

# Underage youth and adults differ in their alcohol brand preferences

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(Medical Xpress)—Youth are not merely mimicking the alcohol brand choices of adults, suggesting that other factors may influence their drinking preferences. This is the conclusion of a new report comparing the alcohol brand preferences of underage drinkers and adults from the Boston University School of Public Health and the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The report, published online by *Substance Abuse*, is the first study to compare brand-specific consumption of alcohol between underage youth and adults. The researchers identified several brands that appear to be disproportionately consumed by youth, including Keystone Light beer, Bacardi malt beverages, Malibu rum, Captain Morgan rum and Smirnoff malt beverages.

Previous research from the authors documented the top alcohol brands consumed by underage youth. By examining the brand-specific drinking patterns of adults, the researchers were able to assess whether youth are simply copying what they see adults drink.

"Underage drinkers are not just adopting the brand choices modeled by their parents or other adults," said lead study author Michael Siegel, MD, MPH, professor of Community Health Sciences at the Boston University School of Public Health. "Other factors are influencing which brands of alcohol young people are consuming."

Each year, approximately 4,300 people under 21 die as a result of alcohol use, and [underage drinking](#) costs an estimated 24.6 billion dollars. More than 70 percent of high school students report having consumed alcohol and about 22 percent report having engaged in heavy episodic drinking.

Three data sources were used to estimate youth, adult, and overall consumption of alcohol by brand: a 2012 internet-based survey of underage drinkers ages 13-20; GFK MRI's Survey of the Adult Consumer for the years 2010-2012 which provides brand-specific consumption data for adults; and national data compiled by Impact Databank to estimate overall market shares for each brand. Researchers calculated prevalence ratios for each brand, defined as the ratio of the percent of youth that reported drinking the brand compared to what market research reports for adults.

Results show that 15 leading brands among youth had disproportionate underage youth consumption as measured by prevalence, market share, and ratios of prevalence and market share: Smirnoff Malt Beverages, Jack Daniels Whiskeys, Mike's Malt Beverages, Absolut Vodkas, Heineken, Bacardi Malt Beverages, Grey Goose Vodkas, Malibu Rums, Keystone Light, Patron Tequilas, Corona Extra Light, Jack Daniel's Cocktails, Burnett's Vodkas, Bud Ice and Natural Ice beer.

The top brand for youth in terms of prevalence and market share compared with adults was Smirnoff Malt Beverages:

- Seventeen percent of youth drinkers (ages 13-20) reported drinking Smirnoff Malt Beverages in the past month (the highest of any brand).
- These beverages accounted for close to three (2.9) percent of youth alcohol consumption in the youth survey.
- These beverages took up a share of youth consumption that was

nearly 7 times (6.7) their share of adult consumption.

- The researchers caution that the findings of this paper are not sufficient to confirm the reasons for differences in [youth](#) and adult alcohol brand preferences.

"Future research is urgently needed to understand to what extent other factors such as price, taste and marketing play a role in young people's choices of these particular brands," said study co-author David Jernigan, CAMY director. "Follow-up studies will allow us to measure the degree of association between exposure to [alcohol](#) advertising and marketing efforts and brand preferences in young people."

**More information:** "Differences in Alcohol Brand Consumption between Underage Youth and Adults—United States, 2012," Michael Siegel, MD, MPH, Kelsey Chen, BA , William DeJong, PhD, Timothy S. Naimi, MD, MPH, Joshua Ostroff, BA, Craig S. Ross, MBA and David H. Jernigan, PhD. *Substance Abuse*, 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/08897077.2014.883344](#)

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