

AUSTRALIAN ADOLESCENTS' STIGMATISING ATTITUDES TOWARDS PEERS EXPERIENCING ALCOHOL PROBLEMS: INFLUENCES ON HELP-SEEKING INTENTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR.

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Introduction and Aims:

Stigma is a prominent barrier to seeking help for mental health problems during adolescence. While studies have examined Australian adolescents' stigmatizing attitudes towards depression, less is known about attitudes towards alcohol misuse, or how alcohol-related stigma influences young people's willingness to help their peers.

Design and Methods:

Year 9 students (n=2447; 49.6% male) were recruited as part of a randomized controlled trial of *MAKINGtheLINK*, a school-based intervention that teaches adolescents how to help peers experiencing mental health problems. Stigmatizing attitudes and intentions to help a peer were assessed in relation to two vignettes of a young person experiencing (i) alcohol abuse and (ii) depression.

Results:

Alcohol misuse was more stigmatized than depression. Peers with alcohol misuse were more likely to be considered 'weak' rather than sick, and more dangerous and unpredictable. Overall, participants were less likely to encourage help-seeking for alcohol misuse. For both disorders, the 'weak-not-sick' dimension of stigma was associated with weaker intentions to encourage a peer to seek help from informal and formal help sources, while the 'dangerousness' dimension was associated with *stronger* intentions to encourage formal help-seeking. Participants who reported higher overall levels of stigma were less likely to have helped a peer seek help in the past.

Discussions and Conclusions:

Australian adolescents may be less willing to help a peer seek help for symptoms of alcohol abuse than depression. As many adolescents approach their peers for support with mental health problems rather than seeking professional help, there is a need for programs to reduce alcohol-related stigma and improve help-seeking skills in young people.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The *MAKINGtheLINK* trial was funded via a National Health and Medical Research Council Grant (NHMRC Grant APP1047492). The NHMRC had no role in the design of this study and will not have any role during its execution, analyses, interpretation of the data, or decision to submit results.