

Norms Correction as Part of A Multi-Component Intervention

A number of community-wide and school-based comprehensive interventions have incorporated norms correction into classroom or workshop activities that fall within one of the levels of prevention specified above. Because the social norms component is only one of multiple interventions used, it is not always possible to evaluate its impact specifically. In these cases, revealing accurate norms to participants may have served as a catalyst to increase their receptivity to other program components, such as skill-training, information, and strengthening resiliency.

For example, a comprehensive middle-school intervention with a norms correction component that had previously been effective among white students was offered in a minority inner-city school. The experimental group demonstrated high-risk drinking rates over 50% lower than the control group in follow-up assessments. Two years after the intervention, corrected perceptions remained correlated with reductions in high-risk drinking (Botvin et al, 2001.) In a similar example for smoking, norms correction strategies were incorporated into a multi-component intervention to reduce smoking among high-school students that resulted in a rate of 14% of students smoking weekly in comparison with 24% in the control group (Perry et al, 1992).

Similar findings have been reported in more comprehensive literature reviews. For example, Hingson & Howland (2002) reviewed comprehensive community interventions to address alcohol, cigarettes, other drugs, and cardiovascular health and suggested that norms correction strategies may be particularly appropriate for adolescents and young adults. And in separate analyses of successful alcohol prevention programs in middle and high schools, both Hanson (1993) and Clemens and Thombs (2004) concluded that normative feedback was the critical ingredient accounting for the success of these programs.

Finally, Dunnagan and colleagues (2003) proposed a theoretical model for reducing underage drinking that combined environmental management, decision-balance, and norms correction to demonstrate the efficacy of using multiple models and evaluation techniques synergistically to formulate public policy.

These studies suggest that social norms activities can effectively be included in comprehensive interventions that are multi-faceted and incorporate a variety of compatible strategies.