

School-based intervention successfully lowers drinking rates in at risk children

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In an effort to combat these startling findings, researchers at King's College London's Institute of Psychiatry describe a successful personality-based intervention for substance abuse delivered by teachers in the September 2010 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

The coming weeks mark the return to school for many of our youngest citizens. Sadly the satisfaction of making new friends and obtaining good test scores may be overshadowed by the prospect of [substance abuse](#) for some school-aged adolescents. The previous decade has witnessed a two-fold increase in both [alcohol consumption](#) and intoxication by adolescents age 12 to 17.^{1,2} In an effort to combat these startling findings, researchers at King's College London's Institute of Psychiatry describe a successful personality-based [intervention](#) for substance abuse delivered by teachers in the September 2010 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.³

In the article titled "Personality-Targeted Interventions Delay Uptake of Drinking and Decrease Risk of Alcohol-Related Problems When Delivered by Teachers," Principal Investigator Dr. Patricia Conrod and colleagues evaluated 2,506 adolescents, with a mean age of 13.7, using the Substance Use Risk Profile scale; a 23-item questionnaire which assesses personality risk for substance abuse along four dimensions including sensation-seeking, impulsivity, anxiety-sensitivity, and hopelessness.

Of the 1,159 students identified by researchers as being at high risk for substance abuse, 624 received intervention as part of the Adventure Trial and a matched high risk group of 384 received no intervention. School based interventions consisted of two 90 minute group sessions conducted by a trained educational professional. In order to adequately evaluate the students, the teachers attended a 3-day rigorous workshop, followed by 4 hour supervision and feedback session. An 18 point checklist was used to determine whether the teachers demonstrated a good understanding of the aims and components of the programs.

Although the trial is designed to evaluate mental health symptoms, academic achievement, and substance use uptake over a 2 year period, the authors have focused their findings on the six month outcomes of drinking and binge-drinking rates, quantity by frequency of alcohol use, and drinking-related problems.

Reporting on the efficacy of the intervention at six months, author and Trial Coordinator Maeve O'Leary-Barrett writes, "Receiving an intervention significantly decreased the likelihood of reporting drinking alcohol at follow-up, with the control group 1.7 times more likely to report alcohol use than the intervention group (odds ratio, 0.6)." Furthermore, receiving an intervention also predicted significantly lower binge-drinking rates in students who reported alcohol use at baseline (odds ratio, 0.45), indicating a 55% decreased risk of binge-drinking in this group compared with controls. In addition, high-risk intervention-school students reported lower quantity by frequency of alcohol use and drinking-related problems compared with the non-treatment group at follow-up.

The Adventure Trial is the first to evaluate the success of the personality-targeted interventions as delivered by teachers. The findings at six months suggest that this approach may provide a sustainable school-base prevention program for youth at risk for substance abuse.

In the JAACAP article, Principal Investigator Dr. Patricia Conrod and colleagues comment on the success of their program by stating, "In-house personality-targeted interventions allow schools to implement early prevention strategies with youth most at risk for developing future alcohol-related problems and provide the potential for follow-up of the neediest individuals."

More information: 1. Office of National Statistics. Drug Use, Smoking and Drinking Among Young People in England in 2007. NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre; 2008.

2. Crome IB, Ghodse H, Gilvarry E, et al, eds. Young People and Substance Misuse. London: Royal College of Psychiatrists; 2004.

3. O'Leary-Barrett M, Mackie CJ, Castellanos-Ryan N, Al-Khudhairy N, Conrod PJ. Personality-Targeted Interventions Delay Uptake of Drinking and Decrease Risk of Alcohol-Related Problems When Delivered by Teachers. *J. Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*, 2010;49(9):954

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