

Population drinking and pricing interventions: Comparing retail, wholesaler, survey, and online retailer data

Nicholas Taylor^{1,2,3}, Ryan Baldwin³, Heng Jiang⁴, Kerri Coomber³, Peter Miller³, Tanya Chikritzhs⁵, Michael Livingston^{1,2}

¹National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Melbourne, Australia., ²Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia., ³School of Psychology, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia., ⁴Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia., ⁵National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth, Australia

Presenter's email: nic.taylor@curtin.edu.au

Introduction: Alcohol pricing policies can reduce alcohol-related harm. Impacts of pricing policies on harm are linked to the proportion of the market they affect. Representative retail sales data is available in some international jurisdictions, but not Australia. A 3-year evaluation of the Northern Territory's (NT) Minimum Unit Price (MUP) by a consultancy firm with access to retail data has allowed researchers to estimate the proportion of the market that was affected by the MUP. This article aims to compare these data to the other methods used by researchers to estimate the proportion of the consumption market affected by the NT MUP.

Methods: Data extraction tool PlotDigitizer was used to extract data on the proportion of alcohol sold in the NT by beverage type and price point in the year before and after MUP introduction (based on graphs from the evaluation report). These were compared to previously collected data from wholesalers, online price monitoring, and survey data. Comparisons examined how well other data sources replicated retail data in describing NT alcohol market by beverage type and across price points.

Results: Compared with retail data, wholesaler data provided similar estimates for the proportion of sales by each beverage type, while survey data overestimated bottled wine. Data based on the proportion of products sold by online retailers vastly overrepresented wine products. No method accurately reflected retail data when examining alcohol sales by price point, survey data overrepresented the lower end of the market, while online price monitoring data underrepresented it.

Discussions and Conclusions: Retail sales data provides unique insights into alcohol markets, especially in terms of prices paid, and no alternative measure accurately replicates it. Measures should be taken to ensure the ongoing supply of retail data to effectively inform future research and policy.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Alcohol retailers should be legislatively required to regularly produce retail sales data.

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