

This is the abstract of a study selected by Drug and Alcohol Findings as particularly relevant to improving outcomes from drug or alcohol interventions in the United Kingdom. It was not published by Drug and Alcohol Findings. Unless permission has been granted, we are unable to supply full text. Click on the [Title](#) to visit the publisher's or other document supplier's web site. Other links to source documents also in blue. Hover mouse over orange text for explanatory notes. Free reprints may be available from the authors - click [Request reprint](#) to send or adapt the pre-prepared e-mail message. The abstract is intended to summarise the findings and views expressed in the study. Below are some comments from Drug and Alcohol Findings.

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► Individual and contextual effects of school adjustment on adolescent alcohol use.

Henry K.L., Stanley L.R., Edwards R.W. et al. [Request reprint](#)
Prevention Science: 2009 [Epub ahead of print].

Further evidence that adolescent substance use is affected not just by specific prevention activities, but by a school's overall climate, especially the affiliation it generates in its pupils.

Abstract Unusually this analysis asked not just whether a pupil's positive affiliation to their school is linked to less drinking, but whether this same pupil would drink less in a school characterised by high pupil affiliation than in one whose pupils are more alienated. In doing so it attempts to strip away factors related to individual pupils to expose the potential impact of the school's climate as a whole. In turn this gives some indication of the potential prevention impact, not of specific substance use education or policies, but of generally how well the school engages its pupils.

The analysis drew on a dataset derived from 43,465 eighth grade pupils (normally aged 13–14) from 349 schools representative of all rural schools across the US mainland. Pupils were surveyed between 1996 and 2000 using questionnaires answered anonymously in each school by 75–100% of pupils. Alcohol use was assessed through a composite measure reflecting frequency of use, self-image as a (none to very heavy) drinker, and the centrality of intoxication in the pupil's drinking. An advanced multilevel statistical model was used to disentangle relationships between drinking and individual versus whole-school (contextual) measures of school adjustment. Adjustment was measured in terms of the pupil's **bonding** to school, how well they **behaved at school**, and their impressions of how bonded their friends were.

After accounting for **other potential influences**, all three school adjustment variables were significantly related to alcohol use both across individuals in the same school, and on average between different schools. The between-schools relationships partly reflected differences between pupil populations in their degree of bonding. This element was statistically eliminated. What was left of the school's influence remained significantly and fairly strongly related to the intensity of a pupil's drinking. The implication is that a

similar pupil, similarly bonded to their school, will drink less in schools where the overall average level of bonding is higher. In other words, drinking levels are not just related to the individual, but to a school's climate as reflected in the affiliation of its pupils. The further implication is that initiatives which improve school climate may have a restraining influence on pupils' alcohol use.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL FINDINGS This analysis follows on from a [similar analysis](#) by the same research team but using a different dataset, a different measure of alcohol use/attitudes, and a different measure of affiliation to school. Nevertheless, it came to similar conclusions: regardless of their own degree of attachment to school, pupils in the lower years of secondary schooling drink less in schools which have managed to engineer or maintain a high level of affiliation from their pupils. British findings with similar implications have [previously been analysed](#) by Drug and Alcohol Findings. As explained there and in the corresponding [background notes](#), impacts on substance use of attempts to 'artificially' improve affiliation to school have at best been promising, perhaps partly because the improvement levers open to researchers fall far short of those 'naturally' available to authorities which can replace staff, inject resources and mandate compliance.

It is important to keep such findings in perspective. The featured analysis focused on the small amount of variation in each individual's drinking which could be attributed to the school they attended rather than their individual characteristics and circumstances. These individual variables (presumably reflecting family and broader social influences as well individual personalities) accounted for by far the greatest part of the difference in drinking between pupils. What the analysis showed was that the minor (but still potentially important) contribution of the school is substantially accounted for by how far it engages its pupils, makes them feel appreciated and liked, and promotes such feelings in return.

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