

Children's awareness of alcohol sponsorship of sport in Ireland: Munster Rugby and the 2008 European Rugby Cup

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Abstract

Objectives Examined children's awareness of sport sponsorship in Ireland, focussing on the 2008 European Rugby Cup win by Munster Rugby.

Methods Following the Munster Rugby win in 2008, a cross-sectional sample of 1,175 children (7–13 years) in 11 National Schools in Ireland were asked which company sponsored “the cup that Munster won” and were then asked to name the product made by that company.

Results Significantly higher level of awareness of the sponsor by children in Munster (69.9 %) to those outside Munster (21.5 %). No significant difference in the level of awareness of their product (alcohol) by location (inside Munster 75.9 %, outside Munster 83.6 %).

Conclusions These findings support the view for an immediate introduction of legislation banning the sponsorship of sport.

Keywords Alcohol · Children · Sponsorship · Sport · Ireland

Introduction

The adverse impact of alcohol is well known (Anderson and Baumberg 2006; Anderson et al. 2012; Babor et al. 2003; Department of Health 2012). The threat posed by alcohol use in Ireland is particularly problematic (Department of Health 2012; Lyons et al. 2011; Martin et al. 2010, 2011; Mongan 2010; Mongan et al. 2009). Ireland has one of the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Europe (Anderson and Baumberg 2006; Butler 2006; OECD 2011), with the Irish spending more of their income on alcohol than any other Europeans (Anderson and Baumberg 2006; TNS Opinion and Social 2010). Binge drinking and harmful drinking patterns remain a notable problem in Ireland (Morgan et al. 2009; TNS Opinion and Social 2010). Dangerous alcohol consumption patterns in Ireland result in corresponding high levels of self-harm (National Suicide Research Foundation 2011), accident and emergency presentations (28 % of injuries: Hope 2008), and acute bed occupancy (2,000 beds every night: Department of Health 2012). Estimates for the year 2007 put the costs of alcohol-related healthcare, crime, lost economic output, and road traffic incidents at €1.2 billion, €1.19 billion, €527 million, and €530 million, respectively (Byrne 2011).

In response to the threat posed by alcohol the *Steering Group on a National Substance Misuse Strategy* concluded that “the burden of health harms and the social consequences of harmful use of alcohol demanded the implementation of further measures to protect and preserve public health” (Department of Health 2012). One of the most controversial proposals made by the steering group is a ban on all alcohol sponsorship of both sporting and large outdoor events, as well as a ban on outdoor advertising of alcohol (Department of Health 2012). This proposal echoes an earlier statement by the *Joint Committee on Tourism,*

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Culture, Sport, Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (2010) that stated “We need to change the current conscious and sub-conscious association between sport and alcohol and alcohol and sport in the Irish psyche”.

There is World Health Organisation (WHO) and European Union support for such moves. The Television Without Frontiers Directive prohibits advertising aimed specifically at minors, or which links consumption to “enhanced physical performance” (Anderson and Baumberg 2006). Similarly, the third ethical principle adopted at the WHO Ministerial Conference in Paris in 1995 states that: “All children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption and, to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcoholic beverages” (Anderson and Baumberg 2006). However, the banning of sponsorship by the alcohol industry in Ireland remains a contentious issue (Houghton 2012).

Research exploring the impact of alcohol advertising on teenagers in Ireland has demonstrated the popularity of such advertising, as well as noting that it promoted a desirable lifestyle (Dring and Hope 2001; Irish College of Psychiatrists 2008). A recent HBSC report identified alcohol consumption among children in Ireland as an issue (Kelly et al. 2012), while the Office of Tobacco Control noted an average weekly spend by Irish 16–17-year-olds on alcohol of €20.90 per week (Office of Tobacco Control 2006). Early initiation to alcohol has been identified as being particularly problematic (Palmer and O’Reilly 2008), and delay in initiation to alcohol is a public health priority (Irish College of Psychiatrists 2008).

The final of the Heineken Cup in 2008 was accompanied in Munster by a strong promotional campaign for the home team (Munster Rugby Supporters Club 2012). This involved a schools-based dimension, in which pupils were encouraged to wear red/Munster team jerseys at school (Munster Rugby Supporters Club 2012). No similar promotional campaigns had taken place in other counties either simultaneously or at other times during the competition. There is a lack of research on the issue of children’s knowledge of sponsorship in sport by the alcohol industry in Ireland. The present study examined National School children’s awareness of sponsorship in sport by the alcohol industry, focussing on the 2008 Heineken Cup win by Munster.

Method

Sample

The study included children in classes 2–6. In total, 1,075 participants were involved representing a response rate

from all schools in excess of 90 %. Participants ranged in age from 7–13 years (mean age 10.2 years, SD 1.5). Of these, 524 participants were males (48.7 %), and 551 were females (51.3 %). 791 participants (73.6 %) were attending national schools inside Munster, while 284 (26.4 %) were attending schools outside of Munster.

Questionnaire

A one-page questionnaire was developed to both explore and explain sponsorship in sport (both verbally and using a pictorial example of the County Offaly Hurling team wearing jerseys featuring their sponsor, Carroll’s Meats). Children were asked which company sponsored “the cup that Munster won” and were then asked to name the product made by that company.

Procedure

A list of National schools was obtained from the Department of Education and Science website and one school was randomly selected from each of the six counties within Munster and two from contiguous counties. Where schools had less than 100 pupils, the closest school nearby was also invited to participate. In total, 11 out of 13 schools approached participated in this study. This included at least one school from each county inside Munster as well as schools in counties Galway and Offaly. The fieldwork was conducted within one month of the 2008 Heineken Cup win by Munster.

Results

Of the total sample, 69.9 % of children in Munster identified Heineken as the sponsor (Table 1). More boys (80.6 %, 300/372) than girls (60.4 %, 253/419) in Munster correctly identified the sponsor. In contrast, less than a quarter (21.5 %, 61/284) of children outside Munster identified Heineken as the sponsor.

Children inside Munster were significantly more likely than those outside of Munster to be aware that Heineken were the sponsors ($\chi^2 = 200.129$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 1,075$). Boys were significantly more likely to correctly identify the sponsor than girls ($\chi^2 = 33.167$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 1,075$). This gender difference was significant both within ($\chi^2 = 38.464$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 791$) and outside of Munster ($\chi^2 = 14.962$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 284$). Older children (11–13 years) were also significantly more likely to know that Heineken were the sponsors than younger children (7–10 years; $\chi^2 = 55.538$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 1,075$). This age difference was significant among both children inside

Table 1 Knowledge of the 2008 European Rugby Cup sponsor by age, gender, and location in Ireland

Who funds the cup that Munster won? (Heineken)									All ages
Gender	% Correct (correct/total)	Age							
		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Schools inside Munster									
Combined	45.5 % (5/11)	38.4 % (33/86)	66.0 % (99/150)	70.1 % (119/157)	81.0 % (149/184)	78.3 % (141/180)	69.6 % (16/23)	69.9 % (553/791)	
Boys	80.0 % (4/5)	52.4 % (22/42)	76.3 % (58/76)	79.5 % (66/83)	92.3 % (72/78)	87.8 % (65/74)	92.9 % (13/14)	80.6 % (300/372)	
Girls	16.7 % (1/6)	25.0 % (11/44)	55.4 % (41/74)	59.5 % (44/74)	72.6 % (77/106)	71.7 % (76/106)	33.3 % (3/9)	60.4 % (253/419)	
Schools outside Munster									
Combined	7.1 % (1/14)	10.0 % (5/50)	10.0 % (6/60)	23.1 % (12/52)	39.6 % (19/48)	29.4 % (15/51)	33.3 % (3/9)	21.5 % (61/284)	
Boys	12.5 % (1/8)	16.1 % (5/31)	18.2 % (6/33)	34.6 % (9/26)	53.8 % (14/26)	37.5 % (9/24)	50.0 % (2/4)	30.3 % (46/152)	
Girls	0 % (0/6)	0 % (0/19)	0 % (0/27)	11.5 % (3/26)	22.7 % (5/22)	22.2 % (6/27)	20.0 % (1/5)	11.4 % (15/132)	

($\chi^2 = 30.212$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 791$) and outside Munster ($\chi^2 = 16.878$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 284$).

Approximately three-quarters of children that correctly identified the sponsor were aware that Heineken sold alcohol (76.7 %, 471/614). Although this figure was lower within Munster (75.9 %, 420/553; boys = 74.0 %, 222/300; girls = 78.3 %, 198/253), than outside of the province (83.6 %, 51/61; boys = 84.8 %, 39/46; girls = 80.0 %, 12/15) the difference was not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.23$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.063$, $n = 614$; boys $\chi^2 = 0.335$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.562$, $n = 346$; girls $\chi^2 = 0.003$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.956$, $n = 268$).

Discussion

The present study examined National School children’s awareness of sponsorship in sport by the alcohol industry, focussing on the 2008 Heineken Cup win by Munster. A significant proportion of the children were clearly aware that Heineken was the sponsor in question. Moreover, the majority of the children that correctly identified the sponsor were able to correctly identify their product as alcohol. This effect was strongest among older boys living in Munster: a key future demographic market for the sponsors.

The present findings clearly attest to the success of the general promotional campaign for the Heineken Cup in 2008, and specifically for the schools based dimension, in which pupils were encouraged to wear red/Munster team jerseys at school (Munster Rugby Supporters Club 2012). Clearly, for many of the children involved in the study, Munster Rugby was associated with the Heineken Cup, which in turn was associated with alcohol. Such findings clearly demonstrate the power of alcohol advertising in sport. The present findings are limited as the cross-sectional survey design does not allow for any follow up of respondents’ awareness over time, or indeed how this awareness may influence the respondents’ future drinking patterns. Moreover, as the schools in the study were randomly selected, no attempt was made to match the schools on possible confounds (e.g., social economic status, parents’ drinking patterns, etc.).

Future research may wish to explore further children’s knowledge of sponsorship in other sports by the alcohol industry in Ireland. Such work should have a temporal component to assess the long term impact of such awareness. In light of the damaging effects of alcohol on children (Dring and Hope 2001; Irish College of Psychiatrists 2008; Kelly et al. 2012), the present findings provide further support for the call for an immediate introduction of comprehensive legislation banning the sponsorship of sport by the alcohol industry in Europe.

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