



ALCOHOL PREVENTION MORE DIFFICULT FOR YOUNG MEN TO SWALLOW

- EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 AEDT MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2007 -

Young men are three times more likely to die from alcohol-related injuries than females. To make matters worse, new research released today shows that they do not respond to school-based drug education as well as their female counterparts.

Delivery of a new school-based program has resulted in lower alcohol consumption, less binge drinking and less alcohol-related harms – but only in females.

CLIMATE Schools: Alcohol Module was developed and trialled by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at the University of NSW. Researcher, Ms Laura Vogl, found that the findings were consistent with the results of many other school-based drug prevention programs.

“Males are a much harder group to reach,” Ms Vogl said. “It is common knowledge that alcohol use generally increases from the early to late teenage years. This program was effective in subduing this growth. Twelve months after the program was delivered it was clear that the CLIMATE program had subdued the growth of alcohol use and harm for females.”

After one year, students who did not get the CLIMATE program reported:

- Twice the increase in average weekly alcohol consumption compared with the students who received the CLIMATE program.
- A five times greater increase in the frequency of binge drinking compared with the students who received the CLIMATE program.
- Twice the increase in the maximum number of drinks consumed during these binge occasions, and
- A five times greater increase in the number of alcohol-related harms experienced in the previous 12 months compared with the students who received the CLIMATE program

CLIMATE Schools: Alcohol Module was developed by NDARC in collaboration with the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression and secondary school teachers. This program was trialled with over 1,500 Year 8 students in Catholic and Independent schools. This innovative program uses a computerised cartoon-based teenage drama to teach young people skills to minimise alcohol consumption and reduce the risk of harm.

The program was successful in teaching all young people, both males and females, the knowledge to minimise alcohol-related harm. It was also effective in moderating students’

beliefs regarding the positive benefits of alcohol. Students were far less likely to glamorise the effects of alcohol after they had completed the CLIMATE program.

However, when it came to behaviour change, it was only female students who changed their behaviour.

For the boys, the CLIMATE program was no more effective in changing alcohol use behaviour than the standard alcohol prevention education currently being delivered in the control schools.

Ms Vogl said that there could be a number of reasons to explain this result.

"The Australian Alcohol Guidelines were used in the program and these state that males can drink more alcohol than females to stay at low risk," explained Ms Vogl. "Currently, many young females drink similar amounts to their male counterparts. Pointing out to young women that they cannot actually drink as much alcohol for the same level of risk, may have been a shock for many and made them rethink their behaviour."

Drinking and the experience of alcohol-related harm is often seen as a badge of honour or sign of manhood and could be a contributing factor to the gender differences.

"If a male student is involved in a fight, he may be viewed as a hero. Likewise, if a male has unplanned sex whilst under the influence of alcohol, he may be viewed as a stud. By contrast, if a female accidentally falls pregnant while under the influence of alcohol, she may be viewed as promiscuous. If she vomits in a public place as a result of drinking, the consequences can be dire."

Traditionally, male socialisation and friendships also revolve more closely around alcohol than that of females. For alcohol prevention interventions to be effective with male students a broader range of alcohol related beliefs may need to be targeted.

Research has suggested that it may be necessary to focus on the negative sexual effects of alcohol, such as erectile dysfunction, to achieve success. The only obstacle to this is that it may be considered inappropriate to teach this in Year 7 and 8 of high school, when alcohol prevention education needs to be implemented.

"Alcohol-related harm is a major concern during adolescence, especially for males. Effective alcohol prevention programs do exist and in many cases are the ones implemented in schools. However, greater time needs to be given for more intensive interventions with the hope of more effectively changing the behaviour of young males."

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