

## Community Engagement in the Alcohol Licensing Processes of Two UK Cities: A Comparative Case Study

Filip Djordjevic<sup>1,2</sup>, Robyn Dwyer<sup>1</sup>, Paul Hickman<sup>2</sup>, Vicky Heap<sup>2</sup>, Joanna Reynolds<sup>2</sup>, Claire Wilkinson<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Australia, <sup>2</sup>Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, United Kingdom, <sup>3</sup>Drug Policy Modelling Program, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Presenter's email: f.djordjevic@latrobe.edu.au

**Introduction:** Though mechanisms for community engagement in alcohol licensing processes are well established, there is a lack of understanding in the literature around who is and is not engaged. Adopting the view that 'community' is a socially constructed phenomenon, often defined by shared geographical location, identity or interest, this study examines how community is conceptualised in alcohol licensing processes in two cities in the United Kingdom (UK). In so doing, we illuminate how the ways in which communities are (and are not) engaged afford opportunities and challenges to influencing alcohol decision-making processes.

**Method:** Fifteen semi-structured interviews were undertaken with community members and stakeholders with an interest in alcohol licensing in one English (n=8) and one Scottish city (n=7). Data were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach.

**Key Findings:** Community was predominantly conceptualised in an inclusive manner. Nonetheless, a central theme generated through analysis was 'representation and power'. Community members most engaged with alcohol licensing processes were wealthier residents and 'community groups' whose activities largely entailed making formal objections to licensing applications on the grounds of environmental impacts (e.g., noise, litter). Communities under-represented in licensing processes were students/young people, residents living in more disadvantaged suburbs and people engaged in treatment for alcohol problems.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Issues of representation and power found in both case studies reflect findings of other community engagement literature: a tendency for better resourced 'community groups' (who frame themselves as representative) to be more active and influential in decision-making, while the views and concerns of more marginalised communities are not captured by available mechanisms of engagement.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** This study's findings demonstrate the need for more inclusive engagement mechanisms that can capture the views towards alcohol licensing of a wider range of communities. This will provide a more representative approach to decision-making around licensing, as well as city planning, health and the night-time economy.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** *No conflicts of interest*