

## Mini Review

# More Than a Liquid: Powdered Alcohol and Its Potential Impact on Today's Teenagers

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## Abstract

Powdered alcohol or “palcohol” was originated in the 1970s, but resurfaced in 2007 in the Netherlands and again in the United States in 2014. The concept for powdered alcohol is that it can be sold cheaply in small packets and mixed with water. Once the powdered alcohol and water are mixed, the beverage fizzes and mimics flavors such as margarita, lemon drop, mojito and cosmopolitan, as well as maintain the effects of regular alcohol. Criticisms of palcohol is that it can be easily snorted since it is already in powdered form and that it can be easily concealed in venues that prohibit alcohol like schools. Furthermore, it has also been speculated that people's drinks could be more easily spiked and cause controversy like the date rape drug. The makers of palcohol dispute these claims and are waiting for government approval to sell the product. In the meantime, cognitive behavioral therapy is recommended to address the misuse and abuse of alcohol, be it in a liquid or a powdered form.

## INTRODUCTION

Powdered alcohol or “palcohol” [1,2], is not a new phenomenon. One of the first indicators that this substance would gain recent attention and popularity was its 2007 emergence in the Netherlands [3,4]. The concept for powdered alcohol was that it can be sold in one ounce packets and mixed with water [3,4], similar to the concept of Kool-Aid and lemonade. It even had a catchy name: ‘Booz2Go’ [3,4]. Booz2Go had selling potential because it was cheap, ranging from \$1.60 to \$2.40 per 20-pack [3,4]. Once powdered alcohol and water are mixed, the beverage fizzes and becomes light green in color with flavors such as margarita, lemon drop, mojito and cosmopolitan. The makers admitted that they purposely targeted teenagers because Booz2Go has the appeal of Bacardi; a drink that minors cannot legally purchase [3,4]. The inspiration for this drink was developed by a group of young people who were doing a final class project in the Netherlands who wanted to target teenagers under the age of 16 [4].

## U.S. PRESENCE &amp; LEGISLATIVE OPPOSITION

Recently, palcohol has gained attention in the U.S. due to Lipsmark, a company out of Phoenix, AZ [2]. Lipsmark manufactures palcohol and plans to market it, once it gains the necessary approval from the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax & Trade Bureau [2]. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax & Trade Bureau recently approved powdered alcohol, but rescinded its approval due to ‘label issues’ [2,5]. Thus, this act has caused suspicion that there may be other issues with the product [2,5].

The product was expected to launch this fall, but will be banned for at least a year due to political push back in South Carolina [6], and at least four other states including Minnesota and Vermont [5]. Nationally, there has been political backlash by New York Senator Charles Schumer who has called on the US Food and Drug Administration to ban palcohol [7]. Likewise, Senator Larry Martin is concerned that palcohol will not be regulated like other alcoholic beverages because it is a powder and not a liquid [8]. Therefore, if current alcoholic regulations are not mandated, palcohol may possibly become legal to sell, which would make it accessible to minors [8].

Other concerns are that palcohol could be easily snorted since it is already in powdered form and that the product can now be easily taken into venues that prohibit alcohol like schools [8]. Moreover, it has also been speculated that people's drinks could be more easily spiked and cause controversy like the date rape drug. However, Mark Phillips, the creator of the modern day palcohol [9,10], argues that these concerns are unrealistic because (1) snorting would severely burn and take about an hour to get a buzz [9,10], unlike taking a shot; (2) the packaging of palcohol is more like Capri Sun which is harder to conceal than a small Kool-Aid package; and (3) palcohol does not dissolve instantly in liquid and would have to be stirred [9,10], before no longer being visible to the human eye. Lastly, the palcohol maker says he is not advocating that palcohol is exempt from taxes or legalized. He says he is willing to abide by all regulations including those that would prevent children from the product until they reach the age of 21 [9,10].

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Powdered alcohol was created in the 1970s by Japan's Sato Foods Industries who created this product as a food processing additive [5,11]. Sato created powdered alcohol to eliminate the stench of meat and fish and tenderize/retain the meat's natural juices and flavoring [5]. In 1974, this concept was brought into the U.S. by General Foods Corporation as "alcohol-containing dextrin powder" who had similar aspirations as Sato, but also shared the aspirations of palcohol [5]. In 2005, two years prior to the Dutch "Booz2Go," a similar alcoholic powder called "Subyou" was developed in Germany, but it was disbanded for nonsuccess and not catching on. Like Booz2Go, this product was also cheap going for \$2-\$3 [5]. The last attempt in the U.S. for powdered alcohol was from a company named Pulver Spirits, but they withdrew their product stating that there were too many 'hoops to jump through' to get the product legalized by the government and the individual 50 states.

## TREATMENT OPTION: COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Treatment for alcohol abuse (liquid or powder) in teenagers, should be catered to their population and not that of adults [12], because they are developmentally at a stage where alcohol is prevalent [13]. The cognitive behavioral approach (CBT) is researched based and effective [14], in decreasing alcoholic tendencies [13]. CBT focuses on the events and experiences that preceded the teenager in using alcohol and examines the consequences of continuing to engage in alcohol usage. In addition, CBT proposes high-risk situations and gives the clients skills to increase [13], prevent or effectively cope with temptation [13]. Thus, CBT is a highly recommended treatment modality for teens who abuse alcohol because oftentimes, alcohol usage is comorbid with mental illness.

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