

SOCIAL MARKETING – A TOOL FOR ALCOHOL-RELATED BEHAVIOUR CHANGE?

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Aim of Abstract: The aim of the symposium is to introduce participants to evidence-based social marketing, outline the potential for social marketing to contribute to addressing Australia's alcohol problem, and discuss the strengths, limitations and challenges of current and future social marketing initiatives.

Nature of interactive element: Each of the presentations contains an interactive element, seeking attendees' engagement with the topic and suggestions for advancing the field.

Presentation 1 – What is the role of social marketing in addressing Australia's alcohol problem?

Introduction and Aims: Social marketing is increasingly touted as an effective solution to addressing the problem of excessive alcohol consumption. This presentation provides an overview of the way that 'social marketing' has been operationalized in Australia, and the effectiveness of recent major interventions.

Design and Methods: We analyse the nature and effectiveness of recent Australian government and NGO interventions; the literature on social marketing/community-based interventions targeting underage drinking; and the potential for social marketing to be utilized to support evidence-based interventions to reduce harmful alcohol consumption.

Results: Governments in Australia, as elsewhere, have tended to focus on mass media, largely fear-based, interventions that focus on binge drinking among adolescents and young adults. The literature contains few examples of community-based interventions that go beyond efforts to 'educate' the community about the harms of excessive drinking.

Discussion and Conclusions: There is a clear role, and missed opportunity, for social marketing to be utilized to bring about necessary community-level and policy-related changes to address alcohol-related harms.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Recent data shows more Australian teenagers are choosing not to drink and the age of alcohol initiation is increasing. Social movements led by young adults, such as Hello Sunday Morning, have begun to make it acceptable to talk about not drinking. Social marketers need to build on these changes. We need to support children, adolescents and young adults in their efforts to change their culture; advocate for appropriate policy changes; and move beyond narrowly-focused efforts targeting teens and their parents to efforts which target whole communities.

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Presentation 2 – Yes, we're talking to you

Introduction and Aims: The primary source of alcohol for many young drinkers is their parents. This study explored knowledge, attitudes and experiences of the supply of alcohol to minor children by their parents. The aims were (a) to investigate whether recent social marketing campaigns successfully reached their intended audience; and (b) inform the development of messages targeted at parents.

Design and Methods: Thirteen focus groups: five with parents of teenagers (n=27) and eight with adolescents (three groups of 12-14-year-olds, three groups of 15-17-year olds, and two mixed groups) (n=47).

Results: The responses from both teenagers and parents suggested their understanding of the notion of 'supply' differed from the strict legal definition. For example, the majority of parents were adamant that they did not, and would not, supply alcohol to their underage teenagers – but many referred to giving their children 'tastes' of alcohol or 'teaching' them to drink responsibly. Both groups expressed a strong preference for high fear campaigns, perceiving these as effective for 'those' kids who drink and 'those' parents who supply alcohol.

Discussion and Conclusions: Our participants wholeheartedly agreed with the messages (they thought) we were communicating – that supplying alcohol to teenagers is inappropriate. However, they clearly distanced themselves from that message by perceiving their provision of alcohol to their children as a fundamentally different (and appropriate) behaviour.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The findings of this study have important implications for the development of communication materials and social marketing campaigns targeting underage drinking, and particularly parental supply.

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Presentation 3 – Responsibility is in the eye of the beholder

Introduction and Aims: In Australia, there are no standards for the wording of warning or caution statements on alcohol products. The recent introduction of industry-developed responsibility messages has resulted in debates as to their potential to reduce alcohol related harm vs avoid government mandated messages.

Design and Methods: 180 participants aged 16+ were surveyed via mall intercepts in Melbourne, Victoria (n=90) and Newcastle, NSW (n=90). They were asked to identify the age group(s) referred to in the industry-developed message "kids and alcohol don't mix"; and the meaning of the slogan 'drink properly' (in a still image from the relevant website) from a list of six options.

Results: Only 54% agreed that 'kids' in "kids and alcohol don't mix" included 16-17 year olds (compared to 81% for 13-15 year olds). The most common interpretations of 'drink properly' were 'knowing your limits' (52%) and 'knowing how to handle your alcohol' (39%). However,

24% stated that it meant 'looking cool when you drink' and 21% 'drinking the right kind of alcohol'. Only 16% agreed that it also meant staying sober.

Discussion and Conclusions: It appears that industry-developed responsibility messages are open to different interpretations. "Kids and alcohol don't mix" has potential to be interpreted to include, or exclude, different age groups (rather than a clear message relating to consumption under the age of 18 years). Similarly, 'drink properly' suggests the goal is subjective interpretation of your own 'limits' or being able to 'handle' your alcohol rather than drinking within health guidelines.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The study provides initial evidence that industry-developed responsibility statements are intentionally vague. More research is needed to assess the positive and negative impacts of such messages on drinking, and thus inform development of appropriate messages. Governments should consider the potential risks of industry involvement in strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm.

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Discussion Section: Presentation 1 will engage attendees in a discussion of the key messages that need to be communicated to the community to bring about cultural and policy change and how these could best be developed and disseminated. Presentation 2 will engage attendees in a discussion of how to develop interventions that are perceived by target audiences as 'talking to me' and shift the conversation away from 'other people's' drinking problems. Presentation 3 will engage attendees in a discussion about the nature and effect of responsibility statements and the role of industry in encouraging responsible consumption of alcohol.

The aim of the symposium is to introduce participants to evidence-based social marketing, and the outcome will be for attendees to have a broader understanding of social marketing's role, potential and limitations in addressing alcohol-related harm.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *Prof Jones is the recipient of an ARC Future Fellowship. The research reported in Presentation 2 was funded by the ARC*