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Sandra C. Jones
University of Wollongong, sandraj@uow.edu.au

Kirsten Brighten
University of Wollongong

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Responsibility messages in alcohol advertising - just one more selling tool?

Abstract

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screening questions. Seventy-three percent of participants reported drinking alcohol in the last 12 months, and 30% screened positive for unhealthy alcohol use: 26% being classified as hazardous or harmful drinkers and 3.8% as possibly alcohol dependent.

Discussion and Conclusions: These results confirm the hospital outpatient setting is one in which a large number of patients could benefit from alcohol screening and brief intervention.

Paper 220

A DOUBLE BLIND, RANDOMISED, PLACEBO CONTROLLED TRIAL OF LITHIUM CARBONATE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF CANNABIS WITHDRAWAL

JENNIFER JOHNSTON,¹ NICHOLAS LINTZERIS,^{1,2} IAIN MCGREGOR,³ DAVID J. ALLSOP,⁴ DAVID HELLIWELL,⁵ ADAM WINSTOCK⁶

¹*Discipline of Addiction Medicine, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,* ²*Drug and Alcohol Services, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,* ³*Department of Psychology, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,* ⁴*National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,* ⁵*Riverlands Drug and Alcohol Centre, Northern New South Wales Local Health District, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,* ⁶*National Addiction Centre, Kings College London, United Kingdom*

Presenter's email: jennifer.johnston@sydney.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Globally, cannabis is the most widely produced and consumed illicit substance. A significant proportion of dependent cannabis users experience withdrawal symptoms upon cessation of use, which may impact efforts to achieve and maintain abstinence. The primary objective was to examine the safety and efficacy of lithium in the inpatient management of cannabis withdrawal. Primary outcomes were: (i) withdrawal severity (Cannabis Withdrawal Scale); (ii) detoxification completion; and (iii) adverse events. Three-month post-withdrawal outcomes (i.e., alcohol and other drugs use, psychosocial outcomes) and the potential role of oxytocin in mediating effects of cannabis withdrawal were also examined.

Design and Methods: Cannabis dependent adults ($n = 38$) admitted to an inpatient withdrawal unit for seven days were randomised to receive either lithium (500 mg BD) or placebo, and followed up at 14, 30 and 90-days post discharge.

Results: Lithium did not significantly reduce total CWS scores ($F_{1,47.85} = 0.11$, $P = 0.74$) compared to placebo, although it significantly reduced 'loss of appetite' ($F_{7,195.8} = 4.05$, $P = 0.001$), 'stomach aches' ($F_{7,199.48} = 2.09$, $P = 0.05$), and 'nightmares/strange dreams' ($F_{1,64.81} = 8.73$, $P = 0.005$). No significant difference was found in the retention of the two groups (Mantel-Cox $\chi^2_1 = 0.11$, $P = 0.75$). There was no significant difference in the number ($t_{36} = -1.15$, $P = 0.26$) or severity of adverse effects between the groups ($t_{36} = -1.15$, $P = 0.26$). No Serious Adverse Events were reported.

Discussion and Conclusions: The efficacy of lithium for the management cannabis withdrawal is not supported by the findings. The implications for the treatment of cannabis withdrawal, and for the direction and conduct of future research will be discussed.

Paper 160

ARE PARENTS CONCERNED ABOUT ALCOHOL BRANDED MERCHANDISE?

SANDRA C. JONES,¹ KELLY ANDREWS¹

¹*Centre for Health Initiatives, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia*

Presenter's email: sandraj@uow.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: One of the key aims of alcohol marketing is to establish a strong brand identity and allegiance among (current and prospective) consumers. Despite growing evidence that young people own alcohol branded merchandise (ABM) and that ownership influences their drinking intentions and behaviours, there are no published studies on parents' knowledge or attitudes in relation to ownership of ABM.

Design and Methods: We conducted three semi-structured focus groups with a total of 15 parents (12 mothers and three fathers) in August 2012.

Results: Participants recalled seeing ABM in a range of store types; reported owning many of these 'functional' and clothing items; and recognised various alcohol-branded toys and ornaments and made reference to children being attracted to these items. Participants expressed particular concerns about five types of ABM: merchandise linked to sexual activity, driving, sports, food and children's toys. There was clear agreement that ABM is a form of advertising. A number of the participants noted that this exposure to ABM resulted in children developing a familiarity with brand names; and felt that this has the potential to impact on their future drinking decisions.

Discussion and Conclusions: The participants in our study moved from disengaged to disconcerted in the space of a 60-minute discussion. This suggests a need for awareness-raising among parents; if parents consciously process the fact that ABM is a form of advertising, they are likely to be more circumspect in providing ABM to their children. There is also a need for regulation of this form of alcohol advertising.

Paper 92

RESPONSIBILITY MESSAGES IN ALCOHOL ADVERTISING – JUST ONE MORE SELLING TOOL?

SANDRA C. JONES,¹ KIRSTEN BRIGHTEN¹

¹*University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia*

Presenter's email: sandraj@uow.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: While there is increasing evidence that alcohol advertising is associated with early drinking initiation and more harmful drinking patterns, the industry maintains that advertising is designed solely to drive brand choice. The voluntary introduction of 'responsibility' messages is one strategy has been positioned by industry as part of its contribution to the reduction of alcohol-related harm.

Design and Methods: We examined alcohol advertisements in three leading Australian women's fashion/lifestyle magazines for the period 2007–2012.

Results: After removing duplicates, there were 216 unique advertisements; 66% (143) included a responsible drinking message. These were most common in ads for ready to drink beverages (100%) and spirits (72%) and least common for wine (46%). Of these 143, only five included detailed responsible drinking messages; 26% simply stated '[please] drink responsibly,' 'drink [brand name] responsibly' or 'please drink [brand name] in moderation'. However, the remaining 74% utilised the moderation message as part of the promotion,

using positively-valenced words and/or playing on the theme and imagery in the advertisement. Fifty-five percent included the word 'enjoy' in the responsibility message and 24% linked the wording of the responsibility message to the theme of the advertisement. In all cases the responsibility message was in substantially smaller font than other writing in the advertisement, and placed at the bottom and/or margin.

Discussion and Conclusions: It appears that responsibility messages in alcohol advertisements are designed not to be noticed by consumers and, if they are noticed, to further promote and encourage consumption by reiterating the key advertising messages.

Paper 158

IT MUST BE GOOD FOR ME, IT'S IN A HEALTH MAGAZINE

SANDRA C. JONES,¹ CAROL KEANE¹

¹Centre for Health Initiatives, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia

Presenter's email: sandraj@uow.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Research into the extent and nature of alcohol advertising in Australian magazines has predominantly focused on 'lifestyle/entertainment' magazines. 'Health' magazines are often perceived as an appropriate source of information on health and nutrition. It is reasonable to expect that advertisements in these magazines would predominantly be for health-promoting (or at least not health-damaging) products.

Design and Methods: We audited three 'health' magazines (*Men's Health*, *Women's Health* and *Prevention*) for the presence and nature of alcohol advertisements for the period 2010–12 (102 of 108 issues published).

Results: Over the three years there were 30 alcohol advertisements in *Men's Health*; seven in *Women's Health* and 10 in *Prevention*. There was considerable variation across years, with over half of the advertisements in *Men's Health* appearing in 2010 and the number in *Prevention* increasing over time. Advertisements in *Men's Health* were predominantly for beer (76.7%); and in *Women's Health* and *Prevention* for wine/champagne. What was particularly concerning was the frequent presence of a 'health' message in advertisements appearing in these magazines, with 17 (36.1%) including a claim about low calorie or low carbohydrate content, but only two promoting low(er) alcohol content.

Discussion and Conclusions: Consumers are presented with a wide range of conflicting messages about alcohol, the majority of which encourage consumption. We find alcohol advertisements are present in 'health' magazines in similar frequencies to other magazine genres, but are often positioned in such a way as to suggest a health benefit or minimise the perception of a health risk.

Paper 104

MY FRIENDS BUNDY, CRUISER AND VB: ALCOHOL MARKETING ON FACEBOOK

SANDRA C. JONES,¹ LAURA ROBINSON,¹ LANCE BARRIE,¹ SONDRON DAVROEN²

¹University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia, ²Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Presenter's email: sandraj@uow.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: The Internet is increasingly being utilised as a medium for alcohol advertising, although the nature of online media makes it difficult to determine the volume of alcohol marketing. Given the high Internet usage of young people, there is growing concern about promotion of alcohol to children and adolescents.

Design and Methods: We examined the official Facebook pages of 12 alcohol brands. Two trained research assistants audited the pages independently, double coding 25% of pages to ensure reliability of coding, during May–June 2012.

Results: Key findings included: alcohol brands had an average of 75 000 fans across the 11 Australian-based pages. The two-way nature of communication was evident with posts by fans exceeding posts by brands by more than 28 to 1 (4796 compared to 170). All pages appeared to breach one or more clauses of the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code, most commonly: 1(a) mature, balanced and responsible approach to consumption of alcohol; 1(b) appeal to children or adolescents; and 1(c) suggest consumption or presence of alcohol beverages as a cause of or contributing to a significant change in mood or environment. The widespread presence of 'unofficial' pages is potentially even more problematic; with six of 12 having 50 or more.

Discussion and Conclusions: Given the high volume of alcohol advertising, limiting exposure through gateway mechanisms (such as age verification tools) is important, although largely ineffective. Thus, complementary policies are required, including encouraging Facebook and alcohol brands to work together to remove 'unofficial' pages that use brand's names and trademarks.

Paper 250

MEDIA LITERACY AS A STRATEGY TO PREVENT YOUTH TOBACCO USE: MIXED METHODS AND MIXED RESULTS

CHRISTINE KAESTLE,^{1,2} YVONNE S CHEN³

¹Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA, ²Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, ³University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA

Presenter's email: kaestle@vt.edu

Introduction and Aims: Pro-tobacco messages in media play an important role in initiating smoking behaviour among youth, but can be addressed in health promotion media literacy interventions. This study uses mixed methods to assess a tobacco prevention media literacy intervention.

Design and Methods: This study compares and contrasts qualitative and quantitative data gathered through focus groups and before and after assessments of treatment and control groups of young adolescents (n = 41, ages 8 to 15 years). Focus groups explored the acceptability of the anti-smoking program, as well as participants' understanding of media and awareness of marketing tactics by the tobacco industry. Using validated quantitative measures, changes in general and tobacco-specific media literacy were also assessed.

Results: General media literacy and some tobacco-specific media literacy measures improved significantly for treatment compared to control ($P < 0.05$); results for other tobacco-specific media literacy measures and for tobacco attitudes were not significant. Future expectations of smoking increased significantly for treatment participants ages 10 and younger ($P < 0.05$). Several themes emerged from the qualitative data, including: (i) understanding persuasion strategies used in advertising; (ii) desirability of commercials despite the intervention; (iii) pre-existing negative attitudes toward smoking; and (iv) distrust of industry intent.

Discussion and Conclusions: Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated differences by age. Improvements in media literacy may be accompanied by an increase in future expectations to smoke, especially for younger children. Pre-existing negative views of smoking may create ceiling effects among young adolescents.

Implications for Practice: Anti-smoking media literacy has potential for developing the ability of young adolescents to recognise persuasive intent, but this ability may not negate the desirability of pro-tobacco media or the expectation of future smoking. Findings will assist in age-appropriate targeting and further development of media literacy interventions.