TOWARD BUILDING RESILIENCE AS THE BEST PATH TO PREVENTION

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Abstract

Substance abuse in the form of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs wreaks havoc in the lives of young and old. The party scene seems to be a given on college campuses. Seventh-day Adventist schools are not immune to these cultural influences. The best method of prevention is resilience. The components that contribute to resilience include a positively involved family, good self esteem, adult supervised after school activities for young people, a sense of community at school, service activities, and faith. By fostering these elements, we can be intentional about making our campuses exception in all areas.

Introduction and Purpose

The use of substances among elementary, high school and college students in the United States has been extensively studied by Lloyd Johnston and his colleagues for over thirty years.[1] While there has been some variance in the rates of use, over the last few decades, this national research project has shown the continuous high prevalence of alcohol and drug use. In 2008, about 14 percent of eighth graders used an illicit drug in the last year as did about 27 percent of tenth graders and 37 percent of high school seniors. The most prevalent substance used among young people remains alcohol with about one-third of eighth graders reported using alcohol in the last year, about 53 percent of tenth graders reporting use and 66 percent of twelfth graders. More alarmingly, 5 percent of eighth graders reported being drunk as did 14 percent of tenth graders and 28 percent of twelfth graders.[2]

The data among college students is even more startling. In 2008, about 47 percent of college students reported being drunk in the last 30 days with a slightly higher proportion of females reporting being drunk than males (47.1% vs. 46.3%).[3] Adventist educators can, perhaps, take some comfort in an article in the *Journal of Research on Christian Education* that indicates that Adventist college students may use alcohol and all other drugs at only about one-third the rate of college students in general society. But this still means that there are a significant number of Adventist students, about one-third, who have initiated alcohol and/or other drug use.[4]

Research reports and clinical observation show that alcohol, tobacco, and non-prescribed drug use are serious issues that result in a wide variety of problem behaviors. Research has shown that poor academic performance is related to substance use.[5] A report from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that over 72 percent of students aged 12-17 who did not use marijuana in the past month reported at least a B average while only 45 percent of those who reported using marijuana at least 5 days in the last month had a B or higher average.[6] Academic consequences may be one of the lesser consequences of substance use. The majority of alcohol users report having hangovers and heavy substance users also report fairly frequent use of the emergency room.[7] Criminal behavior is often a result of substance abuse as well. These behaviors include, driving while intoxicated,[8] unsafe sexual practices and assault including sexual assaults.[9]

In the United States, the growing problem of binge drinking and alcohol consumption in general led to the establishment of a Task Force to assess this problem. The statistics that appeared in the report was startling

(www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov). College drinking was found to account for 14,000 deaths per year in students aged 18-24 years. It was noted that 500,000 students were unintentionally injured; 600,000 were assaulted by another student; 70,000 students were victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape; 2,100,000 students had driven a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, all of these in the previous year. These figures are hugely alarming and Seventh - day Adventist College and University campuses are not exempt from the problem. At present, it is on a smaller scale but nevertheless with us, and the problem is not going away of itself!

In 1989, a survey conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching reported that college presidents viewed alcohol abuse as their top problem related to campus-life. Interestingly, some have suggested that possibly the second-largest problem is that many campuses are still in denial.[10] If this denial of the magnitude and effects of substance abuse is real, there are major consequences to a safe learning environment that significantly affect the mission of higher education.

Data suggest that Adventist college campuses have significantly lower rates of substance use with research finding that about one-third of Adventist students may have substance use problems. Surveys of these students also indicate that the consequences are similar to those reported in general society studies. Our experience as researchers also suggests that Adventist schools may be in considerable denial about the existence of substance use problems on their campuses. It is clear from research data that our society and our Church must recognize the existence of substance abuse problems and use evidenced based prevention techniques to address these problems. It is the purpose of this chapter to provide a review of evidenced based on the research literature as well as from primary research conducted by faculty at the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions, strategies designed to prevent substance use among our young people. The following information and elements might be used to design such programs.

Building Resilience

A powerful concept has emerged from research over the past few decades, inspiring hope among researchers and educators alike: the concept of *resilience*. Resilience is the capacity to maintain competent functioning, to do well in school, hold pro-social values and have high achievement goals in spite of adversity. Such adversity can come from a variety of sources, such as living in poverty, in a home that does not encourage high educational or occupational goals or in a neighborhood with a high rate of delinquency and crime.

Research literature is replete with articles that identify causes, but it may be more important to identify what it is that protects youth in a high risk environment. In his classic article, Reckless, based on numerous studies he conducted, concluded that there were significant internal and external factors that related to protecting youth in a high risk environment. These included such internal variables as a high self-concept, commitment to conventional moral values including strong religious beliefs and such external factors as an adult such as a teacher or pastor, coach or other responsible adult who cared for the youth and provided encouragement, role modeling and appropriate socialization into becoming a functional adult. This classic research has fostered decades of further development and validation of this concept. Resilient individuals are those who, despite severe hardships and the presence of factors that place them at risk of a variety of ills, develop coping skills that enable them to succeed in life.[11]

Researchers explain resilience in terms of hardiness, and suggest that resilient individuals have a strong commitment to self and others and are willing to take action to deal with problems. They also have a positive attitude towards their social environment, hold a strong sense of purpose, and develop the internal strength that enables them to see life's obstacles as challenges that can be overcome.[12] It appears that resilience develops over time as a result of environmental support that facilitates its development at each developmental stage of a youth's life.[13]

In reviewing research on what fosters resilience among young people, one important factor emerges over and over again: the presence of valuable, sincere, and enduring relationships. Brooks has observed that "Resilient youngsters all had at least one person in their lives that accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperamental

idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence."[14] Others have concluded that the "most precious lesson" learned from their research on resilience is that *hope* derived from relationships with caring individuals can serve as a protective buffer in the lives of vulnerable children and youths who succeed in spite of the odds.[15] College mentors of youth can capitalize on this aspect by providing opportunities for positive, sustained relationships with at-risk young people who might not otherwise have a caring and involved person in their lives.

Classically, researchers have applied a resiliency framework to those who live in high risk environments. In that sense, we may believe that the conclusions from this research do not apply to youth in "good" environments; to youth that are growing up within the safe context of a good family, a strong faith community, and quality church school education. In the last few years, it has become very obvious that there is no such thing as a safe environment. The "Monitoring the Future" study shows that most high school students report they have easy access to most illegal drugs.[16] Primary research the IPA has conducted in Adventist schools also indicates that students report ready access to illegal drugs.

Research on pornography indicates that pornographic websites are among the most visited websites in the world. Christian young people report easy access to these sites and may be more vulnerable to internet pornography use than they are to more public high risk behavior.[17] It is important for the Church to recognize that all of our youth exist in a high risk environment today. It is crucial that we implement the elements of resilience that have been found to be protective against engaging in substance abuse or other high risk behavior and effective in stopping high risk behavior.[18] The rest of this chapter focuses on some specific elements of resiliency that have been found to be effective in protecting our youth.

The Role of Family

The role of the family in building resilience is primary. In his classic work on what prevents delinquency, Hirschi documented that attachment between youth and parents plays a core role in building resilience and preventing delinquency and substance use.[19] If parents have a strong emotional attachment to their children, know who their child's friends are and where their children are when they are not at home, study after study has found those rates of substance use and other forms of risk behavior as significantly lower.

Kostelecky found that parental attachment was significantly related to a wide variety of behaviors from academic achievement to positive pro-social behaviors as well as lower relates of the use of all types of substances.[20] Research also indicates that positive parental bonding is preventative across many cultures. McBride and his colleagues found parental attachment, particularly to both parents, was protective against all types of substance use in a study in the Caribbean.[21] Judith Brooke and her colleagues found that parental attachment was related to lower rates of marijuana use across different ethnic groups, for both genders and over a wide range of time periods.[22] Evidence suggests that parental attachment has a direct relationship to lower rates of substance use. Researchers have also suggested that parental attachment helps build resilience against peer influence. That is, strong attachment to parents is related to youth involvement with non-drug using peers and may limit the impact of drug using peers.[23] It is also important to note that attachment to parents not only may prevent substance abuse, but it also appears to be related to cessation of substance use. That is, those youth with higher level of attachment to their parents are more likely to cease drug use.[24]

It is important to note that the family can play a major role in causing or at least facilitating substance use. This can occur at least in two ways. First it has been consistently found that if parents use drugs and a child is emotionally attached to them, children are significantly more likely to also use drugs. Also, family dysfunction prevents the development of positive bonds and is related to higher rates of all types of substance use and lower rates of treatment recovery.[25]

Research also indicates that attachment to parents is also a strong protective variable in preventing substance use among Adventist young people. In 20 years of research conducted by IPA faculty we have found that among Adventist youth, attachment to parents is consistently related to lower rates of all types of substance use as well as other types of risk behaviors. Parents who accept their

children unconditionally, parents or grandparents who's children feel that they can talk to them about anything, parents who represent the kind of Christian that the youth wants to be when they grow up are significantly more likely to have children who have much lower rates of substance use.

Happy functional families have always been a strong part of Adventist beliefs. Data from general society as well as from studies done on Adventists shows that parental bonding is the first prevention building block—the first protective element that builds toward a foundation of resilience. The importance of the Church doing all it can to strengthen the families through its policies, direct programs and school family partnerships is crucial to building resilience among our youth!

Developing Self-Esteem

Youth who had a positive self-concept have lower rates of delinquency even in a high risk environment. One of the most significant developmental tasks facing young people, particularly adolescents, revolves around their identity and self-worth. While the relationship between self-esteem and youth risk behavior is complex,[26] recent studies have shown that positive self-esteem was related to lower rates of violence,[27] lower rates of substance use,[28] and better substance abuse treatment outcome.[29] Some describe global self-esteem as how much a person values him- or herself— how much someone likes, accepts and respects him- or herself as a person.[30] Prevention of high-risk behavior should consider adolescents' self-appraisals and their ultimate ability to understand who they are and their purpose in society.

How do we encourage genuine positive self-esteem in young people? Perhaps we begin by noting a very basic Christian truth, that God so loved every human being that we would have sent His son to save even one of his creation. Each human being is of inestimable worth. It is important to distinguish between an inaccurately high or conceited opinion of oneself and a more valid appraisal of one's worth based on recognized competencies and worth because we are God's creation.

One way is to provide unconditional positive self-esteem, while encouraging an accurate appreciation of their special abilities and worth.[31] This involves showing love and regard for them rather than merely judging them based on their behavior or academic success. It is important for young people to know with certainty that we care about what they are doing. The value of genuine high self-esteem in the realm of prevention is borne out in primary research conducted by the Institute for Prevention of Addictions (IPA). Those young people we have surveyed in 15 years of research in an Adventist College who reported unconditional love from their parents were about forty percent less likely to drink alcohol in the last year. Parental unconditional love may increase resistance to peer influence to use alcohol and other drugs. Within the Church and our schools, it is important for us to provide real opportunities for our young people to build genuine self esteem by recognizing their talents and providing opportunities to exercise their unique talents in a variety of church and school settings. Doing so, research suggests, can play a major role in prevention.

After School Activities

After-school hours, when young people are out of school and while parents may still be at work, are the time of day when young people are most likely to engage in at-risk behavior. Studies show that often the largest proportion of drug use, sexual activity, and delinquency among young people occurs between the hours of three to six in the afternoon.[32] One of the strategies that schools have used to prevent high risk activity during the after school hours is to engage students in protective activities. Students who spent no time in extracurricular activities (after-school programs such as sports, clubs, music, etc) were 49% more likely to have used illicit drugs and 35% more likely to have smoked cigarettes than students who spent one to four hours per week in non-risky extracurricular activities.[33] However, the involvement of adults in after school programs may be an important part of effective after school programming. The "Monitoring the Future Study" has consistently found that students who spend time with their peers in athletic or other peer based activities are more likely to engage in substance use.[34] However, research demonstrates substance use is lower among students engaged in after-school activities that are adult supervised.

A core part of a resiliency perspective is the role of adults in prevention. After school activities supervised by adults are protective; involvement in after school activities without adult supervision is related to higher rates of substance use.[35] Thus, finding ways to engage children during the after-school hours should be a key part of any successful prevention effort. College students can be a significant resource in providing after-school activities for young people and keeping them engaged in positive, meaningful pursuits during that time.

School as a Community

Over the past decade, research has emerged describing linkages between the social context of school and students' involvement in problem behavior. Four decades ago, Hirschi found that youths' commitment to school was related to lower rates of substance use, delinquency or other risk behaviors.[36] Battistich and Hom described school as a "functional community," meaning an environment characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in which students and teachers have the opportunity to participate in school activities and decision making, and a place where there are shared norms, goals and values.[37] Students who had a high perception of their school as a community enjoyed school more, were more academically motivated, were absent less often, engaged in less disruptive behavior, and had higher academic achievement than students who did not. In addition, students who perceived of their school as a community were less disruptive and used fewer drugs.

Other research has shown that when students had a perception of their school as a community they tended to read more outside of school, enjoyed reading more, liked school more, avoided work less, were more academically motivated, enjoyed helping others learn more, and had higher educational expectations. Academically, they performed better on reading and mathematical achievement tests. They also had more concern for others, had higher self-esteem, and resolved conflicts better.[38] Resnick and colleagues found that when students sensed a high level of connectedness at school, they were involved in fewer violent acts; were protected from use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana; delayed first sexual intercourse; and showed better health and less risky behavior.[39]

School connectedness arises from relationships between people, working to create meaning and happiness in the context of an interdependent community of human beings in school settings. This can be accomplished by adults engaging with students in schools and developing meaningful relationships with them.[40] Primary research conducted by faculty of from the IPA found in a sample of Adventist college students that those who felt that there were three or more faculty or staff that they could talk to anything about used substances at half the rate of those who did not report this kind of connectedness.

These findings have implications for college administrators, faculty and staff to work with their students and develop programs using college students to engage in school activities with students, strengthening school connectedness, and promote an open trusting relationship with students. This would promote a school environment that is perceived by the students as caring and concerned about their health and wellbeing. Adventist education has a strong tradition of integrating the home and school as well as defining the school as a core part of the faith community. However, the tyranny of the daily, financial problems and conflicting priorities have resulted in the loss of some Adventist schools and reduced our ability to continue to apply this tradition as strongly as we may have done in the past. The data on the importance of the school for community should remind us that the role of Adventist education plays a crucial role in the resilience of our youth.

Service Activities

Stark has argued that the triumph of Christianity in the Roman world occurred to a significant extent because of how Christians treated the communities in which they lived.[41] He noted that the Christians took the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 to heart and met the human needs of their communities. In Matthew 25 Jesus describes a powerful judgment scene in which God welcomes those to His kingdom who had taken care of those who were sick and had provided food and clothing to those in need. Stark argued that this revolutionary approach where "Christian values of love and

charity had from the beginning been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity" was in such stark contrast to the dominant Roman philosophies that Christianity changed the world.[42]

A recent Ellen White Estate publication noted that, "When we accept Him as our Savior, we will do the things He did, such as caring for the needy and homeless and being compassionate to those who are poor."[43] The importance of service is not only a strong theological statement, but research also shows that engaging in service for others is a crucial part of protecting our youth from a wide variety of high risk behavior.[44]

Considerable attention has been directed at identifying effective approaches to reduce adolescent sexual risk-taking. Researchers have identified risk factors and protective factors related to sexual risk behavior. Kirby is at the forefront of reviewing programs for effectiveness in delaying the initiation of sexual activity and identifying features related to successful and unsuccessful interventions. He reports that service learning programs among young people are effective in reducing adolescent pregnancy and childbearing.[45] Other researchers confirm these findings. Melchior evaluated the "Learn and Serve" programs throughout the United States. Students in these programs spent an average of 77 hours providing various community services. Pregnancy rates among participants during the year in which they participated were lower than among non-participants.[46] Research also shows that engaging in service was related to higher rates of school retention and lower rates of substance abuse.[47] Primary research conducted by the IPA at an Adventist college in 2005 showed that those who engaged in 10 hours or more of community service each month were significantly less likely to use tobacco, alcohol or marijuana.

The exact role that service plays in prevention may be complex. However, Kirby speculates that it may be because participants develop sustained relationships with program facilitators, which may encourage resilience, or enhanced feelings of competency and greater autonomy, along with the positive feeling that they are making a difference in the lives of others.[48] Participating in service activities also reduces the opportunity to engage in problem behavior, especially during after-school hours.

College administrators should identify places and activities to involve their students in service activities. Creative thinking, involvement and planning could have a very positive impact on young people by getting them involved with helping others in their community.

Faith and Prevention

For social scientists and public health researchers, the role of religion in prevention and building resiliency has often been problematic. Many scholars tend to be agnostic and have tended to view religiosity and spirituality as very difficult to scientifically measure and as just indicative of positive social bonds.[49] However, scientific data already gathered has been too powerful to ignore. A review of decades of research on the protective effect of religiosity on substance use showed that in about 80 percent of the studies, religiosity is significantly related to lower rates of alcohol, marijuana, and all other drug use.[50] They conclude that the empirical data is clear that involvement in faith communities and personal spirituality are strongly related to lower rates of substance use. It may also be related to harm reduction among drug users. IPA researchers found that street injection drug users who attended church frequently and indicated that their faith was important to them were more likely to clean their needles to avoid infecting others with HIV and not engage in crimes of violence.[51]

Primary research conducted by IPA researchers on Adventist populations also has found in over 20 years of studies that while the rate of substance use is lower among Adventist young people overall,[52] those who frequently attend church, are involved in church related activities frequently and have a strong involvement in personal spirituality are significantly less likely to initiate and continue alcohol and other drug use.[53] These data suggest that even those who are protected because of their faith based involvement are more likely to not use drugs if they are more behaviorally and personally involved in their faith!

A number of research papers also show that religiosity and spirituality are very involved with recovery from substance abuse. For many, those 12-step programs do work![54] Research has consistently shown that religiosity and spirituality are positively related to treatment progress and

recovery. It is important for treatment providers to recognized and utilize religiosity and spirituality as a part of successful treatment.[55]

The mechanisms of how religiosity and spirituality facilitate prevention and recovery are complex. However, the literature suggests that they may relate to a number of aspects of these two constructs. First it has been noted that being involved in a faith community generally means that one is associating with non-drug users. This means that the social learning environment of faith community members involves interacting with a high proportion of non users. Additionally, being active in a faith community generally means that one has a support group that provides social support in many life stress situations. The availability of a support group is associated with lower rates of substance use. Another element likely involves the internalization of norms against illicit drug use and at least moderation in alcohol use.[56] The internalization of normative values has consistently been found to be related to lower rates of substance use. The role of family in prevention has been discussed. Research also suggests that family bonds are increased by involvement in faith communities. It has also been noted that religion's focus on judgment may be related to a wide variety of conventional behavior including lower rates of substance use. Finally, primary research conducted by IPA researchers over the last twenty years has found that the primary reason Adventist youth have given for not using substances is because of their relationship with Christ.[57]

The faith community and all of us involved in it have a major role to play in prevention and building resilience. An active campus chaplaincy program and integrating faith and learning are crucial element in substance abuse prevention on Adventist campuses. Research suggests that active involvement in church activities and a personal spirituality are key to prevention. It would also seem crucial to engage students in leadership of spiritual programs as well as doing everything possible to facilitate a strong personal devotional life.

Where to Go from Here?

Earlier in this chapter, we alluded to the horrendous statistics uncovered by the US Task Force on College Drinking. The Task Force concluded that:

1. The culture of drinking at colleges and universities can be transformed by *committed, research-based, collaborative* efforts supported by institutional leaders.

2. *College administrators* and *other concerned individuals* need to work together to change the culture of drinking on US campuses (and we would add on campuses throughout the world).

The actual title of the Task Force study and findings are summarized in a document entitled: "A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of drinking at US Colleges". We conclude this chapter with a clarion call to action in our communities, schools, colleges and universities. We have shared the research that undergirds focus on developing resilience and self worth in young people. Resilience leads to the making of good choices especially as far at- risk behaviors are concerned. Our educational institutions already have committed and concerned individuals on staff, in the student body as well as in surrounding communities and churches. We sometimes think that educating and providing information is adequate in our quest of prevention of at-risk behaviors and focus mainly on education and information.

Information is not enough![58] Along with connectedness (and resilience), mentoring, service to others, and spirituality should be modeled, taught and experienced by the faculty and students. When information is shared, it should be accurate. For example, many blindly accept cursory comments that drinking alcohol has some health benefit. But there is no suggestion of this for young people in evidence-based literature! Tell them so! Faculty can help enforce the culture of non–drinking and non-substance use by *themselves* practicing what their employing institutions preach! It is sad to hear from students in our schools the reports that some of their teachers drink alcohol. Our actions drown out our words and values when they are contradictory.

Clinical, preventive interventions can be put in place in our campuses and instructions of learning to decrease at risk behaviors. This prevention will be drawn on the best available science and some

evidence-based initiatives have been discussed in this chapter. These initiatives should focus on the entire student body (universal) and yet others may focus on selected subgroups with greater risk such as those who may be experimenting with or even regular users of recreational substances (alcohol, tobacco and other drugs – ATOD). It is important to remember that non-dependent users often do not perceive the negative consequences of their habits and may be at even great risk of progression to full dependence. They need our efforts and attention.

Alcohol and tobacco should be banned on campuses. Alcohol should be eliminated at our sporting events and college gatherings. Conditions need to be created that support and implement these restrictions.

There should be programs/initiatives which invite those who have problems with addictions to be helped, without judgmental or retributive consequences, and that protect privacy. Such programs will ideally, with the sharing of information, provide skills training and personalized feedback to those in the process of prevention and recovery. This needs to be balanced with the need to prevent the spread of such behaviors within the student body. Psychology and prevention professionals should design and implement these initiatives at each campus, addressing the specific needs and demographics of each school. Human resources and budgets are required to ensure success in these efforts but, the salvific benefits more than warrant such investment.

Faculty and students should intentionally model, nurture and teach with a spiritual emphasis on relationships and connectedness. The National Science Foundation is currently studying majors in the Biology Department and the Behavioral Sciences Department at Andrews University to understand how students in these departments achieve a higher degree of discipline proficiency than would be expected from their college entrance scores. Preliminary data suggest that is the close mentoring and role modeling of faculty that has made the difference.

Focused, Christ-centered discipling is the goal. Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are dangerous and addictive. However, the strongest reason not to cloud the mind with mind-altering substances should not be the fear of addiction but rather the intentional desire to keep the communication with Christ open and the mind clear. We will then witness comprehensive, true education which "…has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man [all]. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."[59]

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