

The School-led Preventure study: translation of a personality-targeted substance use prevention program in Australia

ERIN KELLY¹, LUCINDA GRUMMITT¹, CHLOE CONROY¹, LOUISE BIRRELL¹, EMMA BARRETT¹, LEXINE STAPINSKI¹, MAREE TEESSON¹, NICOLA NEWTON¹.

¹*The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.*

Presenter's email: lucinda.grummitt@sydney.edu.au

Introduction and aims: Adolescence is a vital period for prevention of substance use disorders, yet existing school-based prevention programs are limited. The School-led Preventure study is an effectiveness trial of the Preventure program, which targets personality risk factors for substance use, internalising and externalising problems. Preventure has a strong evidence base when delivered by research psychologists. This trial tests implementation by existing school staff, substantially reducing cost and logistical barriers to widespread implementation.

Design and Methods: A cluster-randomised controlled trial is underway in Sydney, with Year 8/9 students (aged 13-14 years at baseline). Nine schools were randomly allocated to Preventure or control (usual health education). Preventure consists of two 90-minute group sessions of cognitive-behavioural therapy and motivational interviewing to teach personality-targeted coping skills. Student alcohol use, internalising and externalising symptoms were measured through self-report survey. School staff reported implementation fidelity, feasibility, and acceptability.

Results: Baseline data is being collected and Preventure is underway in intervention schools. So far, 477 students have completed the baseline survey (47%F, mean age 13.6 years). Past 6-month alcohol use was reported by 10% of students. In the past 6-months, 32% reported feeling depressed most days, 39% felt anxious most days, and 20% reported externalising problems. School staff rated the program highly, and fidelity was sound. Staff identified barriers including delays through parent consent methods, workload, and timetabling issues. Staff made suggestions to improve delivery, considering student literacy levels, engagement, and workplace demands.

Discussion and Conclusions: By upskilling existing school staff, this implementation method has the potential to increase the uptake and sustainability of the evidence-based Preventure program in Australian secondary schools.

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