

Monitoring Australia's illicit alcohol market

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Introduction: Illicit alcohol products stocked in Melbourne, Australia, have been found to contain high levels of plasticisers and methanol. The Australian Treasury estimates illicit alcohol trade accounts for roughly \$767 million of lost tax revenue annually. However, there is no published research on the availability of these products in Australia.

Methods: Covert audits of off-licence retailers were undertaken in New South Wales & Victoria. Researchers recorded the sales price and alcohol content of cheap and suspicious products, to calculate the portion of the final retail price which was accounted for by tax. Product prices that were over 80% tax were considered suspicious. Researchers used other indicators to determine whether products were likely illicit (i.e., legally compliant labelling, cheap packaging, prior identification, online presence).

Results: At time of submission, 124 alcohol retailers have been audited. Of these 39 (31%) stocked suspected illicit products. A total of 41 unique suspected illicit products were identified. There was notable regional variation in availability, with increased availability in socially disadvantaged regions.

Discussions and Conclusions: Illicit alcohol is easily obtainable in off-licence alcohol retailers in Australia, and preliminary data indicates that availability is greater in socially disadvantaged communities. Further work is needed to understand the full extent of the harms these products pose to Australians, consumer awareness of products, and the social inequities tied to these harms.

Implications on communities, practice, policy: Findings demonstrate that there is an entrenched easily accessible illicit alcohol market in Australia, which may fundamentally shift how Australian alcohol consumption is conceptualised.

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