

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS: FACT SHEET

Under the Influence? The Impact of Alcohol Advertising on Youth

Research shows that advertising affects young people. It pre-programs them to drink, recruits new drinkers, increases consumption among existing drinkers and makes it hard for problem drinkers to stop.

- In Canada, a mixture of government and private interests control alcohol advertising. Government regulates it federally with the "CRTC Code for Broadcast Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages" and provincially through advertising guidelines (Solomon, 1997). Advertising Standards Canada (ASC) imposes its own industry standard on alcohol advertising in the "Canadian Code of Advertising Standards" and other guidelines implemented by the ASC.
- The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario reviewed 5,200 alcohol advertisements in 1998: 44% were approved, 44% were approved with changes and 12% were rejected (AGCO, 1999). It is estimated that about 13% of all new advertisements aired in 1998/99 were for alcoholic beverages: 7% were for wine, 13% were for spirits and 80% were for beer (ACNielsen, 1998/99)
- Advertising Standards Canada received 75 complaints against alcohol ads in 1998 (ASC, 1998). Forty-one (55%) complaints were upheld.
- Young people are targeted by the alcohol industry because about 20% of Canadians between 18 and 24 years of age (537,000 people) drink heavily: this 2% of the population drink about 11% of all beer sold (Theobald, 1999).
- 82% of 28 beer sites on the internet appeal to youth through games, merchandise and attractive "spokes-characters" (Centre for Media Education, 1998).
- Today, about 66% (620,000 students) of Ontario students from Grade 7 to 13 drink alcohol each year- about 10% more than in 1993 (Adlaf et al., 1999).
- Heavy, regular exposure to alcohol ads is linked to both heavy drinking and drinking in dangerous situations (i.e., driving) (Atkin et al., 1983). Messages that connect drinking with a dangerous activity may make them seem safer to do while drinking and make young people accept heavy or hazardous drinking.
- Advertising expenditures affect alcohol problems like motor-vehicle crashes (Hacker and Stewart, 1995). Between 1986 and 1993, ad spending in the US fell by 46% while alcohol-related fatalities dropped by 29% -- especially for youth between 16 and 24 years of age.
- Alcohol advertising fashions the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of young people through role modeling (Slater et al., 1996). Adolescents learn to behave by imitating public figures they identify with for their physical attractiveness and age. When teens "like" certain commercials, their drinking can increase after seeing them. Humour and music are especially appealing (Grube et al., 1996).
- Young people between 12 and 18 years old watch about 18 hours of television per week (Statistics Canada, 1999). For every extra hour of television seen by 14 and 15-year-old non-drinkers, there is a 10% higher risk of starting to drink over the next 18 months. There is also a 31% higher risk of starting to drink for every extra hour spent watching music videos or video-tapes, where alcohol and tobacco are glamorized and mixed with sexuality (Robinson et al., 1998). Once teens start to drink, alcohol ads on TV have little affect.
- Children with firm plans to drink as an adult, see more beer commercials, recognize them, recall the brands and have strong attitudes about the social role of beer, regardless of how their parents drink, or their gender or age (Wallack et al., 1990).

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