

'Responsible drinking' campaign in Ireland likely to be harmful to public health

September 29 2016



Dr Niamh Fitzgerald of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport

A study analysing a controversial 'Stop out of Control Drinking' campaign in Ireland has found that its promotion of "responsible drinking" could actually undermine public health.

The [campaign](#), launched in Ireland last year by drinks company Diageo, stated it was designed to "change the country's culture of drinking for the better," and make out-of-control drinking "socially unacceptable".

However, new research published in the journal *PLOS ONE* by experts in the UK and Ireland analysed newspaper articles, media interviews and social media activity relating to the campaign, and concluded that it lacked independence from Diageo, and presented problems with alcohol, and policy solutions, that were unfavourable to [public health](#).

The scientists also found that the campaign used vague or self-defined concepts of 'out of control' and 'moderate' drinking, presenting alcohol harm as a behavioural problem rather than a health issue.

Dr Niamh Fitzgerald of the University of Stirling, said: "Diageo's campaign generally failed to emphasise the policies known to be most effective such as marketing controls and minimum unit pricing, talking instead about culture change, psychological factors and parenting.

"The language used in the campaign appears to frame alcohol problems as the responsibility of individual drinkers rather than arising from the marketing of an addictive, carcinogenic product. This tactic has been previously used by the tobacco industry. We need to ensure that going forward the public, policymakers and the third sector can recognise these industry strategies."

Researchers found that the campaign emphasised alcohol-related antisocial behaviour among young people, particularly young women, when it is known that alcohol harms are a wider health issue affecting men, women and children across the whole population, resulting in the deaths of three people in Ireland every day.

Professor Mark Petticrew, lead author, of the London School of Hygiene

& Tropical Medicine, said: "The Diageo campaign was controversial from the start, not least because it was initiated and funded by an alcohol company. We were particularly concerned that the campaign emphasised the importance of public opinion about what might work, while placing little emphasis on the scientific evidence already available about solutions to alcohol-related problems. For example, the campaign presented education as an effective way to 'change our culture', though the evidence clearly shows that this has little effect."

More information: Mark Petticrew et al. Diageo's 'Stop Out of Control Drinking' Campaign in Ireland: An Analysis, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0160379](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0160379)

Provided by University of Stirling

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