



Soul City Institute for Social Justice and STRIVE Consortium

Policy Brief: Alcohol marketing, youth and sexual health risks

Key research finding

Overall, the study found that rural and urban youth are heavily exposed to persuasive and appealing alcohol advertising in their home environment. Easy access to alcohol and low prices facilitate alcohol misuse and related health risks including risks to their sexual health.

Policy recommendations

- Appropriate alcohol legislation, such as regulating alcohol marketing, increasing the price and limiting outlet density, needs to be implemented to ensure multiple positive health and social outcomes.
- There is a need to shift the focus from individual responsibility to structural issues, such as policies and environmental influences, when addressing alcohol misuse.
- Alcohol marketing needs greater regulation and monitoring.
- Greater effort must be made to create opportunities for youth, community and the public at large to engage in the alcohol policy development process.

Specific research findings were

- A great many alcohol selling outlets are located within a 500m radius of schools, and school-going youth have opportunities to buy alcohol during school hours.
- The use of colour, images and creative slogans make alcohol advertising attractive to youth. Adverts showing young people having fun encourage youth to try different brands and beverages.
- Youth access to taverns is facilitated by promotional activities and pricing including celebrity events, competitions and discounts that include 'happy hour', 'ladies' night' and 'buy 1 get 1 free'.
- Youth reported that they frequently witness and experience alcohol-related sexual health risks in and around taverns in their communities. These include unprotected and unplanned sex, sex that is later regretted and sexual assault, including while

travelling home from taverns. These were said to be common experiences in and around taverns and their communities.

Selected quotes from youth:

... in and around the neighbourhood, there are schools and taverns like in the same street. The fact is we are exposed to it like in our daily lives (mixed group, urban site)

... And when they advertise alcohol, it seems like a nice thing... It seems like juice... There's this advert of stout, right? They say 'sip and enjoy' you know and they are pouring caramel there. It seems like this thing is nice. So, you want to go for it and taste this thing and once you taste, you will end up being drunk and you want to do that forever. So, advertisements are the ones that bring us to alcohol or lead youth to alcohol (mixed group, rural site)

When it comes to sexual intercourse. Okay, I go to the tavern, I get drunk therefore I'm looking for a girl, then I find that girl. We go wherever we go to, to have sex then like we forget the safety-first... Okay, maybe we look for protection, we don't find it but because we are drunk we carry on doing this thing, without using protection (male group, rural site)

....and these guys also decided to buy them (alcohol) as well. These guys they like to take advantage when these girls are drunk. And these girls are young. And I don't think that when the tavern closes they will want to go or walk home alone, just the two of them. Obviously they will offer to accompany them and that will be the start of things (female group, rural site)

The STRIVE Soul City study

Soul City Institute, under the auspice of the STRIVE research consortium, conducted a community based study to:

- assess the density of alcohol outlets in one urban and one rural community
- explore young people's perspectives on alcohol advertising, marketing and availability, as well as their drinking patterns and sexual health and safety

Soul City conducted the study in a rural village in Mpumalanga and an urban township in Gauteng, South Africa.

The research employed PhotoVoice methodology. Young people captured their experiences through photographic images and captions, complemented by focus group discussions.

Existing evidence on alcohol, advertising and HIV risk amongst youth

- Alcohol use amongst youth in South Africa is high with 50% of youth aged 13-19 reporting ever having drunk alcohol (Ramsoomar L, 2012)
- There is strong and consistent evidence that alcohol consumption is associated with sexual risks for HIV infection, including unprotected sex and sex with a casual partner(Kalichman et al, 2007)
- Evidence from twelve longitudinal studies and including over 35 000 youth confirms that youth who are exposed to higher levels of alcohol marketing are more likely to initiate alcohol drinking and partake in binge drinking and hazardous drinking. (Jernigan et al, 2017)
- Youth who start drinking before age 15 years are six times more likely to develop alcohol dependence or abuse later in life than those who begin drinking at or after age 21 years. (CDC fact sheet)
- Strong evidence internationally shows that industry self-regulatory measures on alcohol advertising are ineffective.(Noel et al, 2016)
- Lower alcohol prices lead to increased consumption and increased related harm. (Xin Xu et al, 2011)

Current policy and legislative environment

The South African Liquor Act has minimal regulations around alcohol marketing and advertising.

The Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill developed by the Department of Health in 2010 has generated considerable controversy. The alcohol and advertising sectors in particular argue that banning alcohol adverts would have a negative economic impact, including significant job losses.

Public engagement around this bill has been very limited. Youth perspectives in particular have not been heard. This study brings community, especially youth voices to policy debates about alcohol control, alcohol advertising, marketing and public health.

What does this study add to the existing evidence?

The study found that in South Africa youth in rural and urban communities are heavily exposed to alcohol advertising, and that the content of the adverts is particularly appealing to young people.

The study highlighted the multiple risks to sexual health associated with harmful alcohol use by South African youth.

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Reference list

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3. Jernigan D et al. (2016). Alcohol marketing and youth alcohol consumption: a systematic review of longitudinal studies published since 2008. *Addiction*, 112 (Suppl.1) 7-20
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