

Social Norms Interventions with Multiple Levels of Prevention

The social norms approach can be used to provide a guiding framework for interventions that are universal, targeted, and indicated to create synergy between these levels of prevention. For example, the University of Arizona combined a universal social norms marketing intervention and other environmental management interventions with a moderation skills program for high-risk drinkers and a targeted campaign directed at sorority members (Glider et al, 2001; Johannessen, 2004; Johannessen & Glider, 2003; Johannessen et al, 1999). Efforts were made to educate stakeholders who were likely to be “carriers of the misperception” about the goals and purposes of the intervention by providing specialized training and developing literature specifically designed for faculty and staff. Interventions utilizing normative feedback were also integrated into environmental management strategies that were successful in reducing problems at the University of Arizona’s annual homecoming event (Johannessen et al, 2001)

In a well-designed intervention at the University of Washington, Larimer and colleagues (2001) combined selective and indicated prevention by providing normative feedback about drinking to individual fraternity members and their whole houses. Participants were assessed during their pledge year and one year later. The intervention and resulted in significant reductions in alcohol use and peak BAC when compared with fraternity members in the control condition.

These examples suggest that it is possible to combine social norms interventions at all levels of prevention to create a comprehensive change environment with mutually-reinforcing, synergistic messages delivered through a variety of channels to a variety of audiences.

Such programs are comprehensive, relevant, intensive, and promote positive messages, characteristics that are components of effective prevention programs (Berkowitz, 1997). This integrated approach is more likely to succeed than the common practice of developing multiple individual interventions that are not compatible or programmatically linked and that are often inconsistent with each other.