

## Alcohol Industry Sponsorship and Hazardous Drinking in UK University Sport

May 2014

### Key findings

- Around one third of students surveyed said they or their sports team was in receipt of alcohol industry sponsorship
- Being in receipt of alcohol sponsorship was associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption, and higher likelihood of both hazardous and dependent drinking

### Research team

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### Background

Research from the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, suggests that sportspeople, and especially university sportspeople, drink in a more hazardous manner than their non-sporting peers and the general population (Martens et al., 2006; O'Brien et al. 2005; O'Brien et al., 2010; Wechsler et al., 1997). One study examining drinking in English university sportspeople has found that hazardous drinking in sportspeople was greater than in their non-sporting peers (Partington et al., 2013). However, there has been no research examining whether alcohol industry sponsorship is associated with more hazardous drinking in UK sportspeople, or indeed in any other European sporting samples. In its response to the 2010 Health Select Committee report on alcohol, the UK Government called for more evidence to be provided on the effects of alcohol marketing (UK Government, 2010). Others have also highlighted the importance of such evidence to alcohol policy debates and decisions (Rehm and Kanteres, 2008; Kypri et al., 2009). The present study sought to contribute to this debate by providing evidence on the relationship between alcohol industry sponsorship and hazardous drinking in sportspeople.

A sample of 2048 university-based sportspeople (females  $n = 891$ , 44%; males  $n = 1157$ , 56%) from five UK regions was recruited for this study. Participants completed a short questionnaire including the World Health Organisation's Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and items assessing receipt of alcohol industry sponsorship. Participants who reported receiving alcohol industry sponsorship were asked to report whether they, their team, or club, sought out alcohol-related industry sponsorship (sponsorship seeking), or whether they, their team, or club, were independently approached by an alcohol-related industry offering sponsorship.

Multiple linear regression adjusting for age, gender, location, disposable income, was used to examine associations between different levels of alcohol industry sponsorship (team, club, team and club, and personal/individual sponsorship combinations), and drinking outcomes. Multiple linear regression adjusting for age, gender, location, disposable income, was also used to examine associations between alcohol sponsorship seeking behaviour and alcohol consumption scores. Multiple logistic regression adjusting for age, gender, location, disposable income, was used to establish whether receipt of alcohol industry sponsorship was associated with greater odds of being classified as a hazardous drinker and alcohol dependent.



## Findings

81 participants (4%) were alcohol abstainers. Among the remaining sample AUDIT scores were high compared with studies using AUDIT to assess drinking in UK university students (Partington et al., 2013). 84% had an AUDIT score of 8 or above; 42% had a score of 16 or above; and 20% had a score of 20 or above. Male sportspeople reported significantly higher alcohol consumption and AUDIT-total scores than females, along with higher rates of alcohol dependence; however, there was no statistical difference between males and females in hazardous drinking. 36% (n = 592) of the sample were in receipt of alcohol industry sponsorship. The final model indicated that sportspeople receiving alcohol industry sponsorship had significantly higher alcohol consumption scores than those sportspeople who did not. In particular, those sponsored at the level of team, club, both team and club, or personal/individual combinations, on average, had alcohol consumption scores of 1.52 points, 2.16 points, 2.47 points, and 3.73 points higher, respectively, than sportspeople not sponsored by an alcohol industry.

We also tested the hypothesis that heavier drinking sportspeople may preferentially seek out alcohol industry sponsorship. After adjusting for all other variables in regression models, those seeking out sponsorship did not have significantly greater alcohol consumption than those who were approached by a alcohol industry sponsor.

## Implications

There is vigorous debate in several countries over the need for bans on alcohol advertising and sponsorship, with calls for more evidence to inform these debates. The present study provides some evidence from the UK, and shows that receipt of alcohol sponsorship in UK sportspeople is associated with more problematic drinking after accounting for numerous confounders. Taken together with recent longitudinal research showing that indirect exposure to alcohol sponsorship in sport influences children's drinking expectancies and behaviour (de Bruijn et al., 2012), and the high levels of hazardous drinking among university sports teams, policy makers and sports administrators should consider whether the potential long term harms outweigh the financial benefits of alcohol sponsorship.

## Further Information

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