

Harnessing the Power of Social Networks: Feasibility Trial of a Two-Stage Social Network Intervention to Reduce Risky Drinking among Residential College Students

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Introduction: Social processes play a critical role in driving risky drinking among young people living residential colleges. As such, there is excellent potential to utilise the power of social networks in college alcohol interventions.

Aims: We aimed to test the feasibility of a two-stage social-network intervention for reducing alcohol-use and related harms in college networks. Stage 1 was a network-wide, harm-minimisation workshop. Stage 2 was a social-network-intervention, in which network analysis was used to identify influential students, to receive a personalised intervention.

Design and Methods: Five colleges were recruited. Stage 1 was delivered to the first-year network at all colleges. Stage 1 included education about alcohol harm-minimisation, and a baseline survey. Stage 2 was delivered to the largest first-year network only. To identify influential students, we collected network data at 4-weeks, and used a method called 'Strategic Players' (Ott et al., 2018). Strategic Players were offered Quik Fix brief intervention (Hides et al., 2014). All participants will complete follow-ups at 3-, 6-, 12-months.

Results: In Stage 1, participation was excellent ($N = 542$), and the sample were hazardous drinkers, according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test ($M = 9.85$). In Stage 2, we collected valid network data from 86% ($n = 134$) of the Stage 2 cohort ($N = 155$). We then applied Strategic Players analysis to identify 60 students to receive Quik Fix. Results of the 3-month survey (closes late June), and 6-month survey (September) will show the results of the intervention.

Discussion and Conclusions: We have demonstrated initial evidence of the feasibility of this social-network-intervention. Results in the coming months will show whether this novel approach has potential to positively impact risky drinking in colleges.

Implications for Translational Research. If effective, this intervention may be applied on a larger scale in Australia.

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