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## Study Links Advertising, Youth Drinking

More Alcohol Ads Led To More  
Consumption, Researchers Say

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The first national study of liquor advertising and its effects on youth confirms what many have long suspected — that young people who see more ads for alcoholic beverages tend to drink more.

The study conducted by researchers at the University of Connecticut and Ohio State University could offer the first sound evidence that limiting liquor advertising should be part of a national strategy to reduce underage drinking.

"This is the most solid piece of research evidence to come forth to date linking exposure to al-

cohol advertising and increased youth drinking," said David Jernigan, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University.

Alcohol producers have long argued that advertising has no influence on liquor consumption by young people.

Jeff Becker, president of The Beer Institute, a trade group representing makers of most of the beer sold in the United States, said the latest study fails to establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between advertising and youth drinking.

He noted that while spending on alcohol advertising has increased in recent years, drinking

among people under 21 has declined since a high in the 1970s and remained stable in recent years.

Some experts attribute that trend largely to an increase in the drinking age from 18 to 21.

To measure the impact of advertising on drinking patterns, the researchers identified 24 media markets and determined how much money the liquor industry spent for TV, radio, newspaper and billboard advertising in each market.

Using random telephone sampling, they found volunteers aged 15 to 26 within each market. Almost 2,000 were surveyed initially, and at 1

PLEASE SEE YOUTH, PAGE

# Youth Drinking, Alcohol Ads Linked

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500 were interviewed four times from April 1999 to February 2001. Interviewers asked about how much alcohol advertising the volunteers remembered seeing and how much alcohol they drank in the past month.

"We found that if there was more advertising in a market there was more youth drinking," said Leslie B. Snyder, director of the Center for Health Communication and Marketing at UConn and the study's lead author.

While young people exposed to more advertising were generally more likely to drink, those who remembered the ads drank even more, Snyder said.

For example, a 20-year-old male living in Tulsa, Okla., where there are relatively few alcohol ads and minimal advertising spending by liquor companies, was likely to have had nine drinks in a month, compared with 16 drinks if he remembered seeing liquor ads.

In a media market such as Chicago or Los Angeles, where ad placement and spending is intense, a similar man was likely to have had 15 drinks in a month if he reported little exposure to the ads and 26 drinks if he remembered seeing many liquor ads.

"So the ads are around you," Snyder said. "You may not remember seeing them, but people around you do, or you don't remember seeing them, but they impact you."

In an editorial accompanying the article published today in the journal *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, Jernigan said the data "calls into question the industry's argument that its roughly \$1.8 billion in measured media expenditures per year have no impact on underage drinking."

The National Academies of Sciences has called alcohol use the leading drug problem among America's youth. Every day, 7,000 people under age 16 take their first drink. Underage drinking has been linked to deaths from traffic accidents, violence and other alcohol-related conditions.

Although public health advocates have long sought advertising limits as part of a national strategy to reduce youth drink-

ing, policy makers have been reluctant, citing the dearth of scientific evidence linking more advertising to more drinking.

To that end, the National Institutes of Health in 1998 funded several studies that looked at the effect of various types of alcohol advertising on schoolchildren in specific cities or states. In Los Angeles, one study found that TV commercials were associated with a higher likelihood of teen drinking, while in South Dakota, in-store beer displays and concession stand ads at music or sporting events had greater influence on teen drinking than TV commercials.

Snyder's study is the first national, long-term look at how media advertising influences drinking among young people.

Although constitutional free-speech guarantees make it impossible for the government to ban alcohol advertising outright, Jernigan suggests that alcohol ads could be limited to programs where people younger than 20 make up less than 15 percent of the viewing audience.

"This change would leave 79 percent of television programming available for alcohol advertising and would reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising by 20 percent," Jernigan says in his editorial.

But Becker, of The Beer Institute, said the liquor industry already aims its ads at adult audiences. He agreed that young people should not drink but said other strategies would be more effective than limiting ads. Parents, he said, must drink responsibly to be role models for their children. In addition, he said peer groups, such as Students Against Destructive Decisions, can help discourage binge drinking, and law-enforcement crackdowns on businesses that sell liquor to minors also can help.

Snyder suggested changing the content of alcohol ads so they do not appeal to young people and barraging young viewers with counter-advertisements that detail the risks of drinking.

"People have been delaying doing anything because they felt the research wasn't there," Snyder said. "This makes it clear that advertising does make a difference."