
From: Erica Schmitz [mailto:eschmitz@mcd.org]
Sent: Tuesday, September 12, 2006 10:04 AM
To: ondcpcprev@ncjrs.gov
Subject: literature review RE: [ondcpcprev] First Offender Programs

I recently conducted a literature review regarding court diversion programs for juvenile alcohol offenses, and I didn't find a whole lot! Below is a brief summary of what I did find. I'm happy to send a copy of my full paper to those who are interested. I look forward to any feedback.

What the research says

While there have been few studies to date to design and evaluate consequences for first-time juvenile offenders of possession of alcohol, several conclusions can be drawn from existing research on prevention, deterrence, and court diversion:

- **Increasing youth certainty of being caught** is more important than the nature of the punishment itself in having a deterrent effect on underage drinking. Increasing severity of punishment does not impact underage drinking.
 - Officers are more likely to enforce underage drinking laws if they believe that consequences will be consistent, predictable, and not overly harsh (but not dismissed, either).
- **No particular court diversion program has yet shown evidence of effectiveness.** To date, experimental research has not found any diversion program model to be effective in reducing substance abuse or recidivism rates compared to control groups.
- **Brief intervention is the only strategy solidly backed by research to reduce drinking by youth.** Extensive experimental research has found the brief intervention model (a focused, 5-10 minute, one-on-one meeting using motivational interviewing and social influence strategies) to be *just as or more effective* than longer, more comprehensive interventions (such as longer interviews, multi-session educational programs, or multiple counseling sessions). NOTE: This does not apply to youth who require treatment for alcohol dependence.
- **Group programs can do more harm than good**, perhaps due to their effect of labeling and stigmatizing youth as delinquent or trouble-makers, and encouraging them to bond with other youth who have been similarly labeled.
- **One-on-one interventions may help to minimize the effects of labeling and differential association** that can occur with group programs, without condoning underage drinking behavior as "normal."
- **Community service requirements are supported by research on many levels.** Officers are more likely to enforce underage drinking laws if they believe that consequences include a community service component. Requiring community service by first-time juvenile offenders is also popular with the general public, which makes it a viable policy option. Community service may also serve to minimize the "labeling" effect, by holding young offenders accountable for their actions while reinforcing their connection to the broader community.

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MESAP, Maine's Environmental Substance Abuse Prevention Center: Helping communities build a healthy environment with policies, enforcement, & norms that support the positive & drug-free development of Maine youth.

Portland CMCA (Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol): A coalition of individuals & organizations working together to strengthen policy, enforcement, & community norms for the drug-free development of our youth.