

Text message intervention to reduce frequency of binge drinking among disadvantaged men: the TRAM RCT

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Plain English summary

The TRAM RCT

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Introduction

Binge drinking by men who are socially disadvantaged greatly increases their risk of liver disease. We tested a novel intervention that was delivered by text message to see if it would be an effective and cost-effective way to reduce their frequency of binge drinking.

Design of the intervention

The intervention was delivered by text messages. These prompted men to review the harms drinking caused, not just to themselves but also to their family and friends. The messages also illustrated the benefits of reduced drinking and encouraged the men to take action to reduce their drinking. The control group received texts on general health topics.

Methods

The men recruited were aged 25–44 years, lived in socially disadvantaged areas and had drunk > 8 units of alcohol on ≥ 2 occasions in the previous 28 days. (Note that four pints of 4% beer contain nine UK units of alcohol.) Potential participants were identified from general practice registers and by community outreach. They were randomised to the intervention or control group, and were followed up for 12 months after the intervention was delivered.

Results

Over 800 men living in socially disadvantaged areas took part. The intervention group engaged enthusiastically with the text messages. The study succeeded in following up a large proportion (86%) of the participants at 1 year. At follow-up, the intervention group had reduced their binge drinking only slightly more than the control group, so that the results are inconclusive.

Conclusions

Further research is needed to resolve the uncertainty around the effectiveness of the intervention. The research methods used in this study provide a platform for testing novel interventions to reduce inequalities in health.

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