

Key points

- Speakers said alcohol advertising predisposes young people to drinking well before buying alcohol is legal.
- New Zealand and overseas industry sources have admitted targeting products and ads at drinkers under the minimum purchase age – Hope.
- People who begin drinking before 15 in the USA are at least four times more likely to become alcohol dependent and become injured while under the influence of alcohol than those who start later – Jernigan.

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SEMINAR: Alcohol Marketing – Recent research and policy responses

You see like slaughtered people, absolutely trolleyed and it's just awesome... and (advertising) reminds you of that occasion. (Tauwiwi male, 17)

With that Export ad ...they got the bus, like I'd love to do that. Just like grab a whole lot of people and go.But you'd need Export to do it as well. (Tauwiwi male, 17)

Contents

- [Seminar speakers](#)
- [Youth overexposed to advertising](#)
- [Alcopops aimed at teenage drinkers](#)
- [Other marketing examples](#)
- [Experiences of young New Zealanders](#)
- [Regulation](#)
- [The arguments of industry lobby groups](#)
- [New policy developments](#)
- [Next seminar](#)
- [Unsubscribe/ Feedback](#)

Seminar speakers

The embedding of alcohol advertising in young people's lives in New Zealand is mirrored in other developed countries, according to speakers at an Auckland seminar organised by Te Ropu Whariki and SHORE earlier this year.

Three eminent visiting speakers discussed new policy initiatives by governments and international bodies with seminar participants. The speakers were –

- **Dr Peter Anderson**, an international consultant on alcohol and tobacco policy for the European Union, the World Health Organization and several national and regional governmental organisations
- **Dr Ann Hope**, National Alcohol Policy Advisor in the Republic of Ireland Department of Health and Children
- **Dr David Jernigan**, research director at the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University in Washington D.C.

Suaree Borell (Ngati Ranginui, Ngai te Rangi, Ngati Haamoia), **Mandi Gregory** (Pakeha) and **Hector Kaiwai** (Ngati Porou, Ngati Maniapoto, Tuhoe), emerging New Zealand researchers from Te Ropu Whariki, also presented preliminary results from their research with teenagers about alcohol marketing.

[Top](#)

Youth overexposed to advertising

The international speakers stressed that alcohol advertising predisposes young people to drinking well before buying alcohol is legal.¹ Dr Jernigan's USA research uses advertising databases to monitor alcohol advertising in youth-oriented media. "Current marketing has pervasively over-exposed our youth to alcohol advertising," he said. [\[More details.\]](#)

He found that people under the legal purchase age in the USA saw 45% more beer advertising, 12% more spirits advertising and 65% more low-alcohol refresher advertising in magazines in 2002 than people 21 and over.² Girls were more over-exposed than boys – girls aged 12 to 20 were more likely to see beer, ale and low-alcohol refresher advertising in magazines than women 21 or more. Girls' exposure to low-alcohol refresher ads quadrupled from 2001 to 2002; boys' exposure increased by 46%. [\[More details\]](#)

He told the seminar that US teenagers who began drinking before 15 are four times more likely to become dependent on alcohol than those who wait until 21³; those who start before 14 are five times more likely to be injured under the influence of alcohol during their lives.⁴ He said that new research on adolescent brain development suggests that early heavy alcohol use damage the physical development of the brain⁵, affecting planning, memory, attention and spatial ability.⁶

Teenagers in a 1997 US survey said that alcohol ads influence their desire to drink in general, rather than their desire to buy a particular brand of alcohol.⁷

[Top](#)

Alcopops aimed at teenage drinkers

Dr Hope described a 1997 UK sting operation by reporters, who recorded alcohol industry executives admitting that drinkers under the legal purchasing age were the intended market for alcopops sweet mixes of soft drinks and alcohol. The Whariki researchers also quoted an industry source who admitted that alcopops were aimed at drinkers under the legal purchasing age as a stepping stone from soft drinks to alcohol.⁸

Other marketing examples

Local examples include branded youth music events; activities like an annual "half day off" sponsored by an alcohol brand which offers free \$25 bar tabs; the Fluid youth-oriented liquor outlet; alcohol websites; cell phone text and picture promotions; the introduction of cheap new products such as alcopops, alcoholic "energy" drinks and premixed cocktails; as well as more conventional use of advertising.

The speakers listed overseas marketing examples - alcohol-branded CD and comics stores, alcohol-branded rock concert series, sports sponsorship, alcohol-branded CD releases and promotions in youth clubs.

Nearly 700,000 USA visitors under the legal purchasing age got past the age verification screens on 55 alcohol websites in 2003; many of these sites include games, interactive elements, music downloads, cartoons and other content attractive to teenagers.⁹ "The age verification process was more discouraging to adults than to underage drinkers", said Dr Jernigan.

Dr Hope said that Irish children were strongly attracted to alcohol advertising and that young people believed that advertisements were targeted at their age group.¹⁰

[Top](#)

Experiences of young New Zealanders

The SHORE and Whariki research project is interviewing 24 groups of young Maori and Tauwiwi (non-Maori) aged 14 to 18 about alcohol advertising three times over three years, as well as one-off interviews with other groups about particular events such as the Big Day Out, school balls, New Year and the Export Gold Party. It is funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.

Their research has found that young people see their positive drinking experiences as just like the advertisements, while their own negative experiences from drinking, such as drink driving injuries, are seen as part of the package of drinking and having fun. They see negative experiences from other people's drinking as that person's choice and not something other young people can prevent.

Young New Zealanders in the research, like New Zealand adults, consistently deny that advertising influenced their choices. However, they showed a detailed knowledge of alcohol marketing, and a keen focus on price:

....If you buy two Tuis you get a prize – little hats.

....Export did that for a while... if you bought 10 handles of Export you got a shirt,if you guessed who scored the first try in a game you got a Steinlager shirt...

...No, if you bought a Steinlager you got a sticker with a number of someone like 13 and if number 13 scored you got a shirt....

... That was Export Gold.

...No, I think Steinlager, people who were sponsoring the All Blacks.

(Mixed gender Tauwiwi group, aged 17)

Alcohol is one of the most trendy personal... things for teenagers possible. You start a conversation about alcohol and everybody gets in on the conversation... their own personal type and experiences. What's good, what's bad. And a lot of the time people influence others.

(Tauwiwi male, 17)

Whenever the flyers come through the mail, you like pick it up, the first page you're looking at is the page where the alcohol is at.

(Maori female, 16)

While some alcohol campaigns may not set out to target underage youth drinkers, very young people are a constant 'by-catch' which is of great value to the industry, said the Whariki researchers.¹¹

What might be dismissed as illusory concerns about any one campaign is much more obvious when tracked during multiple longitudinal interviews, they said.

[Top](#)

Regulation

Dr Jernigan said that alcohol beverages should not be promoted in any way among young people. This includes the creation of products oriented to young drinkers; the alcohol branding of youth activities, images and language such as games, cartoon characters and slang; and the packaging of alcohol in amounts and at prices oriented to the limited financial resources of most young people.¹²

All the overseas seminar speakers agreed that self-regulating industry codes about alcohol advertising don't work. Dr Anderson said that the beverage alcohol industry has "blatantly, consistently and extensively broken their own advertising codes in all areas of the world and it is "easy to find current code-breaking alcohol ads from major European producers".¹³

Dr Jernigan said that the content of alcohol advertising is subjective and very difficult to regulate; however, where ads are placed is easy to monitor and regulate, and our policies need to include restrictions on ad placement.

Information and social marketing campaigns are also ineffective in preventing or reducing alcohol problems on their own, they said.¹⁴ Says Dr Hope: "They should be used to support policy changes." Said the Whariki researchers: "Education is like teaching kids how to swim when the dam is broken."

[Top](#)

The arguments of industry lobby groups

Dr Anderson said that during the last two decades, the alcohol industry has set up and funded global, regional and national lobbying organisations, which consistently advocate policy viewpoints that benefit the industry rather than public health. These organisations argue for a policy focus on drinking patterns and individual responsibility, and against controls on alcohol availability, marketing and taxation. This contrasts with strong research evidence that reducing the total volume of alcohol consumed through these kinds of controls is the most effective way to reduce alcohol-related harm.

Dr Anderson said that for this reason, public health policy on alcohol must be decided independent of the alcohol industry or their lobby groups. However, implementation, for example of minimum purchase age regulations, must be done in co-operation with the industry, he said.

Dr Jernigan told the seminar that around 250 new alcohol products are released each year in the US. An Alcohol Healthwatch participant said that product packaging in New Zealand is not regulated. Unless particular packaging is advertised somewhere, it is not possible to complain about it.

[Top](#)

New policy developments

The Whariki researchers concluded that developments in alcohol marketing to young people in New Zealand are a major challenge for existing regulatory frameworks and public health strategies and that new approaches are needed. "We need policy solutions which deal with the whole marketing environment," they said.

Ireland and NZ have very similar numbers of alcohol outlets, Dr Hope told the seminar. After a 41% increase in alcohol consumption over the last ten years and skyrocketing alcohol-related harm, the Irish government doubled the tax on alcopops, and increased tax on spirits by 40%. This reduced the rate of alcohol-related harm. Ireland is now drafting a law regulating alcohol advertising, sponsorship, marketing and sales promotions aimed at young people.

The law will –

- Restrict the placement of alcohol advertising
- Ensure that advertising content does not appeal to young people
- Restrict alcohol availability
- Ban alcohol sponsorship of youth leisure activities
- Establish an independent monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance
- Ban children under 18 from pubs after 9.30pm
- Establish strict penalties for selling to underage and intoxicated patrons – closure for a week, and naming and shaming
- Include a health warning on all alcohol advertisements.

In Europe, the strict French law restricting alcohol marketing, the Loi Evin, has been upheld by a 2004 ruling in the European Court of Justice, said Dr Hope. The court found that the French restriction on alcohol advertising at sporting events was justified for the protection of public health.

Dr Jernigan said that monitoring of alcohol marketing is essential to regulation. It needs to be done by a completely independent body, based in public health.

Next seminar

Associate Professor Sandra Jones, from the University of Wollongong [Centre for Health Behaviour and Communication Research](#), will give a presentation on alcohol advertising regulation in Australia at SHORE on 27 October at 11am. She will be accompanied by Danika Hall, Associate Research Fellow at the centre.

The centre is working on a [VicHealth-funded research grant](#) with the Australian Drug Foundation examining the effectiveness of the Australian alcohol advertising regulatory system. Their other projects in this area include a preliminary study on the relationship between children's viewing of televised sports (the only daytime programming allowed to carry alcohol advertising) and alcohol awareness/attitudes; a review of the nature and extent of on-premise and off-premise promotions of ready-to-drink alcohol products in Wollongong; and a focus group study on the effect of "drink cards" on young males' drinking.

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[Top](#)

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