Framing alcohol-related harms to children: A scoping Review of the alcohol industry strategies to avoid blame and externalise responsibility

SACENDU WC,
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(Collaboration for Harm Reduction and Alcohol Safety in the Environment in Southern Africa)

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What is FRAMING?
Why is it important?

Who is Responsible ? What role do they play?







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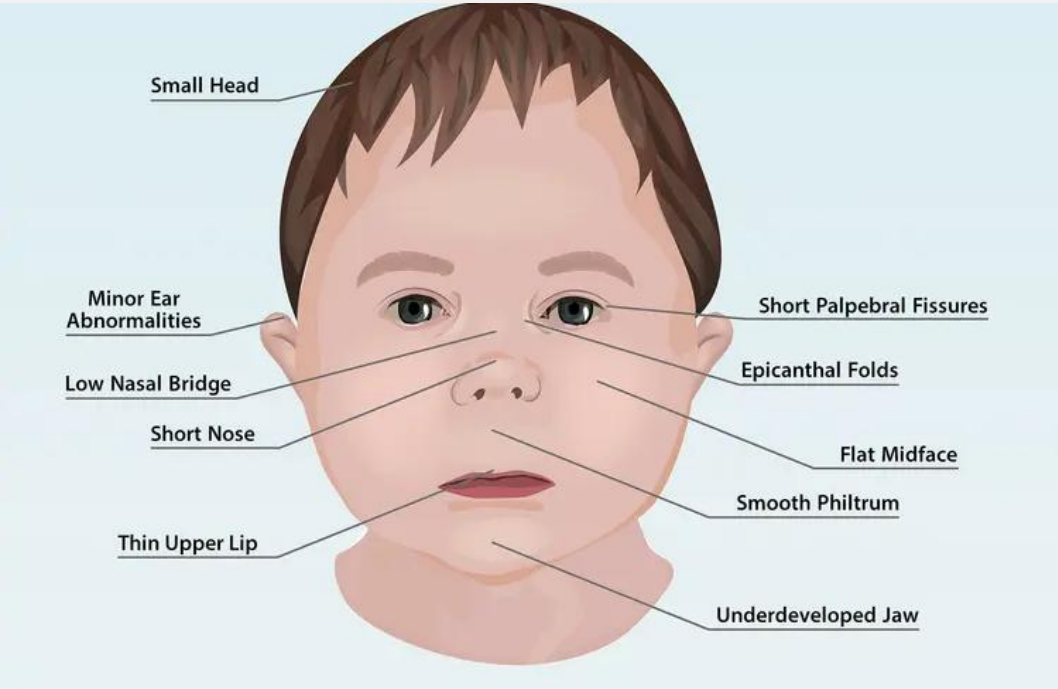
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Background

FASD

- Umbrella diagnosis- life long neurobehavioral disorder/conditions associated with alcohol use during pregnancy.



- Alcohol harms to children are a global public health issue
- Globally- 7.7 per 1000 children diagnosed
- SA- Highest rate globally
- Between 29-290 per 1000 live births (NSAAC, 2025)
- SA- WC & NC provinces

- Between 200-310 per 1000 live births

- 20-31% in some SA communities (history: e.g. Dob systems)

(National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children (NSAAC) 2025),

(Lange et al., 2017)

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- **Underage drinking**

- LMICs- Increased access to alcohol to minors
- HIC - UK 65% of 15 year olds have used alcohol
  - 40 % have been drunk before
  - USA & Australia 30% minors consumed had used alc <- year

- **Secondary harms**

- Children in Low income comm bear the brunt of alcohol harms in SA
- Children harmed by drinking adults

- **Varying harms**: Abuse, Road accidents 36%; homicide 20%; unintentional injuries e.g. burns, drowning 27%, Suicide

(National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children (NSAAC) 2025),(Esposito et al., 2025).

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Aim and Objectives

- How do alcohol industry actors frame alcohol-related harms to children in public and policy discourse (in South Africa) (-including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), underage drinking, and secondary harms arising from adult alcohol use)?

1. How alcohol industry actors frame harms to children
2. How alcohol industry actors position their roles and responsibilities in relation to alcohol-related child harms,
3. Implications for policy and accountability

Methods: Scoping Review

Harms Focus: *(1) FASD; (2) Underage drinking and (3)harms arising from adult drinking*

Followed Arksey and O'Malley five stages of review.

Primary Research: PubMed, Scopus, and EBSCOhost

Secondary search: *Industry:* AB InBev (including SAB-Miller), Diageo, Heineken. SAPROS: Aware.org, Drinks Federation of South Africa (DF-SA) and the South African Liquor Brand Owners Association (ALBA)- Sustainability, CSR reports and campaign materials.

Expert consultations – yet to be done – Prof. Leslie has contributed.

Incl/Exc criteria

- Nuggets of info that

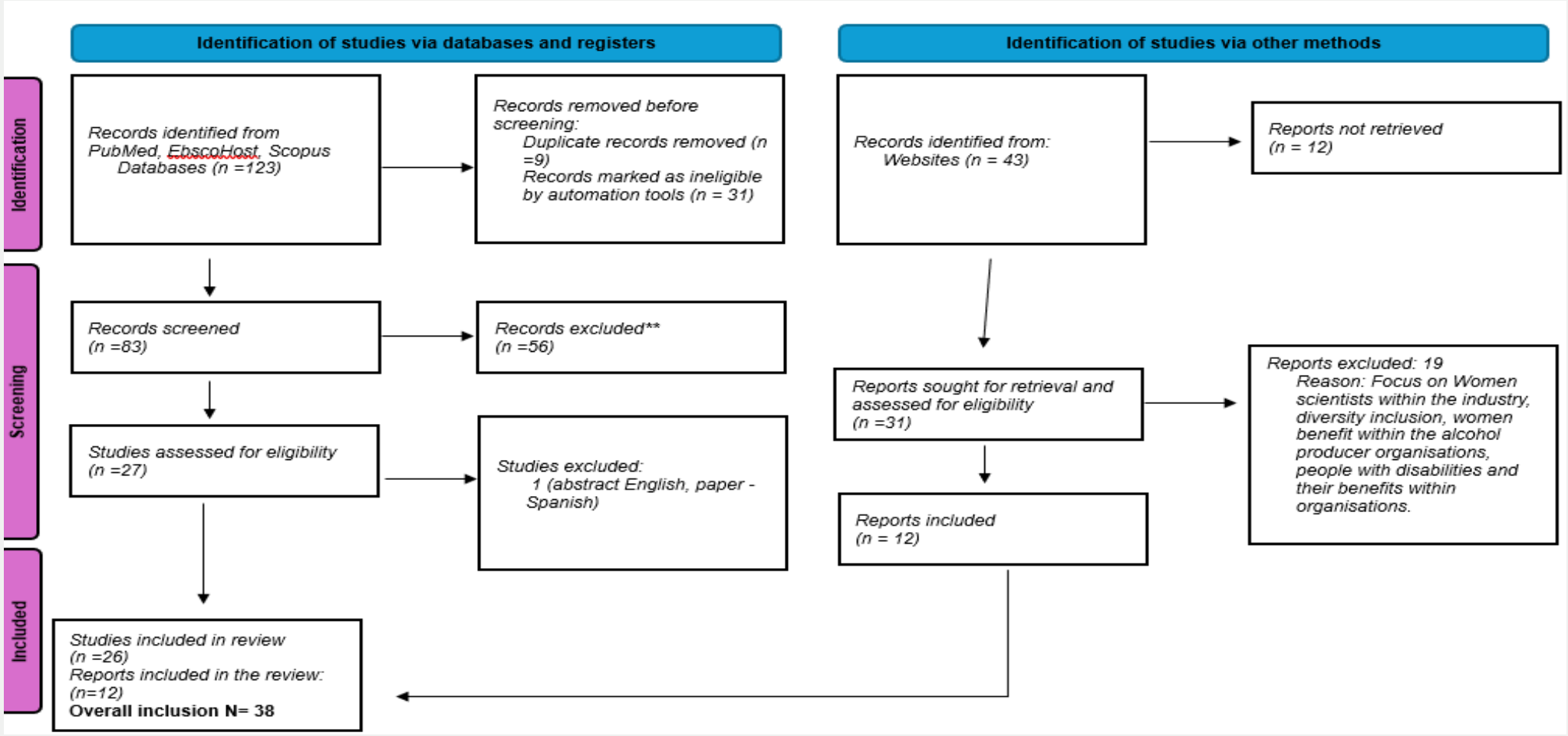
1. analyse/describe industry communication, strategies, activities related to child harms.
2. Examines framing, responsibility attribution, prevention around identified harms.
3. Insight into policy, regulation, public discourse- implications.
4. Published in the past 10 years

Excl.

Biomedical, clinical outcome focused on individual drinking/beh

No mention of alco industry roles, communication, strategies, influence.

Search Outcomes



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Analysis

- Extraction sheet
- Need for 1 secondary review of 10% included lit.
- Thematic Analysis with Malpass Orders of Constructs

1. First order: Participants narratives
2. Second order: Interpretation of participants narratives
3. Third orders: Critically translated new understandings.

Study focus

Second Order	Third Order
"Choosing what is right for you." (DrinkAware) "what is 'too much' may vary by individual." (Bacardi, quoted in Lim et al., 2019, p.528)	Pregnancy drinking is frequently framed as a matter of maternal choice and personal responsibility, often shifting attention away from industry and structural influences.
"Researchers have not been able to determine the exact amount of alcohol that is completely safe for the development of the foetus." (Éduc'alcool, quoted in Mitchell et al., 2025, p.12) *"It is important to note, though, that not all women who are alcohol dependent or who abuse alcohol give birth to children with FAS. Other factors such as diet, older age, smoking and illicit drug abuse have been associated with congenital abnormalities"* (Accra Brewery Limited, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, 2017. p.3). *"Importantly, while ABL is understandably most concerned about ensuring that the alcoholic drinks it sells, chief amongst them being CLUB Beer, are not the cause of complications, or that they negatively impact babies during and after pregnancy, the company is looking much further afield to ensure that no pregnant woman suffers ill consequences from any type or source of alcohol consumption ."* (Accra Brewery Limited, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, p.3).	Industry-associated messaging repeatedly emphasizes ambiguity, uncertainty and debate surrounding alcohol consumption in pregnancy

Findings

MAP: Two linked layers

1 ISSUE FRAMING

FASD causality and responsibility

Maternal responsibility

Underage drinking

Parents' responsibility

Secondary harms

Children affected by others: Abuse, neglect, exposure, accidents ect.

2 FRAMING TOOLS

Knowledge and risk communication

How evidence, uncertainty and advice are presented

Normalisation and marketing

How alcohol becomes familiar in youth-facing contexts

Industry-supported solution

How industry actors and programmes are positioned

FASD framing individualises causality and responsibility

Maternal choice

Pregnancy risk is communicated through individual choice, personal decisions and advice directed to women.

Causality and uncertainty

Uncertain thresholds and multiple contributing factors shift attention from a clear prevention message.

Blame and stigma

Media portrayals move between sympathy and shame, making the framing of prevention ethically important.

"PREGNANT WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOL" **(SABMiller)**

vs

"Choosing what is right for you." **(DrinkAware) (Lim et al., 2019, p.528)**

"what is 'too much' may vary by individual." **(Bacardi, quoted in Lim et al., 2019, p.528)**

"Two frames dominated the media coverage of FASD: a frame of sympathy, and a frame of shame." **(Eguiagaray et al., 2016, p.49)**

Underage drinking is framed through parental responsibility

Parents as role models

Family drinking practices and attitudes are made relevant to young people's alcohol use.

Parents as gatekeepers

Attention turns to parental supply, permission, supervision and household conversations.

Parents as intervention point

Campaigns invite parents to act

When does the industry act?

"Parents serve as primary role models, and their drinking behaviors directly impact their children" (Esposito et al., 2025, p.4)

"Drinkwise… emphasized the 'critical role of parents'" (Jones et al., 2015, p.268)

""Teens/parents" emerged as a major focus in industry-funded communications" (Maani Hessari et al., 2019, p.5)

Sources: Table 2 and quotations from extraction sheet, Parental Responsibility.

Child harm extends beyond the individual drinker

Prenatal and infant harms

FASD and fetal or infant health are treated as child-related.

Family and social harms

Child maltreatment and wider family or community effects

Exposure and future risk

Marketing exposure, youth drinking and injury risks

"Alcohol misuse can hurt children's health and well-being" (Lee et al., 2021, p.3)

"The act calls for the need to protect children and adolescents from exposure to the harm of alcohol" (Athauda et al., 2022, p.544)

Anaf et al. (2022) harm focus: FASD; child maltreatment; impacts on Indigenous children; youth alcohol marketing exposure"

Risk communication shapes actionable knowledge

Uncertainty

Scientific uncertainty and questions about safe levels shape how prenatal risk is communicated.

Selection

Omission, emphasis and selective presentation affect which harms are made salient to audiences.

Audience and channel

Warnings, websites, social media and education materials reach different audiences and frame different choices.

"There is no known safe limit." (Heenan et al., 2023, p.2)

"There is 'confusion about how much one can safely drink during pregnancy'." (DrinkWise, quoted in Lim et al., 2019, p.527)

"Omission of information on pregnancy and infant health was common across all seven sites." (Mitchell et al., 2025, p.5)

Marketing normalises alcohol in youth-facing contexts

Promo settings with repeated cultural cues about alcohol.

Sport and sponsorship

Brand association with events and teams

Digital and social media

Influencers, platforms and brand content

Everyday social cues

Alcohol presented as fun, lifestyle or normal

"Alcohol companies in Nigeria have often focused on youths through diverse marketing campaigns and event sponsorships." (Dumbili et al., 2025, p.5)

"Campaigns often (13/39, 33%) targeted younger drinkers." (Maani Hessari et al., 2019, p.1)

"Brands used photos and videos of these activations… describing their product as a 'sports beer'." (Miller & Wright, 2024, p.1540)

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Industry-backed solutions position firms as responders

Education and behaviour change
School programmes and campaigns emphasise awareness, responsible drinking and individual behaviour.

Partnership and CSR

Industry-linked organisations and partnerships are presented as contributors to prevention and health information.

The framing tension

A solution narrative may centre consumer or family action while giving less space to population-level regulation.

"SAPROs are framed as 'part of the solution' to alcohol harms." (Mitchell et al., 2025, p.2)

"Drinkwise describes itself as an 'independent not-for-profit organization' but was established and is funded by the alcohol industry." (Jones et al., 2015, p.268)

"Changes in individual behavior as the solution." (Jones et al., 2015, p.268)

Why This Matters?

- **Industry Framing influences:**

➢Framing determines which problems/coalitions/interventions are seen as legitimate

➢Shapes public understanding of alcohol-related risk

➢Perceptions and Acceptability of Interventions

- **Outcomes (negative)**

➢Weak or delayed attention to the problem and regulation

➢Emphasis on Individual behaviour and decision making

- Individual targeted interventions

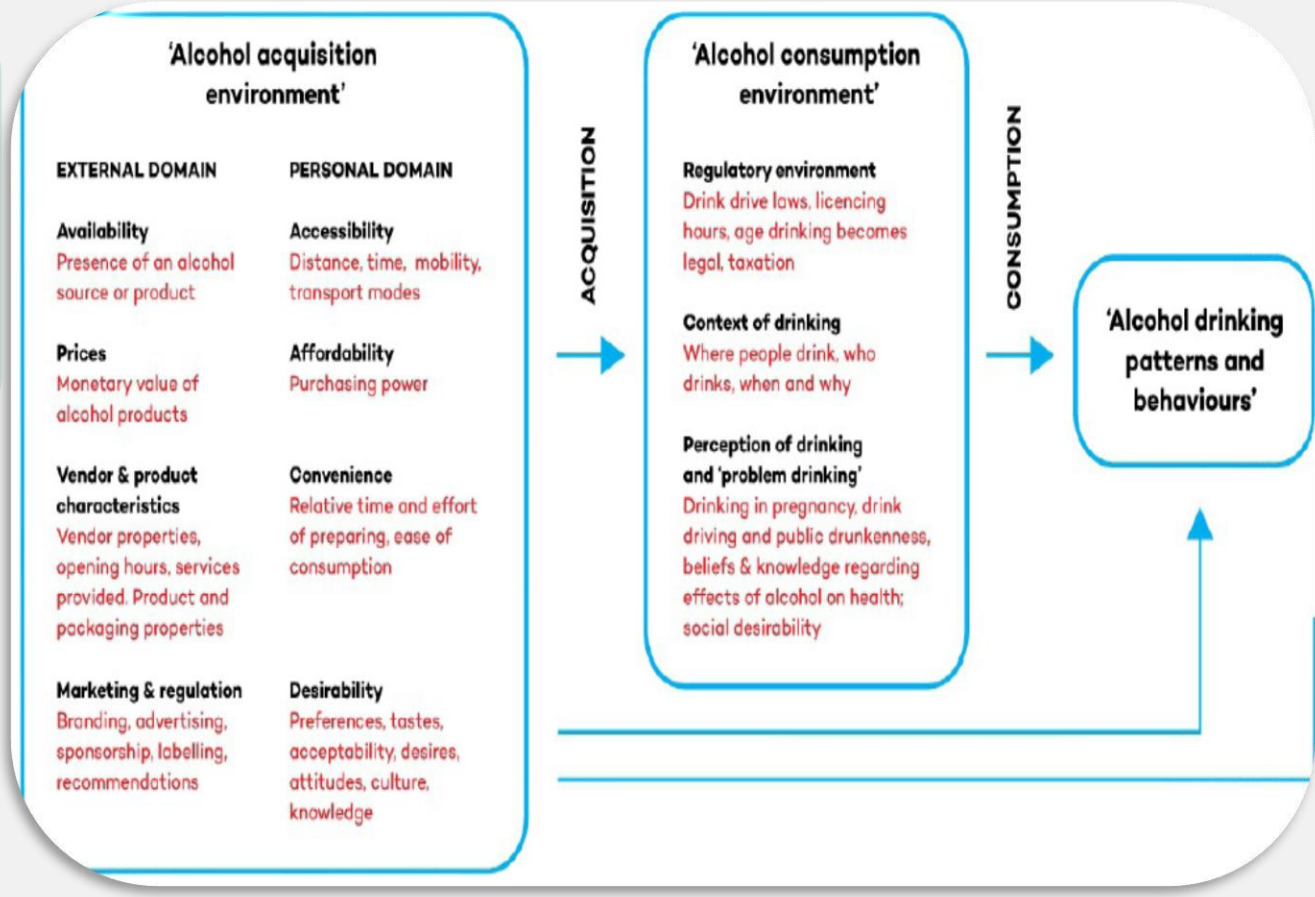
➢Limited structural interventions

Framing Alcohol Harms

Individual problems?

- Risk framing- poor choices
- Attribution of responsibility -
  - ➢ Lack of parental supervision
  - ➢ 'Bad' drinking practices

Minimises structural drivers of alcohol environments



- Alcohol Environment Framework – (Walls et al 2020)

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