



The Web-Based Alcohol Prevention Education Pilot Project

Background

Despite Department of Defense (DoD) policies and programs designed to reduce problem alcohol use, the DoD Survey of Health Related Behaviors has indicated an increase in heavy alcohol use, especially among junior enlisted personnel, since 1998 (Bray et al., 2006). The same survey indicated that heavy drinking among military personnel is related to decreased workplace productivity and increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. To help address these problems, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) requested the development and evaluation of a Web-based alcohol education program designed to reduce problem alcohol use in the military. The appeal of a Web-based approach is that it is available at a person's convenience, is cost effective, can be completed in private to reduce any stigma related to seeking help, and can be personalized for the specific needs of different personnel. This pilot program, called PATROL (Program for Alcohol Training, Research, and Online Learning), determined the utility of Web-based alcohol education programs for the military and evaluated the effectiveness of two specific Web-based programs originally developed for the civilian population. The TRICARE Management Activity (TMA) sponsored this pilot program.

RTI's Approach

RTI collaborated with two other firms to adapt their Web-based alcohol prevention programs for use with military personnel.

- The Alcohol Savvy program, developed by ISA Associates, is an alcohol abuse prevention program with complete narration, rich video and audio elements, and several interactive components.
- The Drinker's Check-Up, developed by Behavior Therapy Associates, is a brief intervention for at-risk alcohol users that features a comprehensive assessment of alcohol use and personalized feedback regarding alcohol use.



Methods

- Participants included active duty personnel from eight military installations (two in each of the four branches).
- Participants at each installation were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions:
 - Alcohol Savvy (AS)
 - Drinker's Check-Up (DCU)
 - Personalized assignment to one of the two programs based on results of a validated screening tool. High-risk drinkers were assigned to the Drinker's Check-Up program; low-risk drinkers were assigned to the Alcohol Savvy program.
- Participants completed online surveys at baseline, 1 month after baseline, and 6 months after baseline to assess changes in drinking behavior and associated negative consequences.
- After the 1-month follow-up survey, participants in the control group were offered the online programs.

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Outcomes

- Both AS and DCU led to significant reductions in heavy alcohol use between baseline and the 1-month follow-up. DCU also led to significant decreases in multiple other measures of alcohol use, as well as workplace productivity loss.
- Reductions in alcohol use found at the 1-month follow-up were sustained through the 6-month follow-up.
- The DCU program was shown to be effective mainly through decreasing the perception of the quantity of alcohol consumed by peers.
- The lack of a representative sample and other methodological issues with the pilot study prevent generalization of these findings to the total DoD or the Services, but this project demonstrated that customized Web-based alcohol education programs do show promise as one method of reducing alcohol misuse in the military.

References

Bray, R.M., L.L. Hourani, K. L. Rae Olmsted, M. Witt, J.M. Brown, M.R. Pemberton, M.E. Marsden, B. Marriott, S. Scheffler, R. Vandermaas-Peeler, B. Weimer, S. Calvin, M. Bradshaw, K. Close, and D. Hayden. (2006). "2005 Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel." Report prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense (Cooperative Agreement No. DAMD17-00-2-0057), RTI Report 7841-106-FR.



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