

Liquor ads linked to youth drinking, sex

Study shows marketing affects consumption

NONI MOKATI

YOUNG people have admitted that alcohol advertisements entice them to drink, further affirming a proposed ban on alcohol advertising.

Research released by the Soul City Institute for Social Justice this week indicated that young people's views on alcohol advertising, marketing and availability have a direct influence on their drinking patterns and sexual behaviour.

The multi-country study, which also includes India and Tanzania, was conducted by Soul City's Lebohang Letsela as part of the Strive research consortium, which aims to tackle the structural drivers of HIV.

She conducted research at a rural village in Mpumalanga and an urban township using the PhotoVoice method, in which young people were encouraged to capture their experiences through photos and captions, including holding focus-group discussions.

Letsela said young people often visited bars and taverns, even when they had no money, and relied on peers to purchase alcohol for them. They also

used occasions such as "Phuza Thursdays" to booze it up.

"Promotional activities such as hosting celebrity events, competitions and discounts that include 'happy hour', 'ladies' night' and 'buy one, get one free' also increase the likelihood that young people will go to drinking outlets," Letsela said in her study.

The research showed that more than 10 alcohol outlets could surround one school. In an urban area, it was found there were 147 outlets to 36 schools, while in rural areas, 11 schools were surrounded by 28 shebeens and taverns.

Young males were of the notion that drinking a certain brand would lead to them being successful, while young women said flavoured drinks were targeted at them.

Meanwhile, Professor Neo Morojele, deputy director at the SA Medical Research Council's Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Research Unit, presented his research conducted in Tshwane as part of the International Alcohol Control Study.

Morojele said all age groups had extremely high levels of exposure to alcohol advertisements, including on TV, at movies and on signs outside shops. Of concern, he said, were the

high rates of exposure to advertisements that adolescents are subjected to, including those who were not currently consuming alcohol.

Five years ago, the cabinet approved the gazetting of a draft bill banning alcohol advertising, but the bill has yet to be legislated.

"We want to lobby that this is made policy as soon as possible. This is how we will change perceptions in communities," Letsela said.

The Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa's dispute resolutions manager, Leon Grobler, said while alcohol abuse at all levels was a multifaceted problem, the organisation could not comment on the study.

"Our purpose is not to assume the responsibility of the government (which has the prerogative to regulate this matter more severely), but rather to fill the gaps between what legislation allows and where advertisers might potentially exploit consumers," Grobler said.

He said that once laws were passed on the banning of alcohol advertising, the organisation would take appropriate measures to ensure there was compliance.

Two wounded in trucks' hijacking

COMMUTERS found themselves caught in the middle of a gunfight on the highway yesterday.

Criminals tried to hijack two trucks filled with cellphones on the N1 and N3 Buccleuch interchange in an incident that left a metro police officer and a truck driver wounded.

Neither of the drivers of the hijacked trucks were injured. Instead, a driver in another truck travelling on the same route was

shot and wounded in the head.

The officer sustained wounds to the upper body during a shootout with the criminals. Reports suggest that 50 shots were fired. One of the security officers who was escorting the two trucks was also injured when he jumped from one of the moving trucks.

"A driver of another truck that was driving on the same road was shot in the upper body by the suspects," said police

spokesperson Captain Mavela Masondo.

The hijackers drove the trucks to Marlboro where, while offloading cellphones into another truck, they were caught by police and a shootout ensued. One truck was recovered but the other one is still missing.

"Two suspects aged 35 and 42 were arrested and the other suspects fled," said Masondo. — Tankiso Makhetha