

Alcohol advertising self-regulation not working, as ads target younger drinkers

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Addiction scientists are calling for tighter regulation of alcohol advertising, as new research shows that self-regulation by the alcohol industry does not protect impressionable children and youth from exposure.

The new research, conducted in Australia, found that adolescents in the five main cities saw nearly as much TV alcohol advertising as 18-24 year olds, and in the case of full-strength beer and wine, in one city underage teens were actually exposed to more advertising than young adults of a legal drinking age.

The researchers also found that all the most exposed alcohol ads included in the study contained at least one element known to appeal to children and adolescents, such as animated characters, animals, simple humorous storylines and pop music, despite the Australian alcohol industry's code of conduct specifically stating that alcohol advertising must not have strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents.

Previous studies have concluded that the more alcohol advertising young people are exposed to, the more likely they are to drink, and in the US, another country where alcohol advertising is subject to self-regulation by the industry, more than 4,600 young people under the legal drinking age of 21 die because of alcohol use each year.

Dr. David Jernigan, an alcohol policy and public health expert, calls for standards for alcohol advertisers to be strengthened in his commentary

on the research, published this week in *Addiction* journal. . "Clearly self-regulation is not working to protect young people from exposure to alcohol advertising. Ongoing monitoring and greater restriction on when these ads can air are needed to safeguard our youth," said Dr. Jernigan.

In response to the failure of the self-regulation system in Australia, the authors propose various measures to reduce underage exposure, including: banning alcohol advertising during live sports programming; further restricting the times at which alcohol adverts can be broadcast; and banning animals and animal characters from alcohol advertising, with carefully controlled exceptions where an animal has traditionally been part of the brand's logo. "The marketing and communications industries are fully aware of execution elements that are attractive to children and young teens - that's part of their job. It should not be part of their job to use that knowledge, or allow it to be used, in alcohol advertising that children and teens are exposed to" said co-author Professor Donovan.

Source: Wiley-Blackwell

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