



**Systemic contributors to inequitable alcohol supply:
the licensing system in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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What was known: persistent inequities in supply and harm

- Higher density of off-licensed stores in under-resourced communities
- Density consistently linked to greater harm
- Alcohol-related harm differs by socioeconomic status

→ How might licensing systems contribute to these inequities?

Research Q: What contributes to the outcome of community objections to off-licensed alcohol stores?

Mixed methods study:

1. Legal review of licensing decisions
2. Case studies in 8 communities, 7 high with socioeconomic deprivation

Data: Licence decisions; semi-structured qualitative interviews:

- Objectors, licensing officials, Māori wardens, lawyers (n=48)
- Local residents (n=155)

OUR COMMUNITY, OUR CHOICE?

New research findings from SHORE & Whariki Research Centre

The alcohol licensing system fails to hear the voices of communities most impacted by alcohol and licences continue to be granted where the risks of harm are high.

Inequities in barriers facing objectors:

- (1) Resources to meet technical and legal demands
- (2) Institutional racism, breaching indigenous rights
- (?) Ineffective notices: 83% of residents unaware of applications; majority would have objected



Making a strong case to oppose a licence takes time, evidence and legal support



The hearings are during working hours, making it difficult to attend



The process is alien and intimidating - lawyers challenge people's right to speak and what they say

“Our biggest problem and issue is actually resourcing... and also, I must say that there’s so much happening in our communities at the moment...it’s been pretty hard for me to focus on this.”

Deprivation makes the technical and legal barriers higher

Institutional racism minimised community input



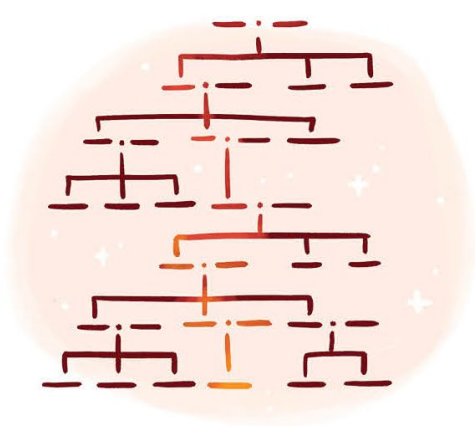
There's a lack of diversity among decision-makers



Important aspects of Māori culture aren't recognised



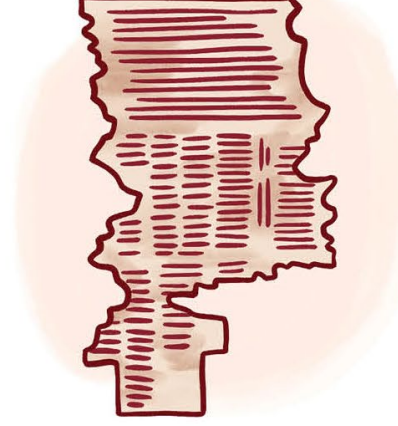
The authority of community leaders is challenged



Whakapapa is not recognised in deciding who can speak



The hearing environment is legalistic and feels unsafe



Despite alcohol disproportionately impacting Māori, licensing law does not refer to Te Tiriti

Indigenous rights unsupported in law or practice

“I’m tangata whenua here and my concern is our people...
And you’re telling me that I can’t get up and speak on behalf of
our people?”

Examples of exclusion were counter to Te Tiriti o Waitangi rights e.g.

- *Rangatiratanga* - right for Māori to make decisions for Māori
- *Oritetanga* – right to equitable participation

Two counteracting forces

Licensing bodies accept socioeconomic deprivation increases risks associated with alcohol supply

Officials argue for greater protection in under-resourced communities

Conclusions about licensing systems

- 1) Inequities in access and influence in licensing systems likely play a part in ongoing inequities in supply and harm
- 2) Recommended review and substantial system changes from equity and indigenous perspectives

The law changed in 2023 to improve participation, but power imbalances remain; Local Authority alcohol policies may better support community choice.

Thanks to our participants and funding from *Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand*

Graphic resources and report: bit.ly/inclusivity-report

Research shows that there are more alcohol outlets in poorer areas, which are often the areas where alcohol has a bigger impact.



So why can't our licensing system do a better job of including and respecting the voices of the people most affected by these decisions?