

Preventing High-Risk Drinking Among College Students: A Social Marketing Case Study

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Abstract

Investigators implemented a social marketing intervention to reduce alcohol consumption at a large university in the southeastern United States. The objective was to decrease high-risk drinking and drinking and driving and to change the perception that alcohol use increases sexual opportunities among college students. Formative research revealed that high-risk college students associate undesirable social consequences with excessive drinking (e.g., embarrassing oneself, annoying peers, offending the other sex, or burdening friends). An intervention was developed in which the product was avoiding the social stigma associated with excessive alcohol consumption. Promotional materials illustrating the social repercussions associated with excessive alcohol use and promoting the advantages of moderating one's drinking were disseminated in popular student venues; price was raised by increased law enforcement; and place was addressed by providing alcohol-free alternative activities. Evaluation included a time-series design in which students completed an anonymous online standard alcohol and drug survey and reviewing campus records of drinking under the influence (DUI) citations, alcohol-related judicial violations, and emergency department transports for alcohol overdose. Self-reported high-risk drinking, drinking and driving, and the perception that alcohol facilitates sexual opportunity rates decreased 33%, 45%, and 21%, respectively. DUI violations, alcohol-related judicial violations, and student transports to the emergency department for alcohol overdose decreased 13%, 28%, and 37%, respectively. Programmatic goals and objectives were met. Social marketing interventions appear to be a promising and cost-effective means to reduce high-risk drinking and the associated consequences among college students. Addressing social ramifications appears to be more motivating than conveying the prevalence of high-risk drinking.