

# Underage drinkers overexposed to magazine advertising for the brands they consume

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The brands of alcohol popular with underage drinkers also happen to be the ones heavily advertised in magazines that young people read, a new study finds.

The findings, reported in July's *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, add to evidence that [alcohol](#) ads can encourage kids to drink.

They also suggest that the [alcohol industry](#)'s self-imposed standards on advertising are inadequate, said lead researcher Craig Ross, Ph.D., M.B.A., of the Natick, Mass.,-based Virtual Media Resources.

"All of the ads in our study were in complete compliance with the industry's self-regulatory guidelines," Ross said.

According to those standards, alcohol ads should be placed only in magazines where less than 30 percent of the readers are younger than 21. Yet, based on the new findings, underage readers see plenty of glossy magazine ads for beer and distilled spirits.

For the study, Ross and his colleagues from The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Boston University School of Public Health examined [alcohol ads](#) that ran in U.S. magazines in 2011—with a particular eye toward the top 25 alcohol brands consumed by youth under the [legal drinking age](#).

They found that, overall, those brands appeared much more effective in

reaching young magazine readers, versus 308 other alcohol brands that are less popular with the underage crowd.

Manufacturers of 11 of the 25 brands most popular with underage males exposed 18- to 20-year-olds most heavily. The same was true for 16 of the top 25 brands among underage females.

In all, those popular brands were five to nine times more likely to have 18- to 20-year-olds in their most heavily exposed audience, compared with all other brands.

"We can't speak to what advertisers' intentions are," said study co-author David Jernigan, Ph.D., director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "But we can say there is clear evidence that 18- to 20-year-olds are the most heavily exposed to these ads."

"That's concerning," he added, "because that age group is at high risk of alcohol abuse and negative consequences from drinking."

Ross noted that underage exposure to [alcohol advertising](#) would be reduced if the industry would agree to stricter standards—such as limiting ads to magazines where less than 15 percent of readers are under age 21.

For now, Ross said, parents could help by educating their kids, from a young age, to be savvy media consumers.

"Parents should take note that scientific evidence is growing that exposure to alcohol advertising promotes drinking initiation," he noted, "and is likely to increase the frequency of consumption for kids already drinking."

**More information:** Ross, C. S., Ostroff, J., Siegel, M. B., DeJong, W., Naimi, T. S., & Jernigan, D. H. (July 2014). Youth alcohol brand consumption and exposure to brand advertising in magazines. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 75(4), 615-622.

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