

Mystery shopping in local alcohol policy project

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Mystery shopping trials in retail sales stores

Aim of the research:

- Mystery shopping (pseudo-patron) trials were used to study how responsible off-premise establishments are in controlling age limits in retail sales of alcohol. With the help of the study we evaluate if the interventions have improved the age limit control in retail sales of alcohol. The study is a part of the PAKKA-project (Local Alcohol Policy-project) headed by *Marja Holmila* from STAKES.
- The pseudo-patron trials give valuable feedback for actors in alcohol prevention and alcohol trade on the results from the interventions. The interventions include increased controls made by the authorities, co-operation with the alcohol trade, training in RBS both off- and on premise, as well as work with the local and national media.

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Research setting and method:

- Pseudo-patron trials were conducted in October 2004 and October/November 2006 in Hämeenlinna (a middle sized city in Southern Finland) and a matched control region.
- With the help of the mystery shopping trials the researchers tried to find out how easy it is for under-aged looking boys and girls to buy alcohol in retail sales stores without having to prove their age.

Mystery shopping trials in retail sales stores

Implementation of the research (1/2):

- Eight volunteers that looked under-aged, but were in fact over 18, were recruited as pseudo-patrons for the study (four girls and four boys).
- In choosing the pseudo-patrons, a panel of experts was used consisting of the researchers, the project co-ordinator and a bouncer.
- Altogether 66 shops were selected from Hämeenlinna and the control region. A third of all purchases were conducted in supermarkets over 400 m², a third of them in shops under 400 m² and the rest of the purchase attempts were made in kiosks, gas stations and Alko shops (the alcohol retail monopoly).

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Implementation of the research (2/2):

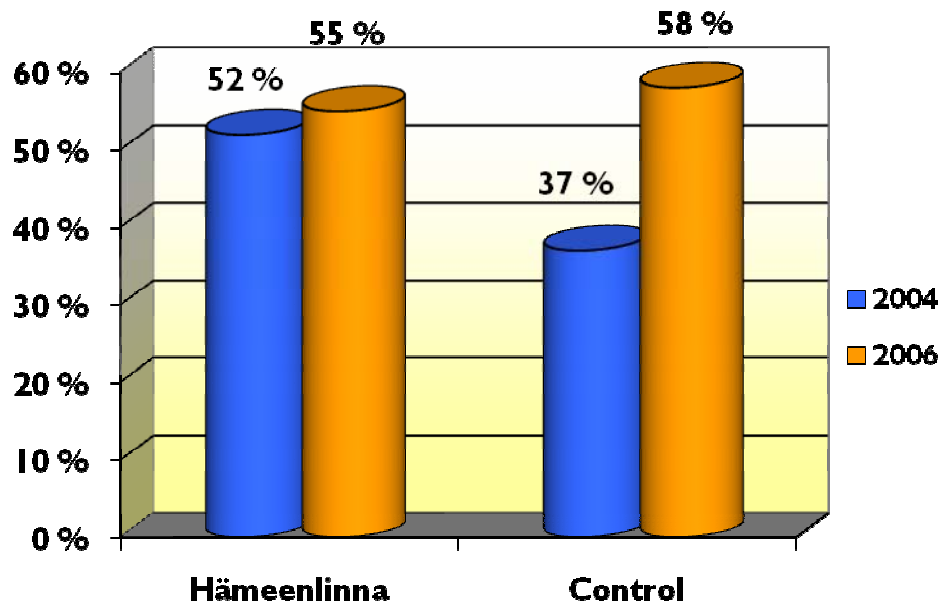
- Over 300 purchase attempts were made in the test and control region during the baseline measurements in November 2004. The follow up measurements, which were made the same way were conducted in October/November 2006.
- The pseudo-patrons were instructed to buy beer or cider from the grocery stores, kiosks and service stations, and long drinks or other mixed drinks from the Alko stores.
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After each purchase attempt, the pseudo-patrons filled in a questionnaire where questions about each separate purchase

Matrix for organising shopping attempts:

Shop number	Shop	Address	Buyers Wednesday				8 buyers Thursday			Attempts/shop
1	Boozers	Liquor Alley 1	R.S.	V-M.P.	M-R.K.	J-P.P.	O.L.	J-P.K.	J.K.	7
2	Winos	Bourbon Street 20	R.S.	V-M.P.	M-R.K.	J-P.P.	O.L.	J-P.K.	J.K.	7
3	Moonshiners	Vodka Street 66	R.S.	V-M.P.	M-R.K.	J-P.P.	O.L.	J-P.K.	J.K.	7
4	Dipsomans	Martini Avenue 2	R.S.	V-M.P.	M-R.K.	J-P.P.	O.L.	J-P.K.	J.K.	7
5	Intoxicada	Torres Street 23	R.S.	V-M.P.	M-R.K.	J-P.P.	J-P.K.	P.H.	J.K.	7
6	Canned Heat	Bacardi Avenue 45	R.S.	V-M.P.	M-R.K.	J-P.P.	J-P.K.	P.H.	J.K.	7
7	Firewater	Rue Gin Tonic 33	V-M.P.	O.L.	J-P.K.		P.H.	M-R.K.	J-P.P. J.K.	7
8	Brewskis	Whiskey Street 44	R.S.	P.H.	O.L.	J-P.K.	V-M.P.	J-P.P.	J.K.	7
9	Grogs	Dom Perignon Alley 66	P.H.	O.L.	J-P.K.		R.S.	V-M.P.	J-P.P. J.K.	7
10	The Bottle	Moet Chandon Avenue 40	P.H.	O.L.	J.K.		R.S.	V-M.P.	J-P.P.	6
11	Six Packs	Renault Street 1	R.S.	P.H.	O.L.		V-M.P.	J-P.P.	J.K.	6
12	Keggers	Single Malt Square 1	R.S.	P.H.	J.K.		V-M.P.	O.L.	J-P.P.	6
13	Varnish	Aqua Vitae Avenue 6	R.S.	P.H.	J.K.		V-M.P.	O.L.	J-P.P.	6
14	Juicers	Heineken Street 2	P.H.	O.L.	J-P.K.		R.S.	M-R.K.		5
15	Imbibers	Champagne Street 66	P.H.	O.L.			R.S.	M-R.K.	J-P.K.	5
16	Rummys	Cava Avenue 4	P.H.	J-P.K.	M-R.K.		R.S.	O.L.		5
17	Drunkards	Light Beer Street 77	J-P.K.	M-R.K.			R.S.	P.H.	O.L.	5
18	Hangovers	Mint Julep Avenue 56	J-P.K.	M-R.K.			R.S.	P.H.	O.L.	5
19	Bag-in-box	Calvados Street 4	J-P.K.	O.L.			R.S.	M-R.K.		4
20	Magnum	Pernod Avenue 5	J-P.K.	M-R.K.			P.H.	O.L.		4
21	Balthazar	Strongbow Avenue 2	P.H.	J-P.K.			R.S.	M-R.K.		4
22	Nabuchadnezzar	Port Wine Avenue 8	J-P.P.				P.H.	J-P.K.		3
23	Rehoboam	Vino Santo Street 3	J-P.P.				M-R.K.	J-P.K.		3
24	Headache	Cabernet Corner 1	J-P.P.				P.H.	M-R.K.		3
25	Two Fingers	Sparkling Street 4	O.L.				P.H.	J-P.P.		3
26	Salmanazar	Still Avenue 56	V-M.P.				M-R.K.	J-P.P.		3
27	Smirnovs	Rhum Street 4	V-M.P.	J-P.P.			M-R.K.			3
28	Super Bock	Teachers Street 3	J.K.				V-M.P.			2
29	Doppelbock	Koskenkorva highway 013	J.K.				V-M.P.			2
30	Krug et co.	Sherry Street 4	J.K.				V-M.P.			2
31	Cristal	Ouzo Avenue 9	J.K.				V-M.P.			2
32	Beefeaters	Carlsberg Square 1	J.K.							1
33	Bombay S.	Pripps Avenue 5	J.K.							1

Refusal rates for alcohol sales in off-premise establishments in 2004 and 2006 (in %):



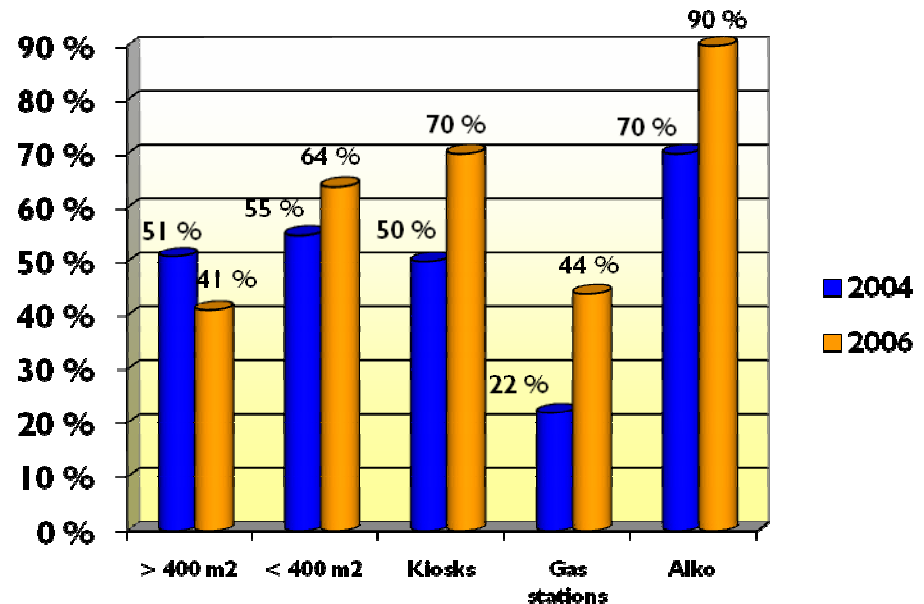
The purchase attempts show that the age limit control for off-premise establishments was slightly improved in Hämeenlinna and clearly improved in the control region.

In 2004 52 % of the purchase attempts succeeded in Hämeenlinna, whereas in the follow-up study the corresponding figure was 55 %.

Men as salespersons were more strict than women, and were less likely to sell alcohol for the pseudo-patrons. Also the age of the salesperson had an impact on the result of the purchase attempts: the older the salesperson was, more likely she was to refuse to sell.

Refusal rates according to types of shops in Hämeenlinna, 2004 and 2006

Most responsible were the Alko shops, where over 70 % of the attempts failed in 2004. In the baseline measurement gas stations had the worst track record, whereas grocery stores over and under 400 m² and kiosks, refused to sell in about half of all purchase attempts.



In the follow-up study all types of shops, except the big grocery stores, had improved their age limit control. The Alko shops were still the most responsible, with a 90 % refusal rate, but also the kiosks had improved their control of age limits considerably.

Also the time of purchase had some bearing on the results, and it seems that a purchase attempt made between 4 and 6 p.m. was more likely to succeed than one made after 6 p.m.

Mystery shopping in off-premise outlets in Finland and Norway:

Aim: to assess whether minimum legal age for purchase of alcohol is better enforced in government monopoly outlets compared to other off-premise outlets for alcohol sales.

Methods: Under-age looking 18 year olds attempted to purchase alcohol in off-premise outlets applying identical procedures in Finland (n=583) and Norway (n=170). Outcomes were measured as whether or not the buyers were asked to present an ID and whether or not they succeeded in purchasing alcohol.

Results: The buyers were asked to present an ID in slightly more than half of the attempts, and they succeeded in purchasing alcohol in 50% of the cases. The buyers were more likely to be requested to present an ID and less likely to succeed in purchasing alcohol in monopoly outlets as compared to other types of outlets.

Conclusion: Monopoly outlets may facilitate enforcement of minimum legal age for purchase of alcohol.

Source: Rossow, I. & Karlsson, T. & Raitasalo, K. (2008) Old enough for a beer? Enforcement of minimum legal age for alcohol purchases in monopoly and other off-premise outlets in Finland and Norway. *Addiction* (forthcoming)

Conclusions:

- The results suggest that the interventions conducted in Hämeenlinna had very little effect by themselves in tightening the age-limit control.
- Nevertheless, the interventions seem to have kept the vendors alert on controlling the legal age limit for alcohol purchases, at least during the study period.
- The fact that the results in the control region improved even more could at least partly be explained by countrywide age-limit campaigns and by increased control by the licensing authorities.
- Alcohol monopoly outlets seem to have a more strict control of legal age limits than other off-premise outlets.