

Department of Defense Alcohol Abuse Prevention Education Campaign

Executive Summary Report for:



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KEY FINDINGS

TRICARE Management Activity (TMA) is addressing the issue of excessive use of alcohol/binge drinking among junior military personnel through an Alcohol Abuse Prevention Education Campaign with the goal of ensuring the health and well-being of all military personnel. On behalf of TMA, Fleishman-Hillard conducted in-depth discussion groups with 75 junior-level, enlisted service members at four installations (May 2006) 18 to 24 years of age to better understand their environment and the most effective messages and activities to reach them. E1s, E2s and E3s were interviewed separately from E4s to ensure candid discussions.

MILITARY ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

Feedback revealed that members currently do not perceive their partying habits as binge drinking. Instead, they think that “bingeing” is drinking for the sole purpose of getting extremely drunk and represents far more drinks than the definition provided to the participants (five or more drinks on one occasion). Participants also indicated that military culture, stress, frustration, and boredom are all factors that lead them to search for an outlet or release such as drinking.

CONSEQUENCES ASSOCIATED WITH BINGE DRINKING

Many service members are likely to associate short-term physical effects with the negative consequences of bingeing (e.g., hangovers). While they clearly know binge drinking can potentially lead to very serious consequences (e.g., death, DUIs), relatively few volunteered that they associate binge drinking with long-term negative consequences on their career or relationships with others. Many appear to believe that the short-term benefits they associate with alcohol use (e.g., distraction, fun, escape) outweigh any potential negative consequences because they think, “It won’t happen to me.”

RESPONSE TO DRINKING ENVIRONMENT

A common theme emerged during the group discussions: junior-level, enlisted members appear to have negative thoughts or feelings toward and do not want to be like the person who drinks to excess and loses control. Some members discussed their desire to **disassociate themselves** from extreme cases of drunken behavior because they find it embarrassing or demeaning. These findings indicate that the target audience wants to avoid being the person who drinks to excess and loses control and is socially ridiculed and embarrassed.

RESONANT THEMES

The themes and messages most favorably received are those that emphasize an individual having control over his/her drinking. For the junior-level, enlisted members interviewed, this theme translates into having more control over one’s life and future. Many feel they have little control over their lives at present. They recognize that maintaining control over their drinking also provides them with a way to better maintain control over their lives (by avoiding the negative consequences associated with excessive drinking).

BEHAVIOR CHANGE CHALLENGES

In the discussions, some participants said that they drink to release themselves from the lack of control they currently have in their lives due to always being on duty and being told what to do. However, some of these same individuals also recognize that by drinking to such excess, junior-level, enlisted members are placing themselves in situations where they will likely behave irresponsibly and lose control. This audience needs to be reminded of the negative consequences (short- and long-term) associated

with excessive drinking. Based on this research and secondary research on the target audience, the most important of these are the short-term negative consequences of losing control and the associated social disapproval.

CHANGING UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR

This target audience is best reached through communication that:

- Does not preach abstinence nor provide a “textbook” definition of binge drinking.
- Highlights the negative consequences of binge drinking that resonate with the target audience—loss of control, negative social impact, embarrassment.
- Underscores the positive outcomes associated with avoiding excessive drinking, namely the greater control soldiers will have over their lives.
- Reminds soldiers about the negative consequences associated with binge drinking in a way that grabs their attention and resonates with their current real-life experiences.

For more information about the Tricare Alcohol Prevention Education Campaign, contact Communications Research Division, TRICARE Management Activity, 703-681-1770.