Reference No. 30

Summarising: Brady & Martin (1999), *Dealing with alcohol in Alice Springs: An assessment of policy options and recommendations for action*
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
Dealing with alcohol in Alice Springs: an assessment of policy options and recommendations for action

Research Publication:
CAEPR Working Paper No. 3/1999

Name of Researcher(s):
M. Brady and D.F. Martin

Time period:
1988–1999

Geographic location:
Alice Springs (NT)

Methodology:
This paper reviews international and Australian literature on alcohol consumption by Indigenous peoples and analyses existing statistical information related to levels of alcohol consumption in the Northern Territory and Alice Springs.

Aims:
The purpose of this report is to propose a strategy to address the high levels of alcohol consumption among Indigenous Australians in Alice Springs.

Selected findings and insights:
While per capita alcohol consumption in Alice Springs dropped over the previous decade, it was still more than one and a half times that of the Northern Territory as a whole and some three times that of Australia as a whole:
- Alcohol consumption in 1997-98 in Alice Springs was 23.83 litres (pure alcohol) for every person over the age of 15 years, compared to 14.55 litres for the Northern Territory, which in turn was high compared to Australian and international standards.

The consequences of high alcohol consumption were demonstrated by the number of road fatality accidents involving alcohol consumption:
- In the Alice Springs rural area, alcohol was involved in 82% of Aboriginal deaths between 1992 and 1997, compared with 35% of non-Aboriginal deaths.
- For the Alice Springs urban area, 92% of Aboriginal road deaths during this period involved alcohol.

A similar pattern of alcohol involvement applied to homicides in the Alice Springs area.
The paper provides detailed information about *alcohol availability* and its relationship to the purchasing of alcohol. The paper found that:

- International and Australian research suggests that limiting or controlling access to alcohol has a selective effect on heavy drinkers, without unduly inconveniencing moderate drinkers.
- It is the total number of liquor outlets rather than the relative number per capita which is arguably the critical supply factor.
- From studies of predominantly Aboriginal drinking, changing hours and days of sale can have an impact, primarily through changes in off-premises availability.
- Cask wine consumption (rather than bottled wine) is highly predictive of indicators of harm (for example, night assaults, acute hospital admissions) in the general population. Given that research links cask wine consumption in particular to high-risk behaviours, the large increase in cask wine sales in the Alice Springs area between 1995 and 1998 required urgent address at the policy level.

*The impact of education and training on alcohol consumption*

Based on international evidence, the paper suggests that education programs can have a *contributory effect* rather than a major singular effect on reducing alcohol consumption, dependent upon the overall mix of the messages:

- For example, restrictions on alcohol advertising and mass media educational programs may have their most significant impact on the social climate surrounding alcohol use rather than a direct effect on the individual's behaviour.

In Australia, the results of school-based education are equivocal, and there is evidence that school-based education in Australia may actually increase the likelihood of adolescents using alcohol, analgesics and smoking tobacco.

- The paper points to a need for a policy and educative emphasis on long-term attitudinal and generational change—which links, in part, into policies directed towards restricting the availability of alcohol.

The paper also describes the NT *Living with Alcohol* program which focused upon the core areas of treatment and care, community education, domestic violence, the criminal justice system. It included an:

- *Aboriginal Living with Alcohol* program specifically directed at people, professional development and training, and research and evaluation.

The paper develops a comprehensive strategy to address high alcohol consumption within the Alice Springs region, several aspects of which are relevant to education and training providers:

- The use of a combination of *education*, negotiation and sanctions to inculcate a culture of responsible serving by liquor outlets;
- Mandatory *training* in the area of Patron Care/Responsible Server programs to be undertaken by licensees; and
- Suitable police *training*, including relevant legislation, in licensing work.
Educational implications:

Whilst this paper may appear to give a mixed message in relation to the role of education in reducing high alcohol consumption levels, this should not be read as a signal to dismiss education as part of an overall strategy to address alcohol-related problems. As the paper notes, attitudinal and generational change is required, and schools play an important role in this regard. Rather, schools can play a significant role in responsible alcohol consumption alongside training measures to promote responsible access to alcohol and supervision. [curriculum] [training]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: The Health of Indigenous Australians

Related papers:
