

Briefing - Protecting Children and Young People from Alcohol Marketing

August 2019

- Children are more susceptible to the toxic effects of alcohol, and drinking in adolescence poses risks to long-term health and wellbeing
- Young people are regularly exposed to alcohol marketing, which changes drinking behaviours and attitudes
- There is no place for alcohol marketing in sport
- Urgent action is required to protect our children and young people through mandatory restrictions on alcohol marketing
- The Scottish Government's forthcoming consultation on measures to restrict alcohol marketing is hugely positive and should cover the recommendations of the expert group on alcohol marketing, including prohibiting outdoor and public space alcohol advertising; and sponsorship of sports, music and cultural events.
- The voices of children and young people themselves should also inform any decisions on alcohol marketing restrictions

Children, young people and alcohol

Alcohol is an age-restricted, toxic, substance associated with over **200 health conditions, diseases and injuries**.¹ Adolescents are more susceptible to the intoxicating effects of alcohol due to their physical immaturity and lower tolerance levels, and drinking during adolescence affects mental health, being associated with higher risk of self-harm and suicide attempts.² Adolescent alcohol consumption also poses risks to **long-term health and wellbeing**, both by affecting important brain development processes,³ and by establishing drinking patterns that continue into adulthood.⁴ For example, early age of drinking onset is associated with an increased **likelihood of developing alcohol abuse or dependence** in adolescence and adulthood, and with **dependence at a younger age**.⁵

Young people are regularly exposed to alcohol marketing

Alcohol marketing in the UK is governed by a complicated regulatory system; different industry-developed codes apply to different media and different bodies oversee compliance. Common across all these forms of regulation, however, is a **strong role for the advertising and alcohol industries**, using systems of **self- or co-regulation**. Although the codes all contain rules prohibiting the targeting of under-18s (by using content that is 'particularly' appealing to children or through the selection of media or context in which the advert appears), **children and young people are still regularly exposed to alcohol marketing**.

Using the UK Youth Alcohol Policy Survey, Dr Critchlow's research found that young people are **exposed to alcohol marketing on a regular basis**: at least half of the 11-19 year olds surveyed saw the equivalent of one ad every day, and a third of under 18s saw the equivalent of two ads a day.⁶ Almost 1 in 5 young people **owned branded merchandise**, and young people could **recognise alcohol brands**, recalling around a third of the brands in the survey, on average. This supports previous research in Scotland, which found that 10 and 11 year olds were more familiar with certain beer brands than leading brands of biscuits, crisps and ice cream.⁷

Exposure to alcohol marketing changes drinking behaviours and attitudes

In current drinkers, alcohol marketing awareness was associated with **increased consumption and greater likelihood of higher-risk consumption**. Of those children and young people who had not previously drunk alcohol, ownership of branded merchandise was found to be associated with a susceptibility to start drinking.⁸

This builds on other international evidence that children find alcohol marketing messages **appealing**,⁹ and alcohol marketing **influences children's attitudes**.¹⁰ The evidence is clear that exposure to alcohol marketing: **reduces the age** at which young people start to drink; **increases the likelihood** that they will drink; and **increases the amount** of alcohol that they consume if they already drink.¹¹

No place for alcohol marketing in sport

Alcohol brands are high profile sponsors of major sporting and cultural events, which are viewed by millions and attract adults and children alike. For example, people watching England and Wales' games in the group stages of EURO 2016 will have seen alcohol marketing almost once a minute during play; based on previous tournaments, up to 14% of the audience will have been under 18 years of age.¹²

Scottish Women's Football is an exemplar of taking a stance against alcohol sponsorship. SWA are clear that accepting alcohol sponsorship would be incompatible with their role in **promoting healthy lifestyles** amongst girls and women and supporting them to make positive choices. They believe positioning themselves as a **'clean' sport** is both beneficial to those who participate in and follow women's football but also to the long-term growth and sustainability of their business.¹³ The demographics of the players has been a huge influence on their decision, with 80% of the almost 8000 players registered under 18 years old.

Measures to protect children and young people

The **current regulatory system of UK codes does not adequately protect children and young people from alcohol marketing**: they still find the content appealing, they are still exposed to it, and poor enforcement means there is little deterrent from misapplying the codes. **Urgent action is required to protect our children and young people by legislating for mandatory restrictions on alcohol marketing.** Such controls are recognised by the World Health Organization as one of the most effective and cost-effective measures in preventing and reducing alcohol harm.¹⁴ Potential action to restrict marketing is a mixture of reserved and devolved matters, however **regulation of the press, printed adverts, billboards, outdoor displays, point of sale displays, adverts or hoardings at sporting events, and sponsorship of events, is within the competence of the Scottish Parliament.**

Marketing restrictions for other health-harming products are currently being considered by both the Scottish and UK Governments who recognise that alcohol marketing drives consumption and harm.¹⁵ The Scottish Government has committed to press the UK Government to ban broadcast advertising of HFSS (high fat, salt and sugar) foods before the 9pm watershed and has consulted on non-broadcast advertising of HFSS products; the UK Government has very recently consulted on introducing further restrictions on TV and online advertising for HFSS products.

Despite alcohol being an age-restricted product, and acknowledging that young people see alcohol marketing and that this influences their consumption, **the UK Government is content with the current self-regulatory approach.** On the other hand, **Ireland** has recently legislated on a range of measures to control alcohol marketing.

Scotland has the opportunity to be progressive in this area. The commitment in the Scottish Government's Alcohol Prevention Framework to **consult on measures to restrict alcohol marketing to protect children and young people** is hugely positive.

The **consultation should cover the [recommendations of the expert group on alcohol marketing](#)**, which include:

- **Prohibiting outdoor alcohol advertising and advertising** in public spaces (advertising in streets, parks, on public transport, and in sports grounds);
- Setting out a timetable for **ending alcohol sponsorship** of sports events, music and cultural events; and
- Pressing the UK Government to **prohibit alcohol advertising on TV between 6am and 11pm**, and to **restrict alcohol advertising in cinemas** to films that have an 18 certificate.

The **voices of children and young people** themselves should also inform any decisions on alcohol marketing restrictions, especially in relation to innovative forms of media. Alcohol Focus Scotland is [working with the Children's Parliament](#) to explore children's thoughts and feelings about alcohol and how it impacts on their lives; findings will be reported later this year.

The public support restrictions on alcohol marketing.

An online survey of over 1,000 people in Scotland found a high level of public support for measures to limit children and young people's exposure to alcohol advertising (70% support). The YouGov survey was conducted in November 2018 for Alcohol Focus Scotland.

The survey also found support for specific alcohol marketing restrictions:

- 72% supported controls on social media sites
- 71% supported only allowing alcohol advertising in cinemas for film with an 18 certificate
- 54% supported a ban on alcohol advertising in outdoor and public spaces
- 53% supported a ban on TV alcohol advertising between 6am and 11pm
- More people supported than opposed a ban on alcohol companies sponsoring sporting events (45% vs 24%)

¹ World Health Organization (2015). *Alcohol Factsheet*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs349/en/>

² Schilling, E. A., Aseltine Jr, R. H., Glanovsky, J. L., James, A., & Jacobs, D. (2009). Adolescent alcohol use, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 44*(4), 335-34; Moran, P., Coffey, C., Romaniuk, H., Olsson, C., Borschmann, R., Carlin, J. B., & Patton, G. C. (2012). The natural history of self-harm from adolescence to young adulthood: a population-based cohort study. *The Lancet, 379*(9812), 236-243.

³ Squeglia, L. M., Jacobus, J., & Tapert, S. F. (2009). The influence of substance use on adolescent brain development. *Clinical EEG and neuroscience, 40*(1), 31-38; Bava, S., & Tapert, S. F. (2010). Adolescent brain development and the risk for alcohol and other drug problems. *Neuropsychology review, 20*(4), 398-413; Eloffson, J., Gongvatana, W., & Carey, K. B. (2013). Alcohol use and cerebral white matter compromise in adolescence. *Addictive behaviors, 38*(7), 2295-2305.

⁴ McCambridge, J., McAlaney, J., & Rowe, R. (2011). Adult consequences of late adolescent alcohol consumption: a systematic review of cohort studies. *PLoS medicine, 8*(2), e1000413.

⁵ Donaldson, L. (2009). *Guidance on the Consumption of Alcohol by Children and Young People*. Department of Health. <http://www.cph.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Guidance-on-the-consumption-of-alcohol-by-children-and-young-people.pdf>

⁶ Critchlow, N., MacKintosh, A. M., Thomas, C., Hooper, L., & Vohra, J. (2019). Awareness of alcohol marketing, ownership of alcohol branded merchandise, and the association with alcohol consumption, higher-risk drinking, and drinking susceptibility in adolescents and young adults: a cross-sectional survey in the UK. *BMJ open, 9*(3), e025297.

⁷ Alcohol Focus Scotland, Alcohol Concern, Balance North East and Drink Wise (2015). Children's Recognition of Alcohol Branding.

⁸ Critchlow, N., MacKintosh, A. M., Thomas, C., Hooper, L., & Vohra, J. (2019). Awareness of alcohol marketing, ownership of alcohol branded merchandise, and the association with alcohol consumption, higher-risk drinking, and drinking susceptibility in adolescents and young adults: a cross-sectional survey in the UK. *BMJ open, 9*(3), e025297.

⁹ Winpenny, E. et al (2012). *Assessment of young people's exposure to alcohol marketing in audiovisual and online media*, RAND Europe.

¹⁰ Chia, S.C. (2006). How peers mediate media influence on adolescents sexual attitudes and sexual behavior, *Journal of Communication, 56*(3): 585-606; Chia, S.C. (2010). How social influence mediates media effects on adolescents' materialism. *Communication Research, 37*(3): 400-19

¹¹ Anderson et al. (2009). Impact of Alcohol Advertising and Media Exposure on Adolescent Alcohol Use: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies. *Alcohol and Alcoholism, 44*(3):229-43; Smith, L. & Foxcroft, D. (2009). The Effect of Alcohol Advertising, Marketing and Portrayal of Drinking Behaviour in Young People: A Systematic Review of Prospective Cohort Studies. *BMC Public Health, 9*:51; Jernigan, D. et al. (2016). Alcohol Marketing and Youth Consumption: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies Published Since 2008. *Addiction, 112*: 7-20; Critchlow, N., MacKintosh, A. M., Thomas, C., Hooper, L., & Vohra, J. (2019). Awareness of alcohol marketing, ownership of alcohol branded merchandise, and the association with alcohol consumption, higher-risk drinking, and drinking susceptibility in adolescents and young adults: a cross-sectional survey in the UK. *BMJ open, 9*(3), e025297

¹² Press Association (27 June 2016). Alcohol adverts seen 'almost once a minute' during Euro 2016 games. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 10/06/2019 from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jun/27/alcohol-adverts-seen-almost-once-minute-euro-2016-games>

¹³ Scottish Women's Football (21 February 2019). No Place for Alcohol Marketing in Sport. Accessed 10/06/19 from <https://scotwomensfootball.com/no-to-alcohol-marketing/>

¹⁴ World Health Organization (2010). *Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol*. Switzerland: World Health Organization

¹⁵ Scottish Government (2017). *A healthier future - action and ambitions in diet, activity and healthy weight. Consultation document*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government; HM Government (2018). *Introducing further advertising restrictions on TV and online for products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS)*. London: Department of Health and Social Care.