



Preventing Alcohol Use among African-American Youth

Overview: The Strong African American Families Program (SAAF) is a universal prevention intervention designed to deter or decrease alcohol and other substances among African-American youth living in rural Georgia. This study is in its 8th year of a randomized, controlled, family-based prevention intervention among rural African-American adolescents from 677 families. Half of the families enrolled in this intervention were assigned randomly to a prevention group and the other half to a no-treatment control group. Multiple repeated assessments of key study constructs and of the youths' alcohol drinking and other substance use were administered to all participants, including mothers, fathers, or extended family caregivers in single-mother families; target children (12-year-olds at study initiation); the children's friends; and the children's teachers. The study follows over time all the adolescents and their families to determine whether the intervention will continue to protect these youth from the use of alcohol and other substances throughout high school. The study will collect three additional data waves to examine mediating and longitudinal family, peer, and other factors. After the initial study was underway, Dr. Brody received supplemental funds to enhance the basic research design by collecting data and conducting analyses at the molecular, genetic level.

Results/Outcomes: The research team found that parenting is related to self-control and self-esteem, and racial socialization is related to ethnic pride. In addition, self-control and self-esteem were related to levels of deviance-prone attitudes and social perceptions that serve as significant predisposing or protective factors for early involvement in substance use and sexual risk behaviors. Preliminary analysis of the genetic add-on to the study shows variability between African Americans and Whites on genetic associations with psychiatric disorders. The analysis will identify genes associated with susceptibility to alcohol use disorders (AUDs) and examine gene-environment interactions during adolescence with regard to initiation, escalation, and persistence of alcohol use.

Significance: This work provides a unique approach to understanding the impact of a systematic prevention intervention among African-American children and families in rural America. The study is highly relevant to NIAAA's health disparities research goals with regard to how key components of prevention strategies and critical precursors of behavioral change vary across racial/ethnic groups and in rural or low-socioeconomic settings. It supports NIAAA's Strategic Plan, regarding the identification of genes associated with vulnerability for alcohol dependence, as well as the recommendations from NIAAA's Extramural Advisory Board to focus on genes and the environment by collecting genetic data from these behavioral studies. Dr. Brody's is the first behavioral study to attempt to achieve the latter goal by expanding the expertise of its investigative team to include genetic epidemiology.

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