

The Effects of Internal and External Support on Drinking Outcomes after Receiving a Brief Intervention for Substance Abuse

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Introduction:

Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) programs effectively treat people with alcohol use disorders and people who are at risk for developing alcohol use disorders (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, 2012). Although a large body of research supports this finding, SBIRT programs are not effective for everyone, and many researchers call for studies which identify patient characteristics that predict positive outcomes after receiving a brief intervention.

The literature on treatment for alcohol addiction shows that support from various external sources (friends, family, spirituality) enhances the effect of treatment on sobriety. Such support results in improved alcohol use outcomes, increased treatment engagement/completion, and higher rates of recovery (Win, 2002). However, there are no known studies that examine the effect of external sources of support on brief interventions for alcohol abuse.

Method:

Health workers recruited patients (18 + years) entering an emergency department (ED) who screened positive for risky drug or alcohol use. Health workers then performed a brief intervention aimed at reducing risky substance use, and administered a survey asking about health behaviors including questions on alcohol use and sources of support. Researchers at GSU contacted 491 out of 829 patients 6 months after entry into the ED, and repeated the intake survey.

Using multiple linear regression, we predicted past 30 day drinking days at 6 month follow up controlling for past 30 day drinking days at intake to compare patients reporting some external source of support (family, friend, clergy member, spirituality) to patients reporting no external support at intake.

Results:

15% of followed patients reported no external source of support at intake. When controlling for past 30 day drinking days at intake, patients reporting no support drank on 2.4 more days at follow up than patients reporting some source of support ($B= 2.38, p=0.019$).

Discussion/Conclusion:

With this information, substance abuse specialists are further aware of the importance of external support in the treatment of alcohol abuse. Patients receiving a brief intervention should be encouraged to gain or except some type of external support as they address their substance use disorders.