



# **THE AUCKLAND PSEUDO PATRONS PROJECT**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

- ♦ The Auckland pseudo-patrons project was conducted to monitor age verification practices of off-licensed premises in the greater Auckland region (Auckland, Manukau, North Shore and Waitakere cities and Franklin, Papakura and Rodney districts).
- ♦ From a public health perspective, adequate enforcement of the drinking age through age verification practices is vital to avoid a rise in alcohol related harm to young people through a decrease in the de facto drinking age.
- ♦ To date it is the largest survey of its kind in New Zealand.
- ♦ Data collection took place over three successive weekends, and involved 18 year old “pseudo-patrons” visiting over 200 randomly selected off-licensed premises on two different occasions to attempt to purchase alcohol without providing age identification.
- ♦ Off-licensed premises visited included bottle shops, supermarkets and grocery stores (convenience stores, superettes, etc.).

### **Results**

- ♦ The total number of successful purchases without ID across the cities and districts was 61%.
- ♦ Pseudo-patrons were able to purchase alcohol without ID for the majority of visits in Auckland and Manukau cities, and Rodney, Papakura and Franklin districts.
- ♦ The percentage of sales made without ID in the cities and districts were as follows:
  - ♦ Manukau (77 %), Auckland (57%), Waitakere (40%), North Shore (39%)
  - ♦ Papakura (91%), Rodney (67%), Franklin (65%)
- ♦ Pseudo-patrons were able to purchase alcohol without ID for 80% of visits to grocery outlets, 59% of visits to bottle shops and 53% of visits to supermarkets.

### **Some comments made by pseudo-patrons during data collection:**

- ♦ “The supervisor asked me for I.D., when I said I didn’t have any, he told me to bring some next time.”
- ♦ “The server asked me for ID, and when I said I didn’t have any, he looked around to see if anyone else was there, then winked and sold it to me anyway.”
- ♦ “The person who served me was being trained by a supervisor, and they weren’t told to check my ID.”
- ♦ “When I asked for a receipt, the server said he didn’t believe I was really 18 and to “just take it” without the receipt. When I still wanted a receipt he took back the purchase and returned the money.”

# THE AUCKLAND PSEUDO-PATRONS PROJECT

## Introduction

The Auckland pseudo-patrons project was conducted to monitor age verification practices of off-licensed premises selling alcohol in the greater Auckland region, and to date is the largest survey of its kind in New Zealand. Data collection took place over three successive weekends in the first half of 2002, and involved 18 year olds visiting more than 200 randomly selected off-licensed premises on two different occasions to attempt to purchase alcohol without providing age identification. The geographical area covered included Auckland, Manukau, North Shore and Waitakere cities and Franklin, Papakura and Rodney districts.

## Background

Drinking behaviour is an important health determinant. Research to date suggests that the age of onset of regular drinking has significant implications for heavier drinking and experience of associated problems in later years (Grant & Dawson 1997; Chou and Pickering 1992; Fillmore et al. 1991).

The minimum legal age for purchase of alcohol is a particularly important environmental policy strategy because ease of access to alcohol in teenage years has been shown in longitudinal research to predict subsequent levels of heavier drinking and problems (Connolly et al. 1992; Casswell & Zhang 1996a & b). Young people also experience disproportionate harm from their drinking, compared to older adults drinking similar amounts (Casswell 1999; Casswell et al. 1993).

During the 1990s the annual Auckland tracking surveys have shown an upward trend in amounts being drunk per typical occasion by 14-17 year olds (APHRU, 1998 and unpublished data). The 2000 National Alcohol Survey showed that 16-17 year olds experienced fewer requests for identification as a proportion of successful purchases than 18-19 year olds (Habgood et al, 2001).

There is currently no congruent monitoring strategy in place to monitor age verification practices and thus ensure compliance with the intent of the SOLA legislative changes. From a public health perspective, adequate enforcement of the drinking age through improved age verification practices is vital to avoid the new lower drinking age being associated with a rise in alcohol related harm to young people through a decrease in the de facto drinking age.

Anecdotal evidence from police and media reports as well as ad hoc data gathered from public health unit age verification operations (Kapiti, Hawkes Bay, Palmerston North) using young-looking 18 year olds purchasing alcohol suggests that there is little consistency in age verification practices across the country, with particularly poor results from off-license sites. The Palmerston North Public Health Unit, which has run an informal series of these operations in December 1999, January and March 2000, has identified a steady decline in requests for age verification with none reported in their March operation when 18 purchase attempts were made (NZDF Website).

A number of studies in comparable countries have tested compliance with laws against the sale of alcohol to minors in on and off licensed premises. All these studies demonstrated inadequate compliance and pointed to the weakness of age verification requirements placed on licensees and their staff in their respective licensing legislation (Willner et al. 2000; Lang et al 1996; Schofield et al 1994; Forster et al. 1994; 1995). A subsequent focus of recent legislative changes in various states in Australia, Canada and the US has been on tightening up sections of legislation related to age verification and to host responsibility, as a way of reducing alcohol related harm among young people and other patrons (Hill 1997).

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample***

The 2002 list of premises holding off-licences in the Auckland region was obtained from the Liquor Licensing Authority at the Department of Justice, Wellington. From this list the total population of bottle shops, supermarkets and grocery outlets (superettes, convenience stores, etc) was identified.

Two random samples were selected: one for the four cities and one for the three districts. Each type of premise was weighted before random selection to ensure that within the two overall samples representative numbers for each type of premise (bottle shop, supermarket and grocery outlet) would be attained. The total number of premises in the city sample was 178, and in the district sample was 69.

The sampling procedure involved each randomly selected off-licensed premise being visited twice, once by a male pseudo-patron and once by a female. This method was chosen since previous research in this area has indicated that there are differences between males and females in age verification practices by premises that sell alcohol.

### ***Pseudo-patrons***

A total of five pseudo-patrons were used for data collection in the city sample, and nine were used for the regional sample. Selecting only a small group of pseudo-patrons served two purposes: reducing inter-person variability and thereby making the data collection process more consistent, and minimising the number of people who knew about the project, and thus maintaining a greater degree of confidentiality.

All the pseudo-patrons were 18 years old, and were required to provide verification of their age from a driver's license, birth certificate or passport before being hired. Each pseudo-patron was paired up with a research supervisor/driver whose role was to drive between premises and to ensure that the research protocols were followed.

### ***Data collection***

Data collection took place over three successive weekends. Weekends were chosen as they are the times that young people are most likely to be trying to buy alcohol. Data collection typically started between 2 and 6 pm on Friday and Saturday nights, and continued until around 10 pm each night. Where necessary, data collection also took place on Sundays between 1 and 7 pm, in order to sample premises that were unable to be reached on Friday or Saturday evenings. However, the majority of premises were visited on either Friday or Saturday nights.

Pseudo-patrons were required to enter a premise, choose one item of alcohol of around \$10 value and attempt to purchase the item. If asked for ID they told the server they had none with

them. The sale then either took place or was discontinued by the server and the pseudo-patron left the premise. All sales were carried out with cash.

Pseudo-patrons wrote up the results of each visit on a standard form. Data was also collected on the gender and likely age and ethnicity of the server, as well as the presence and visibility of '18+' signage.

## **Results**

Results provided in this section include narrative evidence from transactions and cross tabulations of age verification practices across the four Auckland cities and regional districts. The presence of legal age signage and an analysis of what difference the pseudo-patron gender had on service is also examined. Results are also provided for the three different types of off-licensed premises (bottle shops, supermarkets and grocery outlets), and of each city and district by premise type. The percentages reported in the following tables are based on the number of visits to the selected off-licensed premises, bearing in mind that each premise was visited two times. These data have been tested for significance using Chi square.

### ***Coverage of the selected off-licensed premises***

Of the original random sample of off-licensed premises, 83% of city licenses and 86% of regional licences were visited. Coverage rates varied between city and regional district, but no coverage rate for any city or regional area was below 79%. The main reason for off-licensed premises not being visited was because they no longer existed (i.e. they had closed down since the publishing of the 2002 list that was used to draw the sample).

### ***Narrative Evidence***

On the first weekend of the operation the pseudo-patrons were instructed to ask for receipts for their purchases for internal accounting purposes. However, it quickly became clear that this was raising suspicions among some licensees, who associate the requesting of receipts for



purchases with police controlled purchase operations, and then refused to sell. Receipts were not asked for during the second and third weekend.

There is narrative evidence to suggest that sales might have been even higher during the first weekend, had receipts not been requested. For example, at least two premises stated that the pseudo-patron would need to be able to show ID in order to get a receipt, while four other premises voided completed sales when receipts were requested. In one such instance when a receipt was asked for the server asked if the pseudo-patron was with the police, then asked for ID and refused the sale. In another instance the server said that he didn't believe the pseudo-patron was really 18 and to "just take it" without the receipt. When the pseudo-patron still wanted a receipt he wouldn't sell and returned the money.

Other comments made by the pseudo-patrons on the data sheet include the following:

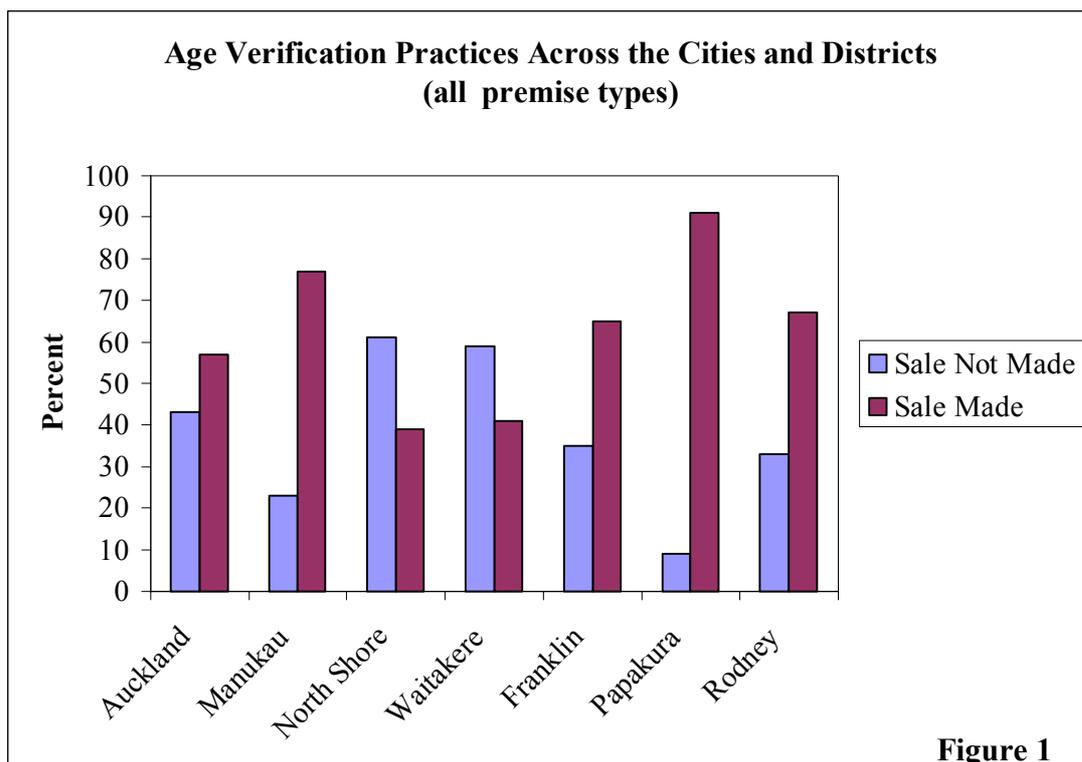
- ♦ “The supervisor asked me for I.D., when I said I didn’t have any, he told me to bring some next time.”
- ♦ “Server asked me for ID, and when I said I didn’t have any, he looked around to see if anyone else was there, then winked and sold it to me anyway.”
- ♦ “The person who served me was being trained by a supervisor, and they weren’t told to check my ID.”
- ♦ “When I asked for a receipt, the server said he didn’t believe I was really 18 and to “just take it” without the receipt. When I still wanted a receipt he took back the purchase and returned the money.”



On several occasions, pseudo-patrons were asked to state their age or date of birth in lieu of providing ID, and this was then used as proof of age by the server.

### ***Age Verification Practices***

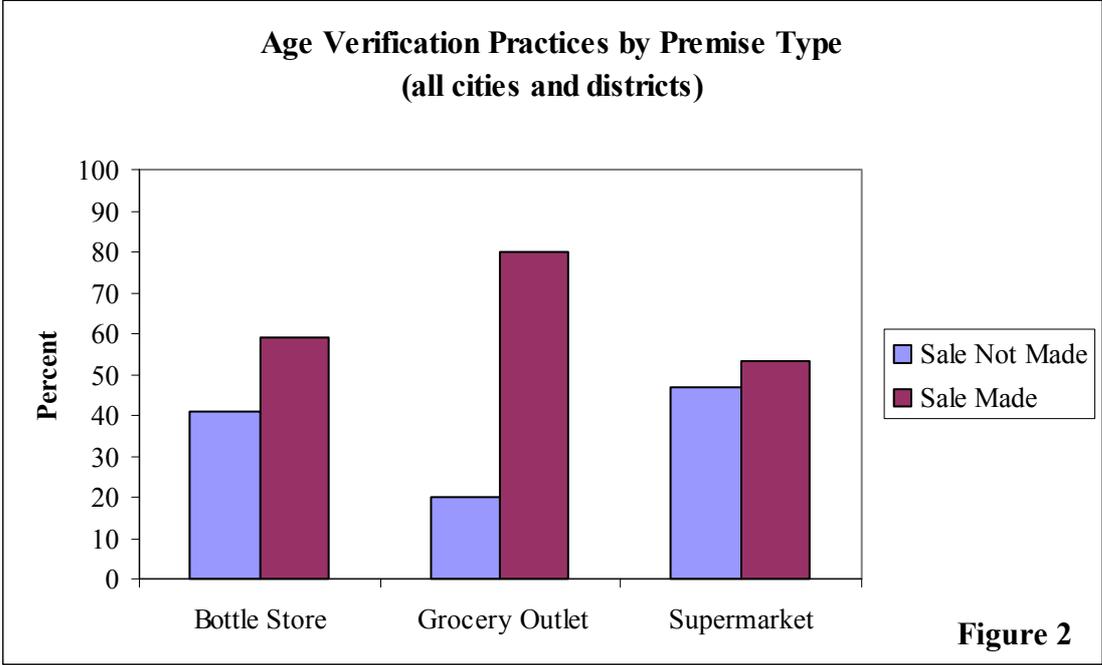
Across all the cities and districts, almost two-thirds of premises (61%) sold alcohol to pseudo-patrons without any ID. The following graph show age verification practices broken down by city and district.



**Figure 1**

Figure 1 indicates that for the cities, Manukau had the largest proportion of sales made without ID (77%) followed by Auckland City (57%). North Shore and Waitakere Cities have the smallest proportions of sales made without ID with 39% and 40% respectively. The proportions are significantly different across the four Auckland cities [Pearson  $\chi^2 = 24.45$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ]. For the districts, Papakura had the largest proportion of sales made without ID (91)% followed by Rodney (67%) and Franklin (65%). The proportions are not significantly different across the three regional districts [Pearson  $\chi^2 = 5.27$   $p = 0.072$ ].

The graph below shows age verification practices broken down by premise type, with grocery outlets (superettes, convenience stores, four-squares, etc) having the highest number of sales of all premise types.

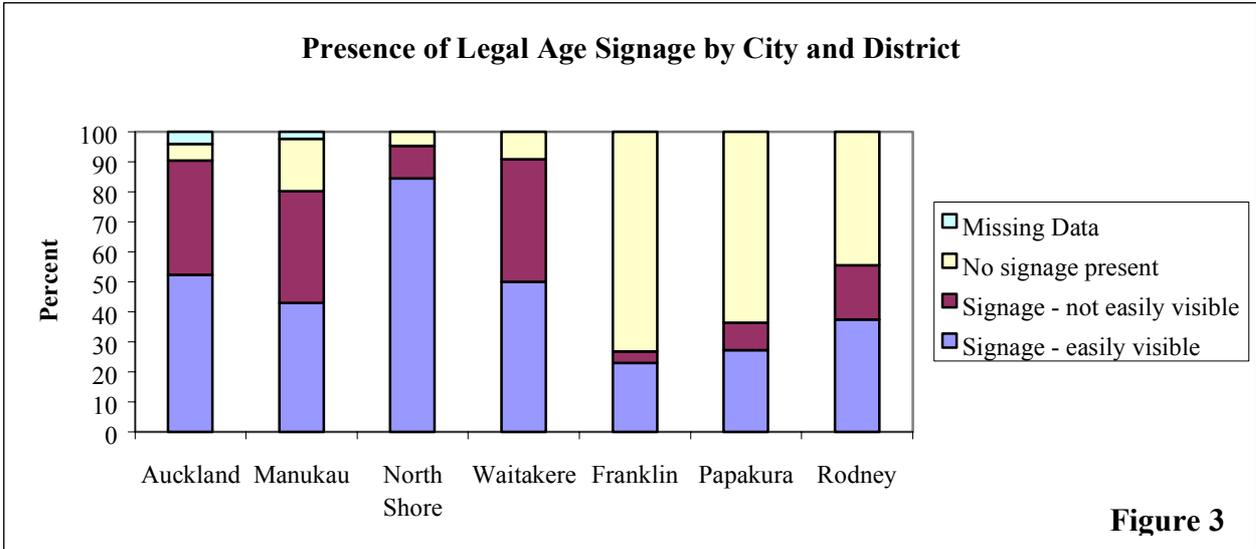


**Figure 2**

The results in Figure 2 (above) indicate that grocery outlets have the largest proportion of sales made with no ID (80%), followed by bottle shops (59%) and supermarkets (53%). There were significant differences between sales made and not made without ID between these three types of off-licensed premises [Pearson  $\chi^2 = 12.54$   $p = 0.002$ ].

**Presence of Signage**

Pseudo-patrons were asked to indicate whether signage was present in premises visited. There were three categories into which signage fell: signage was present and easily visible; signage was present but not easily visible; there was no signage present. In one or two instances this information was not noted by the pseudo-patron, and this is indicated as “missing data”.

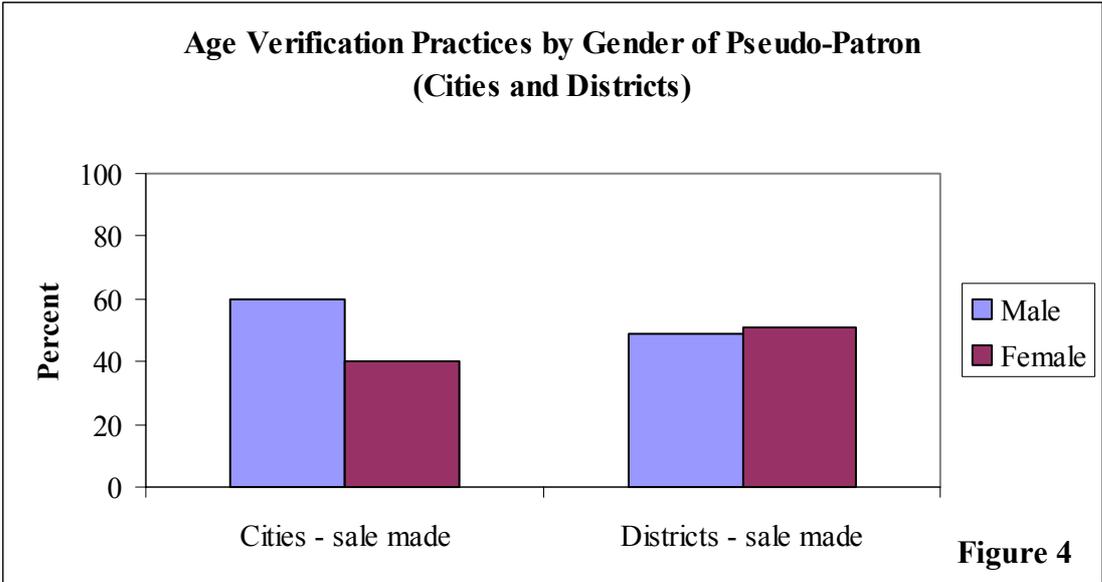


**Figure 3**

Figure 3 indicates that the visibility of legal age signage varied greatly between cities and districts. In the cities, signage was most visible in North Shore (84%) followed by Auckland (52%). Waitakere (50%) and Manukau (43%). Signage was much less prevalent in the districts, with the majority of premises in both Franklin and Papakura having no signage present (73% and 64% respectively), while in Rodney, 44% of premises had no signage present.

***Pseudo-Patron Gender***

As has been mentioned, each premise was visited two times – once by a male pseudo-patron and once by a female. The graph below shows differences in age verification practices by servers towards male and female pseudo-patrons.

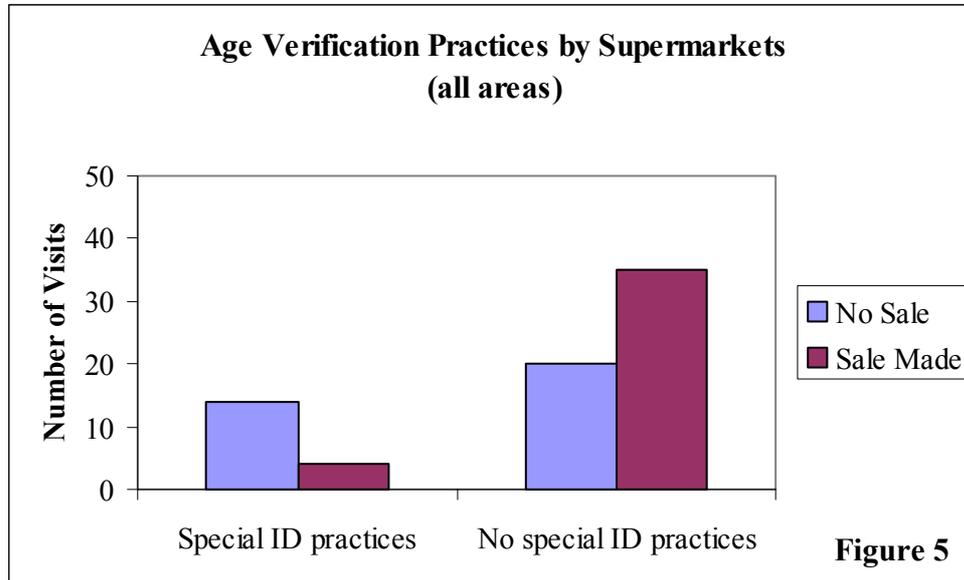


**Figure 4**

There were significant differences between sales made and not made to male and female pseudo-patrons across the four cities (see Figure 4) [Pearson  $\chi^2 = 16.96$  p = 0.001] but no significant differences were found across the three districts [Pearson  $\chi^2 = 0.04$  p = 0.841].

### ***Supermarket Sales***

Supermarkets were one of the premise types that were visited by pseudo-patrons. Because of the different practices employed by some supermarkets in relation to age verification, the graph below breaks the age verification practices of supermarkets into two groups – those that employ some sort of “extra check” ID practices, and those that don’t.



The number of supermarkets sampled was not large enough to be able to make generalisations about particular age verification practices. However, there did appear to be a lower number of sales made by those supermarkets that had special ID practices in place, such as double keying to ensure ID has been checked, or having special lanes for alcohol sales. This is shown in Figure 5. A larger sample of supermarkets would be needed to verify these data.

### City and District Analyses

The graphs that follow look at data from the cities and districts by premise type.

In the city sample, over 70% of all types of premise in Manukau sold without ID having been shown, while over 50% of all types of premise in Auckland sold without ID being shown.

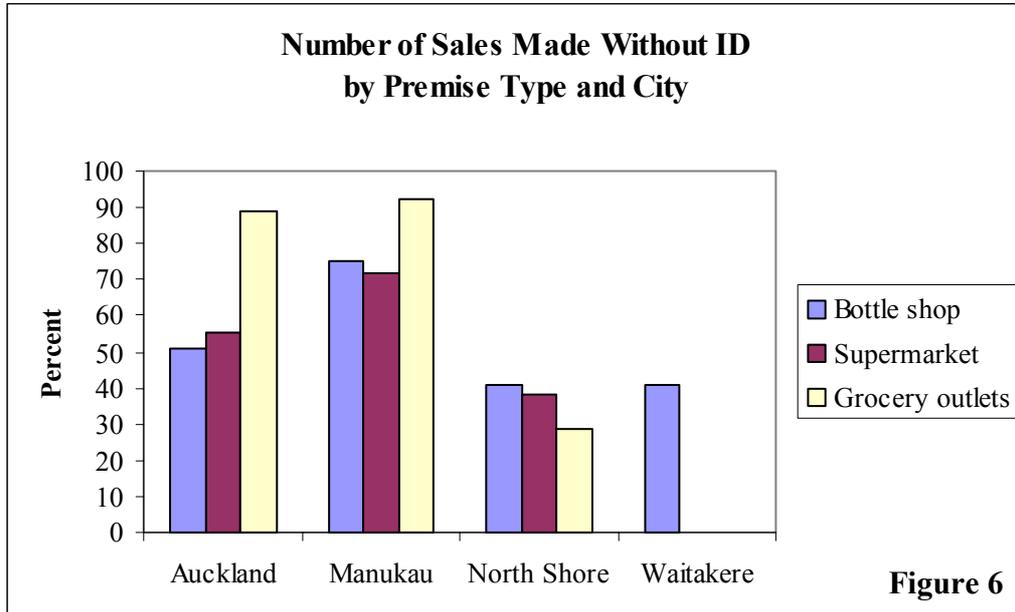


Figure 6 shows the total percentage of sales made in each city, by premise type. Grocery outlets accounted for the highest number of sales made to pseudo-patrons in Manukau (92%) and Auckland (89%), with bottle shops and supermarkets in Manukau having the next highest levels of sales, at 75% and 72% respectively. Auckland supermarkets (55%) and bottle shops (51%) had the next highest number of sales, followed by bottle shops in Waitakere and North Shore, both at 41%. Waitakere operates under licensing trusts (Waitakere Licensing Trust and Portage Licensing Trust), so there were no supermarkets or grocery outlets to include in the sample.

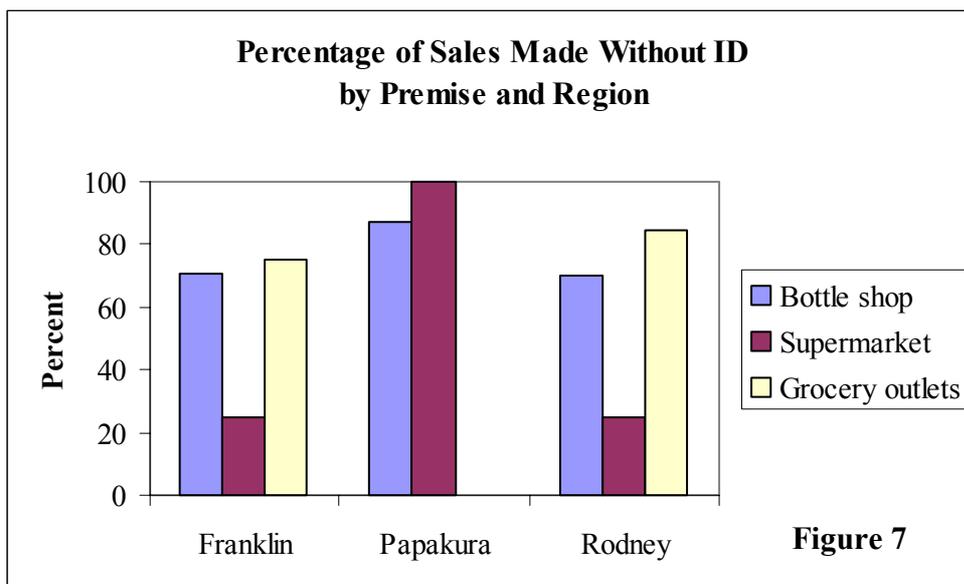


Figure 7 shows the total percentage of sales made in each district, by premise type. More than 60% of bottle shops and groceries in Franklin and Rodney sold without ID being shown, while over 80% of all premises in Papakura sold without ID being shown.

Supermarkets in Papakura accounted for the highest number of sales to pseudo-patrons (100%) in the districts, followed by bottle shops in Papakura (87%) and grocery outlets in Rodney (85%). Grocery outlets and bottle shops in Franklin sold in 75% and 71% of cases respectively, with bottle shops in Rodney selling in 70% of cases. Supermarkets in both Rodney and Franklin sold in only 25% of cases.

### **Summary**

These results indicate that overall the pseudo-patrons involved in this project were able to purchase alcohol without ID for the majority of visits in Auckland and Manukau cities, and Rodney, Papakura and Franklin districts. Pseudo-patrons were able to purchase alcohol without ID for 80% of visits to grocery outlets, 59% of visits to bottle shops and 53% of visits to supermarkets. The total number of successful purchases without ID across the cities and districts was 61%.

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