

YOUTH EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL ADVERTISING ON TELEVISION, 2001-2009

Executive Summary

Youth* exposure to alcohol advertising on U.S. television increased 71 percent between 2001 and 2009, more than the exposure of either adults ages 21 and above or young adults ages 21 to 34, according to an analysis from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Driving this increase was the rise of distilled spirits advertising on cable television. Youth exposure to all distilled spirits TV advertising was 30 times greater in 2009 than in 2001, with significant growth occurring in distilled spirits ads on cable. By 2009, the majority of youth exposure to advertising for all alcoholic beverages on cable was occurring during programming that youth ages 12 to 20 were more likely to be watching than adults 21 and above.†,‡

Under pressure from the Federal Trade Commission to reduce youth exposure to alcohol marketing, in 2003 trade associations representing beer and distilled spirits companies joined wine marketers in committing to advertise only when the underage audience composition is less than 30 percent. This threshold has been ineffective in reducing youth exposure on television, either in absolute or in relative terms.

Using as the comparison 2004 (the first full calendar year after beer and distilled spirits adopted the 30 percent threshold), data show that by 2009 youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television had grown by a greater percentage than that of young adults ages 21 to 34 or adults ages 21 and above.

Moreover, industry compliance with the 30 percent threshold remained uneven. In 2009, 7.5 percent of all alcohol product ad placements (23,718 ads) and 9 percent of all alcohol product ad placements on cable (16,283 ads) were on programming with underage audiences greater than 30 percent.

CAMY commissioned Virtual Media Resources to analyze nearly 2.7 million product advertisements placed by alcohol companies from 2001 to 2009, purchased at an estimated cost of more than \$8 billion. Key findings include:

* In this report, unless otherwise noted, youth are defined as persons ages 12 to 20, and adults are defined as persons ages 21 and over.

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‡ Youth exposure and overexposure (as well as “more likely to be viewed by” and other comparisons of youth and adult exposure to alcohol advertising in this report) are based on “gross rating points,” which measure how much an audience segment is exposed to advertising per capita. Another way of measuring advertising exposure is “gross impressions” (the total number of times all members of a given audience are exposed to advertising). The adult population will almost always receive far more gross impressions than youth because there are far more adults in the population than youth. To calculate gross rating points, one divides gross impressions by the relevant population (e.g., persons ages 21 and over) and multiplies by 100, resulting in a more comparable per capita measurement. See Appendix C for a glossary of terms.

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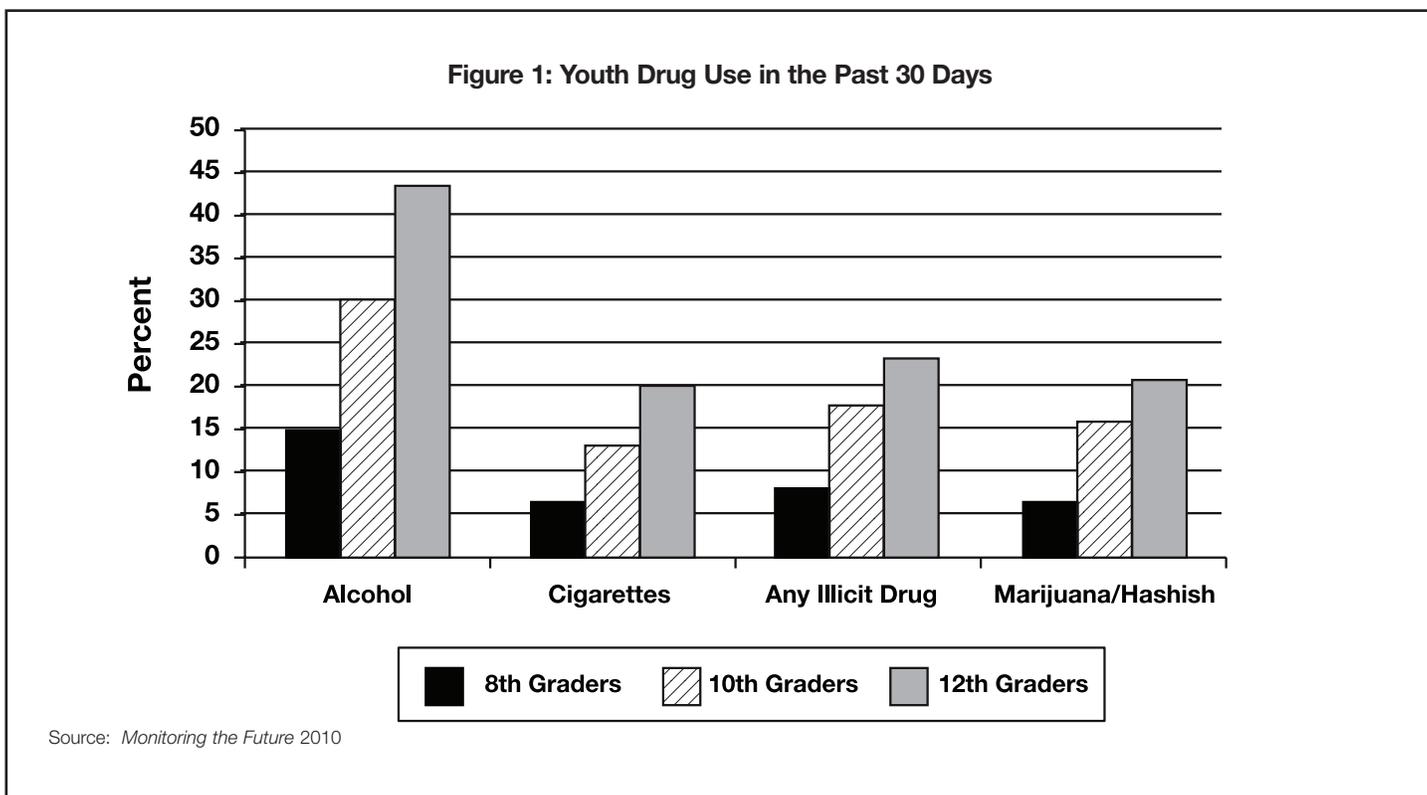
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- The average annual number of alcohol ads seen by youth watching television increased from 217 in 2001 to 366 in 2009, approximately one alcohol ad per day.
- In 2009, 13 percent of youth exposure came from advertising placed above the industry's voluntary 30 percent threshold.
- Also in 2009, 44 percent of youth exposure came from advertising that overexposed youth (i.e., was more likely to be seen per capita by youth ages 12 to 20 than by adults ages 21 and above) compared to persons of legal purchase age (21 and above).
- On cable television, the majority of youth exposure came from advertising more likely to be seen by youth per capita than by adults ages 21 and above.
- From 2004, when the distilled spirits and beer industries joined the wine industry in implementing a 30 percent standard to protect against youth exposure, to 2009, youth exposure to distilled spirits ads on cable television doubled.
- In 2009, five cable networks were more likely to expose youth per capita to alcohol advertising than adults 21 and above: Comedy Central, BET, E!, FX and Spike. Two of these—Comedy Central and BET—delivered more exposure to youth than to young adults ages 21-34.
- In 2009, 12 brands (8 percent) generated half of youth overexposure: Miller Lite, Coors Light, Captain Morgan Rums, Bud Light, Samuel Adams Boston Lager, Miller Genuine Draft Light Beer, Crown Royal Whiskey, Corona Extra Beer, Disaronno Originale Amaretto, Smirnoff Vodkas, Miller Chill and Labatt Blue Light Beer.
- From 2001 to 2009, youth were 22 times more likely to see an alcohol product ad than an alcohol company-sponsored “responsibility”[§] ad whose primary message warned against underage drinking and/or alcohol-impaired driving.

Background

Alcohol is the leading drug problem among youth¹ and is responsible for at least 4,600 deaths per year among persons under 21.² In 2009, 10.4 million (27.5 percent) young people in the U.S., ages 12 to 20, reported drinking in the past month, and 6.9 million (18.1 percent) reported binge drinking (defined as five or more drinks at one sitting, usually within two hours).³ Binge drinkers account for more than 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by this age group.⁴



[§] For the purposes of this report, “responsibility” advertisements had as their primary focus a message about drinking responsibly, avoiding drinking and driving, or discouraging underage drinking.

Every day in the U.S., 4,750 young people under age 16 have their first full drink of alcohol.⁵ This is a problem because the earlier young people start drinking, the more likely they are to suffer alcohol-related health and social problems later in life. Compared to those who wait until they are 21 to drink, young people who start drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent,⁶ seven times more likely to be in a motor vehicle crash because of drinking⁷ and 11 times more likely to be in a physical fight after drinking.⁸

Exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing increases the likelihood that young people will start drinking, or that they will drink more if they are already consuming alcohol.⁹ A wide range of studies has established the association between exposure to alcohol marketing and youth drinking behavior, even after controlling for a variety of variables such as parental monitoring or socioeconomic status.¹⁰⁻¹⁶

Alcohol industry spokespeople have stated that they observe a proportional standard when placing their advertising to ensure that young people are not overexposed.¹⁷ Since 2003, industry-wide voluntary codes of good marketing practice have directed that alcohol advertisers avoid programming where underage audiences exceed 30 percent. However, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine,¹⁸ as well as 20 state attorneys general,¹⁹ have suggested that a 15 percent standard, roughly proportionate to the percentage of the population between the ages of 12 and 20, would be more appropriate. In 2007, one company, Beam Global Spirits & Wine Inc., moved to a 25 percent standard, combined with a 15 percent annual aggregate average by brand and by medium. CAMY has estimated that, if adopted by the entire industry, this standard would reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television by 14 percent and in magazines by more than 10 percent.²⁰