

# Alcohol availability, marketing and sexual health risks to youth in South Africa

A study using GIS mapping and PhotoVoice to understand the environment within which young people drink

EVIDENCE BRIEF

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Youth drinking is a global health problem and South Africa is no exception. Research shows that drinking from an early age increases the chances of developing alcohol dependence later in life.<sup>1</sup> Youth are especially vulnerable to the many health risks that drinking entails. These include contracting sexually transmitted infections and/or HIV, intimate partner violence and perpetuating and/or being a victim of youth violence. In addition, alcohol has a negative effect on brain development that is on going until a person reaches the age of around 25 years.

Even though it is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 years, about half of all South African adolescents report that they have drunk alcohol.<sup>2</sup> Binge drinking, defined as more than five alcoholic drinks within a few hours for males and more than three alcoholic drinks within a few hours for females, is also very common amongst youth, and is on the increase particularly amongst females. Soul City, with the STRIVE Working Group on Alcohol and HIV, conducted this study to investigate the problem of drinking among youth in South Africa and address the following questions:

- What are the reasons for these high levels of drinking amongst youth?
- How do youth access alcohol?
- What are the factors in a young person's environment that encourage them to drink?
- Are youth vulnerable to some of the known risks of alcohol misuse in their communities?

## Why do this study?

This study was conducted to inform the development of policies that better protect youth from alcohol availability and misuse in South Africa. Nationally, debate continues as to 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 2013, which was intended to ban alcohol advertising. The alcohol and advertising industries opposed the bill and although it was approved by cabinet, it was never circulated for public comment. Since then, the new National Liquor Amendment Bill (2016) has been developed by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), which includes a partial ban on alcohol advertising. This bill is under public review. The Bill proposes severe restrictions on advertising alcohol products, prohibits alcohol outlets being located within 500 metres of schools and increases to the legal drinking age from 18 to 21 years. These policy debates tend to take place without considering the views, perspectives and lived realities of the South African public, particularly youth. Very little previous research from South Africa has investigated alcohol availability in young people's environments, their experience of alcohol marketing and their related health risks. Soul City Institute and STRIVE set out to fill this gap.

## How did the study investigate youth alcohol use?

The study used two approaches to understanding the environment in which young people drink.

- **Soul City mapped the number and spread of alcohol-selling outlets** in two South African communities, using Geographical Information System Technology (GIS), and measured the distances of outlets from schools.
- **Soul City explored youth experiences of alcohol availability, advertising, drinking patterns and sexual health**, using PhotoVoice, a qualitative participatory research method. This involved youth taking photos of their experience of alcohol in their communities and then writing a caption to elaborate on the meaning of the visual images. The photographs were used to generate facilitated dialogue and discussion (photo dialogue).

## What is PhotoVoice?

"A participatory action research method based on the understanding that people are experts in their own lives. Using PhotoVoice, participants allow their photographs to raise the questions: Why does this situation exist? Do we want to change it and if so how?"

Wang C, [www.photovoice.com](http://www.photovoice.com)

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>

2. Ramsoomar, L. and Morojele, N. K.(2012). Trends in alcohol prevalence, age of initiation and association with alcohol-related harm among South African youth: implications for policy. *S Afr Med J*, 102, 609-12.

## Where was the study conducted?

The study was conducted in an urban area in Gauteng province and a rural area in Mpumalanga province, so that the experiences of a range of youth could be captured and compared.

## What did this study find?

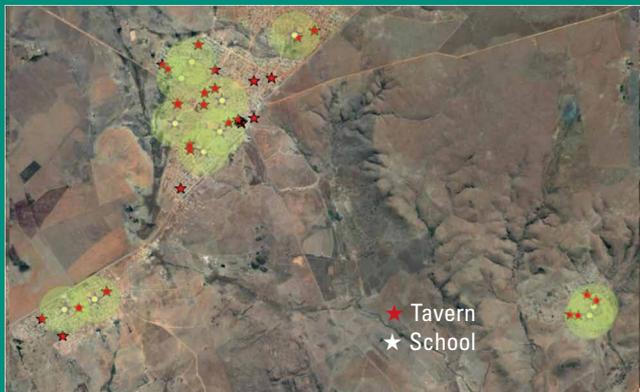
### Alcohol outlets are sited close to schools

The maps showed that in both urban and rural areas there is widespread availability of alcohol and that many outlets are less than the 500 metres from schools. These did not include the unlicensed alcohol outlets in the areas.

#### Urban area



#### Rural area

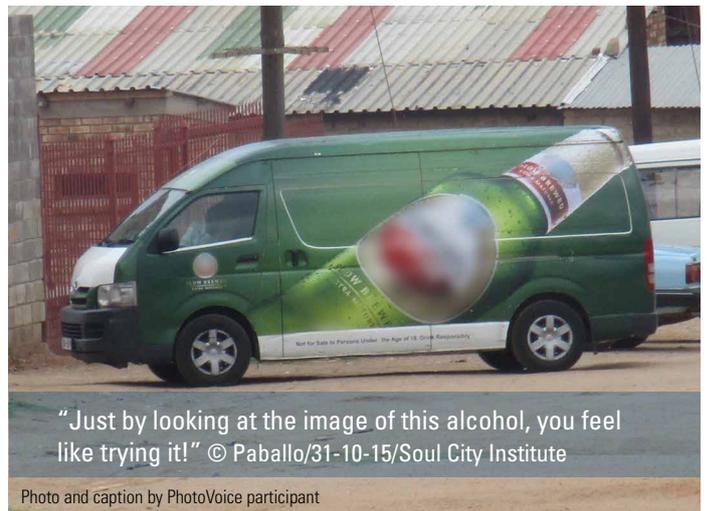


### Alcohol advertising is widespread and attractive to young people

Youth are exposed to multiple forms of alcohol marketing including advertising on TV, social media and outdoor billboards and posters, and at promotional events. Youth are attracted to alcohol advertising because the adverts present images of fun, relaxation, refreshment, friendship and socialising. They find them enticing and appealing, and this makes them want to drink.

“... the first thing that you’ll come across is the big picture and the message [slogan] will be there and you will be like ‘wow’ and then you are sold ...”

(mixed gender group, rural area)



“... 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 gender group, rural site)

### Alcohol is readily available to youth including those under 18 years

Alcohol outlets commonly sell alcohol to children (those under 18 years of age), including when parents send children to buy alcohol for them. Underage drinking is widespread, even during school hours. It is easy for youth to purchase alcohol during break time since it is often sold at the same shops where they buy their lunch, and sellers make little effort to dissuade underage purchase of alcohol.

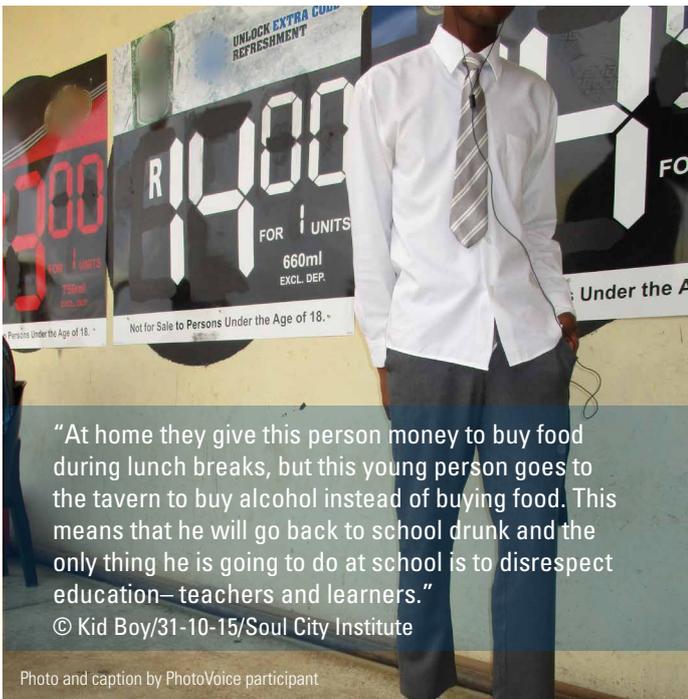
“[They buy at] taverns obviously and most of the taverns are near the schools so it’s easy, even during break time (lunch) it’s easy for me to get alcohol... at the taverns! And [the students] hide it ... And the taverns are near the schools.”  
(male, mixed gender group, rural site)

Taverns seldom conduct age verification checks and so young people have easy access to them. Low prices and discounts help make alcohol affordable for youth.

“There are schools and taverns like in the same street ... the fact is we are exposed to it like in our daily lives.” (female, mixed gender group, urban site)

### Young people identify condomless, unplanned and regretted sex as risky behaviours that result from binge drinking

Youth indicated that they cannot make clear decisions after consuming alcohol. This includes decisions about whether to have sex, whether to use a condom and, if at a tavern, who accompanies young women home. Drinking at taverns leads to sexual dis-inhibition. Young women reported that they make different decisions if they do not consume alcohol.



“... and these guys also decided to buy them (alcohol) as well. These guys they like to take advantage when these girls are drunk. And these girls are young. And I don't think that when the tavern closes they will want to go or walk home alone, just the two of them. Obviously they will offer to accompany them and that will be the start of things.” (female group, rural site)

### At taverns, sex in exchange for alcohol is a common experience

If someone buys alcohol for a woman at a tavern, there is often an expectation that she will have sex with that person. Young women can seldom afford to repay the purchase of alcohol. Sometimes, accepting a drink is part of an existing relationship in which a range of gifts including alcohol are exchanged for sex. This in turn promotes drinking and sexual dis-inhibition.

“Yah and you tend to think that because you bought her alcohol. Now she owes you. So it becomes a problem.”  
(male group, urban site)

### Women, including young women, are at risk of sexual violence when drunk

Drinking makes young women more vulnerable to sexual assault since they are not able to assert their wishes (and in some cases may 'pass out') and may be raped.

“... when they realise that you want to run, they are going to kick you and if they get you they are going to rape you ... when you are intoxicated, you are unable to fight him back. They say alcohol hit you in the knees and you are not able to fight him off.” (female group, urban site)

When women walk to or from taverns, as is commonly the case in rural areas, there is an additional risk of sexual assault.



### National Liquor Norms and Standards

In 2015, national liquor norms and standards were enacted under the current Liquor Act, 2003. The purpose of the norms and standards are to 1) ensure that liquor regulations and practices are harmonised, 2) facilitate effective and uniform enforcement, 3) promote consistency in the application of the law and 4) to decrease the socio-economic and other costs of alcohol abuse by decreasing access and availability of liquor.<sup>3</sup> Organisations, communities and individuals all have a role to play in implementing the norms and standards.

#### Stipulations

- Traders must check IDs of young people – traders who repeatedly serve to under-age drinkers can have their trading licence revoked
- It is an offence for adults (not just traders) to supply alcohol to under-age young people
- Traders must not sell alcohol to someone who is already drunk
- All traders must pay tax and have a valid tax certificate
- Licensed premises can only sell alcohol to be consumed on the premises – not for take-away
- Free drinking water must be made available at all outlets

- Toilets must be provided for each gender (free of charge)
- Disability facilities must be provided
- Condoms must be freely available on site
- No weapons or sharp objects must be allowed on site
- The trader must ensure that noise pollution does not disturb the surrounding area
- The trader must ensure that the surrounding area is not littered
- Drinking and sales can only be done within the premises – not on the surrounding streets

#### Trading hours (applicable in areas where the municipal by-laws are not enforced)

##### Residential areas

Outlets: Monday to Saturday 10am to 9pm  
Sunday 10am to 5pm

Accommodation 10am to midnight

##### Business zone

Outlets: Monday to Sunday 10am to midnight  
Nightclubs 6pm to 6am

##### Special events

Business Zone 10am to midnight  
Residential area 10am to 10pm

3. Department of Trade and Industry, Liquor Act, 2003.

## Call for action: What can you do?

### Organisations

- ✓ Speak out against the availability of alcohol to youth and marketing of alcohol products to youth.
- ✓ Form alliances with other organisations to promote safer alcohol policies, including those that ban or restrict alcohol marketing and promotions.
- ✓ Be informed and train others on the national liquor norms and standards.
- ✓ Write submissions when the National Liquor Amendment Bill and other alcohol-related legislation goes to parliament and public comment is requested.
- ✓ Write submissions to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Industry Association for Responsible Alcohol Use (ARA) to object to alcohol adverts that target youth.
- ✓ Develop public education campaigns and communication materials with messages directed at youth and communities, in order to raise awareness about the negative effects of alcohol misuse and alcohol advertising.

### Communities

- ✓ Involve community leaders in actions to address alcohol and seek their support.
- ✓ Participate in decisions to grant new licences and object to new liquor licences if there are already too many liquor outlets in the area.
- ✓ Work in partnership with the Community Policing Forum and tavern owners/liquor traders to ensure that alcohol outlets comply with the by-laws/National Liquor Norms and Standards in terms of opening hours, not selling to under-age persons, having condoms available and noise disturbance.
- ✓ Report misleading and misplaced adverts to the Advertising Standards Authority, such as alcohol billboards that children are exposed to, including those that are close to schools.
- ✓ Make community members, especially youth, aware of the real intentions of the industry – i.e. to increase sales through increasing consumption and to target groups that are not yet drinkers such as youth and young women.

- ✓ Report illegal sales (such as to those who are under-age) to the liquor licensing authority.
- ✓ Don't accept social responsibility funding for community development from the alcohol industry since this is designed to promote the industry, undermining safer drinking spaces and healthier communities.
- ✓ Help make drinking places safer and publish success stories in the local newspaper.
- ✓ Use community radio to promote safer environments.

### Individuals

- ✓ Be a change agent by opposing unsafe policies and practices in your community, including taverns, schools and workplaces.
- ✓ Model safe drinking behaviour to youth in your family and community.
- ✓ As parents of adolescents, ensure that alcohol is not available at social events/parties that your children attend.
- ✓ If you are over 18 years of age and consume alcohol, ensure you are involved in safe drinking – i.e. drinking with people you know and trust, in places you know are safe and close to home and/or where you can get safe transport home.
- ✓ Say no if you have had enough and do not drink more than you want to.

### Making drinking places safer

- Ensure good lighting both inside and outside
- Provide clean toilets, separate for males and females
- Do not allow overcrowding
- Sell food and water
- Make condoms available and display safe sex messages
- Check IDs routinely to verify age and allow only persons 18 years or older
- Do not sell alcohol to intoxicated individuals or to visibly pregnant women

## Resources

### Relevant websites and contact details

- Soul City:
  - [www.soulcity.org.za/media/materials/alcohol](http://www.soulcity.org.za/media/materials/alcohol)
  - [www.soulcity.org.za/projects/advocacy/phuza-wize/news/news](http://www.soulcity.org.za/projects/advocacy/phuza-wize/news/news)
  - [www.soulcity.org.za/projects/advocacy/phuza-wize/resources/articles](http://www.soulcity.org.za/projects/advocacy/phuza-wize/resources/articles)
- STRIVE: <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/themes/alcohol-and-hiv>
- Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance: <http://saapa.net/> and [saapa.southafrica@gmail.com](mailto:saapa.southafrica@gmail.com)
- MRC: [www.mrc.ac.za/adarg/adarg.htm](http://www.mrc.ac.za/adarg/adarg.htm)

- Sonke Gender Justice: [www.genderjustice.org.za/card/liquor-amendment-bill-2016-explained/sonkes-submission-bill/](http://www.genderjustice.org.za/card/liquor-amendment-bill-2016-explained/sonkes-submission-bill/)
- Child Welfare: [www.childwelfare.org.za/](http://www.childwelfare.org.za/)
- FAMSA: 011 9757107
- Lifeline: 0861322322
- AA: 0861435722

### Soul City booklets

- Alcohol marketing in South Africa. A resource guide for journalists. 2011
- PhuzaWize Drink Safe. Live Safe
- Alcohol and You, 2007

[www.soulcity.org.za](http://www.soulcity.org.za) | <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk>

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