

Alcohol industry sponsorship associated with more hazardous drinking in sportspeople

While policy makers in Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand debate whether alcohol advertising and sponsorship should be banned from sport, new research provides evidence that alcohol industry sponsorship is associated with more hazardous drinking in sportspeople compared to non-alcohol sponsorship.

Health scientists from Monash University, the University of Manchester, Deakin University and University of Western Sydney, asked Australian sportspeople about their drinking behaviours, sport participation, and what sorts of sport sponsorship they currently receive.

After accounting for other influences receipt of alcohol industry sponsorship in various forms was associated with significantly higher levels of drinking. Receipt of similar forms of sponsorship from non-alcohol industries such as, building firms, food or clothing companies was not related to higher drinking levels.

Of the 30% of sportspeople reporting receiving alcohol industry sponsorship, 68% met World Health Organisation criteria for classification as hazardous drinkers.

The research, published online in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, is reputedly the first to compare alcohol industry sponsorship to non-alcohol industry sponsorship.

'Results will be unsurprising to sportspeople or the alcohol industry'

Study lead Dr Kerry O'Brien said "The results will be unsurprising to sportspeople or the alcohol industry, but we wondered whether the financial resources provided from non-alcohol industry sponsors might also increase drinking through the simple provision of additional funds for young sportspeople to spend on alcohol. It didn't. It seems specific to alcohol industry sponsorship."

The research comes on the back of recent recommendations from the British Medical Association, Australian Preventative Health Taskforce, and New Zealand Law Commission to have alcohol advertising and sponsorship removed from sport in much the same way as tobacco was decades ago.

Figures from marketing analysts suggest that major alcohol companies spend up to 80% of advertising and sponsorship budgets promoting alcohol via sports.

"Sport is being misused to promote alcohol to sportspeople and the general population. The public do not need more

encouragement to drink, and there are ways of replacing alcohol advertising and sponsorship dollars in sport," Dr O'Brien said.

"Much like was done with tobacco, a proportion of the excise duty currently gathered by governments from alcohol sales could be ring fenced (hypothecated) for funding sport and cultural events. This would replace alcohol industry funding many times over," Dr O'Brien said.

Long-standing bans

Norway and France have had longstanding bans in place with little apparent effect on sport, and this year Turkey banned all alcohol advertising and sponsorship of sport. France successfully hosted the 1998 FIFA World Cup with their alcohol sponsorship and advertising ban in place, and currently host the multi-nation Heineken Cup Rugby competition, renamed the H-Cup in France.

"The Australian Federal government is taking promising steps in allocating A\$25 million (about R175 million) to a trial program replacing alcohol industry sponsorship of community sports and cultural events, but it can be expanded considerably, and could be funded by alcohol excise duty." Dr O'Brien said.

Deakin University scientist Dr Peter Miller said "This study provides new evidence of the harms associated with alcohol industry sponsorship of sport and we believe that any sporting association serious about the well-being of young people should support calls for governments to provide alternative funding. It's simply not worth gambling with their future for the sake of some easy money."

Source: Monash University

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