

# Boozing in movies may boost teen drinking

April 13 2015, by Tara Haelle, Healthday Reporter

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Alcohol use 20 percent higher in adolescents who watched liquor-laden films, study finds.

(HealthDay)—Seeing actors drink alcohol in movies seems to increase the likelihood that teens will drink and have alcohol-related problems, a new study suggests.

The findings fit with a growing consensus of evidence that [teens](#) are more likely to engage in various risky behaviors that occur in the films and TV shows they watch, said study author Andrea Waylen, a senior lecturer in social sciences at the University of Bristol in England.

But, this study doesn't prove that watching films with [alcohol](#) in them causes teens to drink, only that it's a possible factor.

One expert pointed out another potential explanation for the findings.

"Kids who are more likely to drink or are already drinking may seek out

more films with drinking in them," said Dr. Victor Strasburger, an emeritus professor of pediatrics at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

Yet, he added, a number of long-term studies conducted by a co-author of the current study "show that seeing episodes of drinking in the movies may be the leading cause of teenagers beginning to drink, or smoke if they see episodes of smoking."

For the latest study, the researchers surveyed just over 5,000 English 15-year-olds to find out which of 50 movies they had seen. The 50 films had been randomly selected from popular, recent films, and the researchers had measured how many minutes in each film showed alcohol use.

The teens were categorized according to whether they had seen a small amount of alcohol use in movies (less than 28 minutes), a lot (at least 64 minutes) or somewhere in between. They also answered questions about whether they drank alcohol and how often.

Eighty-six percent of the teens said they had tried alcohol. Nearly half said they participated in [binge drinking](#). And just over 40 percent said they'd had an alcohol-related problem, the researchers found.

Adjustments were made for other factors that might affect [teen drinking](#), such as socioeconomic status, [mental health conditions](#), parental drinking habits and family characteristics.

After considering those factors, the researchers found that teens exposed to the most drinking in movies were still 20 percent more likely to have tried alcohol than teens with the lowest exposure.

Those who watched the most alcohol use in films also were almost twice

as likely to binge drink and more than twice as likely to drink weekly than those who had seen the least alcohol use. Teens who saw a lot of drinking in movies were also twice as likely to have alcohol-related problems.

The findings were published online April 13 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

The study authors suggested that movie ratings take alcohol use into consideration.

Strasburger would take that a step further by including a pediatrician and child psychologist on the Motion Picture Association of America board that determines ratings.

"The ratings should be content-based, not age-based as they are now," said Strasburger, who believes preteens are likely the most susceptible to being influenced by what they watch. "Studies around the year 2000 found that there was actually a surprising amount of [drinking](#) and smoking in G- and PG-rated movies."

Waylen added that, "If movies aren't rated for [alcohol content](#) so that parents are prevented from restricting viewing, we do need to be concerned about the movies and other media that kids are watching, regardless of their age."

In addition, parents should talk with their children about what they see, or watch the films with their kids.

"The important thing is that parents communicate with their kids on a regular basis, that they know the sort of movies they are watching, who they're watching them with and, perhaps most importantly, that they [parents] are aware of the content of the [movies](#)," Waylen said.

**More information:** Read more about preventing childhood alcohol abuse from the [U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)

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Citation: Boozing in movies may boost teen drinking (2015, April 13) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-boozing-movies-boost-teen.html>

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