



The U.S. Department of Education's

HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER

for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention

E-FACT SHEET

Preventing Dangerous College Drinking Is Possible

Alcohol is all too often seen as an accepted part of college life, but there are programs that can significantly reduce students' risky drinking, according to a series of studies in a special college drinking supplement of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. Fourteen studies detail results of projects funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's (NIAAA's) Rapid Response to College Drinking Problems initiative. Between 2004 and 2005, NIAAA selected 15 college campuses with serious student-drinking issues to work with the agency and other experts in developing programs to combat the problem.

The work featured in this supplement underscores the value and critical importance of using scientifically sound research to guide the search for effective prevention and treatment strategies to reduce college student alcohol problems. The original premise for establishing the NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking, and then for the Rapid Response to College Drinking Problems initiative, was to solidify the link between research and practice.

Two of the Rapid Response projects included in the journal found that community-level efforts to deal with off-campus drinking problems can be effective in reducing consumption and improving community relations.

Neighborhoods Engaging with Students (NEST)

The results of the evaluation conducted by Robert F. Saltz and his colleagues add more support for the use of alcohol control and allied environmental strategies in reducing consumption and alcohol-related problems among college students. They evaluated the Neighborhoods Engaging with Students (NEST) project, which was launched by the Bellingham-Western Washington University Campus Community Coalition. Enforcement interventions were heavily publicized and included additional police patrols in targeted neighborhoods and increased compliance checks at both on- and off-premise alcohol retailers near campus. A Web site and a series of neighborhood forums educated students regarding their rights and responsibilities as community residents. NEST also featured a neighborhood mediation program to help settle disputes involving students. At the same time, the university boosted its late-night programming on campus, especially for underage, first-year students. A second public university in Washington created a similar program. Student surveys showed that the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking was lower at these two intervention schools than at a third comparison university.

According to the researchers, the intervention's focus on neighborhood engagement presented some unique challenges: "Even with strong neighborhood infrastructure and capacity, the project encountered a 'culture gap' between neighborhood associations and the university. The relative informality and changeability of the neighborhood associations, combined with a historical lack of collaboration between



the neighborhood associations and the university, required that the partnerships be continually cultivated. In addition, the continual flux of the student population among neighborhoods made it difficult to sustain students' neighborhood engagement.”

Nevertheless, the researchers say that “although some people in recent public debates (including college administrators) question whether anything can be done to reduce alcohol consumption and related problems, these results argue for the affirmative.”

Common Ground, University of Rhode Island

In their evaluation of Common Ground, Mark D. Wood and his colleagues found increases in student awareness of formal efforts to address student alcohol use, perceived likelihood of apprehension for underage drinking, and perceived consequences for alcohol-impaired driving. Police reports of student incidents in the target community decreased by 27 percent over the course of the project, but there were no significant reductions in reported alcohol use or alcohol-impaired driving.

In this program, officials reached out to specific constituencies in Narragansett and South Kingstown to implement environmental prevention strategies, including enhanced police enforcement and a cooperating tavern program, all of which was publicized in a media campaign. Phase 1 of the media campaign targeted potential student resistance to environmentally focused prevention by reporting majority student support for alcohol policy and enforcement initiatives. Phase 2 informed students about state laws, university policies, and Common Ground's environmental initiatives.

The researchers said that this current study makes important contributions to the small but growing body of literature on environmental management approaches in college settings. “The substantial decreases in student-related noise complaints support the utility of our approach for positively impacting quality-of-life outcomes in off-campus neighborhoods.”

In addition, the researchers said that an implication of this study relates to the means by which environmental management initiatives are implemented. “Although there is some evidence for the effectiveness of coalition-delivered EM interventions, outcomes have been shown to vary as a function of the degree of implementation ... Accordingly, prevention specialists should be aware that multiple avenues for EM intervention delivery exist.”

For More Information

To read all the articles in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Supplement No. 16, July 2009, College Drinking: New Research From the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's Rapid Response to College Drinking Problems Initiative, visit www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/SupportingResearch/journalStudiesAlcoholandDrugs.aspx. (Accessed on October 16, 2009.)



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