# Why don’t friends and relatives of underage drinkers comply with secondary supply laws in NSW?

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## Summary

The *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* recommend that “for children and young people under 18 years of age, not drinking alcohol is the safest option”. However, in Australia the majority of children have tried alcohol by the age of 12 and there is a perception among many adolescents and adults that underage drinking is a normative behaviour. Research shows that, in addition to the strong influence of perceived peer norms, adult approval and acceptance of alcohol use is highly correlated with underage drinking behavior.

In Australia, almost 60 per cent of alcohol consumed by 12-17 year olds is supplied by friends, relatives or strangers (with much of the remainder provided by parents). The provision of alcohol to people under the age of 18 by someone other than their parent or guardian, or another adult with the express consent of their parent or guardian, is illegal in most (but not all) Australian jurisdictions.

There is a substantial body of research into the reasons why people do (and do not) comply with the law, particularly in the context of driving offences and crimes against property (such as vandalism, theft and littering). The main obedience variables identified as predictors of compliance are Personal Morality, Deterrence, Perceived Legitimacy, Social Norms and Procedural Fairness.

The study presented in this report sought to explore why Australian adults continue to provide alcohol to adolescents despite being aware that this behaviour is illegal. Given the substantial body of literature exploring reasons for compliance with traffic laws, we also sought to explore similarities and differences in perceptions of secondary supply, speeding, and drink driving offences.

## Outcomes

A total of 413 participants residing in New South Wales (where secondary supply is illegal) were recruited through an online panel provider; 212 were parents of a child or children aged between 12 and 17 years, and 201 were not the parent of a child aged between 12 and 17 years (but had friends or relatives aged 12 to 17 years).

Participants completed a survey which included: the use of projective techniques to explore participants’ motivations for (non)compliance with secondary supply, speeding and drink driving laws; attitudinal questions relating to the five motivational factors identified as predictive of (non)compliance with the law; behavioural questions; and demographic details.

Secondary supply appears to be a behaviour that is generally unacceptable, and that is strongly associated with Personal Morality and Social Norms. In response to the hypothetical scenario of a parent providing alcohol to someone else’s adolescent children, as with the scenario relating to speeding, few respondents focused on the behaviour itself when considering what the hypothetical individuals would be thinking about, instead generally focusing on other aspects of the scenario, such as relief that the evening went well or enjoyment of the social activity. Conversely, the illegal behaviour (and the risk of being caught) was the focus of the majority of the responses to the drink driving scenario.

The attitudinal data was consistent with the scenario responses, showing some consistencies between secondary supply and speeding, and some clear differences between secondary supply and the two driving behaviours. Secondary supply and speeding laws were more likely than drink driving laws to be perceived to be associated with Personal Morality, Social Norms, and Perceived Legitimacy. The difference that separated secondary supply from the two types of driving offences was Deterrence, with respondents clearly perceiving that they are substantially less likely to be caught or punished for secondary supply than for speeding or drink driving.

## Recommendations

* Communication and social marketing campaigns should focus on reinforcing people’s underlying attitudes that secondary supply is inappropriate, and denormalising the provision of alcohol to underage drinkers.
* Communication and social marketing campaigns may benefit from emphasising the social disapproval that ensues from engaging in secondary supply.
* Communication, education and social marketing campaigns need to provide clear information for parents and other responsible adults about the risks associated with secondary supply and the evidence on early alcohol initiation.
* Strategies need to be developed to educate and empower parents, increase their self-efficacy, and delay the onset of drinking.
* Communication and social marketing campaigns should raise awareness among adults of the penalties for secondary supply, given the important role of Deterrence in reducing this behavior.
* Consideration should also be given to education campaigns targeting adolescents that raise their awareness of the penalties for secondary supply that apply to adults (including friends/peers aged 18 and over) who provide them with alcohol.
* Given the demonstrated role of Deterrence in reducing speeding and drink driving, policy initiatives that facilitate enforcement of secondary supply laws are likely to have a substantial impact on reducing secondary supply.

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[VIEW THE MEDIA RELEASE](https://www.fare.org.au/revealed-the-reasons-why-adults-fail-to-comply-with-secondary-supply-laws/)