

BRIEF REPORT

SMOKING CESSATION WITH ADOLESCENTS: A COMPARISON OF RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract— This study compared two methods for recruiting high school students into a voluntary smoking cessation program. A person-to-person approach was compared to an approach that resembled normal school publicity procedures. Active personal recruitment produced 31 volunteers, while the normal procedures produced only one. Subsequent application of the active approach at sites where only static procedures had been used produced an additional 21 volunteers. Results suggest that active person-to-person recruitment may be an important component of a smoking cessation effort with high school students.

Despite widespread knowledge of the harmful effects of tobacco use, adolescents continue to adopt the smoking habit. A recent study by the National Institute of Education (1979) reported a five-fold increase in smoking between junior and senior high school. Attraction of volunteers to youth smoking programs continues to be a serious problem (Smith, Krochalk, & Harris, 1979; Singer, 1977). Smith et al. (1979) approached 3,025 potential subjects in California high schools and were able to recruit only 2%. Auger, Wright, and Simpson (1972) found that static approaches (e.g., posters and displays) were relatively impotent in recruiting adolescents to a smoking program. As Hunt and Bspalec (1974) point out, "It may well be that the major problem is one of enticing smokers into treatment, and that the problem of therapy of choice is a minor one once the smoker is motivated to change" (p. 435).

The present study compared the relative efficacy of two approaches for recruiting adolescents into a smoking cessation program. It was hypothesized that a recruitment strategy using person-to-person contact, student promoters, posters, flyers, and public address announcements would produce significantly more volunteers than an approach relying on just posters, flyers, and announcements, with little or no person-to-person contact.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were students from four public high schools in northern California. Each of

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the four schools contained grades 9-12 and had an enrollment of between 1300 and 1700 students. Schools had policies permitting smoking in isolated smoking areas on school property. Collapsed demographic data indicate that students in the two recruitment conditions were similar along important dimensions. Percent minority students were nearly equal (24% vs. 22%); percent of students going on to four-year colleges were similar (29% vs. 25%); and mean drop-out rates were equal (4% each).

Procedures

Schools were randomly assigned to one of two recruitment conditions.

Static recruitment. This consisted of a five school-day effort to recruit volunteers for an in-school smoking cessation program. "Normal" publicity procedures were used; that is, the same methods used to publicize most other school programs such as fund drives, club meetings, and athletic events. Static recruitment consisted of the following: (a) five days of recruitment activities; (b) ten small (18" × 12") posters placed in hallways; (c) five large (36" × 24") posters placed in hallways; (d) two public address system announcements; and (e) written announcements in the daily bulletin. Personal contact was minimized. Recruiters answered student questions and were congenial, but they did *not* initiate person-to-person contact. Posters were placed exclusively in hallways and on campus bulletin boards.

Active recruitment. This was a more intensive effort to recruit volunteers for the same smoking cessation program. It consisted of nine school-days of active recruitment, the hallmark of which was person-to-person contact. It included all the elements of Static Recruitment plus: (a) leaflet distribution on student property; (b) in-class announcements; (c) person-to-person recruiting on five of the nine days; (d) placement of posters at several student "hang-outs" adjacent to the school; and (e) peer assistance in recruiting. Personal contact with recruiters was maximized. Recruiters were three Stanford graduate students and five pre-med seniors who approached students outside of classrooms at lunch and between classes. Contact outlines were used by recruiters to ensure consistency of presentation. Recruiters maintained a friendly approach that was informal and nonjudgement with regard to student use of tobacco.

The single outcome measure used was a count of the number of students who attended the introductory session of a smoking cessation program and signed a letter of intent to participate. Student identities were kept confidential throughout, and no adults other than recruiters were permitted to attend. After recruitment data were collected Active procedures were applied to the Static sites to ensure that all students had ample opportunity to participate in the cessation program.

RESULTS

There was a significant difference between recruitment strategies ($\chi^2 = 29.3$, $p < .001$). In the Static Recruitment schools only *one* subject volunteered for the smoking program. Active Recruitment schools fared far better with a total of 31 program volunteers. The superiority of Active Recruitment was further demonstrated when subsequent application of Active procedures to Static schools produced an additional 21 volunteers.

Data from the 53 program volunteers revealed that 31 (59%) reported hearing about the program from a recruiter; 10 (19%) from a friend; 8 (15%) from posters, flyers, or announcements; and 4 (8%) from teachers. Thus 85% of the volunteers heard about the program through word of mouth or personal interaction.

Despite the marked superiority of Active Recruitment, the overall percentage of high school smokers who volunteered was quite low. If an estimate of 15% smokers in the total school population is accepted, the 53 subjects in this study represent less than 6% of the estimated smokers in their schools.

DISCUSSION

Typical school publicity procedures seem inadequate for recruiting high school students into a smoking cessation program. This finding is consistent with studies showing posters (Auger et al., 1972) and publicity (Singer, 1977) as ineffective ways to change adolescent smoking behavior. It is possible that posters and public address announcements are so common in high schools that students simply fail to attend to them at all.

Active Recruitment was more encouraging, and results support the contention that college student recruiters can effectively increase the number of adolescent smokers who join a cessation program. Active personal recruitment may increase participation by: (a) providing more detailed information in a personalized and realistic manner; (b) reducing student fears about confidentiality; and (c) providing credible, positive non-smoking models.

Considering the low recruitment rates found thus far, and considering that not all who quit smoking will maintain abstinence over time, a mainstreamed and multifaceted approach is warranted. In addition to active recruitment procedures, smoking awareness and skill training could be productively integrated into the usual school curriculum. Perry, Killen, Telch, Slinkard, & Danaher (1980) found encouraging results with such a school based intervention. Recruitment and cessation figures could potentially be increased by approaching students both personally *and* through school health classes and curricula.

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