

Why Educational Strategies are Ineffective

Research has shown that educational interventions such as school-based programs, counter-advertisements, and warning labels simply do not work.^{1, 2, 3} These methods do not reduce consumption or alcohol-related harm, nor do they change drinking behavior among youth. Moreover, many programs have not been studied for their effectiveness.

School-based Education

- Although school-based alcohol education can increase knowledge about alcohol and improve attitudes in the short run, there is no sustained effect on behavior and no reduction in consumption or alcohol-related harm among youth.⁴

Social Marketing

- A systematic review of 15 social marketing programs noted 8 of 13 programs had some significant effects on alcohol use in the short term (up to 12 months), while 2 of 4 programs had some effect over 2 years.⁵ Long-term reviews, however, concluded that social marketing programs are ineffective overall.⁴

Public Information Campaigns

- Little scientific evidence exists to show that public information campaigns are effective.¹ Because high quality pro-drinking messages appear far more frequently as paid advertisements in the mass media, public service announcements are usually ineffective in reducing alcohol-related harm.²

Counter-advertising

- Counter-ads against alcohol are infrequently broadcast, of poorer quality due to lack of funding, and placed at unappealing time slots or on unpopular programming, making them generally ineffective.⁶ Meanwhile, cable television is now home to 95% of all alcohol ads on national networks.⁷

Industry-funded Programs

- Industry-funded programs such as the “drink responsibly” campaign are ineffective in reducing alcohol-related harm. Such messages tend to lead to positive views about alcohol and the alcohol industry among both drinkers and non-drinkers.⁸ These industry-funded messages actually serve to advance both industry sales and public relations for alcohol corporations.⁹

Health Warnings

- Although warning labels can make an individual want to change his or her drinking patterns¹⁰ and promote conversation about drinking and pregnancy and drunk driving,^{2, 11, 12} exposure to warning labels overall does not produce a change in drinking behaviors.¹

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Parenting Programs

- Research about parenting programs has given them mixed reviews. Although a systematic review of 14 parenting programs noted some reductions in alcohol use in 6 of the programs, the same study noted that 3 of the programs reported increases of alcohol use among youth after the interventions.¹³ Overall, there is not sufficient evidence to show that parenting programs are effective in reducing consumption rates or alcohol-related harm, or changing drinking behavior among youth.

Bottom Line: The scientific evidence available (along with rising levels of alcohol problems) tells us that educational programs have been a dismal failure. Thus, we must re-evaluate the rationale of alcohol education programs.¹⁴ In contrast, research continues to demonstrate that the most effective evidence-based policies to reduce alcohol-related harm include increasing alcohol taxes and prices, decreasing alcohol availability, and restricting alcohol advertising.

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