

Alcohol advertising standards violations most common in magazines with youthful audiences

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The content of alcohol ads placed in magazines is more likely to be in violation of industry guidelines if the ad appears in a magazine with sizable youth readership, according to a new study from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, the study is the first to measure the relationship of problematic content to youth exposure, and the first to examine risky behaviors depicted in alcohol advertising in the past decade.

The researchers examined 1,261 ads for alcopops, beer, spirits or [wine](#) that appeared more than 2,500 times in 11 different magazines that have or are likely to have disproportionately youthful readerships – that is, youth readerships equaling or exceeding 15 percent. Ads were analyzed for different risk codes: injury content, overconsumption content, addiction content, sex-related content and violation of industry guidelines. This latter category refers to the voluntary codes of good marketing practice administered by alcohol industry trade associations. Examples of code violations include ads appearing to target a primarily underage audience, highlighting the high alcohol content of a product or portraying alcohol consumption in conjunction with activities requiring a high degree of alertness or coordination such as swimming.

"The finding that violations of the alcohol industry's advertising standards were most common in magazines with the most youthful

audiences tells us self-regulated voluntary codes are failing," said CAMY Director and study co-author David Jernigan, PhD. "It's time to seriously consider stronger limits on youth exposure to [alcohol advertising](#)."

Specific examples the researchers identified in the sample included advertising showing alcohol consumption near or on bodies of water, encouraging overconsumption, and providing messages supportive of alcohol addiction. In addition, nearly one in five ad occurrences contained sexual connotations or sexual objectification. Results also show ads were concentrated across type of alcohol, brand and outlet, with spirits representing about two-thirds of the sample, followed by ads for beer, which comprised almost another 30 percent. The ten most advertised brands, a list comprised solely of spirits and beer brands, accounted for 30 percent of the sample, and seven brands were responsible for more than half of the violations of industry marketing guidelines.

"The bottom line here is that youth are getting hit repeatedly by ads for spirits and beer in magazines geared towards their age demographic," said Jernigan. "As at least 14 studies have found that the more young people are exposed to alcohol advertising and marketing, the more likely they are to drink, or if already drinking, to drink more, this report should serve as a wake-up call to parents and everyone else concerned about the health of young people."

[Alcohol](#) is responsible for 4,700 deaths per year among young people under the age of 21, and is associated with the three leading causes of death among youth: motor vehicle crashes, homicide and suicide.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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