a pre-paid credit card, each test purchase consisted of a single bottle of vodka. Vodka was chosen to reflect the typical purchasing behaviour of young people (21). Research assistants were instructed to proceed with the purchase as if it were a normal transaction, answering the door if required, and providing their ID if asked. Upon completion of the purchase, research assistants filled out the post-delivery observation checklist using Qualtrics (22). For auditing purposes alcohol was labelled and returned to research team.

Results

Out of the 48 attempted purchases that occurred over the study duration, 34 ($n = 23$ rapid, $n = 11$ same day) were successfully delivered on the day of purchase. One additional purchase delivery was delayed and was delivered several days after the initial purchase. This delivery has been omitted from the below findings as it cannot be considered a same day purchase. Of the remaining 13 purchases attempts that were not delivered, ten were cancelled without any specified reason provided and three were cancelled due to no driver availability.

For the 34 successful same day purchases, some method of age checking at point of purchase (i.e., on the website) was present for all purchases. This was done through entering date of birth ($n = 24$), agreeing that the purchaser was over 18 years ($n = 8$) or a combination of both ($n = 2$). “Buy Now Pay Later” options were only identified as an option at a single retailer. For rapid deliveries, the average time from order to delivery was less than one hour (*Median* = 46 minutes, *Interquartile range* = 32 – 60 minutes).

Eight deliveries were made without checking identification (24%). The lack of ID checks occurred relatively evenly across delivery type ($n = 4$ rapid, $n = 4$ same day) and retailer category ($n = 3$ independent, $n = 5$ larger chain). There was one recorded instance of an unattended rapid delivery where the alcohol was left at the residence without any face-to-face contact at the door. Qualitative notes also documented three instances of confusion with regulations: two cases of drivers deliberating whether to ask for identification, and one instance where a driver

insisted the research assistant had to be over 25 years to receive the delivery, however each of these three deliveries resulted in ID being checked and alcohol being delivered. Finally, during one rapid delivery a promotional beverage (one standard drink) was also included, with no option to remove the beverage from the cart.

Discussion

The current study provides evidence regarding adherence to same day online alcohol delivery regulations to young adults in Perth. There was only one instance of a rapid delivery being left at the door unattended. The requirement to hand over the alcohol, as opposed to leaving unattended, reduces the likelihood of a delivery being made to an intoxicated individual. However, within our sample, 24% of orders were delivered without checking identification at time of delivery. Non-compliance with ID checking appeared consistent across retailer category and delivery type (i.e., rapid delivery or same day delivery). The findings from the current report suggest that despite new online alcohol delivery regulations being implemented within Western Australia from February 2022, there are still some failings at point of delivery. In order to effectively monitor adherence to WA online alcohol delivery regulation, policy is needed to allow regulators and police to conduct mystery shopping exercises, as is now conducted in New South Wales (23). Such an approach would increase retailer accountability and ensure implementation of adequate driver training.

The WA government introduced new regulations to help reduce harms that may stem from alcohol delivery (14). However, the lack of consistency in ID checks at point of delivery, and the ease with which age checking can be circumvented at point of purchase (i.e., selecting a checkbox or entering a date of birth), may still enable access to alcohol by those who are underage. Further, while same day deliveries require ID checks and cannot be left unattended, this is not the case for next day or longer delivery timeframes. Allowing alcohol to be left unattended for next day or longer deliveries provides an avenue for underage alcohol purchases that could be easily exploited. Additionally, some retailers deliver alcohol amongst other goods or alongside alcohol that was ordered the previous day, adding to potential for confusion regarding ID checking requirements at point of delivery. Therefore, expansion of the current regulations to require identification checking to all alcohol deliveries, rather than only those made within the same day, is recommended. Finally, it is possible that the transition to online alcohol delivery places delivery drivers in situations that lack the same supports provided to staff in bottle-shops or on-premises venues

when refusing a purchase of alcohol. That is, purchases at an on-premises location are made in the context of a wider team of staff members and the presence of security measures. For online alcohol delivery, the lack of readily available support at time of delivery may create a power imbalance whereby a delivery driver may feel unsafe to refuse a delivery, particularly to intoxicated patrons or larger groups within a home. Such a purchase may be denied on-premises. Introducing appropriate training and policy for drivers to mitigate such risks, such as implementing a minimum two-hour delay on delivery of orders and extending policy to all delivery timeframes, is needed.

Conclusions

This is the first study to provide direct evidence of the proportion of rapid and same day alcohol deliveries that are not being delivered in line with regulations in Western Australia. The current report was able to provide demonstrate that despite WA same day alcohol delivery regulations being in place since February 2022, there is still a level of non-compliance across retailers. These violations represent potential avenues for underage or intoxicated people to access alcohol, indicating that policy refinement is needed. This policy should not allow unattended delivery at the door and requires identification checks at point of delivery for all delivery timeframes (i.e., not only same day). Further, regulations allowing for regulator and police 'mystery shopper' exercises would improve compliance among retailers.

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