Alcohol consumption is believed to be linked to approximately 12,800 cancer cases annually in the UK\(^1\) and is linked to seven types of cancer, including two of the most common, female breast and bowel\(^2\)-\(^3\). If current alcohol consumption trends continue, it will lead to an estimated 135,000 cancer deaths over the next 20 years and cost £2bn in cancer costs to the NHS\(^4\).

Levels of alcohol consumption in the UK for 15 year olds remain amongst the highest in the Western World\(^5\). Whilst the root causes of under-age drinking in Britain are undoubtedly complex, industry claims that their marketing merely influences switching between brands and do not affect overall consumption do not accord with the evidence\(^6\)-\(^9\).

This is the second report following on from Morey et al., 2017\(^10\) which explored youth engagement with alcohol brands. This report, based on interviews with academics and public policy specialists considers whether new ways of regulating alcohol brands may help address the harmful effects of alcohol marketing.

**FINDINGS**

**INTERVIEWS WITH ACADEMICS AND PUBLIC POLICY SPECIALISTS**

- Current UK regulation was widely regarded as inadequate.
- Commercial marketers are perceived to have bypassed regulations that, by focusing on media use, were seen as unfit for purpose in an era in which sophisticated brand building techniques are commonplace.
- The use of online marketing, TV sports and music event sponsorship were all seen as particularly problematic in enabling brand builders to bypass traditional media and reach large numbers of young people.
- The inadequacy of UK regulation was contrasted with the French Loi-Evin\(^11\) (a law that strictly controls French alcohol marketers by stipulating what they are allowed to include in their marketing), which was met with approval but was regarded as highly unlikely to be introduced in the UK due to policy constraints.
- Performance based regulation\(^12\) is a fairly new idea and may take the form of setting public health related targets to specific brands that are deemed to be causing or contributing to a public health problem. This was regarded as intriguing but a series of challenges were raised concerning its possible introduction.

**POLICY AND PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

Government should review the efficacy of current restrictions on when and where alcohol advertisements are shown and consider how best to minimise young people’s exposure to this marketing.

Further research is needed to investigate further the links between brand-specific marketing activity and under-age drinking behaviour in the UK, preferably with a longitudinal survey.
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