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Collaboration for Harm Reduction and Alcohol Safety in the Environment in Southern Africa

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FRAMING THE NARRATIVE ON HARMS FOR CHILDREN: POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY TO AVOID BLAME AND EXTERNALISE RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract:

Background:
The alcohol industry faces growing criticism over its role in alcohol-related harms, particularly for children through prenatal exposure and marketing practices. Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), underage drinking and secondary outcomes arising in children from adult drinking, including abuse and injuries, remain major public health concerns, particularly in South Africa. Evidence shows that, globally, the alcohol industry evades responsibility for alcohol-related harm to children.

Methods:
To understand how alcohol industries deflect responsibility, we conducted a scoping critical review of the existing literature, including industry communications, marketing campaigns, and sustainability reports, to examines how alcohol industry actors frame alcohol-related harms to children.

Findings:
The alcohol industry employs strategies with (1) strong emphasis on corporate philanthropy and economic contributions (2) focus on responsible drinking messages while framing harms as societal or individual problems, and (3) distancing the industry from harm-related discourses by outsourcing responsibility for child-related harms, including FASD, through educational programmes that blame alcohol related harm on personal choice rather than alcohol environmental and structural risk.

Conclusion:
Industry messaging positions themselves as socially responsible while ignoring harm towards children and deflecting accountability. These findings reveal a deliberate political strategy employed by the alcohol industry to shape public discourse and mispresent alcohol's role in child-related harms. In order to address structural drivers of harm effectively, policymakers and public health advocates must critically assess

evidence on the impact of alcohol on children and evaluate the alcohol industry strategies that deflect responsibility from alcohol-related harm on children.

Topic: Economic and social effects of alcohol and alcohol policies
Harm to others and alcohol policies

Keywords: Children, alcohol industry, alcohol-related harm