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## Alcohol Advertising Affects Underage Drinking, Study Says

Brand-specific advertising may impact teens' drinking choices.

By Jamie Ducharme | Hub Health | August 6, 2014 10:50 am



ALCOHOL PHOTO BY JAMIE DUCHARME

Though it may seem that teenagers will drink anything they can get their hands on, a new study from the Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) says otherwise.

The study, done in conjunction with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, found a strong link between the alcohol brands underage teenagers saw advertised on television and which brands they decided to drink, further strengthening arguments that advertising affects teenagers' drinking behavior and decisions.

"There's been a number of previous studies that have looked at this [issue], but they've all looked at it in an aggregate way, meaning that what the studies have done is looked at overall exposure to alcohol advertising," says Dr. Michael Siegel, a professor at BUSPH and one of the study's authors. "It would add a lot of strength to the conclusion that alcohol advertising is influencing youth drinking behavior if we had evidence that when kids make a decision about what to drink, they're actually choosing the brands to which they're most heavily exposed."

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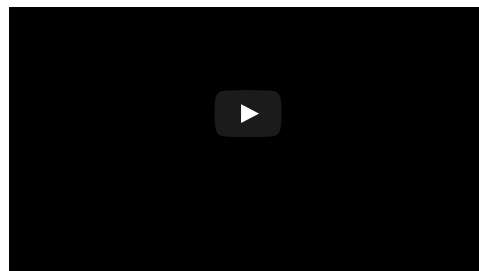
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To conduct their study, Siegel and his team polled 1,000 people between the ages of 13 and 20 about the TV shows they watched and the alcohol they drank during the past 30 days. Then, they studied Nielsen data about alcohol brand advertising during 20 different TV shows to find overlap between brands seen on TV and brands consumed.

After analyzing the data, the researchers found that teenagers were three times more likely to drink alcohol from brands that advertised during shows they watched than those that didn't, suggesting that advertisements have a legitimate impact on underage drinking. "Previously, all we could say is that when youth are exposed to advertising, it appears that they are more likely to consume alcohol; now what we can say is youth are more likely to consume the brands they see on television," Siegel says. "I think that specificity adds a lot to the ability to draw a causal conclusion from these data."

Still, Siegel adds that more research is needed to draw a firm conclusion. Specifically, Siegel and his team — part of a National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism-funded project called Alcohol Brand Research Among Underage Drinkers — plan to expand their research beyond the 20 shows and 123 brands included in this study to look at all alcohol advertising across all channels. That expansion is important, Siegel says, due to the personal and public health problems perpetuated by underage drinking, a list that includes everything from individual health risks in the long term to more car accidents and instances of sexual abuse in the short term. "There's a whole host of adverse consequences that are associated with underage drinking, especially excessive drinking," he says.

Those adverse consequences provide some of the motivation for research like Siegel's. "The goal is to identify the potential role that alcohol advertising and marketing may play in youth drinking behavior," he explains, "so that if there is an effect we can potentially reduce youth drinking behavior by addressing that effect."

And until then? Maybe fast-forwarding through commercials is the way to go.

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