

Alcohol Access by Underage Youths: A mixed-method study on underage youths' habits and strategies applied for accessing alcohol in Switzerland

Summary

Current state of research: Underage youths' alcohol accessibility remains a central issue concerning public health and health related youth protection policies. Selling bans on minor purchases are widely described as a key strategy to reduce youths' access - or at least commercial availability - and are currently widely implemented in Western countries. However, compliance to such measures is often low due to the common lack of enforcement strategies and efforts. Another reason for this lack of compliance is underage youths' various strategies to get around these laws. Yet, in Switzerland the absence of comprehensive studies and empirical data on habits and strategies applied by youths for accessing products under retail ban minimize preventive effects of ongoing structural measures.

Objectives: The proposed study aims to balance this phenomenon by addressing, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the way alcoholic beverages under retail ban are accessed by youths in Switzerland. It further aims to provide an in-depth focus to strategies applied by youth in commercial contexts (i.e., out of law accessibility process). To deepen understandings in this matter is not only needed to move toward better enforcement of existing measures, but also to offer new insights for the developing of state-of-the-art preventive strategies.

Methods of data collection and analytic strategy: A mixed-method approach is proposed for the current investigation. Convenience sampling will be used to recruit participants from public places in four cities of Switzerland (Geneva, Lausanne, Sion, and La Chaux-de-Fonds). As participants need to have personal experience with the research topic, only alcohol users will be recruited. Data will be collected by means of brief semi-structured interviews and self-reported questionnaires. Approximately 250 underage youths will be recruited. Interviews content will be coded in categories that will emerge during pre-tests and later on during the fieldwork. Descriptive statistics and multivariate quantitative analytical methods will be performed on quantitative data.

Expected value: In addition to document whether strategies already identified in studies conducted in other socio-cultural settings are applied in Swiss contexts and to assess the relative prevalence of application of these strategies we expect to identify emerging and innovative strategies that can be of interest to scientific audiences, prevention shareholders, and national and regional policy makers. Further we aim at identifying and discussing issues regarding potential ways of improving the level of compliance with existing retail bans.

Dissemination strategies: We intend to publish two articles in international peer-reviewed journals. The findings will also be presented at an international scientific conference. It is also our firm intention to inform and collaborate with prevention advocates and professionals, as well as with prevention services involved in the training of sales professionals.