

YOUTH VOICES IN ALCOHOL POLICY PROCESSES IN SOUTH AFRICA

SUMMARY

Alcohol misuse remains a major problem amongst South African youth and contributes to sexual health risks including HIV and sexual assault. Action at community and structural level is needed to ensure that youth live in environments which protect them from early and excessive alcohol consumption.

The Soul City Institute for Social Justice (SCI), a STRIVE partner, conducted participatory research and geographic information system (GIS) mapping of alcohol outlets and outdoor advertising, to produce evidence on the availability and advertising of alcohol in two communities in South Africa. Participatory methods were used to explore the impact of alcohol availability and marketing on young people. As a result of SCI's engagement with government, NGO (non-governmental organisations) and research stakeholders at many levels – from local community to national and global – the study findings have been taken up in campaigns for alcohol legislation to restrict and possibly ban alcohol advertising in South Africa.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Youth drinking is a global health problem and South Africa is no exception. Even though it is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 years, about half of all South African adolescents have drunk alcohol. Drinking from an early age has been shown to increase the chances of developing alcohol dependence later in life. Young people are especially vulnerable to health risks such as contracting sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and violence such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence and perpetuating and being a victim of youth violence. Also, alcohol has a negative effect on young people's brains that are still developing until their mid-20s. Despite high levels of youth drinking in South Africa, and the negative health outcomes associated with it, little was known about reasons for high levels of drinking amongst youth, how youth access alcohol and the factors in a young person's environment that encourage them to drink, including marketing and advertising.



An image from SCI's photovoice study. The young photographer's caption: "They say the future is in the hands of the youth and yet adults sometimes lead us into the path of darkness. They indirectly and unknowingly introduce us to alcohol."

In South Africa, alcohol policy and legislation have historically been weak, poorly implemented and not designed to protect youth from alcohol misuse. For example, advertising and marketing of alcohol products is subject to industry self-regulation, which has been shown to be ineffective. A persistent public health question has been: "What alcohol policies should exist to protect the health of the population, including youth?" The Department of Health developed the Control of Marketing and Alcoholic Beverages Bill in 2010 with the intention of banning alcohol advertising. The alcohol and advertising industry opposed the bill and it was never circulated for public comment. A new policy, the National Liquor Amendment Bill developed in 2016 by the Department of Trade and Industry and containing protective proposals, has provoked controversy, with particular resistance from the liquor industry. Previously, these policy debates did not consider the views, perspectives and lived realities of the South African public, particularly youth.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Substantial evidence confirms that youth who are exposed to higher levels of alcohol marketing are more likely to initiate alcohol drinking and partake

in binge drinking and hazardous drinking.¹ There is strong evidence at the international level showing that industry self-regulatory measures on alcohol advertising are ineffective.² Banning or severe restrictions on alcohol marketing represent a structural intervention to decrease youth exposure to alcohol advertising and decrease both initiation of drinking and binge drinking amongst youth.³

RESEARCH

SCI conducted the South African research in STRIVE’s multi-country study of youth and alcohol. (The other two countries that participated were India and Tanzania). The research built on SCI’s previous experience in addressing alcohol misuse in South Africa through research-based social and behaviour change communication interventions.⁴ The STRIVE study addressed the gap in evidence about the impact of alcohol availability in young people’s environments and their experience of alcohol marketing and related health risks. The South African STRIVE research project was a community-based study conducted in a rural and urban area – Nkangala district in Mpumalanga and Tshwane district in Gauteng – and used GIS mapping of alcohol outlets together with participatory photovoice activities to gain an understanding of young people’s exposure to and experiences of alcohol and alcohol marketing. The study found that rural and urban youth are heavily exposed to persuasive and appealing alcohol advertising in their home environment.

“... So, you want to go for it and taste this thing and once you taste, you will end up being drunk and you want to do that forever. So, advertisements are the ones that bring us to alcohol or lead youth to alcohol.”

MALE, MIXED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION, RURAL SITE.

The research demonstrated that easy access to alcohol and low prices facilitate alcohol misuse and related sexual health risks including HIV and sexual violence. According to informants, young women engage in transactional and casual sex, have condomless sex and are at risk of sexual assault after consuming alcohol at alcohol outlets.

RESEARCH UPTAKE PRODUCTS

- **Policy brief: Alcohol Marketing, Youth and Sexual Health risks.** February 2017. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/policy-brief-alcohol-marketing-youth-and-sexual-health-risks>
- **Evidence brief: Alcohol availability, marketing and sexual health risks to youth in South Africa.** September 2017. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/evidence-brief-alcohol-availability-marketing-and-sexual-health-risks-youth-south-africa>
- **Photo-exhibition** containing eight double-sided banners, with 16 photos and their captions grouped into themes.
- **STRIVE Learning Lab webinars:**
 1. Alliance building for alcohol policy change. October 2016. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/knowledge-action-alliance-building-alcohol-policy-change-savera-kalideen>
 2. Youth Perspectives on Alcohol: Availability and marketing in South Africa, Tanzania and India. January 2018. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/youth-perspectives-alcohol-availability-and-marketing-south-africa-tanzania-and-india>

TIMELINE

OCT 2015– JUL 2016	SCI conducted a community-based study of alcohol outlet density and youth perceptions of alcohol and related marketing in an urban and rural area of South Africa
MARCH 2016	The study team held a photo-exhibition in the rural study community (in Mpumalanga province) attended by 48 people including study participants, their family members and representatives of local government, Community Policing Forum, local police station (Liquor Officer), local youth NGOs, liquor traders’ association and the church. SCI presented the study findings; youth investigators explained their photovoice images; and the gathering discussed local actions.
JULY 2016	SCI presented the study findings at the 2016 International AIDS Conference under the title “Using photovoice participatory methods to understand the role of alcohol availability, promotion and affordability on young people’s HIV risk and safety in South Africa”.
JAN 2017	SCI and STRIVE published a policy brief – Alcohol Marketing, Youth and Sexual Health Risks – based on study findings. Three hundred copies were printed and distributed. An online version is available on the SCI and STRIVE websites.

1. Jernigan D et al. Alcohol marketing and youth alcohol consumption: a systematic review of longitudinal studies published since 2008. *Addiction*, 2017; 112, 7-20.

2. Noel J et al. Does industry self-regulation protect young persons from exposure to alcohol marketing? A review of compliance and complaint studies. *Addiction*, 2017; 112 (Suppl. 1): 51–6.

3. Barbor T et al. Toward a public health approach to the protection of vulnerable populations from the harmful effects of alcohol marketing. *Addiction*, 2017; 112 (Suppl1); 125-127.

4. <https://www.soulcity.org.za/projects/advocacy/phuza-wize>

TIMELINE

FEB 2017	SCI held a media briefing on research findings and distributed a press release on 22 February. As a result, a bite from an interview with SCI aired on radio news; study findings were broadcast on an additional five news bulletins; five radio stations aired interviews with SCI/STRIVE researchers (18 minutes length on average, ranging from 5 to 25 minutes), and five online print articles and three newspaper articles were published. Social media coverage via #YouthAndAlcoholAdvertising achieved wide reach and public attention.
APRIL 2017	SCI was invited to share the findings of the study at the regional meeting of the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU), organised by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Research Unit of the South African Medical Research Council (MRC). The presentation resulted in greater visibility of the research findings within and beyond this group of 31 professionals and academics.
MAY 2017	SCI held a panel discussion on young people, alcohol and sexual risk with contributions from SCI, the national Department of Health's Policy for Substance Abuse Unit and the Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance (SAAPA). Attended by 43 representatives of NGOs and government, the meeting discussed the study findings and their policy implications, and resulted in further visibility of study findings through two news bulletins on the national broadcaster (SABC), three online articles, one newspaper article, and one radio interview. SCI produced a series of eight large, double-sided banners for this event, displayed throughout the session.
JUNE 2017	At the 8th South African AIDS Conference, SCI presented on the role of alcohol availability, promotion and affordability on young people's sexuality and HIV risk in South Africa. The double-sided banners were also displayed at the conference and had a powerful impact at subsequent events and meetings with policy makers (Department of Trade and Industry, SAAPA).
AUG 2017	SCI and STRIVE met with SAAPA to discuss ways to ensure that SAAPA and other bodies make best use of the study findings in alcohol policy and advocacy. SCI shared copies of the STRIVE/ SCI policy brief for distribution at SAAPA events.
SEPT 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SCI participated in a SAAPA-organised seminar at the Wits School of Public Health to discuss the case of the South African Breweries (SAB) supporting Stop Hunger Now South Africa (SHNSA). Here, the policy brief and photo-exhibition attracted much interest. One outcome of the meeting was that SAAPA adopt a campaign to reinstate the 2013 Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill. ■ National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) commissioned Genesis Analytics to conduct an assessment of the economic and health impacts of the proposed Liquor Amendment Bill. SCI researchers were interviewed by Genesis on the Youth and Alcohol study findings which, together with an evidence brief, were used in the NEDLAC report (pages 45, 54,91) along with SCI's photovoice images. The NEDLAC report – which finds strong evidence that exposure to alcohol advertising resulted in increased drinking – cites the STRIVE study several times and the Genesis website uses one of the photovoice images to promote the NEDLAC study. ■ SCI produced, printed and distributed a four-page evidence brief of the study findings (550 hard copies in addition to electronic distribution) for use by SAAPA, NGOs, government departments and communities.
OCT 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SCI presented the research findings to the Liquor Law and Policy Unit of the Department of Trade and Industry, and distributed copies of the policy and evidence briefs. ■ The SCI team was invited to present at both the Global Alcohol Policy Conference in Melbourne, Australia, and at a pre-conference symposium on Alcohol and Development. There, Lebohang Letsela gave a paper on Alcohol availability and marketing, and sexual health risk amongst South Africa youth.
DEC 2017	SCI researchers met with the Gauteng Liquor Board to present and discuss the study findings.
JAN 2018	SCI research staff participated in a STRIVE Learning Lab webinar to present the findings and recommendations of the multi-country study.
FEB 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Liquor Amendment Bill, including a ban on alcohol advertising on radio and TV from 6am to 10pm, was read in the South African parliament and entered the cabinet processes. ■ A member of the STRIVE study team was interviewed on 702 radio station, to discuss the new liquor amendment bill and what our research says about young people's drinking and exposure to alcohol marketing.

IMPACT

STRIVE research in South Africa has contributed to making a case for change by bringing in the voices and perspectives of young people affected by the negative impacts of alcohol in their communities.

“It is very hard for the alcohol industry to deny what the voices are saying (from the photovoice research). Voices have a powerful impact, they cannot be dismissed.” SAAPA NATIONAL CO-ORDINATOR

By combining maps of the density of alcohol outlets with youth voices, the study created a clearer picture of the environment within which young people are exposed to alcohol. The research findings were used by Genesis Analytics Consulting in their independent assessment of the health and economic risks and benefits of alcohol law reforms. The study was cited in several places, Photovoice images were used in the report and SCI researchers were interviewed for the assessment.

“We used the Soul City work most in determining youth attitudes to drinking and also in trying to map the economics of drinking in townships and informal settlements. We found both of these areas to be under-researched, and we were grateful for the Soul City research, thank you.” LEAD AUTHOR OF THE GENESIS REPORT

The Genesis assessment was commissioned to inform the National Liquor Amendment Bill which is currently in Parliament and will then go for public comment. The Bill provides for restrictions on advertising of alcohol including during prime time TV and radio. It prohibits alcohol advertising in a number of formats and situations including:

- billboards placed less than hundred (100) meters away from educational institutions, junctions, street corners or traffic circles
- in unsolicited short message service (SMS), multi-media messaging service (MMS), fax or internet pop-up
- in pamphlets
- in and around cinemas and theatres.

HOW DID STRIVE ACHIEVE IMPACT?

Through sustained engagement with the Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance, STRIVE and SCI:

- enabled the dissemination and use of the evidence generated from the alcohol and youth study
- exhibited the photovoice images at key SAAPA and SCI events
- contributed to SAAPA's re-engagement with the Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill as a key priority

Through media briefings, a panel discussion and SCI's strong profile and relationships, STRIVE and SCI:

- maintained the profile of alcohol, youth and policy via print, radio and TV
- helped to keep the issue of alcohol policy in the public discourse, including discussion of an alcohol advertising ban
- promoted dialogue and debate that included youth voices on the issue of alcohol policy and changes to the legal drinking age

Through sharing research findings and engaging with government, this evidence was included in the policy process. The findings were included in an independent report to highlight the role of alcohol advertising on consumption by youth.

NEXT STEPS

The STRIVE research has contributed to the alcohol policy process by adding knowledge on alcohol availability and youth voices to the debate. SAAPA and their alliance partners can achieve ongoing impact by distributing the evidence and policy briefs, and by displaying the photo-exhibition and banners at upcoming SAAPA events and parliamentary hearings. Through SAAPA, NGOs working in the area of alcohol can access and amplify the impact of this evidence and the youth voices it embodies.

Acknowledgements

This case study was prepared by Renay Weiner, Lebohang Letsela and Annie Holmes, with input from Sue Goldstein and Matokgo Makutoane.

STRIVE is supported by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

Suggested citation

Weiner, R, Letsela, L., STRIVE Impact Case Study: Youth Voices In Alcohol Policy Processes In South Africa; Soul City Institute, Johannesburg, South Africa; London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, UK; 2018

