

Alcohol brands influence teen drinking preferences

July 6 2011

American adolescents are hitting the hard stuff, according to a new report from Dartmouth Medical School and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health published in the July issue of the journal [Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine](#).

The [phone survey](#) of 2,699 youth ages 16 to 20 about their [alcohol](#) use and favorite brands revealed that the most commonly chosen favorite among underage females was Smirnoff and for underage males, Budweiser. Smirnoff was overall the most popular brand of alcohol for adolescent drinkers surveyed, but the study did not specify products within the brand to allow distinction between products within a brand such as Smirnoff Vodka or Smirnoff Ice.

“This study shows that the alcohol industry is affecting kids’ preferences about drinking,” said David Jernigan, PhD, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “Despite alcohol industry promises to shield young people from their advertising, youth exposure to alcohol advertising particularly on television has grown by leaps and bounds.”

The study shows a link between underage drinkers’ brand preferences and marketing expenditures, pointing to a marketing influence on a young person’s choice of alcoholic beverages. Additionally, higher rates of binge drinking (defined as 5 or more drinks at one sitting) among adolescents who named a favorite brand suggest that alcohol advertising campaigns may influence the likelihood that alcohol will be consumed at

levels that pose a risk to health.

Jernigan collaborated with Dartmouth pediatricians Susanne Tanski, MD, MPH, Auden McClure, MD, MPH, and James Sargent, MD, on the report.

“The association between favorite brand to drink and binge drinking is disturbing,” said Tanski, the study’s lead author. “It suggests that the ‘drink responsibly’ message is being swamped by other advertising messages that associate alcohol brands with partying and drinking to excess. For example, one recent advertisement showed how many shots of rum there are in a half gallon of Captain Morgan rum.”

Of the teen drinkers, 26 percent of the boys and 16 percent of the girls reported consuming five or more drinks in a row in the past 30 days. Nearly 70 percent endorsed a favorite brand of alcohol, naming 158 brands in all. Fifty-three percent of these indicated a distilled spirit brand as their favorite, compared to 42 percent preferring a beer brand and only 3.3 percent choosing a wine or cider [brand](#).

“Reducing young people’s exposure to [alcohol advertising](#) has to be part of our national agenda for preventing and reducing underage drinking. The current standards governing where and when this industry advertises its products are determined by the industry; self-regulation is clearly not protecting young people from marketing influence,” said Jernigan.

Provided by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Citation: Alcohol brands influence teen drinking preferences (2011, July 6) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-07-alcohol-brands-teen.html>

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