

Alcohol sponsorship linked to hazardous drinking in sportspeople

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A new study provides the first evidence of a link between alcohol-industry sponsorship and hazardous drinking among sportspeople.

Researchers from The University of Manchester and the University of Newcastle in Australia quizzed nearly 1,300 sportspeople and found alcohol-related companies sponsored almost half of them.

The sponsorship ranged from financial incentives, such as payment of competition fees and the supply of sports kit, but nearly half of the sponsorship deals included free or discounted alcohol for sporting functions and post-match celebrations.

The study, published in the December edition of the journal *Addiction*, found that sportspeople sponsored by the alcohol industry were more likely to engage in binge drinking than those with no alcohol sponsor.

This figure increased significantly when the sponsorship deal included free or discounted booze, and among those sportspeople who believed there was an obligation for them to drink the sponsor's products or attend their establishments.

"Alcohol consumption is a leading cause of mortality, responsible for 9.2% of the disease burden in developed countries," said the study's author, Dr Kerry O'Brien, who is based in Manchester's School of Psychological Sciences.

"Heavy episodic drinking is particularly harmful. It is common among sportspeople and is associated with other risky behaviour, such as drink-driving, unprotected sex and antisocial behaviour."

A growing body of research has detailed the drinking behaviour of sportspeople, including peer pressure and the increased opportunities for consumption, but this is the first time a link between sport sponsorship and hazardous drinking by sportspeople has been investigated.

"Sportspeople receiving direct alcohol-industry sponsorship of any kind, including payment of competition fees, costs for uniforms and the provision of alcoholic beverages, reported more hazardous drinking than those not receiving sponsorship," said Dr O'Brien.

"Similarly, those receiving free or discounted drinks from sponsors and those sportspeople that felt they were required to drink their sponsor's alcohol product at their establishments reported even higher levels of drinking.

"While finding that provision of free or discounted alcohol is linked to higher-reported drinking seems common sense, we needed to show clearly that this form of sponsorship occurs, and that it is actually associated with hazardous drinking."

The research, say the authors, raises serious ethical issues for sports administrators concerned with the health of sportspeople. Dr O'Brien added: "We suggest that health and governmental organisations need to work with sporting organisations and clubs to find ways to sever links with the alcohol industry, while still ensuring sports groups have sufficient financial support."

Source: University of Manchester

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