

Head: Free alcohol giveaways come at a price

Point-of-sale bottle shop promotions target young, inexperienced drinkers and may encourage them to drink too much.

This was a finding of a study published in the August issue of Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health.

Lead author, Prof. Sandra Jones from the University of Wollongong, said point-of-sale promotions – such as 'buy some, get some free' and gifts with purchases – were concerning.

"Young drinkers react very strongly to price promotion. Anything that makes alcohol cheaper or gives them extra 'bang for their buck' is going to encourage them to consume," Prof. Jones said.

"If young people normally drink a particular brand of bourbon and coke, and there's a different type of bourbon and coke brand offering a free hat or a free drink with purchase, they are likely to switch brands."

The danger lies in the large variation in serving sizes and strength among different brands.

"One drink may actually constitute two or more standard drinks. That can make a big difference to the person's capacity to drive and make rational decisions."

The solution lies not with drinkers but with regulators, Prof. Jones said.

"The way alcohol promotions are regulated now centres on proving harm. For example, you are not permitted to price a product so low that it encourages excessive consumption. However, there's no clear definition of what that means.

"We'd like to see regulators to be more specific in regulating in-store promotions. In particular, whether those types of promotions are acceptable for product that we know is predominantly consumed by young people."

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For more information about this research, contact the research author:

Prof. Sandra Jones, Centre for Health Initiatives, University of Wollongong, 0402 848 743, sandraj@uow.edu.au

MEDIA ONLY: To receive a PDF of the paper or for more information about ANZJPH, contact: Irina Fainberg ANZJPH Administration Ph: (03) 9329 3535 E-mail: irina.fainberg@substitution.com.au