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Comparing media and family predictors of alcohol use: A cohort study of US adolescents

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Objective: To compare media/marketing exposures and family factors in predicting adolescent alcohol use.

Design: Cohort study.

Setting: Confidential telephone survey of adolescents in their homes.

Participants: Representative sample of 6522 U.S. adolescents, aged 10-14 years, and surveyed four times over 2 years.

Main outcome measure: Time to alcohol onset and progression to binge drinking were assessed with two survival models. Predictors were movie alcohol exposure (MAE), ownership of alcohol branded merchandise (ABM), and characteristics of the family (parent alcohol use, home availability of alcohol, parenting). Covariates included sociodemographics, peer drinking, and personality factors.

Results: Over the study period the prevalence of adolescent ever-use and binge drinking increased from 11% to 31% and from 4 to 13% respectively. At baseline, the median estimated MAE from a population of 532 movies was 4.5 hours, and 11% owned ABM at time 2. Parent alcohol use (≥ weekly) was reported by 23%, and 29% could obtain alcohol from home. Peer drinking, MAE, ABM, age, and rebelliousness were associated with both alcohol onset and progression to binge drinking. The adjusted hazard ratios for alcohol onset and binge drinking transition for high vs. low MAE exposure were 2.13 (95% confidence interval 1.76, 2.57) and 1.63 (1.20, 2.21) respectively, and MAE accounted for 28% and 20% of these transitions respectively. Characteristics of the family were associated only with alcohol onset. Conclusions: Limiting media and marketing alcohol exposure could prevent both alcohol onset and binge drinking, whereas family focused interventions would have larger impact on alcohol onset only.

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Cross-sectional associations between movie viewing, alcohol and cigarette use in among British adolescents

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Our aim was to see whether exposure to alcohol use in movies was associated with alcohol consumption in a population cohort of British adolescents and to compare this association with previous research showing that increased exposure to smoking depictions in movies is associated with a higher risk of tobacco use. Information about frequency of movie viewing and alcohol consumption was collected from 5162 15-year-old adolescents in the UK using a computer-assisted structured interview. Movie frequency was assessed by asking whether adolescents had seen 50 movies, randomly selected from a larger pool of popular contemporary movies. Outcome measures were initiation and current (weekly) use of alcohol. Social, family and behavioural factors were adjusted for together with peer alcohol / tobacco use.

On average, adolescents had seen 17.7 (SD 8.3) of the 50 movies asked; exposure was grouped into quartiles. In this cohort 87.7% of adolescents had tried alcohol and 21.3% of the cohort drank alcohol weekly. More frequent movie viewing was associated with a dose-response increase in alcohol use: adolescents in the highest quartile of movie viewing were 1.14 (95% CI 1.09-1.18) times more likely (adjusted risk ratio ARR) to have tried alcohol and were twice as likely to be current drinkers (ARR 2.02 (95%CI 1.66-2.46)). Frequent movie viewing is associated with a higher risk of imitating alcohol use during adolescence and also of current alcohol use, even after adjustment for social, family and individual factors. These findings are comparable to previous results for cigarette use although the pattern for each differs: by the age of 15 the majority of adolescents have tried an alcoholic drink and the higher risk of trying alcohol associated with movie viewing is weak compared to the risk of smoking onset. Conversely, for those who frequently watch movies, there is a high risk of current alcohol use at 15 despite adjustment for social, family and behavioural factors but this risk attenuates for tobacco use after adjustment for behaviour factors. These preliminary analyses suggest that alcohol depictions in movies are associated with higher levels of alcohol use in adolescence. Further work is required according to the alcohol specific content of movies before we can confirm that the relationship is as important as it is for tobacco use.