

Development of Posted Alcohol Warnings for Specific Target Groups

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Research suggests that the effectiveness of alcohol warnings may depend on the extent to which they meet the special needs of specific "target" groups [Hilton 1992; Mazis et al. 1991]. Thus, the current warning may need to be supplemented with dissemination techniques that convey alcohol-related information that is consistent with the beliefs, attitudes, existing knowledge, and concerns of intended target groups [Patterson et al. 1992; Smith 1990].

A group particularly at risk with respect to alcohol consumption, and therefore, in need of effective alcohol warnings, is college students [Berkowitz and Perkins 1986; Hanson and Engs 1992]. Recently, Kalsher, Clarke and Wogalter [1992] demonstrated the effectiveness of posters for disseminating alcohol-related information to college-age males. These researchers reasoned that posters may be an effective tool for conveying the hazards of alcohol consumption to this target group because they: (a) can be made more conspicuous than the current label warning, and therefore, are more likely to attract attention, (b) can be constructed to complement and/or extend the information contained in the current warning label, (c) can incorporate information most relevant to persons in this age group, (d) do not require that the drinker be near the alcohol bottle or can which may be necessary when alcohol is served from kegs or other bulk method, (e) allow for inclusion of important information too numerous for a single beverage alcohol container label, (f) do not require that a person consume alcohol to learn about alcohol hazards, and (g) allow placement at tactical locales that would promote it being read (e.g., bathroom stalls, elevators, meeting rooms).

College-age women are rapidly achieving parity with men with respect to alcohol-related problems, although their alcohol-related risks differ somewhat from their male counter-parts [Perkins 1992]. Therefore, a warning poster containing facts believed to be relevant to women was constructed and then tested to determine its efficacy in increasing college coeds knowledge of alcohol-related hazards and modifying their drinking behavior.

A 37.5 x 71.1 cm (14.75 x 28 in) three-color poster containing alcohol-related information was developed based on an earlier study by Kalsher et al. [1992]. Alcohol-related information was presented in five knowledge categories, including: *Compared to Men* (ways in which alcohol differentially effects women); *Drinking is Glamorous* (the unpalatable aspects of excess alcohol consumption); *On the Social Side* (social influences on womens' drinking); *Sexual Problems*; and *Fatal Fetal Facts* (specific effects of alcohol on fetal development). The signal word CAUTION and an accompanying triangle/exclamation point icon were placed at the top of the poster. Yellow and black colored pictorials depicting a potential hazard for each category were placed to the left of each heading and accompanying text. The purpose of the pictorials was to capture the attention of the coeds and communicate the hazards associated with a particular category quickly. A second chart, posted separately, described how to use a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) nomogram.

Following completion of a 25-item Alcohol Survey (pretest) designed to test the coeds' knowledge of alcohol-related hazards, warning posters were placed in high traffic areas (e.g., toilet stalls, adjacent bathroom mirrors) in a sorority and a women's dormitory where they remained in place for one week. After the posters were removed, the coeds completed the Alcohol Survey (posttest), including a problem designed to test their ability to use the information presented via the BAC nomogram chart.

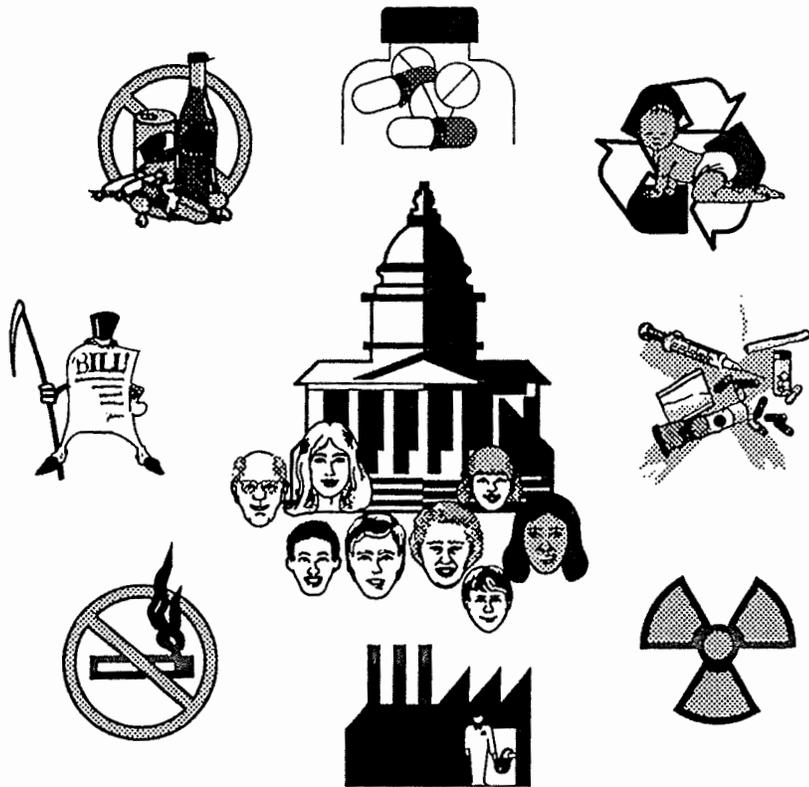
Analysis of the posttest scores showed that coeds exposed to the poster demonstrated significantly greater knowledge of alcohol-related hazards, compared to coeds who were not exposed to the poster. Moreover, comparison of these groups' posttest scores for each of the knowledge categories revealed that participants exposed to the warning poster had significantly higher posttest scores in four of the five knowledge categories (i.e., only *Compared to Men* was not significant). Performance on the BAC nomogram problem did not differ between the groups.

One question that arises concerning the use of interventions like the warning posters used in this experiment is their potential to change behavior, and not simply knowledge. Coeds exposed to the posters generally agreed that the posters: (1) provided valuable information about the dangers of excessive use of alcohol, (2) made them more knowledgeable about the differential effects that alcohol has on women compared to men, and (3) provided facts they could use to monitor their alcohol intake. However, they took a more neutral stance regarding the probability that the posters would modify their alcohol intake or influence the likelihood that they would drink to excess.

The finding that posters can be an effective means of conveying alcohol-related information is consistent with the results of earlier studies (e.g., Kalsher et al. 1992). However, the failure to demonstrate the effectiveness of posters to impact actual drinking practices is somewhat discouraging, and this issue should be the central focus in future studies involving the use of alcohol warning posters.

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