



Fewer tobacco products, but not alcohol, in movies

Genevra Pittman Reuters

2:11 p.m. CDT, May 28, 2013

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Movie characters smoke less since 1998 regulations that stopped tobacco companies from buying on-screen brand placements, according to a new study.

But at the same time, researchers found the number of alcohol brand appearances has increased in popular movies rated PG-13 and below, and the amount of time characters spend drinking hasn't changed.

"These results are of great concern," said David Jernigan, head of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

"In movie reality, it seems like every occasion is right for a drink," said Jernigan, who wasn't involved in the new study. And that suggests to young viewers that alcohol is much more common than is actually the case, he said.

"This whole conversation is about normalization of alcohol use," Jernigan told Reuters Health. "Young people are particularly vulnerable to the message that drinking is everywhere."

For the new study, researchers watched the top 100 box office releases of each year between 1996 and 2009 and recorded when a movie character was shown using or handling tobacco or alcohol, and when a particular brand was pictured.

In all, Elaina Bergamini from the Norris Cotton Cancer Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire, and her colleagues recorded 500 tobacco and 2,433 alcohol brand placements in all films combined.

The number of tobacco brand appearances ranged from 54 to 98 per year before 2000, then declined to 22 per year after 2006. The amount of time characters were shown using tobacco also dropped over time in both youth and adult movies.

That suggests the 1998 regulation, part of the Master Settlement Agreement between tobacco companies and U.S. states, successfully stopped the tobacco industry from paying for its products to be shown on screen, the study team wrote in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

On the other hand, alcohol brand appearances in youth-rated movies, in particular, increased from 80 to 145 per year during the study period.

Budweiser was the most common alcohol brand shown in films. Parent company Anheuser Busch did not comment before press time.

Jernigan said that because there's unlikely to be a similar settlement for the beverage industry, any regulation on product placement would have to come from the companies themselves or from the movie industry.

For example, some organizations have suggested movies showing drinking should automatically be rated R.

Concern stems from research tying on-screen smoking and drinking to more of that behavior among youth who watch those movies.

"Children who see smoking in the movies are more likely to initiate smoking," Bergamini told Reuters Health. "I think there is some concern that that may hold true for alcohol as well."

"The notorious thing you find in movies and in TV is heavy drinking without consequences," Jernigan said. "It leaves it up to parents to tell the consequences story."

SOURCE: <http://bit.ly/12e4NIP> JAMA Pediatrics, online May 27, 2013.