Media Release

CALL FOR POLICY REFORM AS STUDY LINKS UNDERAGE DRINKING TO ONLINE MARKETING

(Sydney: Monday, 31 October 2016) Alcohol marketing on social media is reaching large numbers of Australian teens and is being linked to early alcohol initiation and riskier drinking, a new study presented at the APSAD Scientific Alcohol and Drugs Conference today shows.

The results are leading researchers to call for a re-evaluation of both alcohol and social media regulation.

“Australian teens are clearly being reached and influenced by alcohol campaigns, despite current restrictions and regulations in place by advertising boards and social media platforms. We need to rethink our regulations and ensure this at risk group are protected from these campaigns,” said Dr Megan Lim, Head of Sexual Health and Young People Research, Burnet Institute.

The study questioned Victorians aged 15-29 years about ‘following’ different types of alcohol marketing accounts on social media, in addition to questions about alcohol consumption and other risk behaviours.

Overall, 22 per cent of participants ‘followed’ at least one type of alcohol marketing on social media. ‘Liking’ a page was significantly associated with early age of first alcohol consumption, riskier alcohol consumption behaviours, ever using illegal drugs and male gender.

Disturbingly, participants aged 15-17 were equally as likely as older participants to ‘like’ or ‘follow’ alcohol pages.

“The results of this study are concerning. Social media campaigns to promote alcohol are reaching and engaging large numbers of underage teens, and are linked to riskier behaviour and drinking at a young age. There is a need to evaluate strategies used by social media moderators and alcohol regulation bodies to reduce the exposure to and potential impact of alcohol marketing pages on adolescents and young adults, and ensure these pages are not accessible to or targeting underage social media users,” said Dr Lim

RELATED RESEARCH:

Why Parents Supply a Sip of Alcohol in Early Adolescence
Parents who believe their child is engaged with substance-using peers are more likely to supply their child with sips of alcohol, possibly in the belief it will protect their child from unsupervised alcohol use with their peers.

Teen Alcohol Initiation and Binge Drinking
A study on adolescent alcohol initiation and progression to binge drinking - also presented at the APSAD Scientific Alcohol and Drugs Conference - found early initiation was common: half of the sample were drinking by year 11, and of these, 30 per cent had started drinking by age 14.
Regular and binge drinking by Year 11 was also common, with more than half (51 per cent) reporting current alcohol use and over a third (36 per cent) engaged in some form of binge drinking.

However, introduction to alcohol in early adolescence was NOT associated with binge drinking by year 11.
“Regardless of the age of initiation, early drinking remains an important target for prevention, given the range of acute risks associated with binge drinking including injuries, violence, suicide, and car accidents,” said Ms Alexandra Aiken, Senior Research Officer in the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC).

Other factors that may be important in the development of binge drinking include parental and other supply of alcohol, peer alcohol use and adolescent externalising behaviours.

**OTHER RELATED RESEARCH:**

**Trends in Estimated Alcohol-Attributable Assault Hospitalisations in Australia**
- In 2012/13 about 10,360 people aged 15+ years were admitted to hospital for alcohol-attributable assaults in Australia (rate 5.7 per 10,000 persons).
- Rates of male alcohol attributable assault hospitalisations were higher than female rates for all age categories across all jurisdictions except the NT.
- By 2012/13 rates of male alcohol-attributable assaults were either lower or similar to 2003/04 levels across all jurisdictions except the NT for every age group (15+, 15-19, 20-29 years).

**Global Alcohol Policy and the Reduction of Attributable Harm**
This analysis of 50 countries over 25 years looks at what measures work to reduce alcohol harm, and what we should be looking to in the future. *Additional material available upon request*

**What’s the link between parental care and drug use?**
The preliminary results of a new UK study found significant negative correlations between parental care and recent stimulant use in students: *Available upon request*

**Prevalence of Parental Alcohol Supply and Adolescent Alcohol Use in LIC/MIC**
Parental alcohol supply was significantly associated with early alcohol onset and adolescent alcohol use in a study of 80 mostly Lower/Middle Income Countries.

**Australian adolescents’ stigmatising attitudes**
Australian adolescents may be less willing to help a friend seeking help for alcohol misuse than for depression, revealing a stigma that could be preventing adolescents from accessing care and support. *Available upon request*

**Harm from others’ drinking**
This study suggests that perceiving others’ intoxication as dangerous to oneself - as opposed to actual experience of harm - may motivate support for stricter alcohol policies. *Additional material available upon request*

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**About APSAD Sydney 2016**
The APSAD Scientific Alcohol and Drugs Conference is the southern hemisphere’s largest summit on alcohol and other drugs attracting leading researchers, clinicians, policy makers and community representatives from across the region. The Conference is run by the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD), Asia Pacific's leading multidisciplinary organisation for professionals involved in the alcohol and other drug field.
- View the APSAD Sydney 2016 Conference Program
- Read more about the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD)
- Contact Petrana Lorenz to arrange an interview or find out about other key topics.