



# Coffee Break Companion

“Learn what the latest research says about adolescent substance abuse in the time it takes to have your coffee break”



Published by the UNCG Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships in collaboration with the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services with financial support from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), US Department of Health and Human Services (grant number 6 J79 T117387-02-2). Reproduction of the text is encouraged; however, copies may not be sold.

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## The Article

Title: Adolescent substance abuse treatment: A synthesis of controlled evaluations  
 Authors: Vaughn, M.G., Howard, M.O.  
 Published in the *Research on Social Work Practice*. Vol. 14., No. 5, 2004, pp. 325-335.

## The Background & Objective

It is only within the last 15 years that strictly controlled evaluations of adolescent substance abuse treatment have become available. This review attempts to review what research has been completed on the effectiveness of adolescent substance abuse treatment within a common set of rules.

The objective of the study was to synthesize outcome findings and methodological characteristics of controlled evaluations in adolescent substance abuse treatment. Put simply, the authors compared the effectiveness of 24 treatment interventions using standard metrics.

## The Methodology

Searching bibliographic resources, the authors compiled a list of 3,012 citations with keywords related to adolescent substance abuse treatment. From this sample were obtained 32 controlled evaluations. With the goal of obtaining the best data available, the authors filtered the citation results for evaluations that (1) Targeted adolescents (2) Did not use pharmaceutical therapies except in special circumstances (3) Contained treatment outcomes (4) Measured alcohol and drug use outcomes (5) Used statistically controlled evaluations. 15 evaluations remained for the final study.

Data from the 15 evaluations were rated using an adapted form of the Methodological Quality Rating Scale (MQRS). The 15 controlled evaluations contained a total of 24 intervention types. The MQRS used was made up of 13 attributes of effective substance abuse treatment that culminated in a 1 to 16 point final score. Sample sizes ranged from 22-426 per evaluation. Socio-economic status tended to be low throughout all samples. Racial/ethnic disparities were unremarkable. Nearly half of sample participants were adjudicated and receiving correctional treatment. Majority of participants were male.

**A note of caution:** The methodology used in this evaluation synthesis is not comprehensive nor an accurate portrayal of all adolescent substance abuse treatment outcomes. As stated by the author, an initial sample of 32 adolescent substance abuse treatment evaluations is overshadowed by over 300 such studies in adult substance abuse treatment outcome evaluations. More research is required in this area to provide an accurate picture of effectiveness in adolescent substance abuse treatment interventions.

## Results

The primary outcome of interest for all evaluations was substance abuse reduction. Overall, most interventions reduced substance use and increased abstinence rates. Positive gains that immediately followed treatment were often not sustained at follow-up. Post treatment results ranged dramatically, consult the article for more detailed information. The included table of intervention MQRS ratings are a selection meant to represent the breadth of evaluations presented.

Intervention Type	MQRS
Multidimensional Family Therapy	15
Cognitive-Behavioral Group Treatment	14
Minnesota Model, 12-step	14
Family Therapy	13
Individual Cognitive-Behavioral	13
Multisystemic Therapy (18-week)	13
Cognitive-Behavioral Coping Skills Group Therapy	12
Purdue Brief Family	12
Behavioral Therapy	11
Brief Strategic Family Therapy	11
Coping Skills Training	11
Family Systems Therapy	11
Botvin Life Skills	10
Multisystemic Therapy (16-week)	10
Residential Treatment & Aftercare	8