



"Big Kids Don't Drink"

Executive Summary

Background: Adolescence is a sensitive and unique developmental stage during which brain development is crucial. Therefore, alcohol consumption is particularly dangerous during this stage of development. Even so, studies show that most adolescents experiment with drinking alcoholic beverages before the legal age of 18 and that the vast majority of adolescents drink alcohol in large quantities in relatively short periods of time (binge drinking). Drinking alcohol among adolescents is a major problem in western countries. Rates of alcohol consumptions among adolescents are a concern in Israel and in the world in general. Research shows that age of drinking initiation is getting younger, and frequency of drinking alcohol, is rapidly growing.

Various factors have been suggested as contributing to alcohol consumption among adolescents. One of the main contributors is social networking and support. Adolescents with peers who drink alcohol are more likely to drink themselves. Parent's involvement has also been related to young people's alcohol consumption. Studies show that positive parent-child relationship and well structured boundaries can protect adolescents from alcohol consumption.

Drinking alcohol has physical, cognitive, emotional and social consequences such as: alcohol poisoning, cirrhosis of the liver, alcohol dependency etc. Alcohol use during adolescents has been associated with a wide range of dangerous behaviors with major health, social and economic consequences like: driving under the influence, unprotected sex, violence and property damage and low academic outcomes. Drinking alcohol can lead to brain damage and in certain cases cause death. Thus, there is great significance in interventions aimed at preventing alcohol use among pre-teens, even before they become adolescents.

School is considered in the scientific literature as an effective setting for intervention and risk behaviors prevention programs. The schools setting, in its essence, is the foundation for educational, environmental and structural activities, as part of an ongoing process of a 12 year learning sequence.

The alcohol prevention program "Big Kids Don't Drink" for elementary schools presents the complex issues relating to alcohol use. The findings of the current study may help in building more wide range prevention programs, dealing with alcohol consumption among young people.

Main objective: To evaluate the successes and efficiency of alcohol the prevention program: "Big Kids Don't Drink", among fifth and sixth grade students in elementary schools nationwide.

Specific goals:

- a) To examine knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, subjective norms and sense of control among students who participated in an alcohol prevention program, before and after they participated.
- b) To examine gender differences in alcohol use and regarding the measures mentioned above.
- c) To examine attitudes, perceptions and parent's involvement in health promoting activities in school, among parents whose children participated in the alcohol prevention program.

Study population: the study included three groups:

- 1) Fifth and sixth grade students from state schools nationwide who participated in the prevention program "Big Kids Don't Drink" (intervention group).
- 2) Parents of fifth and sixth grade students from state schools nationwide, who participated in the prevention program "Big kids don't drink".
- 3) The program team members: program developers, school principals and program operators (school's guidance counselors or homeroom teachers).

Study design:

- 1) Cross sectional study among the intervention and control groups, pre and post participation in the program.
- 2) Cross sectional study among parents of fifth and sixth grade students who participated in the prevention program.

3) Qualitative interviews among fifth and sixth grade students who participated in the prevention program and among program's team members (developers, principals and operators).

Sample: The program was implemented in 30 schools nationwide. Among the schools that completed the program, 25 schools were sampled. 27 fifth grade classrooms and 39 sixth grade classrooms were sampled in these schools, they answered a before and after questionnaire. In addition, 5 more schools that did not participate in the program served as a control group and completed the before-after questionnaire too. A total of 970 students in the intervention group and 152 students from the control group completed the survey. In addition, 318 parents of children who participated in the program completed the survey.

Fifteen interviews and 20 focus groups were conducted among program participants. Qualitative in depth interviews were held among 10 school counselors, 5 of the program developers and 10 school principals. In addition, 7 observations were held during intervention stage.

Methods: the current study combined quantitative and qualitative methods in order to evaluate the alcohol prevention program "Big Kids Don't Drink". The study had 3 stages:

- 1) **Planning evaluation:** In depth interviews were conducted with school counselors, principals and operators about the importance of the program to schools and about how to implement it in school settings. Program developers were interviewed as well, in order to get information about the process of building the program.
- 2) **Process evaluation:** Data about program's implementation was derived from a sample of 25 schools from different regions in the country, who participated in the program. All the activities in the program were evaluated and so was the presentation to students by program operators.
- 3) **Outcomes evaluation:** a) in order to evaluate the effect of the program on participant's attitudes in relevant subjects, compare to the control group, a survey was completed before and after the program, both in the intervention and control groups, followed by focus groups among students who participated in the program. b) A survey was completed among parents whose children participated in the intervention.

Results:

Qualitative findings among students: The interviews show that after participating in the program "Big Kids Don't Drink", students understand and internalize the main message of the program. The participants showed a high level of knowledge about alcohol, its components, and its physical, mental and social

influences. It seems participants have learned different ways of coping with peer pressure at social events. Among the different activities that were offered during the intervention, visual means and games were the most enjoyable for students. It seems participants needed those mediators for illustration and demonstration of the information that was given to them throughout the program.

Student's reports show that the program contributed in raising awareness towards drinking alcohol and the dangers that come with it. However, the focus groups showed that the message wasn't uniform in all schools in regards to drinking alcohol. While in some schools the message was drink in moderation, other schools were against drinking alcohol completely, which led to some objections from students and their parents.

In addition, there was great importance to who the person implementing the program was. A homeroom teacher or the school counselor, to the involvement of students, parents and other teachers during intervention stage. The more the operator could maintain the student's interest and was invested in the program (as far as fun activities, consistency and ways of teaching materials), the more it contributed to student's sense of connectedness to the program and understanding of the materials. Many students complained about lack of participation from classmates and about the teacher's difficulty to maintain the class, which resulted in the program not being implemented fully. Student's reports show they had a hard time staying concentrated and connected, therefore being unable to understand the program's message. Those students complained about the program being too long, tiresome and repetitive.

Quantitative findings among students: Results show that the program "Big Kids Don't Drink" obtained some of its specific goals. Differences were found between the two measures (pre and post intervention) among: student's subjective norms, sense of control and knowledge about alcohol. Differences were also found between intervention and control groups, so that there was a significant increase in program participant's level of knowledge after the program, compare to the control group, who showed no significant change.

Multivariate analysis was used in order to predict differences between two time lines (before and after) among different groups (intervention/control). It was found that participation in the intervention led to a statistically significant change in participant's subjective norms and sense of control towards drinking alcohol. These findings show that participating in the program "Big Kids Don't Drink" contributed to developing healthy subjective norms about drinking alcohol, so that alcohol wasn't considered socially acceptable among students in the post intervention stage. It also contributed to an increase in student's

sense of control on their decision whether or not to drink alcohol, so that they felt less pressured to drink. However, compare to the control group, no significant change was found in student's perception of parental involvement in alcohol related subjects and in student's attitudes towards alcohol.

In this study, correlations between school socio-economic status (SES) and the dependant variables were examined as well. Findings show no significant differences in student's attitudes and subjective norms about drinking alcohol between schools with higher SES and with lower SES, as measured before and after the program.

However, significant differences were found in student's perception of parent's involvement in alcohol related subjects, between schools with different SES, before and after the program. Perception of parent's involvement in alcohol related subjects was higher among high SES schools compared to low or middle SES schools, so that students from low SES schools reported that parents were less involved in health promoting activities in schools, compared to students from high SES schools. Also, students from high SES schools presented higher levels of knowledge compared to students from low SES schools.

Findings from the parent's survey: In this study, parent's involvement in the program was low. Even so, findings show a positive correlation between parent's attitudes towards health promotion in school and their involvement in health promoting activities. Parents with positive attitude toward health promotion education in school were more likely to be involved in health promoting activities and vice versa. However, there were no correlations between parent's attitudes towards drinking alcohol and their involvement in health promoting activities, and no significance differences between mothers and fathers in all measures.

Conclusions: The alcohol prevention program "Big Kids Don't Drink" was found effective in this current study regarding three measures: changing subjective norms related to alcohol consumption, increasing sense of self control in regards to alcohol drinking and increasing knowledge about alcohol and its consequences among fifth and sixth grade children. Creating social norms that discourage alcohol drinking and increase a sense of control in children, while they face the dilemma whether to drink or not, may shape their future behavior during adolescence and beyond. This study shows the importance of this program as an early intervention, to delay or prevent the onset of alcohol misuse among adolescents. Although positive results were found among students who participated in the program, among parents, study shows low participation, as observed in different schools. Parents participation in health promoting activities and interventions, raise an important discussion that must be considered in order to improve the efficiency of this program even more, in the future.