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Vodka, Malt Liquor Most Likely to Buy Trip to Emergency Room

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Reviewed by
November 01, 2011

MedPage Today Action Points

- Note that these studies were published as abstracts and presented at a conference. These data and conclusions should be considered to be preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Review

WASHINGTON -- Vodka and malt beverages were the forms of alcohol most likely to have been consumed by patients who wound up at the emergency department seeking treatment for an injury, according to a small study.

In addition, more men than women presented to the ED with injuries after drinking (69% versus 31%), according to the study presented at the American Public Health Association's annual meeting.

Men were also more likely than women to report drinking beer. However, women were more likely to have consumed spirits, wine, champagne, or flavored malt beverages, said lead author David Jernigan, PhD, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Nearly a third of injury-related visits to emergency departments are alcohol-related, said Jernigan, who is director of the institution's Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth.

Jernigan and colleagues wanted to monitor which types of alcoholic beverages were most commonly consumed by people who sought emergency room after sustaining injuries. The conventional wisdom is that it's too cumbersome to collect that kind of data given that there are 900 brands of alcohol on the market, he said.

Jernigan's research assistants camped out an inner-city Baltimore hospital at least one weekend night a week for the better part of a year. They recruited 105 injury victims who had been drinking within the previous six hours.

Causes of injuries included violence, car crashes, and even falling off of a ladder. The survey took place only after a physician certified that each patient was sufficiently

sober to answer questions that would last for several minutes, using a handheld computerized device that listed various types and brands of alcohol.

The age of patients was fairly evenly split between men and women, ranging from 18 to 89. Most (70%) of the patients interviewed were black; 25% were white, 4% were Hispanic, and 2% Alaskan or American Indian.

Whites and Hispanics were more likely to have consumed beer, while blacks were more likely to have consumed flavored malt beverages and malt liquor.

Hard liquors were overrepresented among patients with injuries in the ED, considering that beer and other malt beverages have a far larger market share, the authors stated. Liquors including vodka and gin made up about one-third of the total market for alcoholic drinks, but were responsible for nearly 70% of hospital visits.

Vodka was by far the most common liquor to have been consumed by those surveyed, which wasn't surprising, Jernigan said, because vodka makes up more than 90% of the spirits market.

In a distant second and third were brandy/cognac and gin, which both make up a tiny share of the spirits market, but together were responsible for 20% of the total injury visits to the emergency room.

Malt beverages were consumed by about 27% of the injury patients who had been drinking.

"These data can point attention to specific beverages and beverages types that are disproportionately problematic within a population," Jernigan said. He added that the data can help lawmakers determine which beverages to tax at a higher rate in order to curb their use. Another possibility would be to implement bans on widely consumed beverages that lead to higher alcohol-related injury rates and hospitalization, such as malt liquor, he said.

In terms of brands, the inexpensive McCall's and Barton, as well as Smirnoff vodka, were among the most common alcoholic drinks reportedly ingested by the survey respondents. Popular malt beverage brands were Steel Reserve, Budweiser, and Bud Ice.

Limitations of this study included the small sample size at a single institution, and the lack of synchronicity between data on beverages consumed (2010-2011) and market share data (2009), the group stated.

Another study from the same group examined the damage caused to other people by a person's drinking.

Samantha Cukier, MBA, and colleagues conducted a literature review and found that secondhand effects of drinking alcohol were widespread, ranging from an intoxicated

person pushing another person to causing a serious car accident.

Cukier's definition of the secondhand effects of drinking included:

- Drinking and driving
- Alcohol-fueled physical violence
- Alcohol-fueled emotional violence
- Unplanned sexual behavior
- Workplace incidents
- Chronic disease or disability due to alcohol

Data from a 2009 study found that six in 10 people in the U.S. said they have been harmed in some way by another person's drinking, Cukier reported. A 2010 Canadian study found that the most common "secondhand effect" of drinking was a person reporting being insulted or embarrassed by someone who had been drinking, followed by getting in a serious argument, being verbally abused, and being pushed or shoved.

Cukier said that while a push or shove may not seem serious, the fact that such drinking-related disruptions are so common points to the widespread acceptance of harmful behavior in settings where alcohol is consumed.

Jernigan's study was funded by the CDC.

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