

## **Implementation Evaluation of an Alcohol and other Drug Education and Counselling Program embedded in Secondary Schools: Odyssey Victoria's BRACE Program**

Petra K. Staiger<sup>1,2</sup>, Rebecca Sheils<sup>1</sup>, Raji White<sup>1</sup>, Monique Smith<sup>1</sup> & Stefan Gruenert<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Psychology, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia*, <sup>2</sup>*Centre for Drug use, Alcohol and Addictive behaviour Research, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia*

Presenter's email: [sgruenert@odyssey.org.au](mailto:sgruenert@odyssey.org.au)

**Introduction:** Building Resilience via Advocacy Counselling Education (BRACE) is an embedded secondary school alcohol and other drug specialist program developed by Odyssey Victoria that employs universal prevention and targeted selective intervention for at-risk youth and their families whilst also supporting school staff. Considerable evidence points to the importance and effectiveness of place-based programs for youth which take a holistic approach. However, understanding barriers and facilitators to the implementation of these programs are critical to their ongoing success.

**Method / Approach:** A single-arm implementation evaluation across six secondary schools was conducted. Interviews were conducted with teachers (n=7), BRACE clinicians (n=6) and young people (n=14). Thematic analysis was utilised to identify the barriers and enablers of successful implementation.

**Key Findings:** Key themes included: young people reporting positive experiences of the program, in particular, those who had been supported by family work. Teachers highlighting the importance of learning the skills of how to talk to young people about alcohol and other drugs and; clinicians highlighted the importance of engaging at-risk students via prosocial activities such as drumming, basketball and camps rather than through traditional referrals to counselling.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Implementation enablers included strong engagement by school leadership, the importance of health and harm minimisation approaches embedded within schools and delivered by trained youth AOD clinicians as well as drawing on prosocial activities within the school environment to engage young people. The barriers to implementation highlighted the importance of ongoing funding, support at senior levels and health-based rather than punitive attitudes towards alcohol and drug use.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** These findings highlight the importance of addressing the systems and school-based barriers to managing alcohol and drug issues faced by at-risk youth and their families.

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