



POLICY PERSPECTIVE

PROGRAMS THAT USE COMMUNITY COALITIONS TO REDUCE UNDERAGE DRINKING ARE EFFECTIVE IN REDUCING DRINKING AND ASSOCIATED RISKY BEHAVIORS AMONG TEENAGERS. SUPPORTING LEGISLATION AND FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS THAT UTILIZE COALITIONS CAN PROVIDE COMMUNITIES WITH USEFUL CONTEXTS IN WHICH TO ADDRESS SERIOUS HEALTH RISKS AMONG THEIR YOUTH.

The Issue

Research suggests that youth drinking is related to other problems such as risky sexual behavior, injury, suicide and traffic crashes. Various strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing underage drinking. These include raising the legal drinking age, enforcing policies related to underage drinking and increasing the price of alcohol. Other research suggests that community coalitions may be effective in reducing youth drinking and the problems associated with it. To this end, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded 12 coalitions (in 10 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia) as part of the Reducing Underage Drinking through Coalitions Project (RUD).

In the article entitled “Effect of State Coalitions to Reduce Underage Drinking: A National Evaluation,”¹ Alexander Wagenaar and colleagues evaluate the effects of the RUD Project on media coverage, state alcohol policy, drinking behaviors of youth and alcohol-related driving behaviors. The study used a longitudinal quasi-experimental design to compare 10 states that participated in the program with 40 states that did not have the program. Programs in Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia were excluded due to differences in social and political environments and data availability.

Key Findings

The RUD project increased alcohol-related media coverage and improved state alcohol-related legislation. When the study began, RUD states had more media coverage than non-RUD states. Even when this is taken into consideration, RUD states when compared to non-RUD states showed significant increases in media coverage overall. With respect to specific topics, RUD states showed significant increases over non-RUD states in media coverage on underage drinkers, alcohol pricing and taxes, and social host liability. Policies involving social access to alcohol were significantly increased in RUD states as compared to non-RUD states.

The RUD project appears to have had significant effects on certain teenage drinking behaviors. Eighth graders in states with the RUD project reported significantly larger decreases in getting drunk in the past 30 days when compared to eighth graders in non-RUD states. Twelfth graders in RUD states reported significantly less drinking in the past 12 months, and were significantly less likely to drink five or more consecutive drinks in the past two weeks or get drunk in the past 30 days than twelfth graders in states without RUD. When compared to non-RUD states, twelfth graders in RUD states also reported significant reductions in driving a car after drinking in the past two weeks.

Although significant differences were found in certain teenage drinking behaviors, overall teen drinking and driving-after-drinking behaviors were not significantly different between RUD and non-RUD states. Several factors might explain the lack of significant findings. From a statistical perspective, the study may not have had enough power to determine the significant effects, even if they were there. Also, non-RUD states had other concurrent programming that targeted underage drinking, which may have caused reductions in teen drinking and other behaviors thereby lessening the appearance of the RUD program's effectiveness. Programmatic issues may also provide explanation. Some sites took longer to organize efforts, and most sites focused only a portion of their efforts on the core requirements of the program.

—Deanna Lewis

Deanna Lewis is a Rutgers/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Policy Fellow

1 Wagenaar AC, Erickson DJ, Harwood EM and O'Malley PM. "Effect of State Coalitions to Reduce Underage Drinking: A National Evaluation." *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 31(4):307-315, 2006.