

Institution: Lancaster University
Unit of Assessment: 19, Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: Informing Policy and Practice to Reduce Excessive and Underage Drinking.
<p>1. Summary of the impact:</p> <p>Excessive alcohol consumption in the UK is recognised to cause widespread health, social and economic problems. Researchers at Lancaster sought to investigate related aspects of the problem: consumer and retailer perspectives. Piacentini's research on student alcohol culture has influenced medical practitioners' understandings of alcohol consumption, informed Portman Group research, was cited in the Guardian and discussed on BBC Radio 4. Hopkinson's research on underage alcohol sales identified the need for a new collaborative, community based action model, subsequently realised through the formation of Community Alcohol Partnerships. A successful pilot scheme resulted in over £1m being invested by major retailers and a further 54 CAPs being set up across the UK. The research also contributed to the transition from 'Challenge 21' to 'Challenge 25' and to staff training DVD on alcohol sales for SPAR employees.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research that underpins this case details a bi-partite investigation into young peoples' use of alcohol and their access to it through the retail trade. Alcohol misuse is frequently referenced in national and international news and has been the focus of the Government's Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy. There have been numerous national campaigns aimed at reducing excessive and underage drinking including Drink Aware and Think 21. The research at Lancaster focused on two related aspects, informed by this common concern. First, the cultural and behavioural reasons behind drinking and their association with alcohol misuse and second, the role of retail practices in under-age sales.</p> <p><u>Cultural and behavioural aspects of alcohol consumption:</u></p> <p>The initial research took place between 2005 and 2008 by Maria Piacentini and Emma Banister, both then Lecturers in Marketing at Lancaster. Piacentini is now Professor in Marketing at LUMS and Banister has since joined Manchester Business School. Their research explored the culture of intoxication that characterises students' lives and the efforts and decisions to adopt more sensible drinking approaches. The target groups were heavy drinkers and abstainers/near-abstainers. The research found that both groups experience tensions and pressures in their approach to alcohol. This tension stems from the ambivalence felt by both groups around potential social exclusion and stigmatisation associated with not participating in the mainstream alcohol culture.</p> <p>Key insights from this work related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the pros and cons associated with excessive alcohol consumption • Deeper understanding of the experience of abstention/near abstention among young people • Recognising the tensions and difficulties for both abstainers and heavier drinkers, and that there are various ways of coping with these tensions in place <p>Between 2009 and 2012 Piacentini and Banister's supervised ESRC PhD student Hayley Cocker on her thesis 'Young People (16-18yr old) and Alcohol Consumption'. Cocker is now a Lecturer in the Department of Marketing. She has two published papers with her supervisors, on the consumption of alcohol by young people, providing additional and ongoing impact in the field.</p> <p><u>The retail practice perspective:</u></p> <p>In 2005, Piacentini's research on alcohol culture was presented to the Portman Group's Steering Committee, a body comprising alcohol producers. Subsequently she advised this group with respect to their tracking study 'An anatomy of a big night out'. The work was also communicated, via the Portman Group Head of Policy to the British Retail Consortium who work on alcohol related issues with the Portman Group, with retailers and with government. Thus, when the retail industry was required to conduct research on persistent levels of underage sales, Piacentini was initially</p>

approached however she suggested that Hopkinson (Senior Lecturer) had experience more relevant to this aspect of the alcohol problem because of her previous studies of sales work (e.g. '[Stories from the front-line](#)', 2003, *Journal of Management Studies*). As with the research into young consumers and alcohol, this project was concerned with how participants (i.e. retail sales staff) understand and explain their own actions.

'A study of cashiers' perceptions and behaviours in young alcohol sales situations' was undertaken in 2006 (with Professor Michael Humphreys of Nottingham University) and examined a range of types of alcohol sales outlets in England and initiatives such as test purchasing and Think 21. The main focus of the research was store worker identity, allowing the many parties involved in alcohol sales to understand how store staff saw themselves. This showed that a failing system of monitoring and punishment (according to Home Office Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign statistics) meant that an opportunity was being missed to promote more reflexive practice. This focus would enable stores to take a more effective approach to combating underage sales by capitalising upon store worker identity as the front line of child protection. Key insights from the work were that store workers felt themselves to be central in the community, and that part of their identity was to be protectors of the vulnerable - protecting children in particular from themselves and others. Recommendations focused upon systems to leverage store worker identity to better effect. This included store training and systems, communication with the public and inter-agency collaboration.

3. References to the research

The research on alcohol and young consumers has been cited in international, peer reviewed journals and the age-related sales research has been disseminated nationally to government and alcohol retailers at conferences and internationally to researchers in the academic field.

Alcohol and young consumers:

1. Piacentini, M.G., Chatzidakis, A., and Banister, E.N. (2012) 'Making Sense of Drinking: The Role of Techniques of Neutralisation and Counter-Neutralisation in Negotiating Alcohol Consumption', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 34(6): 841-857.
2. Piacentini, M.G. and Banister E.N. (2009) 'Managing Anti-Consumption in an Excessive Drinking Culture', *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2): 279-288. The paper has been cited in top academic journals in management and applied sciences, including: *British Journal of Criminology*; *Sociology*; *Gender and Education*; *European Journal of Marketing*; *Journal of Marketing Management*; *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.
3. Banister, E.N. and Piacentini, M.G. (2008) 'Drunk and (Dis)Orderly: The Role of Alcohol in Supporting Liminality', In: Lee, A.Y. & Soman, D. (eds.) *Advances in Consumer Research XXXV. Duluth, MNL: Association of Consumer Research*. pp 311-318.

Alcohol and age-related sales (copies of presentation slides available upon request):

4. Hopkinson, G.C. and Humphreys, M. (2006) 'A Study of Cashiers' perceptions and behaviour in young alcohol sales situations', presented to RASG and UK Home Office at Lancaster.
5. Hopkinson, G.C. and Humphreys, M. (2010) 'Identity Challenge: Constructing and sustaining a contested workplace self,' 9th International Conference of Organisational Discourse (Amsterdam).
6. Hopkinson, G.C. (2007) 'Think 21: Act 21' Responsible Drinks Retailing Conference, November: London.

Grants:

- 2003 – £4,000, Lancaster University Small Grant Scheme: 'Why do young people binge drink?' (Lead researcher Maria Piacentini, with Emma Banister).
- 2006 – £29,000 (£4,500 from the British Retail Consortium and £2,480 from ten retailers and members of the [Retail of Alcohol Standards Group \(RASG\)](#), including Asda, Sainsbury's and Tesco) for 'A study of cashiers' perceptions and behaviours in young alcohol sales situations' (lead researcher: Gillian Hopkinson).

4. Details of the impact

The research on underage drinking and alcohol sales have been presented to a broad audience including retail organisations, government departments, health practitioners and charities. The work has made an impact in a number of ways, as outlined below.

Impact on policy:

Leicester County Council was asked to investigate whether appropriate measures were in place to regulate and mitigate the effects of Binge Drinking in the county. The report '[Binge Drinking In Leicestershire - Scoping Review](#)' (Max Hunt, 2008) used Piacentini and Banister's paper 'Getting Hammered' (2006) – it was the only academic paper used as background material for this review. In 2010, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation cited Banister and Piacentini's 2008 paper in their policy report '[Drinking to belong: Understanding young adults' alcohol use within social networks](#)'. The paper, aimed at policy-makers and health educationalists, explores the decision making process young adult's use before consuming alcohol and its affordability and availability in the UK.

The research insights on alcohol sales have primarily been impactful through the establishment of CAPs (see www.communityalcoholpartnerships.co.uk). The findings of the Cashiers study were presented at The Home Office, to an audience comprising Police, Trading Standards, Education, Health and Retail representatives, and fed directly into this programme. The Chair of the Retail of Alcohol Standards Group (RASG), which was set up in 2005 by leading supermarket retailers, confirms that *'the research unearthed numerous practically useful insights, including: the social and psychological stresses involved in asking colleagues to "challenge" customers about their age; the role of gender in the process of "challenge"; and crucially, the way in which "test purchase" enforcement methods had a tendency to alienate the very checkout operators – by "catching them out" – that needed to be highly motivated guardians of responsible process. This last insight fed directly into the RASG's decision to advocate a collaborative model of local action: Community Alcohol Partnerships.'*

The Advisory Board of the CAP is made up of retailers, voluntary and charity sectors, the police and trading standards. Funding is provided by all the major alcohol retailers, who have already invested £1m in the programme. The partnerships were based on the research presented at the Home Office and initially trialled in St Neots, Cambridgeshire. The pilot findings showed a reduction of up to 94% on key indicators such as alcohol-related litter (see 'Protecting young people from alcohol-related harm', Better Regulation Delivery Office, 2009). The programme has received significant investment from major alcohol retailers and has spread nationally. As of September 2013, 55 CAPs were operating throughout the UK.

The CAP Programme Manager corroborates that this *'research was also the catalyst for a move from Challenge 21 to Challenge 25... Challenge 25 is one the most widely recognised strategies for preventing underage access to age restricted products and recent statistics released by the Department of Health have shown a continued downward trend in underage sales in the off trade.'*

This approach has been cited as best practice by the Home Office in publications including, 'Selling alcohol responsibly: Good practice examples from the retail and hospitality industries' (2010). KPMG were appointed to undertake an independent review of the effectiveness of the alcoholic drink industry's 'Social Responsibility Standards' and their contribution to a reduction in alcohol harm in England. They worked with Lancaster University to interview industry and non-industry stakeholders across eight locations in England and in 2008 they produced a '[Review of the Social Responsibility Standards for the production and sale of Alcoholic Drinks](#)' for the Home Office. This was further cited by Sainsbury's in their submission for the Scottish Government's consultation paper '[Changing Scotland's relationship with alcohol](#)'. The CAP programme has been commended in a number of parliamentary debates on [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill](#) (2011) and the [Policing and Crime Bill](#) (2009) and a [House of Commons Health Committee Public Health Report](#) (2011).

Impact on retail and medical practice:

The research from the study of alcohol and young consumers has had impact mainly in terms of alcohol education aimed at practitioners. The work was initially presented at academic conferences and policy-oriented conferences, notably the Alcohol Focus Scotland Harm Reduction Conference Glasgow in February, 2006. Following this conference, Piacentini and Banister were invited to write a paper for Alcoholis, a bulletin the Medical Council on Alcohol (MCA) newsletter distributed to all GPs and medical students in the UK. This was published in 2006, entitled '[Understanding Alcohol Consumption Among University Students](#)'. This research was subsequently cited by a member of the Medical Council on Alcohol at annual conferences, between 2008 and 2010, to the BMA Medical Students Committee (e-mail available upon request). The workshops focused on the personal consumption of alcohol by medical students and the possible effects that might develop in their ability to practise as doctors in the future. The work was also detailed on the website of the [Victoria Alcohol and Drug Association \(VAADA\)](#), a drug and alcohol education organisation aimed at alcohol practitioners in Melbourne, Australia.

The findings of Hopkinson's and Humphrey's work were referenced by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) in their [Public Health Programme Guidance](#) on Alcohol-use disorders. It was disseminated to independent retailers as the research progressed (for example [Off Licence News](#) and [Convenience Store](#) magazine). The report findings enabled shop keepers to feel more empowered and confident about their practices. The work has also had an impact in retail practice outside the context of CAPs through presentation to the retail trade (including the multiple grocery and off-licence sectors). The Wine and Spirits Association released [new guidance](#) on tackling underage drinking based on the CAP programme.

Most tangibly the work was incorporated in a training video, which has been used throughout the SPAR group. This featured Senior Trading Standards Officers who presented 'real-life' cases, making the DVD more impactful. James Hall and Co. (Preston) that produced the DVD said that the work done at Lancaster '*on the behaviour of cashiers and age-related sales, helped our organisation to give us the understanding of the challenges that our teams face on a daily basis and helped us to build these challenges into the filming of the DVD.*'

Impact via the national media:

The research findings have also been brought to the general public through 'media exposure' for example a [Guardian Newspaper Feature](#) called 'The Party's Over' on 3rd June, 2008 and a BBC Radio 4's 'Thinking Allowed' feature on '[Students' Drinking](#)', 12th September, 2012 (links provided below). This has drawn attention to the issues around young people and the challenges of not drinking to the listeners of the programme.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. A 'Study of Cashiers' report, presented to RASG, available upon request.
2. E-mail from Medical Council on Alcohol corroborating the use of Piacentini's research at successive annual BMA Student Conferences, available upon request.
3. Information about the CAP scheme, including comments from stakeholders (health, police, trading standards etc.), the continued growth of the scheme and case study examples, is available at <http://www.communityalcoholpartnerships.co.uk>.
4. CAP Programme Manager (formerly the Head of Policy and Information at the Portman Group) – corroborates the impact on policy and training through a change in perception to consider the retail trade as part of the solution.
5. Chair of RASG and Head of Legal Services, Sainsbury's - corroborates the research insights led to a new collaborative model for tackling underage drinking, resulting in the formation of CAPs.
6. Health and Safety Director, James Hall & Co Limited – corroborates the production of the SPAR training DVD and how the research findings were integrated into the filming.