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MEDIA RELEASE

Young adults' experience of responsible service practice in NSW

Only one in ten young adults showing signs of intoxication at a pub or club report that the bar-staff either;

- refused them service
- asked them to leave the premises
- called the police
- advised them on or organised transport home
- advised them to buy low or non-alcoholic drinks
- suggested they buy food or,
- suggested they stop drinking

according to a recent study conducted jointly by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University (WA).

The research, based on telephone interviews with 1,090 young adults aged 18-39 in NSW, found that 75 per cent of males and 64 per cent of females have consumed alcohol at high-risk levels at least once in the previous 12 months.

For over half of these drinkers (54%), the last high-risk drinking occasion occurred on licensed premises, usually a pub or club.

Those whose last episode of high-risk drinking occurred on licensed premises were asked whether they showed one or more of five obvious signs of intoxication. These were: (1) loss of coordination; (2) slurred speech; (3) staggering or falling over; (4) spilling drinks and (5) loud or quarrelsome behaviour.

Over half of the high-risk drinkers (56%) reported showing at least one of these five signs of intoxication and almost one in five (19%) reported showing three or more signs.

Of those who reported showing at least one sign of intoxication, less than three per cent were refused service of alcohol and less than four per cent were asked to leave the licensed premises. For those reporting three or more signs of intoxication, less than four per cent were refused service and only about six per cent were asked to leave.

According to those surveyed, the most frequent response of licensed premises staff to intoxication was to continue serving alcohol, with 55 per cent of intoxicated patrons reporting that this had occurred.

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In fact, 65 per cent of those showing three or more signs of intoxication said the licensed premises staff continued to serve them, compared with only 49 per cent of those showing fewer than three signs of intoxication.

Although very few intoxicated drinkers reported experiencing responsible service practices, the study did find some evidence of responsible service.

Almost one in three (3%) 'non-intoxicated' drinkers said they had observed at least one occurrence of refusal of service to other intoxicated patrons and one in four (24%) said that they had witnessed an intoxicated patron being asked to leave.

At the same time, one in four (26%) of these 'non-intoxicated' drinkers also reported seeing the continued service of alcohol to other intoxicated patrons at the licensed premises.

Commenting on the findings, the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn said that they provided clear evidence that, despite the legal prohibition on serving alcohol to intoxicated patrons, licensed premises often continued to do so.

Professor Tim Stockwell, Director of the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University, stated that 'this research highlights the huge opportunity for preventing injury and crime by responsible service of alcohol and the enforcement of liquor laws. If bar staff are going to stop service to intoxicated customers their managers need to believe that the laws requiring this will be enforced'.

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