

Examining alcohol management practices in community sports clubs: a systems approach

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of macro-level regulatory systems on alcohol management for community sport organisations (CSOs). It examines how alcohol regulations translate into meso-level management actions and interactions that impact alcohol consumption in community sport clubs.

Design/methodology/approach – Management of alcohol was explored through the holistic lens of macro, meso, and micro-levels of influence. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with Australian club administrators from community sports clubs.

Findings – Thematic analysis revealed macro-level influences on alcohol management in CSOs, with government regulations and the state sport associations being the most influential. Challenges arise in alcohol policy implementation when sport administrators do not prioritise alcohol consumption as a problem to be addressed, or where a conflict of interest arises between alcohol revenue generation and clubs positioning as health promoting environments.

Practical implications – Targeting club administrators' attitudes towards alcohol as a benign influence and revising alcohol management practices are recommended as priority strategies to enhance the implementation and promotion of responsible alcohol management in sport clubs. Affiliate state sport associations were also identified as influential settings to provide administrative or strategic direction to CSOs, which would reduce the resources required by volunteers and standardise alcohol management practices across sports clubs.

Originality/value – The prevailing alcohol research focuses on the consumption behaviour of individual members and sports players. The study findings are novel and important as they explore the macro-level influences that administrators experience when enacting and policing alcohol management strategies in sports clubs. To-date, administrators of CSOs have not been included in many studies about alcohol consumption regulation; therefore, the findings provide an original perspective on alcohol regulation and demonstrate how CSOs operationalise alcohol management in club settings. The original insights from this study informed the conceptualisation of a multilevel sport system framework, which can be applied to guide future governance of alcohol consumption in sport settings.

Keywords Social marketing, Systems theory, Community sport, Sports, Alcohol management

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

In social marketing, sport is considered a healthy setting and a “solution” to health issues and challenges. At the same time, it is also viewed as a risky social context that is saturated with alcohol promotion, sponsorships and consumption, which puts athletes, fans and young consumers at risk (Palmer, 2011). Previously described as a contributing factor to the “wicked problem” in sport (Westberg *et al.*, 2017), alcohol misuse and excessive

consumption is attributed to the influence of multi-stakeholder conflicts arising from commercial motives and the social and sporting motives of athletes, community players fans and the wider sport consumer public. In their paper, [Westberg *et al.* \(2017\)](#) identify critical vulnerabilities for both athletes and consumers in sport which have evolved from the complex ecosystem of sport, including the harmful consumption of alcohol, the pervasive influence of commercially embedded alcohol brands, violence, drug use and gambling. These vulnerabilities reveal the problematic embedding of alcohol in social systems within sport. The embedding of alcohol in sport is sustained and stabilised by the participation of multiple stakeholders, resulting in problems that are resistant to sustainable solutions ([Kennedy and Parsons, 2012](#); [Westberg *et al.*, 2017](#)).

In this paper, we engage and extend discussion of the wicked problem in sport through investigation of club administrators' and officials' views of the regulation of alcohol in community sport organisations (CSOs). With an estimated 270 million people participating in community sports clubs globally ([Rowland *et al.*, 2015](#)), the reported association between CSOs and risky alcohol consumption is critical to investigate. As social and health heartlands, CSO settings that fail to adequately create a culture of responsible service and consumption, have the potential to diminish the broader health and social fabric of the communities they serve ([Rowland *et al.*, 2015](#)). To-date, the challenges and issues arising from grass-roots club administrators' incapacity to address the negative outcomes from the "sport-alcohol nexus" have not been effectively documented. The majority of sports management and social marketing literature attribute the alcohol problem in sport to factors such as sport spectator drinking ([Nicholson *et al.*, 2013](#)); athletes' anti-social behaviour ([Stewart and Smith, 2014](#)); pervasive alcohol sponsorship ([Kelly *et al.*, 2016](#)) and alcogenic environments which intensify alcohol marketing advertising, promotions and aggressive (affordable) pricing; and inadequate liquor legislation ([Kypri *et al.*, 2005](#); [Jones, 2014](#)). Studies have tended to focus on the effectiveness of interventions designed to influence patron and member consumption ([Kingsland *et al.*, 2015](#); [Nicholson *et al.*, 2013](#)), but a deeper examination of cultural norms driven by CSO administrators and how and why club rituals and culture may be successfully targeted, is needed to inform these policies.

In this paper, we explore how grass-roots club administrators manage alcohol regulation, through a social marketing lens, to identify the macro, meso and micro-levels of influences on alcohol consumption in CSOs. Interviews with administrators responsible for the management of sport clubs provide unique insights into club managements' knowledge of alcohol regulations and how this translates to alcohol management practices in CSO environments. The paper's findings demonstrate the meso-level reality of managers as they navigate macro-level policy regulations to manage the responsible service of alcohol (RSA) in CSOs. Based on these findings, we identify opportunities for rethinking how social marketing interventions can be introduced in CSOs in the future.

The governance of alcohol in sport club settings

Sport clubs offer multiple benefits to participants, including physical and psychological health benefits ([Geidne *et al.*, 2013](#); [Rowland *et al.*, 2015](#)) and are therefore, an excellent setting for health promotion activities. Modifying alcohol management practices in CSOs has the potential to reduce both risky alcohol consumption in clubs, as well as community-level alcohol use and misuse ([Rowland *et al.*, 2015](#)). There is some evidence that targeted interventions at the grass-roots level can be very effective for health promotion in the wider community, including in terms of both safety and positive social capital outcomes ([Kingsland *et al.*, 2015](#); [Nicholson *et al.*, 2013](#)). While this line of research has been very promising, it has not directly examined the possible barriers to these interventions,

including the voluntary nature of CSO administration and entrenched cultures that drive alcohol consumption. Moreover, available studies have examined the embeddedness of alcohol in professional sports through marketing and sponsorships, due to the wide reach in these markets. While some recent research has examined the sourcing, promotion and accessibility of alcohol in the CSO setting and its relationship with consumption (Kypri *et al.*, 2005; Kelly *et al.*, 2016), richer insight into the role of management policy and influence is needed.

The connection between CSO-volunteering arrangements and alcohol management practices has received little empirical attention in sports management (Meganck *et al.*, 2015). Recent studies show that while volunteers in CSOs mobilise social capital, they are under-resourced and ill-prepared to cope with increasingly complex administrative demands (Sharpe, 2006; Wicker and Breuer, 2013), including the management of alcohol in their clubs (Fuchs and Le Hénaff, 2013). Normative practices such as the post-game drinking session, typify the pressures on CSO administrators, who may wish to reduce the centrality of alcohol to community sport club life.

As clubs have developed more professional business practices, tensions have arisen about sustainable income sources, inclusive practices and health promotion (Wicker *et al.*, 2015). There is increasing pressure for clubs to promote themselves as *Health-Promoting Sport Clubs* (HPSCs) to attract new participants and increase their appeal to the public. A key practice of an HPSC is a responsible alcohol management plan (Kokko *et al.*, 2016). Responsible alcohol management includes practices that limit the promotion of alcohol consumption or limit the alcohol-related harms (Rowland *et al.*, 2012). Responsible alcohol management includes removal of alcohol promotion from junior sport activities, restricting or replacing alcohol sponsorship, promoting other healthier beverages, removing alcohol promotional signage and limiting the timing of alcohol sales.

Regulation guiding Australian sports clubs

Government bodies in Australia have introduced alcohol-related legislation that are specific to sport, Returned and Services League (RSL) and ethnic clubs. The purpose of this regulation is to manage and reduce alcohol-related harm in sport club settings (e.g. *Liquor Act 1992*, Qld). Each state of Australia has different liquor acts pertaining to liquor licensing and the implementation of liquor licensing policies is typically self-regulated at the club committee level. Sports club administrators are expected to communicate what is acceptable or unacceptable with respect to alcohol use by a range of patron alerts/notifications, in a manner similar to that of publicly licensed venues. There are several differences between management practices in sport organisations and in publicly licensed venues. The difference most significant to this research is that the provision of sport facilities is also often reliant on a local government body, which may also place restrictions on the sport and entertainment operations of the club (Kelly *et al.*, 2016).

A number of macro-level regulatory policies have been implemented to reduce alcohol-related harm, promote good health and regulate linkages between the alcohol industry and sport in Australia. Government alcohol regulations form direct and explicit communications to clubs and there can be punitive consequences for non-compliance. In addition to the regulatory government bodies, other influential organisations that impact the operation and management of CSOs include the national sport associations (NSAs), state sport associations (SSAs), public health organisations (such as Good Sports) and elite sport competitions. Working within the government legislation, NSAs and SSAs can require affiliate clubs to participate in responsible alcohol management programmes (e.g. the AFL Illicit Drugs and Alcohol Education Module, Australian Football League, 2016). However, it

is not only the SSAs that deliver alcohol management programmes. The Good Sports Accreditation Programme (ADF, 2016) supports clubs in the reduction of alcohol-related harm and the reliance of clubs on alcohol-based income. Good Sports is widely approved and supported by government authorities and uses a three-tiered accreditation system. Sports clubs are required to comply with liquor licensing laws, including the provision of food and low alcohol beverages at bar opening times and transportation facilities to address the issue of drinking and driving (Hart, 2016). Clubs electing to participate in this accreditation programme are thus able to transparently demonstrate that they are seeking to generate revenue and sponsorship opportunities through means beyond alcohol to increase club membership (ADF, 2016, Duff and Munro, 2007).

Implementing alcohol policy regulation in Australian CSOs is a multi-pronged strategy and research on how these policies are enacted and enforced at the sport club level is limited. The challenges are likely to be related to the conflicts of interest due to the significance of alcohol sales as a source of revenue and the consumption of alcohol as a social bonding activity. Additionally, there is a potential conflict between the income derived from sales of alcohol and the interest in promoting a healthy club image (Duff and Munro, 2007; Sawyer *et al.*, 2012). To explore these complexities and how alcohol policy is communicated and enacted in club settings, we apply a social marketing systems view (Brennan *et al.*, 2016; Brychkov and Domegan, 2017) to identify the constituent macro, meso and micro levels of influence that impact RSA in clubs.

Systems framework

To understand alcohol management in community sport, we draw upon social ecological principles (Stokols, 1996) and social marketing systems models (Brennan *et al.*, 2016). Social ecological models emphasise multi-level transactional antecedents, including community factors, local factors (club factors in this case) and individual factors. Social marketing systems thinking is used to explore a multiple-level analysis of social change processes around alcohol consumption in CSOs.

Systems thinking focuses our interest on the regulatory system governing alcohol consumption in Australia (see Figure 1). In applying a holistic systems approach to effective alcohol management in sport, we are interested in how the sport delivery systems interact with other elements in the eco-system. Specifically, the findings address the overarching macro-policy elements and orientation of club activities and the meso-level influences which incorporate the activities of club administrators that set strategic directions on sport club culture and participation (Kokko *et al.*, 2016). The following discussion focuses attention on the influential “upstream” actors at the macro-level, such as public authorities and local community authorities, as they influence the available alcohol management options for CSOs. These overarching policies and practices are implemented, developed and communicated by club administrators (meso-level actions). Within the sport club, separate teams and social groups also adapt and modify their own acceptable behaviours to align with these policies, usually to meet club behavioural expectations (micro-level actions). Each level of the eco-system has a different implication for the volunteers managing the sport club. For example, at the meso-level, how a club’s management committee communicates responsible consumption of alcohol to members can alter the organisational culture through the endorsement, or disapproval, of different values – which ultimately influences the micro-level, i.e. individual alcohol consumption behaviours of members and players.

Concern about alcohol consumption by sport participants has resulted in government regulation and research on consumption levels; however, interventions and social marketing strategies so far have been targeted towards individuals as players or sport spectators.

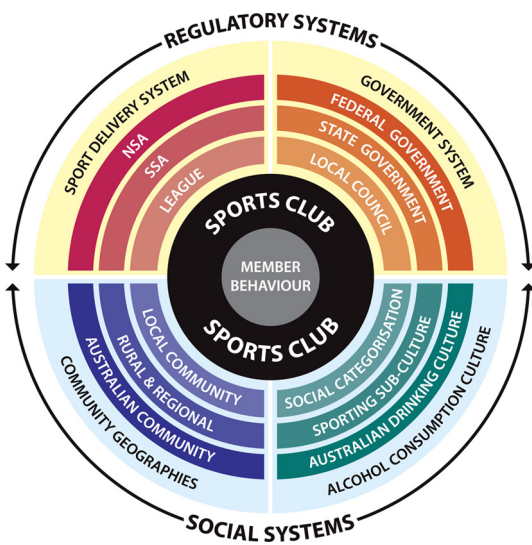


Figure 1.
The multilevel sport
system framework
approximately

Accordingly, in this paper, we explore the complexity of alcohol policy and how enactments of alcohol policies influence management practices in CSOs.

Research method

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling strategies were used to identify and recruit managers of sports clubs that had licensed bars in their clubrooms, had both junior and senior team members and amateur competition levels. Interviews were held during July 2015 (winter season sports) and November 2015 to January 2016 (summer season sports). Club and respondents’ details are summarised in Table I. All respondents were male, which demonstrates the dominating role played by men in managing sport clubs (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2007). The participant sample had considerable sport management experience (3-14 years of management). Only one of the managers interviewed was in a paid administrative role, which further demonstrated the volunteer contributions of study participants to their clubs. All administrators recruited were involved in popular, male-oriented community sports – cricket and football codes (AFL and Rugby) – which align with other studies about the behaviours and practices that influence sport-associated drinking (Palmer, 2011). All clubs in the study have a player code of conduct, which is a state association requirement and involves players agreeing to a code of conduct. Some clubs listed in Table I have their own player code of conduct, while others use the league (state) code of conduct for players. The inclusion of a code of conduct, however, is not an indicator of alcohol consumption standards being addressed in the code. In this study, Queensland Cricket is the only state association to specifically address alcohol in the player registration code of conduct; however, this rule only addresses removal of intoxicated players from the field.

To ensure confidentiality of clubs and participants, the job titles of the interviewees are not included. An interview was conducted with one person from each of the 16 CSOs from leagues in Brisbane and the surrounding areas, having the job titles of president (*n* = 12), board member (*n* = 1), football manager (*n* = 1), chairman (*n* = 1) and CEO (*n* = 1). A

Club and sport code	Highest level of competition	Administration role/experience	Good sports club?	Player code of conduct	Alcohol behaviour included in code of conduct?
AFL1	Queensland Australian Football League Seniors (QAFL)	6 years	No	Club level	No
AFL2	QFA Division 5	4 years	Level 3	Club level	Not sure
AFL3	QFA Division 2	10 years	No	Club level	Yes
AFL4	QFA Division 1	7 years	No	Club level	No
AFL5	QFA Division 1	8 years	Level 3	Club level	No
AFL6	QFA Division 2	14 years	Level 3	Club level	Yes
AFL7	QAFL	10 years	Level 3	League level	No
AFL8	QFA Division 1	10 years	No	League level	No
Cricket1	Queensland Premier Cricket	4 years	No	Club level	No
Cricket2	Queensland Premier Cricket	4 years	No	League level	Yes
Cricket3	Queensland Premier Cricket	4 years	No	League level	Yes
Cricket4	Queensland Premier Cricket	8 years	Level 3	Club level	No
Cricket5	Queensland Premier Cricket	3 years	No	League level	Yes
Cricket6	Queensland Premier Cricket	6 years	No	League level	Yes
RU1	Brisbane Club Rugby – Premier Grade	5 years	No	Club level	No
RU2	Brisbane Club Rugby – Premier Grade	8 years	No	Club level	No

Table I.
Club and administrator characteristics of respondents

nominated representative from each club was contacted because of their management role and position in the club that allowed them to respond to questions regarding club alcohol management and member behaviour.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview format to allow for the interviewer to probe for elaboration of discussion points. Each interview involved discussions on the structure of regulations and policies relating to alcohol management and the behaviour of members. Typical questions covered the presence of an alcohol management policy, who was involved in its development and how the policy was communicated to members. Where the policy was new, the interview discussion also explored how the policy was implemented and members' reactions. The respondents were also asked about the state sport association policies and how these influenced the club's operations. Respondents answered questions such as: "are you aware of the SSA policies on alcohol management? How are these communicated?" and "does the [SSA] run training and workshops to aid club management?" The communication of behavioural expectations to new members and the induction process for new players were also discussed. The role of the clubrooms and food and alcohol sales were discussed, particularly during the peak usage times. This opened the interview to exploration of the people who use the clubrooms, the types of activities that occurred at the club and the importance of the bar in the clubrooms. The research project was approved by the institution's research ethics committee.

All interviews were audio-recorded and ranged in length from 25 to 65 minutes. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo10 to facilitate coding and analysis. The process used to conduct a thematic analysis began with the researcher transcribing and reading the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the data and identifying potential themes. A preliminary list of themes was then created using inductive coding and definitions relevant to the study context and issues were developed. The themes identified corresponded with either explicit or implicit communication by the club to members to illustrate the meso-level actions of administrators and where appropriate, codes were also aligned with the macro and micro-levels of influence that impact implementation and management of alcohol regulation in club settings.

Findings

This paper explores the enactment of responsible alcohol management in CSOs and the communication of these policies to club members. The discussion of results presented aligns with the regulatory and structural levels of influence experienced by sport club administrators – managers, CEOs and board members – when they undertake to implement alcohol policy and interventions in their clubs. The results identify and discuss the macro-level influences of state government policy actions such as licensed venue regulations and the SSA institutional influences and the meso-level responses and actions demonstrated through club management communication and implementation of alcohol policies. The implementation of meso-level policy actions and activities are designed by club managements to guide and influence the micro-level actions of club members. The following discussion therefore presents a holistic purview of the enactment of alcohol management in CSOs to reveal:

- the regulatory and institutional-level influences from working with (or around) the responsible management of alcohol in club settings;
- the club management challenges arising from variable levels of influence; and
- the health and social consequences arising from club management regulatory actions.

Macro-level influences of government regulation

In sport clubs, the management makes economic decisions about the viability of the club's entertainment and services and sport-focused decisions to minimise risk and maximise sport and health outcomes. Of interest in the following analysis is how club administrators' economic and sport decisions are also influenced by the imperatives of health that are applied to engage and motivate club membership in sport pursuits. The RSA and adherence to its regulation by club management can demonstrate how a sport club creates an environment that promotes healthy, responsible behaviours within its players and wider membership.

Regulating alcohol settings through licensing laws. The liquor licensing laws of each state are explicit directives, which have punitive implications of loss of license for clubs that do not adhere to them. All club administrators interviewed held the view that the sale of alcohol provided important social and economic resources that encouraged membership participation and retention at the club. For many of the administrators interviewed, a liquor license is considered important in creating a setting where club members can congregate and socialise, as well as a reason for people to stay at the club longer:

[...] if we had any functions here, that we wouldn't be able to serve alcohol then people'd [*sic.*] say, "oh, we'll go elsewhere". Well, that can happen. You know, having a license is important to be able to sell [alcohol] (Cricket4).

Adhering and enforcing alcohol consumption spaces in club settings is challenging for club management as they also need to ensure that the staff complies with state-level liquor licensing regulations, such as the RSA. Such enforcement is challenging in contexts where alcohol is ingrained in sport socialisation and offered as a reward for good team performance. Club bar opening hours also influence the behaviour of members by indicating when the consumption of alcohol is acceptable. The majority of clubs in the study did not open the bar on training nights, making the only time that the club promotes alcohol consumption in clubrooms to be on "game day". The sale of alcohol however remains an integral part of important club events such as hosted dinners and team selection events.

Administrators' reflections on the impact of bar trading times and less alcohol sales was dependent on a variety of factors such as people wanting to go home after training and the need for volunteers to run the bar. The decisions to operate the bar on game day is also driven by a view that spectators are a source of potentially increased sales revenue, as compared to only club members after training. No administrators interviewed volunteered the view that limiting bar trading times was a strategy to reduce alcohol consumption at the sport club. The consensus view of the integral role of alcohol clearly demonstrates the pro-alcohol environment created by CSOs and illustrates a belief that "alcohol is harmless, socially normative and essential to having a good time" (Jones, 2014, p. 267).

Macro-level influences of public health organisations

Complexity is added to alcohol management in Australian sport clubs through government-supported, structured interventions such as the Good Sports programme. "Good Sports" specifically enables an accredited club to position itself as being a "health promoting" venue. Five of the clubs interviewed for the study had achieved the highest level of accreditation in the Good Sports programme and a further five clubs were considering membership at the time of the interview (Table I). Two administrators were not aware of the programme and four did not identify any benefits to be gained from a Good Sports membership.

The outcomes from club participation in the Good Sports programme have been highly evaluated and widely published. These evaluations report that Good Sports clubs, particularly those with the highest accreditation, had decreased reliance on alcohol income and despite team numbers remaining unchanged, witnessed increased club membership (Crundall, 2012; Rowland *et al.*, 2012). This study did not undertake to assess the outcomes of the Good Sports programme, but during interviews, some Good Sports clubs did identify that they were less reliant on alcohol. One club specifically noted: "we knew this day was coming. [...] it's the same as smoking – alcohol is the next one to be turfed obviously" (AFL7).

Association with the Good Sports programme allows clubs to demonstrate alcohol regulations, which aligns with promoting healthy values and provides the club with opportunities to access alternative funding sources. Some administrators, however, acknowledged challenges when trying to incorporate the Good Sport programme into their club management; they identified the extra work required to meet the programme requirements, or believed there were no transparent involvement benefits. As one administrator noted:

I can't remember why we're not a member now; I can't remember what it gave us either [...] Like there were no tangible benefits to us, or no disadvantages (Cricket2).

The lack of knowledge of the programme could also be due to the volunteer nature of some management positions, with club operations being a stronger focus and the need to align with a health programme being considered less important; as another administrator noted:

[...] when Good Sports were talking to me about being on board about hygiene and proper work practices and responsible service of alcohol, we've already got those measures in place. We realise how important they really are [...] what we offer as opposed to what cricket offers is "chalk and cheese". So if they're a Good Sports Club, we're a great sports club [...]. Running a course doesn't [...] what check and measures are in place is my big thing (RU2).

For participants in this study, involvement in the Good Sports programme did not distinguish alcohol management within CSOs. Some of the clubs affiliated with the Good Sports programme did not have clear and explicit alcohol management strategies. Rather, they relied on informal communication of behavioural expectations from players and members to regulate alcohol consumption in the club. On the other hand, there are clubs in this study that did not hold a Good Sports accreditation, but had explicit alcohol management strategies in place.

Macro-level influences of state sport association policies

The administrators identified a range of different influences of SSAs on alcohol management:

- policies and requirements relating to partnerships and sponsorships for the clubs;
- league or SSA-delivered programmes in which clubs must participate; and
- development of codes of conduct.

Whilst legislation and government policy are explicit directives, the communities around the sport club provide guidance, allowing for interpretation and self-regulation by the sport clubs. The SSAs have a strong interest in sport clubs creating a positive image for the sport through conforming to government legislation. Although SSAs allow for self-regulation, they also implement programs to get affiliated clubs to align to operational standards. Specific programmes may use rewards for participation and alignment, such as the Rugby Union aggregation programme:

What they do is they put parameters in place and say well you will be entitled to some of this funding if you are 50 per cent aligned, if you are 70 per cent aligned with our sponsors you will get this, if you're 90 per cent or above you'll get this. And it's like 2 ½ thousand dollars, \$10,000, \$15,000. Now when most of the club's turn around about \$15-\$20,000 a year that's a significant amount of money [...] They get us to sign a participation agreement. It used to be a mutual obligation agreement so there was some onus on you and some onus on me and now it's a participation levy where it's all on me. They're trying to tell us what to do. They are deciding we know what's best for the game, we are taking this direction for the game, you need to come with us otherwise you'll be sanctioned (RU2).

Some club officials, including the administrator above, see this style of regulation as a "waste of time" because their club has the ability to find its own sponsors, which typically include sponsors from the alcohol industry. However, what one club views as being restrictive, other clubs see as beneficial. For example, other administrators interviewed see the SSA aggregation program as providing sponsorship benefits, particularly when club volunteers do not have the capability (or time) to generate sponsorship and funding independently. Yet, what is also evident in the quote above is the implied control leveraged

by the SSA, which has power to sanction clubs that do not cooperate with SSA programs and to reward those that do.

Extending association program influence over alcohol policy. SSAs deliver programmes about responsible alcohol management with their affiliated sport clubs. These programs can be developed at a national level and distributed across Australia. The benefit for the associations is demonstrated commitment from clubs to responsible alcohol management and alignment with government policy programs promoting health and alcohol regulation in sport club settings. The challenge for individual sport clubs is the addition of “one more program” in which the club needs to participate and requirements for organising players to attend education or training sessions. As one administrator noted:

[...] people are time poor [...] To get them to sit still and listen to [a] program is a bit difficult. [...] we ask our seniors to try and assist with the juniors, they have jobs, they have families, they don't get paid. [...] especially if AFL Queensland for example is putting on all types of programs as well. The AFL community clubs program, we participated in that last year as well and we were told we have one of the best clubhouses for that, which was great for our club. I just think timing would be the key (AFL3).

Meso-level club activity influences

CSO administrators in this study reflect Australian society's wider sentiment towards alcohol as limited in the extent of the harm it creates and being socially normative. What is interesting in the following evidence is how different strategies have been developed by administrators to address societal concerns about the negative influence of alcohol in sport. These meso-level interventions focused on exploiting the human resources of the club – staff, volunteers and players – to communicate behavioural standards, which also protect the reputation and image of the club as a space where families and other community members can congregate to enjoy sport.

The club “code of conduct” – managing players’ alcohol behaviours. Sport clubs explicitly communicate behavioural regulation through the “player code of conduct”, or player contract. This written document is either developed by the clubs, or is provided by the sport league or association. The document aligns with legislation affecting the club and SSA-imposed behavioural expectations. Some clubs noted that alcohol consumption was not explicitly identified in their behavioural code of conduct. This is interesting given the nature and problem of alcohol consumption in sport (Tobin *et al.*, 2012; O'Brien and Kypri, 2008). Many AFL and cricket clubs explained that members had to sign a code of conduct as a part of their registration process. This was despite the belief of some administrators interviewed, that player codes of conduct were superfluous because competition levels dictated “good behaviour” and that societal standards and expectations influenced players’ conduct. For some managers, societal standards were all that were needed to enforce positive behaviours:

You hope that when people come here that they come here for a purpose and a reason and that they toe the line and generally 99 per cent of the time I've been here most people do [...] it's pretty basic in what you can and can't do. You'd like to think that in the way that they are brought up, you know, that it's in society and education (AFL5).

Whilst clubs in general were active in communicating expectations and alcohol policy regulation of consumption, they reinforced these standards further by hosting dedicated workshops, but noted logistic and other resource barriers in instituting these actions. For example:

We sit them down and talk about a couple of the basic things but the problem is, you do it once and there is only 30 here [...] you can never get the whole group here at one time. So we do one thing where we talk about the social media and just behaviour around the footy club [...] we just say, look if you're drinking in public and you've got your [football] club Polo [tshirt] on, you need to be smart about what you are doing, so we make it very brief like that's it. And the time we did it, I think, we had about 25 here out of a possible 130 players (AFL5).

Five clubs participating in this study did not have a club-level alcohol policy, arguing that league-level policies sufficiently regulated alcohol and player conduct. As most CSOs are run by volunteers, there may not be the time or capacity to ensure compliance with club codes (Nichols *et al.*, 2005; Griffiths and Armour, 2013). Higher-level assistance from governing bodies aims to reduce administrative burdens and build consistency across clubs and leagues in player behaviour:

In terms of having to discipline someone and make reference to a formal policy, [I] think we would probably be calling on the general conduct of the league [...] There are drug and alcohol policies which we conform to, the league would, if an umpire reported or an official reported us, we would be judged on that drug and alcohol policy from the league's level (AFL8).

Exploiting team and club leadership to model positive behavioural standards. For some CSOs in the study, appropriate modelling was an important device for creating positive standards, which was updated each season by the incoming leadership group (e.g. captain or coach). This approach distributed responsibility to the players of the leadership group, to develop suitable regulations for their team:

Generally, in our club, we have our leadership group in our players group will establish a code of ethics at the start of the year which is conducive to what they think is reasonable [member behaviour] (AFL3).

Governance of alcohol was enacted by clubs through both written and in-person communication. Codes of conduct and written policies at the club or association-level guide what is viewed as acceptable alcohol consumption at the sport club. Four clubs in this study also noted hosting workshops at the beginning of the season, where expectations for the season are outlined:

[...] two or three weeks or four weeks even before games start. We'll have a pre-season barbeque or something like that so they'll learn and understand the culture, what the [behavioural] expectations are then. And they'll learn more as the year goes and how teams are selected and how communication comes through (Cricket6).

A few of the clubs in the study also employed other interventions, such as bringing in external stakeholders respected by players and the club to discuss player behaviour. This approach was about further reinforcing the role of team leaders in transferring this knowledge and model positive behaviours to their team:

At the start of the season, we [...] get an umpire in and everyone has to sit back that [sic] is going to hold any position of leadership, like captaining [...] So that sets standards. And then we go through it at the start of the season, just expectations, code of behaviour, that sort of thing [...] [and] they are meant to tell everyone (Cricket5).

However, some clubs extend or circumvent explicit documents and policies through social media. One club administrator noted for example:

A lot of social media is used [...] we use Facebook a lot to do with our direct communications. So if we ever have an issue or that we think people are starting to pull out of line in anything, sort of put out general reminders that way (Cricket6).

Club administrators spoke about the importance of leaders in the club setting normative alcohol practices through their performance of alcohol consumption. As one administrator noted:

[...] it starts at the top from your President to your coach to your captains you know if you're in here as a drunk as President well obviously the players will follow suit but we try and all wear the correct club attire on Saturdays and, you know look the part and we make sure that we don't drink when the game's on but at the end of the game we'll sit down and if you want to have a beer, we stress look no committee person has a beer during, but at the end of the day by all means sit down and have a drink (AFL5).

This implicit communication and role-play of alcohol consumption from the committee sets an example for members on what is acceptable behaviour. Thus, some committee members involved in the study viewed not drinking during game times as setting a good example for the club members to follow. However, this message is potentially undermined by the fact that the bar is open during game times, thereby also implicitly communicating that alcohol consumption is acceptable at any time during the game.

Delegation of alcohol management: micro-level influences

Clubs involved in the study indicated two, almost oppositional reasons, for devolving alcohol management responsibilities. First, administrators identified the importance of empowering the team and club members to self-regulate behaviour. Second, other administrators argued that they do not have the time to manage alcohol behaviours in an ongoing manner and assumed it was an individual's responsibility to manage their alcohol consumption.

Those clubs that delegate communication of alcohol behavioural expectations to team leaders, coaches and captains believe these club members are more influential in creating expectations and influencing the team to act responsibly. However, in some circumstances, the committees did not undertake to explicitly communicate behavioural expectations to members, even to the team leaders, because the committee believed they were empowering the team to self-regulate, for example:

The leadership group have their agreement within the team, I'm not privy to it [...] we've got to stop telling these guys what they can and can't do and put the pressure back on the guys, on the peers to tell each other what to do (AFL6).

Committee members identified with not wanting to dictate to members, as they believed that the playing group should be personally responsible. This style of club management is grounded in the view that individual decisions are influenced via club regulations and norms and the norms developed within the team. Norms at the team-level will be more salient than the group norms of the club, when team members have a strong attachment to the team (Giguère *et al.*, 2014; Martinus *et al.*, 2012). Research evidence suggests that self-regulation of alcohol consumption in a group setting will occur when transgressions of group norms result in feelings of guilt or shame, affected by the level of attachment to the group, which can result in decreased alcohol consumption in following drinking occasions (Giguère *et al.*, 2014). However, this type of management approach can only be successful in promoting responsible alcohol consumption practices where the normative behaviour of the team is responsible alcohol consumption.

Committee members also delegate the responsibility of behaviour management to team leaders when the committee has limited time or capacity to manage:

[...] you honestly don't have the time; like I've got work full-time, you don't have the time to pull someone in and give them an hour lesson on what you expect as a footy club. You hope that the players sort of drive it and, you know, set the standard (AFL5).

There are a number of positive outcomes from supporting teams in managing and engaging in discussion about alcohol consumption within the team. Whilst this allows the club management to remove themselves from the responsibility of member behaviour, they are at the same time, drawing a distinction between team-level and club management responsibilities. In clubs with complementary communication, where implicit and explicit communications convey the same responsible drinking message, it may be unnecessary for the committee to remain involved in the management of alcohol consumption behaviour on a day-to-day basis, as the club as a whole shares an understanding of the acceptable behaviour:

[...] now it's just a given, people know the expectations of how they behave down here and what's appropriate and what is not appropriate. And the players actually pull up other players now who are doing the wrong thing instead of encouraging them, so that's very, very good (AFL7).

Individual behavioural choices

Some club administrators clearly expressed the view that explicit communication of information about alcohol consumption to the club members was not needed at their club. Whilst they expressed a preference for responsible behaviour and alcohol consumption by members, they did not explain how this behaviour was communicated. The sentiment of these administrators was that responsible consumption "is normal behaviour" and therefore, it is unnecessary to communicate behavioural expectations:

Once the guys are representing the footy club whether it be on social media or got a polo [tshirt] on or whatever they are expected [...] to set a standard that is acceptable in society, you know, people know what they can and can't do, we don't have set rules but we just expect them you know not to overstep the mark (AFL5).

When there is no explicit communication to members about behaviour, the club leaves the individual to interpret what is acceptable behaviour at the sport club through the informal communication from the club that situates alcohol as an integral element of club events and observations of behaviours of current members. Heavy and irresponsible alcohol consumption, with no ramifications, can undermine the wider principles of responsible alcohol consumption in the sport club settings. Also, given the evidence that there is a strong association between sports and heavy drinking amongst members and players, this management approach of delegating individual responsibility is misdirected.

Discussion and implications

There is strong research evidence that alcohol consumption is high in Australian sport settings. Australia's multi-pronged regulatory and policy interventions targeted at club settings align with this view (Meganck *et al.*, 2015; Nicholson *et al.*, 2013). The findings presented in this study demonstrate the complexities faced by club administrators in translating and communicating these policy initiatives. The multilevel sport system framework (Figure 1) summarises the key forces identified by administrators as they reflected on the management of practices relating to RSA and players' and members' alcohol-related behaviours in club settings. The interview analysis also reveals the breadth of the regulatory environment which CSOs are required to navigate if they are to be considered "health promoting" organisations that offer positive environments where community members can participate in sport and entertainment.

The multilevel sport system framework identifies two influential systems – the “regulatory system” and the “social system” – these are both interacting and influential macro-forces that impact the negative problem of alcohol drinking in sport. The macro-level regulatory system includes the sport delivery system and the government system, which are the focus of the inquiry undertaken in this paper. The evidence in this study focuses primarily on the regulatory system, which, to-date, has been under-researched. Specifically, administrator voices have been absent from explanations of how alcohol regulation is enacted in a club setting. The bottom half of the framework illustrates the “social systems” and identifies two significant forces impacting alcohol consumption. Community geographies include the influence of community cultures that shape sport and recreational adoption in community spaces; whereas the alcohol consumption culture identifies the significant influence of Australia’s drinking which has been extensively researched in sport and social marketing domains (Savic *et al.*, 2016). These social systems’ influences have been identified in the reasoning of the administrators’ policy actions as having impact on the regulatory processes implemented in CSOs. Whilst social systems are identified in Figure 1, they are not discussed extensively in the findings of this paper, but their inclusion acknowledges them as significant forces that circulate to influence administrators’ actions in sport club settings. Whilst the social systems (drinking culture and geographical community) are not explored in-depth in the current study, the regulatory system and the enactment of policy in CSOs do not work in isolation from these systems. Sport club management and communication is at the centre of the multilevel sport system framework, as they exert meso-level influence on the micro-level member behaviour. The findings above have explicated both the macro-level regulatory (government and sport delivery) systems and the complexity that these create for sport club administrators in enacting and communicating responsible alcohol consumption.

The findings discussed identify a range of challenges confronting sport club administrators and address the lack of evidence currently available to regulators and the community to ensure informed policy decision-making on this important issue. These challenges are potentially more difficult for the people who work on the management committees in CSOs, as they are volunteers, players, or parents of the children playing; therefore, there is no guarantee that they will have knowledge about the administration of a sports club. There are a number of ways in which the capacity of the committee may be limited when attempting to adhere to all the regulations, including knowledge, time, staff and funds (Casey *et al.*, 2009). One limitation identified in the study is the limited time that the CSO staff has to conduct club operations and often, it is the daily operation of the club that comes foremost. This study further extends the understanding of staff time restrictions in CSOs by acknowledging that sport club members also have to participate in health promotion programs, such as responsible alcohol behaviours. The health promotion initiatives by SSAs were seen as being more relevant and useful by the CSOs than those of other public health organisations, as they have more legitimate links to the operations of the club.

Many of the club officials in this study reported that they felt that they were successfully managing alcohol in the club setting as alcohol consumption levels were acceptable. This shows that the current belief of administrators does not reflect the prevailing literature that identifies alcohol consumption levels to be higher in sport club settings than in general society (O’Brien *et al.*, 2005; Poortinga, 2007) and that the availability of alcohol in a club setting is largely driven by direct-to-user alcohol sponsorship, including promotions, vouchers, volume rebates and uniforms. Evidenced in the interview discussions is a feeling of some club management officials that alcohol consumption regulations, such as having a blood alcohol content of 0.05 to drive, have negatively impacted the CSO by making it more difficult for members to stay and drink and socialise at the sport club after a game. Whilst acknowledging

that the regulations are for the safety of the community, some CSO administrators also expressed some feelings of loss because CSOs were no longer a community hub; this is a lasting negative result of alcohol regulatory changes on community sport clubs. This finding suggests that club administrators and policy makers at all levels need to consider the subtlety of club culture in driving drinking behaviour, in addition to the availability of alcohol in a club setting. This tension and complexity faced by CSO administrators identified in our research can be conceived as a wicked problem, consistent with previous research recognising the dark side of sport due to its complex ecosystem of stakeholders (Westberg *et al.*, 2017; Bloodworth and McNamee, 2010). Wicked problems are difficult to define and resolve due to the number of conflicting stakeholders and objectives (McGregor, 2012). Reflecting this conceptualisation, administrators acting in a voluntary capacity must comply with legal restrictions upon alcohol service while ensuring club financial viability, which is often dependent upon alcohol sales and sponsorships. They are expected to provide a healthy, positive setting for the local community, which runs counter to widespread evidence of excessive and even dangerous alcohol consumption regularly reported on club premises. Administrators have limited power, ability or will to enforce responsible service policies due to increasingly limited resources and capabilities. On top of all of these conflicting duties and objectives, they are the leaders of club culture, wardens of safety and, incongruously, generators of social capital (Rowland *et al.*, 2015).

Macro-policy interventions will have limited impact on the day-to-day behaviour of club members without buy-in from club administrators. The enactment of regulatory policies in the management of alcohol is reliant on club administrators' belief of what is responsible and acceptable behaviour. Where the majority of responses from administrators in this study indicated that the regulations had led to a loss of community for the club, there did not seem to be equal concern about the negative impact and influence of alcohol on sport activity and members' alcohol behaviour in their clubs. This indicates an important intervention point for social marketing strategies, that should firstly target management as a market for change and a need to implement programs that sensitise sport club managers to the impacts of alcohol and the weaknesses in meso-level policy enactment that do not explicitly address codes of conduct around alcohol consumption in sport. However, the challenge with this type of intervention is the potential for high turnover of club management as they are primarily volunteers. Additionally, as already identified, volunteer administrators are also time-poor within their club role, so further training and engagement in a social change program could be perceived as an added burden. Not all solutions require extensive time and resource expenditure by administrators. For example, explicit and consistent communication strategies that communicate standards of alcohol consumption should be a keystone strategy in building a culture of responsible alcohol use in CSOs. Clubs administrators need to be pro-active in communicating responsible alcohol consumption standards and administrators cannot simply expect club members and players to "know the rules" of conduct regarding alcohol use in CSOs. Nor can delegating responsibility to other club officials be viewed as a strong response to addressing social and civic accountability toward responsible engagement with alcohol. Complexity around alcohol regulation and management influencing CSOs identifies a need to consider the multiple levels of hierarchy that interact when considering future alcohol management strategies. The results of this study recognise that state-level government and affiliated SSAs also impact alcohol management approaches in CSO. Social marketers have a role in highlighting to macro-level regulators, the issues and complexities of policy requirements experienced by CSO administrators and could be in the position to work collaboratively with these multi-stakeholders to find synergies and identify policy duplications or redundancies in regulation that limit the capacity of CSOs to adopt health promoting

activities for their clubs that ultimately could reduce their reliance on alcohol sales. There needs to be more alignment with policy interventions to ensure that CSOs are able to implement and manage the expectations of policy decision makers and to ensure that clubs have the capacity to meet these multipronged requirements, if a unified and sustainable effort to address the problem of alcohol in sport is to be achieved.

Conclusion

The use of sporting clubs as a setting for positive social marketing programs for behavioural change is not a new idea. Sport clubs can provide a productive setting in which alcohol social change can be supported. Typically, social marketing programs use downstream social marketing, which target the individual. This study demonstrates opportunities where interventions can be designed to target administration levels in clubs – and for management to be proactive about how alcohol is managed within the social gathering of people in their club. Whilst excessive alcohol consumption and the management of alcohol remains a complex, wicked problem, the approach of multi-level understanding is necessary and government, communities, public health agencies and sporting communities must collaborate as each of them impacts the potential behavioural choices at the CSO level. This study has given new insights into the difficulties facing volunteer administrators of sport clubs in promoting healthy values and future social marketing interventions can learn from the challenges and barriers noted in this study when designing future interventions.

Whilst there is a general move towards the concept of the HPSC (Kokko *et al.*, 2006), there remains tension with the tradition of the post-game alcohol consumption and the licensed bar in many club settings throughout Australia. In documenting the combined effects of the macro-policy and the meso-level engagement in the distribution and delivery of policy, we have provided unique insights to demonstrate the challenges and barriers to integrating upstream and downstream social marketing actions. These challenges, however, are not insurmountable. Policy decision makers need to be made more aware of the demands and challenges being made on volunteers in sporting clubs when they institute multipronged strategies that impact the resourcing and capacity of community sporting clubs to participate in the responsible management of alcohol.

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