

Alcohol marketing in popular movies doubles in past two decades

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SAN FRANCISCO – Alcohol brand placements in popular movies of all ratings nearly doubled during the past two decades, new research shows, but particularly in child-rated movies. Researchers presenting these findings at the 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in San Francisco found the alcohol brands on the movie set are often those young people report drinking the most.

“Children and young people look to movie stars as role models,” said James D. Sargent, MD, FAAP, a professor in the departments of Pediatrics and Community & Family Medicine at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth and an author of the study. “For alcohol companies, when a favorite star uses a certain brand of alcohol, that brand gets linked to all the characteristics young admirers see in their movie idol. That’s why it’s no surprise that the brands commonly shown in movies are the most highly advertised brands, and the same brands underage drinkers tend to drink,” he said.

The abstract, “Trends in alcohol brand placements in top U.S. Movies, 1996-2015,” will be presented on Tuesday, May 9, at the Moscone Center West Convention Center.

Looking at the top 100 movies with the highest U.S. box-office gross revenues each year during the two-decade study period, the researchers determined that alcohol brand placement increased annually by an average of 5% each year, and 92% overall. Other findings:

- Alcohol use was portrayed in 87% (1,741) of all movies, overall. Specific brands of alcohol appeared in 44% (867) of them.
- Characters were shown drinking alcohol in 85% (1,108) of all top movies rated for children during the study period.
- Alcohol brands appeared in 41% (533) of child-rated movies during the study period.

“Alcohol continues to be the drug of choice among young people,” says co-author Samantha Cukier, Ph.D., M.B.A., one that is responsible for 4,300 deaths in the U.S. each year among people under the age of 21.

“This research suggests exposure to alcohol marketing increases in movies each year, which is concerning because movie alcohol exposure has been repeatedly shown to predict future alcohol use and higher rates of problem drinking,” she said.

Dr. Cukier said the findings also have policy implications.

“The high frequency of brand placements in movies aimed at children and young adolescents raises questions about the adequacy of alcohol marketing self-regulation,” she said. “I don’t think they are doing enough to avoid the underage segment in their movie alcohol placements.”

Dr. Cukier will present the abstract, "Trends in alcohol brand placements in top U.S. Movies, 1996-2015," during a poster session from 7 to 10 a.m. in the convention center's Poster & Exhibit Hall. It is available at https://registration.pas-meeting.org/2017/reports/rptPAS17_Abstracts.asp.

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