

Alcohol adverts attract the young

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Alcohol advertising and marketing may lead to underage drinking. A large systematic review of more than 13,000 people, published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*, suggests that exposure to ads and product placements, even those supposedly not directed at young people, leads to increased alcohol consumption.

Lesley Smith and David Foxcroft from Oxford Brookes University collated information from seven rigorously selected studies, featuring information on 13,255 participants. This systematic review, funded by the Alcohol and Education Research Council (AERC), is the first to study the effects of advertising, product placement in films, games, sporting events and music videos, depictions of drinking in various media, and exposure to product stands in shops. According to Smith, "Our work provides strong empirical evidence to inform the policy debate on the impact of alcohol advertising on young people, and policy groups may wish to revise or strengthen their policy recommendations in the light of this stronger evidence".

The authors found that exposure to TV alcohol advertisements was associated with an increased tendency to drink, as were magazine advertisements and concession stands at sporting events or concerts. Hours spent watching films, playing games and watching music videos also correlated with young peoples' tendency to consume alcoholic beverages. Smith said, "All seven studies demonstrated significant effects across a range of different exposure variables and outcome measures. One showed that for each additional hour of TV viewing per day the average risk of starting to drink increased by 9% during the following 18 months. Another found that for each additional hour of exposure to alcohol use depicted in popular movies there was a 15% increase in likelihood of having tried alcohol 13 to 26 months later".

The authors recommend that counter-advertising, social marketing techniques and other prevention options such as parenting programmes, price

increases and limiting availability may be useful to limit alcohol problems in young people.

More information: The effect of alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal on drinking behaviour in young people: systematic review of prospective cohort studies, Lesley A Smith and David R Foxcroft, *BMC Public Health* (in press) www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpublichealth/

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