

Appendix 7: Societal measures to restrict drug influences

A range of measures exist for ensuring inappropriate popular media, including those that make reference to drug use, are less accessible by young people. The efficacy of these measures is currently unknown.

Film

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is responsible for classifying film works in relation to their content, with a particular emphasis on protecting children from harm. In relation to drugs, the 2009 BBFC guidance sets out that no film taken as a whole may promote the use of illicit drug use, and any detailed portrayal of drug use likely to promote or glamorise the drug use may be cut.^a Any film that shows drug use while emphasising the dangers may receive less restrictive classifications, in comparison to films presenting drug use in a more neutral manner (see table on page 276).^a

^a British Board of Film Classification (2009) *The guidelines*. London: British Board of Film Classification.

Film/video game classification	Description	Guidance in classifying film/video game
U: Universal	Suitable for all	No reference to illegal drugs or drug use unless they are infrequent and innocuous, or there is a clear educational purpose or antidrug message suitable for young children
PG: Parental guidance	General viewing, but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children	Reference to illegal drugs or drug use must be innocuous or carry a suitable antidrug message
12A/12	Suitable for 12 years and over. The 12A category only exists for cinema films, where children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult to enter. Films classified as 12A are not recommended for children under 12	Any use of drugs must be infrequent and should not be glamorised or give instructional detail
15	Suitable only for 15 years and over	Drugs may be shown but the film as a whole must not promote or encourage drug use. The misuse of easily accessible and highly dangerous substances (for example, aerosols and solvents) is unlikely to be acceptable
18	Suitable only for adults	No specific guidance on drugs
R18	To be shown only in specially licensed cinemas, or supplied only in licensed sex shops, and to adults of not less than 18 years	No specific guidance on drugs

Source: British Board of Film Classification (2009) *The guidelines*. London: British Board of Film Classification.

In addition to adhering to film classifications, policy makers may also wish to consider requiring all films portraying drug use to be preceded by a warning message advising on drug-related harms. This is because evidence suggests that warning messages displayed ahead of films portraying pro-smoking imagery may mitigate some of the effects these images have in terms of encouraging uptake of smoking.^b It is not unreasonable to assume similar beneficial effects may be seen with the portrayal of drug use.

Given that evidence suggests film images can influence drug behaviour, film producers should consider the impact that depicting drug use may have on individuals.^{c-e} Any such inclusions should only be used when editorially justified. To aid in this process, policy makers may wish to consider informing those involved in the production of film of the potential damage done by the depiction of drug use in film.

Television

Governance of television is relatively strong. On television, the watershed operates to protect young people from materials that may be unsuitable for them, which may include drug use. The watershed begins at 9pm on standard television and runs until 5.30am. The most recent guidance from Ofcom on the UK television watershed, states that material unsuitable for children should not be shown before or after this time period.^f As well as these restrictions, Ofcom encourages programme makers to consider the potential harm that displaying the use of illegal drugs to younger viewers may have, and that any inclusion of drug use pre-watershed, or at times when children are particularly likely to be viewing, must be editorially justified.^f

Music

Similar to classification ratings used by the BBFC in film, the Recording Industry Association of America uses parental advisory warning messages to inform consumers that a recording contains explicit material that is not suitable for children. Many retailers in America limit the sale of such albums to adults only. While similar warnings are commonly used in the retail of UK music, sale restrictions do not apply. Policy makers

b Edwards CA, Harris WC, Cook DR et al (2004) Out of the smokescreen: does an anti-smoking advertisement affect young women's perception of smoking in movies and their intention to smoke? *Tobacco Control* **13**: 277-82.

c Hunt K, Sweeting H, Sargent J et al (2011) Is there an association between seeing incidents of alcohol or drug use in films and young Scottish adults' own alcohol or drug use? A cross sectional study. *BMC Public Health* **11**: 259.

d Stern SR (2005) Messages from teens on the big screen: smoking, drinking, and drug use in teen-centered films. *Journal of Health Communication* **10**: 331-46.

e Gunasekera H, Chapman S & Campbell S (2005) Sex and drugs in popular movies: an analysis of the top 200 films. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* **98**: 464-70

f Ofcom (2009) *Guidance notes section one: protecting the under 18s*. London: Ofcom.

may wish to consider the classification of music, in restricting the influence of drug-promoting references to young people. Given that a large proportion of music sales now take place online, where assessments of age is not easily verifiable, policy makers should also consider the difficulties in enforcing controls in this market. Taking action to inform major artists and musicians of the potential harm of depicting drug use in music should also be considered by policy makers.

Celebrity

Available evidence suggests celebrities can have both a role in reducing drug use, and also a conflicting role in increasing drug use.^g Informing and educating celebrities, as well as encouraging them to act as spokespeople for drug-related harm, may be an interesting area for policy makers to consider.

Video games

The BBFC is also responsible for classifying video games in relation to their content. As with film, any video game glamorising drug use is likely to receive a more restrictive classification, in comparison to a game emphasizing the danger, or presenting drug use in a more neutral manner.^h

The efficacy of video game classifications may not go far enough. Research has demonstrated that parents are less likely to supervise video games, compared to other forms of media, suggesting there is potential for young people to ignore classifications.ⁱ It may be necessary to supplant video games that have drug references with advisory messages informing about the harms of drug use.

Internet

Content-control software is a form of software designed for controlling what content is permitted to a user on the internet. The restrictions on which web pages can be accessed can be applied at various levels. While research has not investigated the impact of these forms of software on reducing illicit drug use, they may represent useful tools in restricting exposure of drug influences to young people. Further research in this area is needed.

g Brown WJ & de Matviuk MAC (2010) Sports celebrities and public health: Diego Maradona's influence on drug use prevention. *Journal of Health Communication* **15**: 358-73.

h British Board of Film Classification (2009) *The guidelines*. London: British Board of Film Classification.

i Haninger K & Thompson KM (2004) Content and ratings of teen-rated video games. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* **291**: 856-65.