

INTRODUCTION:

Acceptability of the harmful drinking culture in Ireland is widespread across all societies, including adolescents. According to the 2010 Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey of 10-17 year olds, 46% of children reported ever drinking, 21% reported being current drinkers, and 18% reported having been drunk in the last 30 days (Kelly et al., 2012). Studies have shown that risky drinking behaviours in young people are associated with negative psychological, social and physical health consequences including impaired brain development.

There is a growing body of evidence, using a variety of methodologies, which suggests that alcohol marketing influences drinking behaviour and drinking intentions of adolescents (Hastings et al., 2005; Austin, Chen, & Grube, 2006; Hurtz et al., 2007; McClure et al., 2006). Many of these data have also been pooled in systematic reviews which confirm similar findings across various studies (Anderson et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). Ownership of Alcohol Branded Merchandise (ABM) has also been shown to predict initiation of alcohol use (Collins et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2007; Henriksen, et al., 2008) and to be associated with binge drinking (McClure et al., 2009). In addition to this, Gordon and colleagues (2011) found online marketing strategies which require audience participation (e.g. games, quizzes), to be significantly associated with current drinking behaviours.

These sophisticated marketing strategies, which integrate a complex mix of traditional media channels with online promotion, event sponsorship, alcohol branded merchandise and the development of new and attractive products (Dobson, 2012), have contributed to the exacerbation of children's exposure to alcohol marketing in recent years.

As yet, limited research has been carried out in the Irish context that examines adolescents' exposure to alcohol marketing and its potential relationship with their alcohol drinking behaviours.

Aim: This study aimed to investigate adolescents' exposure to different types of alcohol marketing in Ireland, and the relationships between exposure and adolescents' alcohol drinking behaviours.

In order to achieve this aim, the researchers set out to meet the following objectives:

1. To describe levels of alcohol marketing exposure and engagement among a sample of adolescents attending post-primary schools in Ireland.
2. To explore associations between alcohol marketing exposure and engagement with drinking intentions and drinking behaviour.

METHODS:

This study employed a cross sectional design and data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and an alcohol marketing diary. The study population consisted of young people aged 13-17 years, attending post-primary schools in Ireland.

Sixteen schools across Dublin, Cork and Galway agreed to participate in the study, and in each school three classes between 2nd and 5th year were randomly selected to be invited to participate, resulting in a sample of 686 children who took part in the study.

The aim of the study was to assess the degree and nature of exposure to alcohol marketing among Irish adolescents, and to investigate the relationship between exposure to alcohol marketing and alcohol drinking behaviour in adolescents.

Three different measures of alcohol marketing exposure were used:

1. Referring to all types of marketing and via all media.
2. Engagement, referring to active involvement in alcohol marketing, beyond passive exposure to advertisements.
3. Intensity of exposure, referring to the extent to which one is exposed to all type of alcohol marketing.

These measures, among others regarding drinking behaviours, intentions to drink and socio-demographic factors, were assessed through a self-administered questionnaire and an alcohol marketing diary.

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November 2015

ALCOHOL MARKETING AND Young People's DRINKING BEHAVIOUR in Ireland



FINDINGS:

DRINKING BEHAVIOURS:

Findings showed that 64% of the children who participated in the study, reported having consumed alcohol. Of those, 53% reported having been drunk at least once; 41% reported being drunk in the previous month; 37% reported having engaged in binge drinking in the previous month; and 50% reported that they drink regularly (every month). Almost a third (30%) of the children in this study reported that they intend to drink in the next month; 44% reported that they intend to drink in the next year; and 73% reported that they intend to drink when they are aged 18 or older.

Overall, older children (16-17 year olds) were more likely to report intentions to drink and to engage in all the above alcohol behaviours, when compared to the younger age group (13-15 year olds).

ALCOHOL MARKETING:

A staggering 91% of children in this study reported exposure to traditional (offline) alcohol advertisements; 61% reported ownership of ABM; and 77% (significantly more girls than boys) reported being exposed to online alcohol marketing, including via social media.

While 72% of children in this study reported that they had seen advertisements for an alcohol product on social media; 35% were invited to 'like' an alcohol brand via social media; 30% were invited to 'like' an alcohol sponsored event, and 21% were invited to go to such an event. Overall, more girls were exposed to most types of social media-related marketing.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DRINKING BEHAVIOURS AND ALCOHOL MARKETING:

Ownership of ABM was the strongest predictor of drinking behaviours, increasing risk of engaging in drinking, drunkenness and binge drinking behaviours at least twofold. Exposure intensity was also a strong predictor of these drinking behaviours.

Findings also showed that the intensity of the exposure is a strong predictor of alcohol drinking behaviours. Exposure to seven or more advertisements increased the risk of drinking threefold; binge drinking more than fourfold; drunkenness fivefold, and the risk of drinking intention fourfold.



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These findings clearly indicate that the more intense the exposure to alcohol marketing, the greater the risk of drinking alcohol and engaging in risky drinking behaviours.

Dr Michal Molcho,
Health Promotion Research Centre,
NUI Galway.

The bottom line is that the current regulatory system does not protect children from exposure to alcohol marketing and this failure is associated with increased consumption. Creating an environment where children are free from alcohol marketing is a children's rights issue that requires immediate attention

Dr Pat Kenny,
School of Marketing,
Dublin Institute of Technology.

It is vital that we legislate to regulate alcohol marketing, which sees Irish children continuously exposed to positive, risk-free images of alcohol and its use, which are far removed from the reality of the situation

Conor Cullen,
Head of Communications and Advocacy,
Alcohol Action Ireland.

CONCLUSION:

Findings from this study, consistent with previous research, clearly indicate that the higher the intensity of exposure to alcohol marketing, the greater the risk of engagement in drinking alcohol and other risky drinking behaviours.

A key objective of recent public health policy has been to delay the age of initiation of alcohol consumption among adolescents, however these data reveal that three quarters of respondents, aged 13-15 years, are exposed to online alcohol marketing and are therefore unprotected by the existing marketing regulations.

These results highlight the need to identify the limitations of existing regulations in order to protect children from being exposed to alcohol marketing; while also taking into consideration the constant expansion of social media networks and avenues for targeted advertising.

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The One Foundation
National Lottery

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23.6% of my Peers have Been Drunk in the last month



OF THOSE CHILDREN WHO ARE ALREADY PRINKING ALCOHOL

41.8% GIRLS Have Been Drunk once or more in the Past month



39.2% BOYS Have Been Drunk once or more in the Past month



51.4% of my Peers have Been Drunk in the last month

