

STUDY FINDS ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BLACK ADOLESCENTS DISPROPORTIONATE EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL MARKETING AND UNDERAGE DRINKING



It is generally believed that African-American youth are targeted by alcohol marketers in their advertisements in magazines and television, more than white-youth, perhaps because they probably feel that they are the more vulnerable and by extension the more productive group. A report by researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health has shed further on this belief and their finds reveal that the ads are indeed disproportionate and that African-American youth are exposed more to them than their white counterparts. The report says that the African-American youth are exposed to such advertisements more because of two reasons, first that the "brands that are targeting African-Americans generally expose the entire group (including youth) to more advertising per capita than the general population" and secondly African-Americans watch more television. The report says: "At least 14 longitudinal studies have found a significant association between youth exposure to alcohol marketing and underage drinking." Whatever be the reasons, the study says that the lopsided ads make this section of the people more vulnerable and at risk from alcohol advertising. The researchers say that the African-American youngsters, despite being inundated with a barrage of alcohol advertisements are less likely to take to drinking than their Caucasian counterparts, primarily because they cannot afford to. Their social norms and religious beliefs also prevent them falling victim to the marketers designs. Sarah L. Pedersen, assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh said, "Studies have shown that the African-American culture may hold more conservative views about drinking compared to the majority culture in the United States." The report says that for the African-Americans who do drink, the consequences are worse than their Caucasian peers. Their drinking habits take a toll on their relationships, employments and create financial and legal problems for them more than for the others. Doctors say that more African-Americans drinkers suffer from alcohol-related diseases, such cardiovascular disease and hypertension, than the white drinkers. Alcohol industry bosses say that whatever the report says is not true. They say that the industry is totally opposed to juvenile drinking and actually invest generously on ads asking the underage not to drink. Frank Coleman, senior vice president of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States said, "The beer, wine and spirits industry (is) totally opposed to underage drinking and spends millions of dollars a year fighting it." Analysts say that if there is any surge in growth in teenage drinking amongst blacks, it is not because of the advertising but because of the hip-hop culture. The report says that more than 64 percent of the most popular rap songs made reference to alcohol. According to reports excessive alcohol consumption by underage youth results in almost 5,000 deaths each year. Apart from the tragic waste of youthful lives its economic costs run in billions. Alcohol is the most widely used drug among African American youth and 65 percent of high-school students surveyed, confessed that they had drunk alcohol at least once. The study worrying concludes, "Research has also shown that young people who initiate drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence and five or more times as likely to experience alcohol-related injuries as those who wait until age 21 to start drinking."