

# Awareness of alcohol marketing among adolescents in Scotland

## Findings from the 2017 and 2019 Youth Alcohol Policy Surveys

Research routinely [suggests a causal link](#) between exposure to alcohol marketing and alcohol use among young people. The Scottish Government included two commitments about marketing in its [2018 Alcohol Framework](#): (1) to consult on the appropriateness of a variety of measures, including mandatory controls, to reduce exposure among children and young people in Scotland; and (2) to press the UK Government to implement a 9pm watershed for alcohol advertising on television and restrict cinema advertising for alcohol, or devolve the powers for Scotland to do so.

Up-to-date evidence on awareness of alcohol marketing among young people is key to informing the forthcoming Scottish Government consultation. In this briefing, we present data examining: (1) awareness of alcohol marketing among adolescents in Scotland; (2) changes in marketing awareness between 2017 and 2019; and (3) what factors are associated with seeing alcohol marketing.

### Key findings

- In both survey waves, around 90% of adolescents recalled seeing at least one instance of alcohol marketing in the past month (Appendix 1).
- In both waves, awareness was highest for television adverts, special price offers, celebrity endorsement, sport and event sponsorship, and billboards. Across both waves, around three fifths to three quarters of adolescents recalled seeing alcohol marketed these ways in the past month (Fig. 1; Appendix 1).
- Past month awareness of alcohol marketing did not differ significantly between waves, either overall or for each individual marketing activity (Appendix 1).
- After controlling for age, gender, survey wave, and level of area deprivation, susceptible never-drinkers were approximately twice as likely to recall seeing at least one instance of alcohol marketing in the past month versus non-susceptible never-drinkers, while current drinkers who consumed at lower-risk were around 2.5 times more likely to recall seeing at least one instance of marketing than non-drinkers/never-drinkers (Appendix 2).
- After controlling for age, gender, survey wave, and level of area deprivation, current drinkers consuming at higher risk were around 3.2 times more likely to recall seeing at least one instance of alcohol marketing versus all other consumption groups (Appendix 2).

### Study

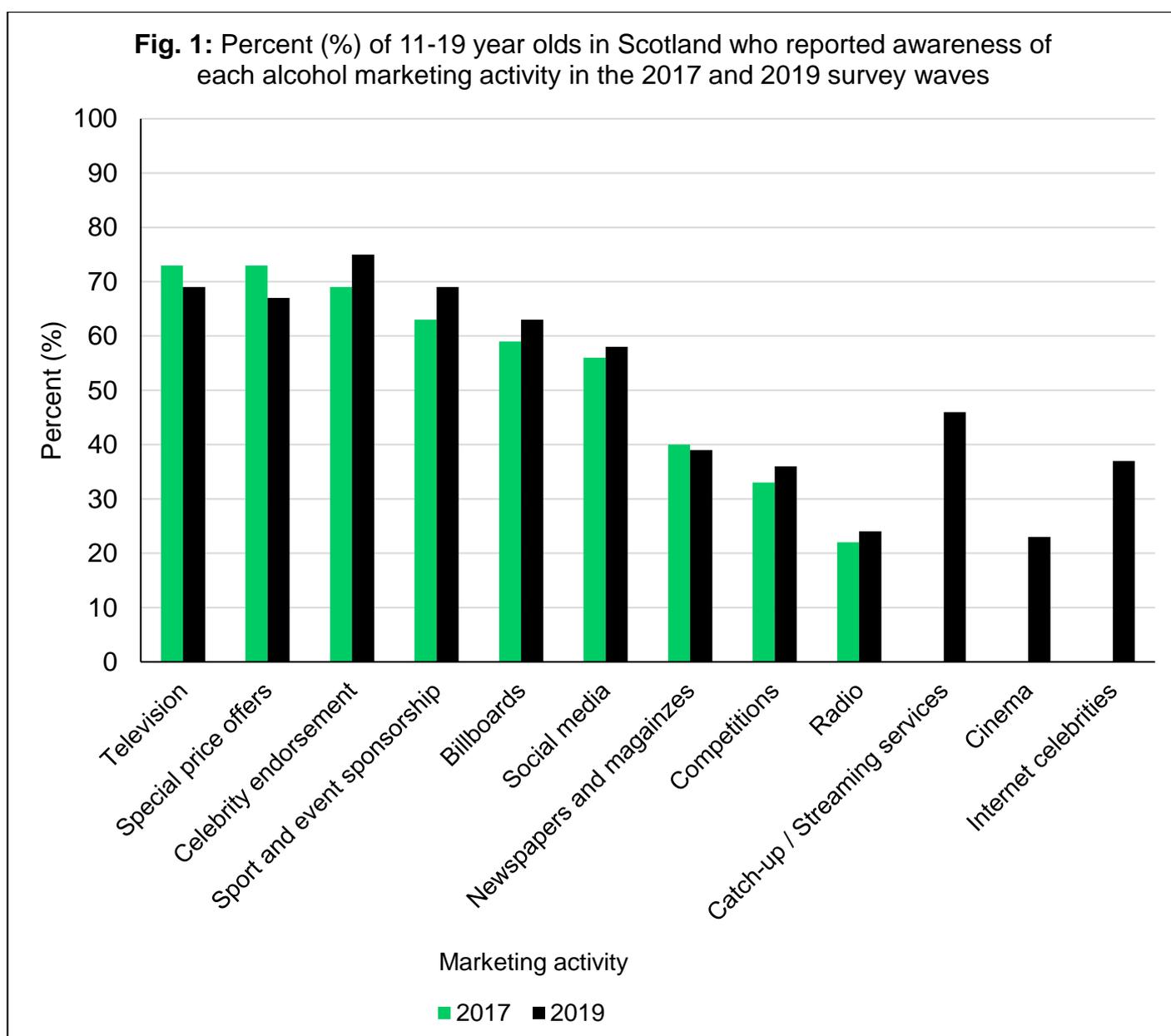
The data come from the first two waves of the Youth Alcohol Policy Survey, a repeat cross-sectional survey of 11-to-19-year-olds from across the UK. The survey is commissioned by Cancer Research UK and conducted in partnership with the Institute for Social Marketing and Health at the University of Stirling. The data is collected by YouGov from their non-probabilistic online panel. [Further survey details are reported elsewhere.](#)

Wave one data were collected April to May 2017 and Wave two data collected September to November 2019. The data in this briefing come from both waves, but focus only on adolescents in Scotland (2017  $n=424$ ; 2019

$n=418$ ). The descriptive data are weighted, by the research team at the University of Stirling, to reflect the age, gender, and area deprivation of 11-to-19-year-olds in Scotland, in line with mid-year population estimates for [2017](#) and [2019](#) (Appendix 3).

In each survey wave, adolescents were asked to self-report how often, if at all, they recalled seeing alcohol marketed through a variety of activities in the past month (Fig. 1; Appendix 1). Nine activities were measured in both waves, while three new activities were added in 2019. Here we focus on whether participants recalled past month awareness of each individual marketing activity and past month awareness of any of the nine activities measured in both waves.

The surveys also asked adolescents about their alcohol use, using measures reported in detail [elsewhere](#). In summary, adolescents were categorised as one of: (1) never drinkers who firmly rejected they would start drinking in the next year ('non-susceptible'); (2) never drinkers who did not firmly reject that they may drink in the next year ('susceptible'); (3) those who had tried alcohol, but did not currently drink (past/non-drinkers); (4) current drinkers consuming at lower risk<sup>1</sup>; and (5) current drinkers consuming at higher risk<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Defined using the AUDIT-C ( $\leq 4$  = lower risk;  $\geq 5$  = higher risk)

## Implications for policy and practice

- Most adolescents surveyed in Scotland recalled seeing at least one form of alcohol marketing in the past month, and awareness was more likely among those susceptible to start drinking (vs. not susceptible) or current drinkers who reported consuming at higher risk (vs. all other consumption groups).
- These awareness trends corroborate data also collected by ISMH more than a decade [previously](#), thus suggesting exposure to alcohol marketing among adolescents in Scotland represents a long-term trend. This previous research [has also shown](#) a longitudinal association between marketing and alcohol use among adolescents in Scotland.
- The data will inform the forthcoming Scottish Government consultation about introducing new controls, including potential mandatory restrictions, on alcohol marketing.
- The data are self-reported and not exhaustive of all the ways that adolescents may be exposed to, or can participate with, alcohol marketing. As such, they likely underestimate overall exposure to alcohol marketing.

## About this research

This briefing is based on research commissioned by Cancer Research UK and carried out by the Institute for Social Marketing and Health at the University of Stirling (Funding ID: 1511624). The research was led by:

- Dr Nathan Critchlow, Institute for Social Marketing and Health, University of Stirling.
- Anne Marie MacKintosh, Institute for Social Marketing and Health, University of Stirling.
- Jessica Newberry Le Vay, Policy and Implementation Research, Cancer Research UK.

**UNIVERSITY of  
STIRLING**



**CANCER  
RESEARCH  
UK**

**Institute for  
Social Marketing  
& Health**

## Contact

Dr Nathan Critchlow  
Institute of Social Marketing and Health  
Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport  
University of Stirling  
Scotland  
✉ [nathan.critchlow@stir.ac.uk](mailto:nathan.critchlow@stir.ac.uk)

**Appendix 1:** Awareness of alcohol marketing in the past month among 11–19-year-olds in Scotland and comparison between the 2017 and 2019 waves

	Recalled seeing at least one alcohol marketing activity in the past month					
	2017		2019		Chi-Square	
Marketing activity <sup>1</sup>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
Adverts for alcohol...						
...in newspapers or magazines	40	117	39	128	0.15	n.s.
...on television	73	249	69	243	1.07	n.s.
...on catch-up or streaming services <sup>2</sup>	-	-	46	142	-	-
...at the cinema <sup>2</sup>	-	-	23	74	-	-
...on billboards	59	180	63	212	1.22	n.s.
...on radio	22	62	24	79	0.34	n.s.
...on YouTube, Tumblr, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram or other social media	56	167	58	194	0.19	n.s.
Famous people in films, music videos, on TV or pictured in magazines with alcohol	69	217	75	254	2.54	n.s.
Sport and event sponsorship	63	206	69	232	2.68	n.s.
Special offers	73	231	67	227	3.32	n.s.
Competitions	33	94	36	119	0.56	n.s.
Seen internet celebrities (e.g., YouTubers) talking about, or promoting, an alcohol brand <sup>2</sup>	-	-	37	127	-	-
<b>Recalled seeing at least one marketing activity in the past month<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>90</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>n.s.</b>

Footnotes: <sup>1</sup> Base = Those who provided a valid answer to *each* marketing activity in each wave; missing data (i.e., those saying 'not sure' to an activity) are excluded on a test-by-test basis; <sup>2</sup> Activity only measured in 2019, and therefore no between-wave comparison; <sup>3</sup> Base = All participants in both waves; n.s. = Non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ); Data are weighted by the research team at the University of Stirling to reflect the age, gender, and area deprivation of 11-to-19-year-olds in Scotland, in line with mid-year population estimates for [2017](#) and [2019](#).

**Appendix 2.** Binary logistic regression exploring the association between awareness of at least one alcohol marketing activity, demography, survey wave, and drinking status.

	Awareness of any alcohol marketing activity in the past month				
	<i>n</i>	OR <sub>Adj</sub>	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	<i>p</i>
<b>Legal age to purchase alcohol</b>					
No	616	REF			
Yes	179	2.32	0.76	7.02	n.s.
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	401	REF			
Male	394	0.95	0.56	1.63	n.s.
<b>IMD Quintile</b>					
1&2 (most deprived)	279	REF			
3,4,5 (less deprived/more affluent)	516	1.39	0.81	2.38	n.s.
<b>Drinking status</b>					0.003
Non-susceptible never drinker	171	REF			
Susceptible never drinker (vs. non-susceptible never)	212	1.97	1.04	3.74	0.038
Not current drinker but has drunk in past (vs. never drinkers)	39	1.09	0.36	3.29	n.s.
Current drinker low risk (vs. never drinkers and non/past drinkers)	188	2.48	1.12	5.50	0.025
Current drinkers higher risk (vs. all of the above)	185	3.28	1.09	9.83	0.034
<b>Wave</b>					
2017	401	REF			
2019	394	1.57	0.90	2.72	n.s.
Notes:					
Adjusted Odds Ratio (OR <sub>Adj</sub> ); Reference category (REF); 95% confidence interval (95% CI)					
Based on all respondents in Scotland ( <i>n</i> = 795); Data are unweighted					
Cases with missing data on at least one variable ( <i>n</i> =47)					
Dependent variable: Awareness of any alcohol marketing in any one of nine channels: 1 = Aware ( <i>n</i> = 733) and 0 = Not aware ( <i>n</i> = 62)					
Test of model coefficients in final block: $\chi^2(8)=32.05, p<0.001$ .					
Hosmer & Lemeshow for final block $\chi^2(8)=10.05, p=0.262$ .					
Nagelkerke $R^2$ for final block =0.094.					
Cases correctly classified in final block: 92.2% in final block					

**Appendix 3.** Demographics and consumption behaviour of adolescents in Scotland in the 2017 and 2019 Youth Alcohol Policy Surveys

Variable	2017 Unweighted		2017 Weighted		2019 Unweighted		2019 Weighted	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	56	236	51	214	44	182	51	214
Female	44	188	49	210	56	236	49	205
<b>IMD Quintile</b>								
1 (most deprived)	17	71	20	85	17	72	20	84
2	18	76	20	85	20	83	20	84
3	17	71	20	85	19	81	20	84
4	20	83	20	85	16	67	20	84
5 (least deprived)	29	123	20	85	28	115	20	83
<b>Legal purchase age</b>								
No ( $\leq 17$ years)	82	349	76	321	74	309	77	322
Yes ( $\geq 18$ years)	18	75	24	103	26	109	23	96
<b>Current drinker<sup>1</sup></b>								
No	51	214	54	228	57	230	59	242
Yes	49	204	46	191	43	177	41	165
<b>Higher-risk drinker<sup>2</sup></b>								
No (<4 AUDIT-C Score)	59	120	56	106	42	72	43	69
Yes ( $\geq 5$ AUDIT-C Score)	41	84	44	85	58	101	57	93
<b>Susceptibility<sup>3</sup></b>								
Not susceptible	39	75	43	89	53	111	54	118
Susceptible	61	119	57	119	47	98	46	103

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Missing values/not stated: 2017, n=6; 2019, n=11 (unweighted). <sup>2</sup> Base: All current drinkers, Missing values/not stated: 2019, n=4. <sup>3</sup> Base: All never drinkers; Data are weighted by the research team at the University of Stirling to reflect the age, gender, and area deprivation of 11-to-19-year-olds in Scotland, in line with mid-year population estimates for [2017](#) and [2019](#).