Communities That Care: Preventing Substance Use and Delinquency in Middle School Students

The prevention program, “Communities That Care (CTC),” has shown promising results in the effort to prevent middle school students from engaging in use of alcohol and tobacco and in delinquent behavior. The program, developed by Dr. J. David Hawkins and Dr. Richard Catalano at the University of Washington, focuses on using interventions specific to risks defined by the community where the students live.

The study included samples of middle school students in 24 small U.S. towns. Surveys on behavior were collected from middle school students each year for a four-year period. The towns were paired and one town in each pair was randomly assigned to CTC and the other continued with normal prevention activities. In the designated CTC towns, a diverse group of community stakeholders (teachers, parents, law enforcement representatives, etc.) received six training sessions over a one-year period. The CTC intervention trained community members to define risks and protective factors within their communities. They then chose from evidence-based intervention programs available through CTC based on the risks specific to that community. Communities implemented several interventions (the average was 3 per year); the pattern and content depended on the risk profile of the town. Some were focused on family relationships while others were more school- or community-focused.

Over 4000 middle school students were surveyed each year in 5th through 8th grades. The 5th grade assessment occurred before any interventions were in place. By the time the 8th grade assessment took place, the CTC interventions chosen had been in place for about 32 months. Eighth-grade results showed that the CTC interventions prevented initiation of delinquent or substance use behavior. Between 7th and 8th grades, the students in the CTC towns
“were 32 percent less likely than those in the control towns to have begun using alcohol, 33 percent less likely to have smoked a first cigarette, and ... 25 percent less likely to have committed their first delinquent act (Reynolds, p. 13).” Eighth graders in the CTC towns also were less likely to report binge drinking in the past two weeks or using smokeless tobacco or alcohol in the past 30 days as compared to those in the control towns. The researchers plan to follow this sample to one year beyond high school to examine longer term effects of the interventions.

References:


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