

What does the scientific evidence tell us about the effectiveness of prevention?

...with a particular focus on young people

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Types of prevention

- Form: Universal or Targeted

Selective

Indicated

- Function: Environmental or Individual

Skills

Knowledge

Change the Environment

- Opportunities for risky behaviour limited by actions on availability / enforcement
- Operates in three areas -
 - Legislation e.g. forbid or restrict drug use; drug testing
 - Physical e.g. neighbourhood renewal; police action
 - Economic e.g. target supply upstream or locally
- “...supply-control interventions absorb the bulk of drug control spending in most nations, even nations that have a reputation for tolerating drug use. The evidence base concerning these interventions is distressingly weak”

Developing Skills

- Socialization of thinking skills and behavioural skills to develop good habits, values and norms
- Limited good quality evidence of effectiveness in some settings
 - Social / life skills curricula in schools
 - Parenting / family strengthening programmes
 - Classroom behaviour management strategies
- “A small number of high quality studies, mostly from the US, support particular community, family-based or classroom management programs in terms of preventing drug use.”

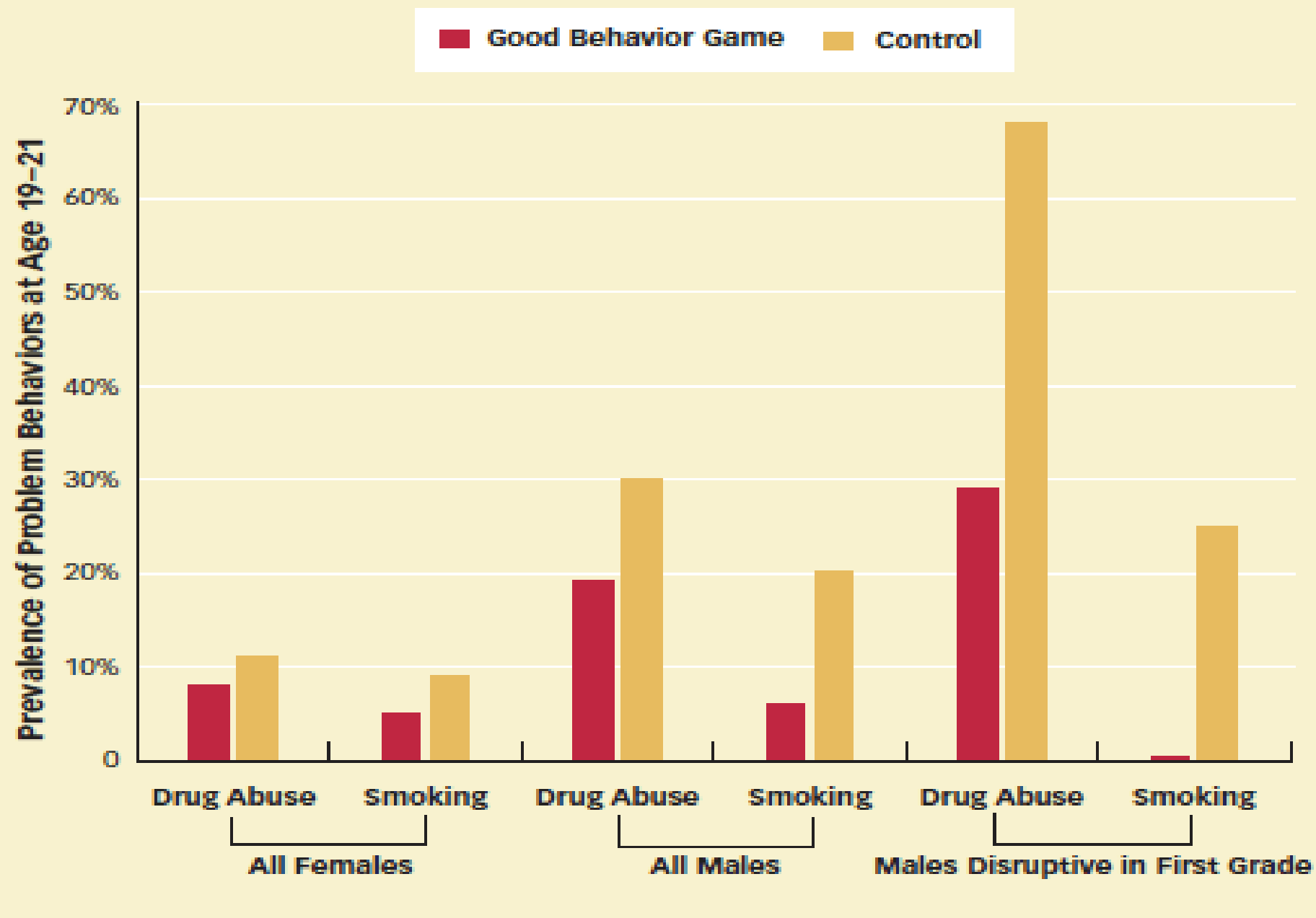


Figure 8.1 Impact of the GBG on smoking and drug abuse diagnoses at age 20-21

Source: Kellam et al. 2011

Improving Knowledge

- Provide information to change knowledge and awareness of risks
- Fairly good evidence of poor effectiveness -
 - School-based drug knowledge curricula
 - Mass media campaigns
 - Social normative feedback
- “...purely didactic prevention programs, whether delivered through the mass media, in the community or in the classroom, have no evidence of effectiveness.”

Are Small Effects Worthwhile?

- Benefit-cost models tend to show, over the medium and long-term, benefits outweigh costs for developmentally oriented programmes:
 - Life / social skills (\$13 : \$1)
 - Strengthening Families Programme (\$3.60 : \$1)
 - Good Behaviour Game (\$59 : \$1)

Conclusions and Cautions

- Lack of good evidence for environmental prevention approaches
- Reliable evidence that informational approaches are, on their own, ineffective
- Some evidence that developmentally oriented prevention approaches can be effective with good benefit:cost ratios, but evidence is patchy
- The best prevention evidence still suffers from notable risks of bias: performance and reporting bias, garden of forking paths, publication bias
- No strong evidence for how to best organise or combine different types of prevention efforts in prevention systems