



Research paper

Using media exposure to predict the initiation and persistence of youth alcohol use in Taiwan

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 April 2013

Received in revised form 7 January 2014

Accepted 19 April 2014

Keywords:

Media exposure

Alcohol use

Youth

ABSTRACT

Background: Youth consumption of alcohol is a major public health problem in Taiwan, yet little research has been conducted to examine the potential influence of exposure to alcohol advertising. The present study examined the prospective influence that exposure to alcohol advertising has on the initiation and persistence of youthful drinking in Taiwan.

Methods: A total of 2315 students from 26 high schools in Taipei, Taiwan were assessed in the 10th grade with follow-up conducted in the 11th grade. Self-administered questionnaires were collected in 2010 and 2011 to assess the patterns of change in youth alcohol drinking behaviors, media exposure to alcohol, and risk and protective factors.

Results: Of the 1712 non-drinking students in the 10th grade, 285 (16.6%) had initiated drinking by the 11th grade. Of the 590 drinkers in the 10th grade, 396 (67.1%) were persistently drinking by the 11th grade. Multivariate analysis results indicated that when other potential confounders were accounted for, greater media exposure to alcohol advertising in the 10th grade was found to be significantly associated with the initiation of alcohol use and when combined with an increase in media exposure from grades 10 to 11, this was significantly associated with the persistence of alcohol use.

Conclusion: Exposure to alcohol advertising in the media was associated with both the initiation and the persistence of alcohol use by youth.

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Introduction

Alcohol is the main risk factor for disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) for young people aged between 10 and 24 years (Gore et al., 2011). Youth alcohol use is a major public health problem. Early age onset of drinking has been associated with greater alcohol involvement in adulthood (Deutsch et al., 2013), prescription drug misuse (Hermos, Winter, Heeren, & Hingson, 2008), subsequent alcohol-related driving risks (Lynskey, Bucholz, Madden, & Heath, 2007), and various risky behaviors (Calvert, Keenan Bucholz, & Steger-May, 2010). In addition, youth alcohol use can result in a number of health and social problems, including

academic problems (Ellickson, Tucker, & Klein, 2003), illicit drug use (Adam et al., 2011; Ellickson et al., 2003), motor vehicle accidents (Sommers, Fargo, Lyons, Shope, & Sommers, 2011), violent crimes (Ellickson et al., 2003; Patra, Rehm, & Popova, 2011), and risky sexual behavior (Connor, George, Gullo, Kelly, & Young, 2011; Stueve & O'Donnell, 2005).

Young people are increasingly at risk of being exposed to alcohol advertisements and pro-alcohol messages. Youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television (TV) in the U.S. increased by 71% between 2001 and 2009 (Center on Alcohol Marketing & Youth, 2012). A UK study indicated that 60% of young people reported being exposed to alcohol advertisements daily through TV (Atkinson, Elliott, Bellis, & Sumnall, 2011). Alcohol advertising shapes youthful attitudes and perceptions by using pro-alcohol messages that may contribute to more favorable beliefs about drinking, positive alcohol expectancies, intentions to drink, and consumption (Fleming, Thorson, & Atkin, 2004; Grube & Wallack, 1994)

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Evidence suggests that exposure to alcohol advertisements, portrayals, and promotion campaigns contribute to adolescent alcohol drinking. For example, cross-sectional studies (Hurtz, Henriksen, Wang, Feighery, & Fortmann, 2007; Jones & Magee, 2011; Morgenstern, Isensee, Sargent, & Hanewinkel, 2011), longitudinal studies (Anderson, de Bruijn, Angus, Gordon, & Hastings, 2009; Collins, Ellickson, McCaffrey, & Hambarsoomians, 2007; Dal Cin et al., 2009; Gordon, MacKintosh, & Moodie, 2010; Nunez-Smith et al., 2010; Sargent, Wills, Stoolmiller, Gibson, & Gibbons, 2006; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009), and experimental studies (Engels, Hermans, van Baaren, Hollenstein, & Bot, 2009) have shown that exposure to alcohol advertising, portrayals, and promotion campaigns were all associated with adolescent intentions to drink alcohol, drinking initiation, increased drinking, and subsequent alcohol consumption by young people.

In addition, studies have found that exposure to alcohol use via films was significantly associated with the onset of youthful drinking (Dal Cin et al., 2009; Hanewinkel & Sargent, 2009; Sargent et al., 2006), while parental restrictions from viewing adult-rated movies were associated with reduced exposure to alcohol use in films and with a lowered risk for drinking (Hanewinkel, Morgenstern, Tanski, & Sargent, 2008; Tanski, Dal Cin, Stoolmiller, & Sargent, 2010). Social cognitive theory states that media promotes changes by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding participants (Bandura, 2001).

Despite studies in developed countries examining the relationship between media exposure and adolescent substance use (Anderson et al., 2009; Hurtz et al., 2007; Morgenstern et al., 2011; Nunez-Smith et al., 2010; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009), relatively few studies have been conducted in Asian societies. Taiwan was forced to open foreign alcohol and tobacco markets and allow advertising in 1987, and this has been associated with an increased level of smoking by young people (Hsu et al., 2005). In 2002, the Taiwan Tobacco and Wine Monopoly Bureau became privatized. This led to an increase in alcohol advertising and marketing by both domestic and foreign companies. Twenty-two percent of high school students reported having used alcohol in the previous month in Taiwan (Bureau of Health Promotion, 2011), where adolescents reported spending 43.7 h per week viewing media (Wu, 2009). The potential influence that the advertising, marketing, and portrayals of alcohol can have on youthful drinking has been neglected in Taiwan. The present study was an examination of the baseline cross-sectional (10th grade) effect and longitudinal (10th–11th grade) effect of media exposure to alcohol on the initiation and persistence of alcohol use among high school students in Taiwan. We hypothesized that a greater baseline media alcohol exposure and an increase in the longitudinal change in media alcohol exposure would be associated with an increased likelihood of the initiation and persistence of youth alcohol use.

Methods

Participants and procedure

In 2010, a total of 72,327 10th grade high school students attended 122 high schools (including vocational high schools) in Taipei City and New Taipei City, Taiwan. Based on the sampling frame, which was a list of schools and their 10th grade student enrollments, a probability-proportionate-to-size sampling method was used to systematically draw a random sample of schools. Three to four classes were randomly selected from each sample school.

Following class selection, consent forms were taken home by students to give to parents requesting their consent to allow the children to participate in the survey. After the parental consent

forms were collected, researchers visited the schools to conduct the self-administered survey and address students' questions. Students were assured the information would remain confidential.

In 2010, a total of 2992 10th grade students from 102 classes in 26 sample schools completed the questionnaire. The response rate for the first-year survey was 80%. In 2011, when the students were in the 11th grade, they were asked to complete the questionnaire a second time. However, at the time of the follow-up surveys some students had dropped out of school, some had transferred to other schools, and some refused to participate or were absent on that day. Overall, a total of 2315 students from 26 sample schools completed the questionnaire in the 2010 and 2011 surveys. The response rate for the follow-up survey was 77%. The experiences of the 2315 students who completed both surveys were used to explore the change pattern for drinking behaviors, media alcohol exposure, and risk and protective factors.

The responses to alcohol use and media alcohol exposure on the baseline survey from students who subsequently dropped out of school were compared with the responses from the students who completed the follow-up survey. The results indicated that at the time of the baseline (10th grade) survey, the percentage of alcohol drinking during the past year among the dropouts (31.8%) had been higher than that among the students who later completed the follow-up survey (25.6%). The mean score of media alcohol exposure at the time of the baseline survey among the dropouts (mean = 3.08) was higher than that among the students who later completed the follow-up survey (mean = 2.97).

Measures

The self-administered questionnaire was developed based on previous studies. A group of 10 experts was invited to assess the content validity of the questionnaire. The experts specialized in the following fields: substance use, media, information science technology, health education, and computer education. Experts reviewed the draft questionnaire and provided comments and suggestions for improvements. A pretest survey was conducted at 2 schools to interpret the students' responses to the survey and to evaluate the reliability of the scales in the questionnaire.

Alcohol use

The dependent variable in this study was the change pattern of alcohol drinking behavior from grades 10 to 11 (not drinking, initiation, stop drinking, persistently drinking alcohol). Alcohol use was measured based on each respondent's answer to how often they had ever drunk alcohol. Response options for each item included the following: "never," "not in last year," "a few times within a year," "a few times a month," and "a few times a week." If participants answered "a few times within a year" or more frequently, they were coded as alcohol drinkers. Using students' self-reported alcohol drinking behaviors in the 10th and 11th grades, respondents were categorized into four groups: (a) a non-drinker, for a student who reported that he/she did not drink alcohol in the 12 months prior to the 2 surveys in the 10th and 11th grades; (b) an initiator, for a student who reported that he/she did not drink alcohol in the past 12 months in the 10th grade survey but reported drinking in the 11th grade survey; (c) a quitter, for a student who reported that he/she drank alcohol in the past 12 months in the 10th grade survey but reported that he/she did not drink alcohol in the 11th grade survey; and, (d) a persistent user, for a student who reported that he/she drank alcohol in the past 12 months in the 10th and 11th grade surveys.

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