

BRIEF REPORT

Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in Australia's major televised sports

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Abstract

Introduction and Aims. Exposure to alcohol advertising is associated with greater alcohol consumption in children and adolescents, and alcohol advertising is common in Australian sport. We examine child, adolescent and young adult exposure to alcohol advertising during three televised sports in Australia: Australian Football League (AFL), cricket and the National Rugby League (NRL). **Methods.** Alcohol advertising and audience viewing data were purchased for all AFL, cricket and NRL TV programs in Australia for 2012. We estimated children and adolescents (0–17 years) and young adults (18–29 years) exposure to alcohol advertising during AFL, cricket and NRL programs in the daytime (06:00–20:29 h), and night-time (20:30–23:59 h). **Results.** There were 3544 alcohol advertisements in AFL (1942), cricket (941) and NRL programs (661), representing 60% of all alcohol advertising in sport TV, and 15% of all alcohol advertisements on Australian TV. These programs had a cumulative audience of 26.9 million children and adolescents, and 32 million young adults. Children and adolescents received 51 million exposures to alcohol advertising, with 47% of this exposure occurring during the daytime. Children and adolescents exposure to alcohol advertising was similar to young adults and peaked after 8.30pm. **Discussion and Conclusions.** Child and adolescent and young adult's exposure to alcohol advertising is high when viewing sport TV in Australia in the daytime and night-time. Current alcohol advertising regulations are not protecting children and adolescents from exposure, particularly in prominent televised sports. The regulations should be changed to reduce children and adolescent excessive exposure to alcohol advertising when watching sport. [Carr S, O'Brien KS, Ferris J, Room R, Livingston M, Vandenberg B, Donovan RJ, Lynott D. Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in Australia's major televised sports. *Drug Alcohol Rev* 2016;35:406–411]

Key words: alcohol, advertising, sport, children, TV.

Introduction

Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising is associated with earlier initiation of drinking, and greater consumption in existing drinkers [1,2]. Similarly, young adults exposure to, and liking of, alcohol

advertising has been found to be associated with greater consumption [3]. Restriction of alcohol advertising and sponsorship via effective independent regulation has been recommended as a population-level strategy for reducing youth drinking [4]. In Australia, alcohol advertising is not permitted during designated child TV

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classification periods (i.e. 05:00–20:30 h) with the exception of between 12:00 and 15:00 h on school days [5,6]. However, for no clear reason, advertising regulations permit alcohol advertising during otherwise prohibited times if it is within sports programming [5,6]. Children and adolescents watching televised sports during their peak viewing times are thus likely exposed to alcohol advertising.

A recent analysis of the extent of alcohol advertising in Australian sport and non-sport TV for 2012 showed that the majority of alcohol advertising during sport was in the broadcasting of matches from the three leading televised sport codes, Australian Football League (AFL), cricket and National Rugby League (NRL) [7]. It was also found that large numbers of children and adolescents were watching TV at the same time, and therefore were likely exposed to alcohol advertising. However, the study could not estimate actual exposure within the AFL, cricket and NRL, and did not establish whether individuals were watching a specific program that was known to contain alcohol advertising. More accurate estimates of exposure to alcohol advertising via sport TV are needed for alcohol policy debates, and there is no research examining children and adolescent's exposure to alcohol advertising while watching major televised sports in Australia. An examination of AFL, cricket and NRL is also pertinent because most other sporting codes (e.g. Netball Australia, Football Federation of Australia) have refused alcohol advertising and sponsorship [8].

In this paper we examine the extent of alcohol advertising in televised AFL, cricket and NRL. We also estimate exposure of children and adolescents to alcohol advertising while viewing these sports during the daytime and night-time, and compare children and adolescent's exposure to that of young adults (18–29 years). The research addresses a gap in the literature and provides evidence for alcohol policy debates on the effectiveness of current alcohol advertising regulations aimed at protecting children.

Method

Information on all alcohol advertising in sport and non-sport TV in 2012 on the 11 commercial free-to-air TV channels for the five major metropolitan centres of Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth; 61% of the total Australian population) was purchased from Ebiquity, an international media monitoring company. The data included the time/date, sport program in which the advertisement was placed and full content (i.e. video/sound/image). We did not examine subscription (pay-per-view) TV because it contains little commercial advertising and has low audience numbers relative to free-to-air TV.

We also purchased TV audience viewing data (rounded to the nearest 1000) for ages 0–4, 5–13, 14–17 and 18–29 years for all AFL, cricket and NRL games and related pre-/post-game commentary televised in the five major metropolitan centres, from Australian Television Audience Measurement (OzTAM). Here we examined audience numbers and alcohol advertising exposure for children and adolescents (0–17 years), and young adults (18–29 years). The audience viewing data indicated whether individuals were watching a specific AFL, cricket or NRL TV program at a particular time of day. By cross-matching audience data with the advertising data, we were able to calculate exposure to alcohol advertising when watching AFL, cricket and NRL programs during the day and night. For example, if there were 30 000 0- to 17-year-olds watching an AFL game containing one alcohol advertisement, then the exposure score would be 30 000; if there were four alcohol advertisements, then the exposure score would be 120 000.

Analysis

We report the number of alcohol advertisements broadcast during AFL, cricket and NRL programs in the daytime (06:00–20:29 h), night-time (20:30–23:59 h) and early morning (24:00 h–05:59 h), along with viewing audience numbers for 0- to 17- and 18- to 29-year-olds between 06:00 and 20:29 h, and 20:30 and 23:59 h. We also report alcohol advertising exposures for children, adolescents and young adults. Because the three sport codes vary in popularity, advertising content and broadcast time across the metropolitan centres, we report data by metropolitan centre (total population 14.3 million [9]).

Results

There were 3544 alcohol advertisements in televised AFL (1942), cricket (941), and NRL (661), representing 60% of all alcohol advertising in sport TV, and 15% of all categorised alcohol advertisements (23 936) on Australian TV in 2012. The alcohol advertisements were contained within 751 AFL, cricket and NRL sport programs broadcast across metropolitan centres. There was variation in the distribution of alcohol advertisements as well as audiences across the three sports codes and five metropolitan centres. AFL programs in Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth contained 93.8% of all AFL alcohol advertisements (Table 1). Across all cities, 45.8% of these advertisements occurred in the daytime. Numbers of alcohol advertisements during cricket programs were similar across the five cities; with 72.7% in the daytime. NRL programs in Brisbane and Sydney contained 62.0% of all NRL alcohol advertisements.

Table 1. Number of alcohol advertisements broadcast during AFL, cricket and NRL programs in the daytime (06:00–20:29 h), night-time (20:30–23:59 h) and early morning (24:00–05:59 h) for the metropolitan centres

	AFL	Cricket	NRL	Total
Adelaide				
Day	320	166	—	486
Night	307	38	32	377
Early morning	8	10	58	76
Brisbane				
Day	16	122	13	151
Night	25	27	186	238
Early morning	21	10	—	31
Melbourne				
Day	294	151	—	445
Night	350	57	14	421
Early morning	28	8	47	83
Perth				
Day	269	107	—	376
Night	226	38	40	304
Early morning	20	7	60	87
Sydney				
Day	15	138	15	168
Night	30	53	196	279
Early morning	13	9	—	22
Total	1942	941	661	3544

AFL, Australian Football League; NRL, National Rugby League.

Across all cities, 95.8% of alcohol advertisements in the NRL occurred during the night-time.

The cumulative audience of 0- to 17-year-olds for AFL, cricket and NRL programs was 26.9 million. As can be seen from Table 2, AFL games attracted the greatest number of child and adolescent viewers (12.4 million), followed by NRL (8.3 million) and cricket (6.2 million). The number of young adult viewers was similar to that of children and adolescents. Across all three sports, 88% of audience viewing was during the day.

There were a total 111.6 million exposures to alcohol advertising with children and adolescents receiving 50.9 million exposures. Forty-seven percent of exposures were during the day. As can be seen from Table 3, child and adolescent exposures to alcohol advertising was greatest when watching the AFL (27.2 million), followed by NRL (12.7 million) and cricket (11.0 million). Exposure was similar to young adults watching the AFL (29.9 million) and the NRL (14.2 million). Across both age groups, there was more exposure during the day for AFL and cricket, and more during the night for NRL. Figure 1 shows that peak exposure for children and adolescents and young adults was between 20:30 and 22:00 h.

Discussion

Sixty percent of all alcohol advertising in sport TV for 2012 was in the AFL, cricket and NRL, and an audience of 26.9 million children and adolescents watched these sports on TV. Forty-seven percent of children and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising was during the daytime, and was similar to that of young adults. Children and adolescents exposure to alcohol advertising peaked between 20:30 and 22:00 h, and mirrored young adult's exposure. The results indicate that current alcohol advertising regulations do not achieve their stated intent, which is to protect children and adolescent's from exposure to alcohol advertising irrespective of time of day [6].

The findings are consistent with the pattern of exposure identified in previous research in Australia [10]; however, the present work is the first to examine children and adolescent's exposure during sport TV programming. This study shows that the clause in Australian advertising regulations allowing alcohol advertising during sport TV during the daytime exposes children and adolescents to alcohol advertising. Considered alongside research showing that greater exposure to alcohol advertising in children is associated with earlier initiation and more harmful drinking [1,2], the results suggest that this regulatory loophole may lead to more problematic drinking in young Australians. Additionally, children and adolescent's exposure was similar to, and peaked at the same time as young adults (20:30–22:00 h), suggesting that advertising regulations allowing advertising after 20:30 h are not protecting children, and should be changed to a later time.

There was considerable variation in the amount of alcohol advertising across metropolitan centres, with Adelaide and Melbourne having considerably more alcohol advertising than other centres. This is due to the AFL carrying more alcohol advertising than cricket and the NRL. This may represent marketing strategy differences between the three sporting codes, whereby the NRL and cricket may rely on sponsorship arrangements, which see alcohol branding placed on player uniforms, the pitch/field, and stadium signage.

It should be noted that the data were restricted to the five major metropolitan regions of Australia and the results may not generalise to other areas. Also, the advertising data reported here do not include alcohol advertising and sponsorship messages placed on player uniforms, field/pitch and stadium signage, or in-game promotional comments regarding alcohol [11–16]. Thus, our results likely underestimate alcohol advertising exposure. Further, prohibitive costs prevented the purchase of more comprehensive age ranges for analysis. Finally, it cannot be known whether the alcohol advertisements were actually viewed and/or attended to.

Table 2. Number of children and adolescents, and young adults viewing AFL, cricket and NRL games/matches broadcast in the daytime (06:00–20:29 h), and night-time (20:30–23:59 h) for the metropolitan centres

	AFL		Cricket		NRL		Total
	0–17	18–29	0–17	18–29	0–17	18–29	
Adelaide							
Day	1 539 000	1 719 000	581 000	733 000	43 000	60 000	4 675 000
Night	213 000	358 000	—	7 000	18 000	22 000	618 000
Brisbane							
Day	534 000	596 000	900 000	1 661 000	2 250 000	2 415 000	8 356 000
Night	56 000	139 000	17 000	46 000	310 000	526 000	1 094 000
Melbourne							
Day	5 790 000	5 411 000	2 319 000	3 148 000	543 000	686 000	17 897 000
Night	1 137 000	1 550 000	5 000	74 000	78 000	221 000	3 065 000
Perth							
Day	1 785 000	2 609 000	505 000	730 000	70 000	160 000	5 859 000
Night	210 000	318 000	—	2 000	31 000	77 000	638 000
Sydney							
Day	975 000	884 000	1 855 000	2 805 000	4 304 000	4 254 000	15 077 000
Night	134 000	102 000	32 000	76 000	648 000	793 000	1 785 000
Total							
Day	10 623 000	11 219 000	6 160 000	9 077 000	7 210 000	7 575 000	51 864 000
Night	1 750 000	2 467 000	54 000	205 000	1 085 000	1 639 000	7 200 000

Note: Daytime audience includes viewers of all games that commence between 6am and 8.30pm. Dashes (-) indicate that audiences were below 1000. AFL, Australian Football League; NRL, National Rugby League.

Table 3. Alcohol advertising exposure during AFL, cricket and NRL programs broadcast in the daytime (06:00–20:29 h), and night-time (20:30–23:59 h) for children and adolescents, and young adults in the metropolitan centres

	AFL		Cricket		NRL		Total
	0–17	18–29	0–17	18–29	0–17	18–29	
Adelaide							
Day	2 482 000	2 903 000	1 018 000	1 227 000	—	—	7 630 000
Night	1 909 000	2 516 000	240 000	454 000	4 000	15 000	5 138 000
Brisbane							
Day	125 000	219 000	875 000	1 528 000	380 000	407 000	3 534 000
Night	—	—	184 000	455 000	3 822 000	4 575 000	9 036 000
Melbourne							
Day	8 910 000	8 749 000	3 098 000	4 180 000	—	—	24 937 000
Night	9 701 000	10 394 000	1 216 000	1 957 000	123 000	298 000	23 689 000
Perth							
Day	2 544 000	3 115 000	597 000	911 000	—	—	7 167 000
Night	1 115 000	1 564 000	89 000	195 000	18 000	29 000	3 010 000
Sydney							
Day	451 000	477 000	2 382 000	4 114 000	724 000	811 000	8 959 000
Night	—	—	1 288 000	1 523 000	7 642 000	8 047 000	18 500 000
Total							
Day	14 512 000	15 463 000	7 970 000	11 960 000	1 104 000	1 218 000	52 227 000
Night	12 725 000	14 474 000	3 017 000	4 584 000	11 609 000	12 964 000	59 373 000

Note: Exposure was calculated by multiplying the audience numbers for each program by the number of alcohol advertisement within that program. Exposures were then summed for metropolitan centres, age groups and time of day. AFL, Australian Football League; NRL, National Rugby League.

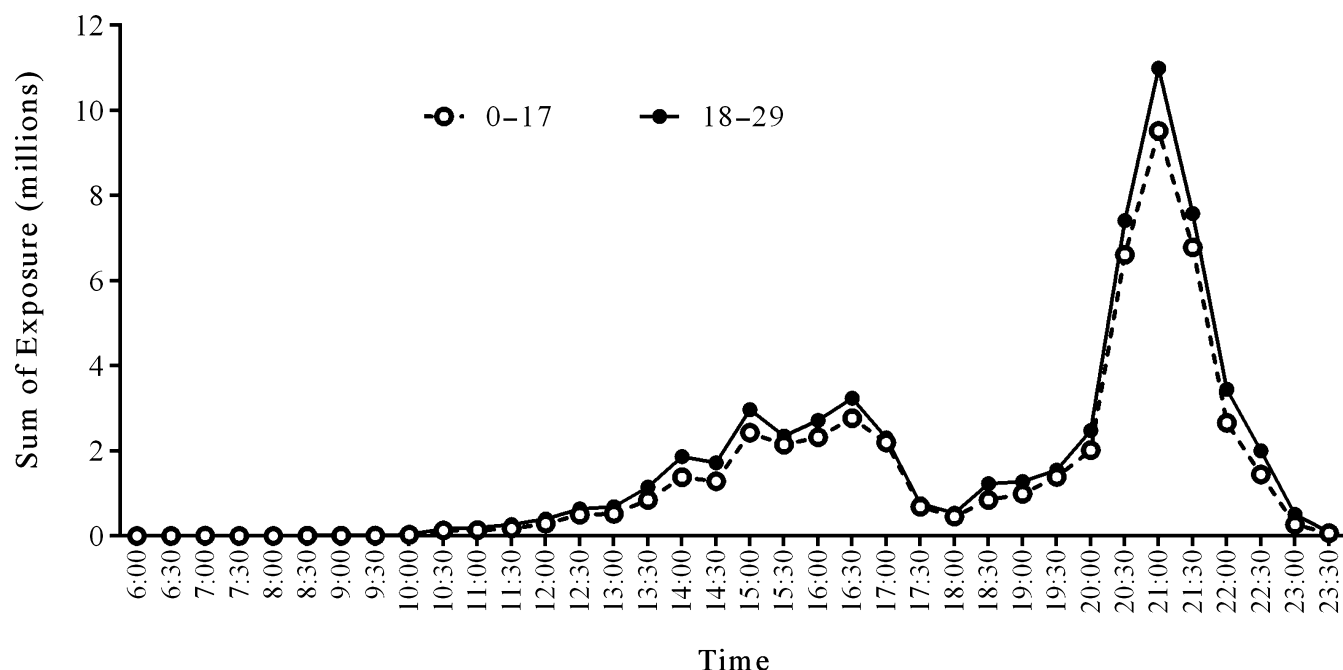


Figure 1. Total alcohol advertising exposure per half hour for children and adolescents (0–17 years), and young adults (18–29 years), between 06:00 and 23:59 h.

Sport TV programs attract large viewing audiences nationally and internationally. In Australia, 30 of the top 50 TV programs in 2012 were sport, with a cumulative viewing audience of 100 million people [17]. The loophole in advertising regulations that permits alcohol advertising during the daytime, and especially in sport TV, should be closed. Additionally, because alcohol advertising exposure peaked between 20:30 and 22:00 h, regulations should prohibit alcohol advertising in sport before 21:30 h to reduce children's exposure. Stricter regulation of alcohol advertising has been shown to be associated with lower alcohol consumption in European nations [18].

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