

*Literature Review*

**Effects of Alcohol Advertising on  
Alcohol Consumption Among Youth**

*Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection*

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Prepared by: Research Power Inc.



Finding the solution is simple when you know how

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# Introduction

## Background

Alcohol consumption among youth represents a serious health concern. Underage drinking is associated with a number of negative health and social consequences such as impaired brain development, suicide and depression, loss of memory, high risk sexual behavior, addiction, impaired decision making, poor academic performance, violence, and motor vehicle accidents (injuries and fatalities) (Bronomo et al., 2001). There are concerns that alcohol advertising is a contributing factor to youth alcohol consumption. Up until 1997, the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC) regulated alcohol advertising in Canada. This responsibility has since been shifted to ‘Advertising Standards Canada’ (ASC), who ensure compliance to the CRTC’s Guidelines for Alcohol Advertising in Canada (see box #1) and address public complaints and concerns around potential violations to these guidelines.

*Box 1: Select Guidelines for Alcohol Advertising in Canada.*

Alcohol advertising should not:

- Be directed at persons under the legal age to drink or purchase
- Attempt to influence non-drinkers of any age to drink or to purchase alcoholic beverages
- Contain an endorsement of an alcoholic product by any person, character or group who is (or is likely to be) a role model for minors
- Imply that social acceptance, personal success, or business or athletic achievement may be acquired through consumption of the product
- Attempt to establish the product as a status symbol, a necessity for the enjoyment of life, or an escape from life’s problems

(CRTC, 1996)

Despite the guidelines and regulations, there is evidence that youth are regularly exposed to alcohol advertising and some have expressed concern over the potential impact these advertisements have on youths’ perceptions of alcohol and alcohol consumption, intentions to drink, actual consumption and consumption patterns (e.g., binge drinking).

## **Purpose**

There is public policy debate about whether alcohol advertising is partially responsible for youth consumption levels and whether the association is causal. In order to address this question, Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection has contracted a consultant to complete a comprehensive literature review addressing the impact of advertising content and exposure rates on alcohol consumption among youth. The purpose of this report is to provide the findings of a review of the literature around the effects of alcohol advertising on alcohol consumption among youth.

## **Methods**

The review included a search, review and synthesis of the academic literature (peer reviewed journals). Databases searched for this review included Prowler, PubMed, Science Direct, Cochrane Library, Academic Search Elite, EBSCO, and Proquest as well as individual searches within key journals (e.g., Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, Journal of Adolescent Health, etc.). Grey literature searching was also conducted to identify key government documents pertaining to the search topic and review of reference lists within these documents. The search was limited to 'recent' literature (i.e. 2000-present).

# Findings

## Alcohol Advertising

### ❖ Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising

Despite regulations to protect youth from alcohol advertising (see box #1), children and teenagers below drinking age are regularly exposed to high levels of alcohol advertising (Winter et al., 2008). Studies suggest that youth are exposed to similar, if not higher levels of alcohol advertisements than young adults (a target demographic for advertisers) (Winter et al., 2008; O'Hara et al., 2003). For example, one of every six magazine advertisements and one of every fourteen television advertisements for alcohol, target underage drinkers (Austin & Hust, 2005). In 2002, underage youth were exposed to 65% more cooler advertisements, 45% more beer advertisements, and 12% more spirits advertisements than adults 21 years and over (Jenigan et al. 2004).

Although efforts have been made to counter the abundance of pro-alcohol messaging to youth (e.g., public service announcements, MADD Canada, Concerned Children's Advertisers), these efforts cannot match the increasing volume of industry alcohol advertising. According to the CRTC (2004), in 2002, 556,503 industry alcohol advertisements aired in Canada compared to 325,821 public service announcements. In 2003, the number of alcohol advertisements increased to 699,310 while public service announcements remained virtually the same (359,768). Further, industry promotion/messaging around responsible consumption is virtually negligible. Statistics suggest that youth are 60 times more likely to see television advertisements promoting alcohol compared to industry funded responsible consumption advertisements and 93

times more likely to see advertisements promoting alcohol than industry advertisements discouraging underage drinking (CAMY, 2003).

### ❖ **Demographic Differences in Exposure**

Demographic differences in youth exposure to alcohol advertising have also been noted in the literature. Generally, boys tend to be exposed to more television alcohol advertising (Ringel et al., 2006) while girls (ages 12-20) are more likely to be overexposed to alcohol advertising in magazines and radio (Jenigan et al. 2004; Jenigan, 2006). Among both girls and boys, African Americans youth are exposed to more alcohol advertising (across mediums) than their white counterparts (CAMY, 2003; Jenigan, 2006; Ringel et al., 2006). For example, compared to other youth, African American youth (ages 12-20) were exposed to: 60% more radio advertising for alcohol and 43% more magazine advertising for spirits (CAMY, 2003).

### ❖ **The Appeal of Alcohol Advertising to Youth**

Studies suggest that alcohol advertisements make use of techniques which specifically target and appeal to youth. The appeal of alcohol advertising has been revealed through qualitative studies with youth. Research shows that young people find many aspects of alcohol advertising attractive (Waiters et al. 2001; McCranor et al, 2008; Chen & Crube, 2002).

*Box 2: Seven Myths Alcohol Advertiser want Youth to Believe:*

1. Everyone drinks alcohol
2. Drinking has no risks
3. Drinking helps to solve problems
4. Alcohol is a magic potion that can transform you
5. Sport and alcohol go together
6. If alcohol were truly dangerous, we wouldn't be advertising it
7. Alcohol companies promote drinking only in moderation

- Strasburger, 2002 (adapted from Kilbourne- Media and values)

Through focus groups with youth (ages 9-15), Waiters et al. (2001) found that alcohol advertising commonly includes components which youth find highly appealing including animals, humor, music, innovative technical effects/aspects, and bar/ party settings. Others have found similar characteristics of alcohol advertising (e.g., celebrity

*Box 3: Effect on Children*

Children (9-10 years old) could identify the Budweiser beer frogs nearly as frequently as Bugs Bunny and more frequently than Tony the Tiger

(Strasburger, 2002)

endorsements, comedy, animation, popular music, etc) to appeal to children and adolescents (Chen & Crube, 2002). According to Waiters et al. (2001), youth also find depictions of fun, friends and camaraderie attractive and often identify the main message of alcohol commercials to be encouragement to purchase/drink the product, description of the product's quality or superiority over its competition, and the relationship between the product and sexual attractiveness, social success or popularity. Further, youth often believe that the advertisements suggest that drinkers will: find love, success, happiness and a sexual partner; become physically active, appear attractive; and lose personal control/ inhibitions. Overall, youth indicate that alcohol commercials imply that attractive young adults drink alcohol to personally rewarding ends.

Similar findings have been found elsewhere, such as McCranor et al. (2008) who interviewed youth and found that alcohol advertising was often enjoyed. These advertisements established a climate or association that alcohol is cool, exciting and fun. McCranor et al. (2008) concluded that alcohol advertising creates an 'intoxicogenic social environment' for youth, or an environment which creates and maintains unhealthy expectations, norms and behaviours around alcohol consumption.

Some have expressed concern around internet alcohol advertising and youth as many of the components youth find appealing in traditional alcohol advertisements (e.g., technological graphics, animations, etc.) may be more prominent and heightened in online advertising (Grube & Waiter, 2005). However, there has been little research on internet alcohol advertising and its impact on youth.

## Alcohol Advertising: Impact on Consumption

There has been much debate and question as to the potential impact or influence of alcohol advertising on youth. Recently, Anderson et al. (2009) conducted a systematic review of longitudinal studies on the impact of alcohol advertising on youth. Based on a review of the best evidence and research to date, Anderson et al. (2009) revealed the following findings:

- Evidence of exposure to alcohol advertising and the **onset of drinking** amongst non-drinking youth
- Evidence of exposure to alcohol advertising and **increased levels of consumption** among existing youth drinkers
- Evidence of a **dose-relationship** with regards to the impact of advertising exposure

### ❖ Onset of Drinking among Youth

Studies suggest that an association exists between alcohol advertising and the onset or initiation of alcohol consumption among youth. Alcohol advertising shapes youths' attitudes, perceptions and particularly expectancies around alcohol use, which in turn, influence youth decisions to drink (Grube & Waiters, 2005). As such, youth interactions with alcohol progress from the liking of alcohol advertisements (as previously described) to positive expectations about alcohol use (internalizing messages about alcohol) to intentions to drink or actual drinking behaviour (Austin, & Knaus, 2000).

In a longitudinal study of 3111 students, Ellickson et al. (2005) found that for 7<sup>th</sup> grade non-drinking youth, exposure to in-store beer displays predicted drinking onset by grade 9. Similar trends and findings have been reported elsewhere (Anderson et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2007) in that exposure to alcohol advertising during very early adolescence predicts both intention to drink and initiation of consumption. Exposure to multiple sources of alcohol advertising (television advertisements, alcohol



advertisements in magazines, in-store beer displays/concessions, radio advertisements and promotional merchandise) is strongly predictive of intention and onset of drinking one year later (Collins et al., 2007; Ellickson et al., 2005; Pasch 2007). There is evidence that even passive advertising also has an effect on initiation and consumption. For example, the ownership of or willingness to use an alcohol promotional item (e.g., owning and wearing a alcohol brand t-shirt) was associated with an increased likelihood of alcohol initiation (Fisher et al., 2007).

Some have also expressed concerns around the exposure and effects of outdoor alcohol advertising and youth. This type of advertising in places where youth (grade 6-8) regularly congregate such as schools is of special concern because of the potential for repetitive, daily exposure (Pasch et al., 2007). Further, there is evidence that outdoor alcohol advertisement near schools increase alcohol use behaviours and intentions (Pasch et al., 2007). Pasch et al. (2007) found average of 15 alcohol advertisements within 1,500 feet of schools in their study. Others such as Kelly et al. (2008) have found a rate of alcohol advertising to be 25 advertisements per square kilometer, representing the single most advertised food/beverage product within a 250 meter radius of primary schools in the study. Further, it has been noted that youth attending schools with 20% or more Hispanic students are exposed to 6.5 times more alcohol advertising than students attending schools with less than 20% Hispanic students (Pasch et al., 2008).

### ❖ **Consumption & Over consumption**

Studies suggest that advertising has an effect on intention to drink, actual drinking as well as drinking patterns (Anderson et al., 2009; Ellickson et al., 2005; Snyder, 2006; Fisher et al., 2007; Collins et al., 2007; Stacey, 2004). Alcohol advertising exposure has been positively related to an increase in drinking among youth (aged 15-26) (Snyder, 2006). Each one standard deviation increase in alcohol advertising exposure is associated with a 44% increase in the odds of youth (grade 7 and 8) drinking beer, and a 34% increase in the odds of wine/liquor consumption (Stacy et al., 2004). Marketing measures including brand recognition, brand recall, and receptivity to alcohol advertisements increased the

likelihood of youth (grade 6-9) alcohol consumption (Henriksen, et al., 2008; Unger, et al., 2003).

Of concern, research also suggests that along with consumption, there is emerging evidence that exposure to alcohol advertising is linked to over consumption among youth. Increased alcohol advertising has been associated with a 26% increase in the odds of drinking three or more drinks in one sitting (Stacey et al., 2004). Further, advertising in the form of seemingly benign alcohol promotional items (e.g., t-shirt, hats, key chains, etc.) appear to also contribute to underage alcohol use and abuse. Owning or being willing to use alcohol promotional items had an impact on alcohol initiation (McClure et al., 2006) and adolescent (age 11-18) drinking behaviours including increased binge drinking among girls (Fisher et al., 2007).

### ❖ **Dose-Relationship**

Research also suggest a dose relationship exists; in other words, youth who see more alcohol advertising drink more (Snyder et al., 2006). The dose relationship was such that each additional advertisement seen equated to a 1% increase in alcohol consumption. Snyder et al. (2006) also note that each additional advertising dollar per capita raised the number of drinks consumed among youth by 3%. This finding is especially notable given that in 2005, the alcohol industry spend \$2 billion on television, radio, print, outdoor and newspaper advertisements (Neilson AdvIEWS, 2005). Similar relationships have been reported elsewhere such as Saffer and Dave (2006) who concluded that reductions in alcohol advertising could produce some declines in adolescent alcohol consumption (e.g., a 28% reduction in alcohol advertising would reduce adolescent monthly alcohol participation from 25% to 24-21%, and binge drinking from 12% to 11-8%).

## Addressing Alcohol Advertising & Youth

A technical consultation for the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) on the advertising of alcohol to young people was conducted with 50 marketing and public health experts. Select recommendations to the World Health Organization included:

1. Noting the dangers inherent in the exposure of young people to alcohol marketing, and the general failure of industry self-regulation to limit the marketing of alcohol to young people, we recommend that the WHO assist countries in taking all **legislative or regulatory steps** necessary to ensure that young people are not exposed to promotional messages about alcohol.
2. Noting that the alcohol industry has achieved a high level of sophistication in its use of media to attract and encourage young people to drinking, we recommend that the WHO assist countries in raising awareness of these techniques, and developing **best practices in media advocacy and counter-advertising programs**, and that such practices be undertaken independently of commercial interests, and with participation of and leadership from young people themselves.
3. Noting the importance of young peoples' perspectives on this problem, and the creativity and unique knowledge of the situation that they possess, we recommend that **young people play a central role** in the work to free their generation from the illusions created by marketing and associated promotions of alcohol.

Areas of potential action around addressing the harms of alcohol advertising may include advertising bans, stricter policies and regulations, tax increases and media awareness/drug prevention education.

Hollingworth (2006) suggests that tax increases and bans hold promise as effective interventions to counter advertising and reduce alcohol related harms. For example, a tax-based 17% increase in the price of alcohol could reduce deaths from harmful drinking by 1,490, equivalent to 31,130 discounted years of potential life saved or 3.3% of current alcohol-attributable mortality. It also been estimated that a complete ban on alcohol advertising would result in a 16.4% decrease in alcohol related life years lost among

youth (Hollingworth, 2006). An alternative to a ban on advertising would be regulations around alcohol advertising content. It has been suggested that, alcohol advertisers should produce advertisements which are more product oriented or based on product qualities – aspects which youth (ages 10-17) often do not understand, find boring or less appealing (Chen et al., 2005; Waiters et al., 2001). These advertisements would still facilitate building brand recognition (and therefore increased alcohol sales) among adults without appealing to youth.

Attention must also be paid to alternative forms of alcohol advertising which are often seen as benign. Given the strong association between owning or wanting alcohol promotional items and underage drinking, it has been suggested that policies and regulations similar to bans on cigarette promotional items would benefit adolescent health (Henriksen et al., 2007). Further, there is emerging evidence that drug prevention programs (e.g., ALERT Plus) have been effective in reducing or counteracting the effects of alcohol advertising on youth in grades 8 and 9 (Ellickson et al., 2005).

## Conclusion

Based on the current body of knowledge, Anderson et al. (2009) state: *“it is clear, therefore, that longitudinal studies demonstrate that alcohol advertising, amongst other factors, encourages youth drinking.... We conclude that alcohol advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to use alcohol, and to drink more if they are already using alcohol”*. Similar conclusions have been drawn by international researchers from the World Health Organizations who state *“[alcohol advertising] has been found to promote and reinforce perceptions of drinking as positive, glamorous and relatively risk free... exposure to repeated high levels of alcohol promotion inculcates pro-drinking attitudes and increases the likelihood of heavier drinking”* (Barbor et al., 2003).

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