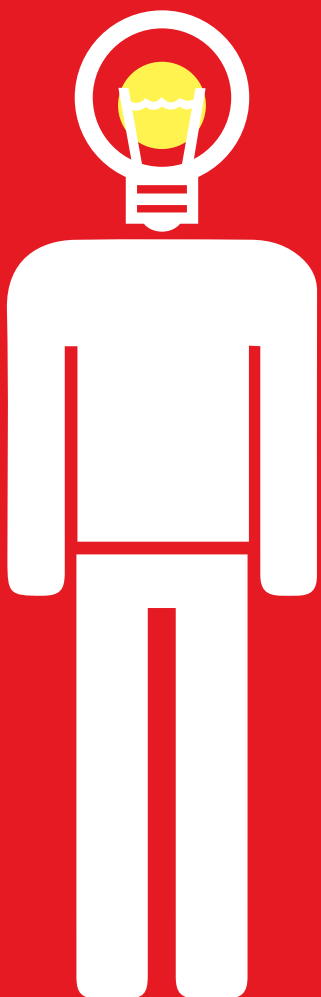


DOORDRINGEN



of



DOORDRINKEN

Effectevaluatie Halt-straft Alcohol  
Summary

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**At the request of**

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afdeling Extern Wetenschappelijke Betrekkingen

## **Summary**

*Jos Kuppens en Henk Ferwerda*

# **Doordringen of doordrinken**

Effectevaluatie Halt-straaf Alcohol

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# Summary

In the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme, Halt and care organisations for addicts work together to provide young people who have committed a punishable offence under the influence or in possession of alcohol with insight into the consequences of alcohol consumption on their health and actions. Halt Alcohol sanctioning is an intervention focused not only on the actual youngsters but also on one or both of their parents. After the Halt Alcohol sanction is accepted, a care organisation for addicts implements a training order (comprising two meetings and a homework assignment) of six hours for the youngsters in question, and organises an information session of two and a half hours for their parents. The young people as well as their parents are given information on the effects of alcohol and the consequences of alcohol consumption, among other things. For the young people additional modules are added, such as on how to deal with group pressure and to say 'no' when alcohol is being offered. The intention of the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme is to achieve the following objectives:

- Getting more knowledge about the effects of one's own consumption of alcohol, and about the consumption of alcohol in general, by young people and their parents;
- Developing a better attitude with regard to the consumption of alcohol by young people;
- Less drinking by young people (less binge drinking and less excessive drinking);
- Less delinquent behaviour by young people;
- Parents developing a better attitude in regard to their children's alcohol consumption;
- Enhancing parents' involvement with their children who use alcohol.

### *Reason for the effects evaluation and research questions*

The Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme was developed in 2006, when it was rolled out in a number of regions. At the Ministry of Security and Justice, the wish to obtain greater insight into the effectiveness of Halt Alcohol sanctioning has been expressed, with a view to perhaps rolling it out on a national level. This effects evaluation was preceded by a process assessment (Kuppens, Nieuwenhuis and Ferwerda, 2011). The Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme was adjusted in response to this.

The principal question of the effects evaluation is: *'to what extent is the sanctioning effective in terms of enhancing knowledge about the effects of alcohol consumption and awareness of one's own consumption (e.g. the risks and effects this consumption may have) and in terms of behavioural changes and recidivism?'* This has been elaborated in the following subquestions:

1. Does the intervention result in a change in the young people's knowledge and attitude?
2. Does the intervention result in less alcohol consumption by young people, both in the number of units drunk each time and the number of drinking occasions a week?
3. Does the intervention result in less recidivism, measured over a period of six months?
4. To what extent is the intervention more effective as parents are more involved?
5. To what extent does Halt Alcohol sanctioning help change the knowledge and attitude of parents about alcohol consumption and change their views about their child who has committed a punishable offence?
6. What other factors affect the effectiveness of the sanctions?

### *Research methods*

Central to the effects evaluation is a comparison between a randomly divided experimental group and control group. In this experimental design, the young people and their parents in the control group are not offered the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme; after their introduction at Halt but not until *after* they fill out the initial questionnaire they are told that because of the effects evaluation, they need not take part in the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme. The young people and their parents in the experimental group are asked to take part in the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme.

All the youngsters and one of the parents in both groups receive three questionnaires, for pre-, interim- and final assessment. Pre-assessment forms are filled out prior to the intake talk at Halt; interim assessment is at around six weeks and the final assessment after about six months. We worked with three questionnaires

to be able to report both on the short-term effects (the period of about six weeks between the pre- and interim- assessment) and the medium-term effects (the period of about six months between pre- and final assessment). Halt staff were in charge of sending the questionnaires and making sure they were filled out; a conscious choice was made to avoid any interaction between the researchers on the one hand, and the young people and their parents on the other, so as not to affect the process and, as a consequence, the effects of the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme.

The research response is high, even if only complete files are considered. Of the 432 dossiers that were initiated (among young people and their parents), 343 (79.4%) were received fully filled out. Since another 45 dossiers with one or several missing questionnaires were also used, a total of 388 research files (a 89.8% response rate) were considered in the effects evaluation. Of these, 201 young people and their parents were put in the control group and 187 young people and parents in the experimental group. Analysis shows that there are no significant differences in the backgrounds and characteristics between the control and the experimental group so that accordingly, the random division seems to have been effective. This means that the groups with and without intervention can be compared for the intended effects.

Besides the self-reports received from young people and parents in the questionnaires, in this study use was made of the information supplied by trainers in questionnaires regarding, among other things, the attitude of young people and parents during the training. For information on the offences committed and the backgrounds and characteristics of the young people, also the Halt (AuraH) registrations were consulted. To get the fullest possible picture of recidivism, apart from the questionnaires study and the AuraH information also police registrations were consulted.

### *The effects of the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme*

The analysis of the possible effects of Halt Alcohol sanctioning was focused on seven themes, related to the objectives of the intervention: the knowledge of both young people and parents, the attitude to alcohol consumption of young people and parents, the drinking behaviour of young people, recidivism of young people and parent involvement. In respect to those themes, both for the short and the medium term it was ascertained whether participation in the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme has an effect.

Going through Halt Alcohol sanctioning yields three short-term effects. Firstly, following the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme results in young people believing that their knowledge about alcohol has increased. This is a subjective and partial effect on their knowledge, since the knowledge scores indicate that their actual knowledge has not in fact increased. Secondly, the same effect is seen also in

parents who have gone through the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme: also they believe that their knowledge has increased whereas effectively, it has not. Thirdly, parent involvement with their children is promoted by following the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme.

There is a short-term effect also in young people who did not follow Halt Alcohol sanctioning. Although it is a Halt Alcohol sanctioning objective, it is actually the young people in the control group who develop into lighter drinkers in the short term; in other words: in the short term, for young people's drinking behaviour it actually seems to have more effect just to have been arrested by the police and referred to Halt than to also subsequently go through the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme.

However, it is preferable to observe more closely the effects in the medium term, in this case after about six months. After all, if only the short term is considered it remains unclear whether any effect achieved are sustainable. In the medium term, Halt Alcohol sanctioning turns out to become less effective. Having gone through the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme only still effects the subjective knowledge component in young people. This means that in the medium term, the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme fails to yield any verifiable effect with regard to at least six of the seven objectives researched. More specifically, this means that Halt Alcohol sanctioning has no positive effect on young people's knowledge about alcohol, their attitude in regard to alcohol consumption, their drinking behaviour, their parents' knowledge about alcohol, their parents' attitude in regard to their children's alcohol consumption and parents' involvement with their children.

The study shows that, irrespective of whether the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme was followed, there is less drinking behaviour among children of greatly involved parents and of parents who will punish their children.

### *Discussion and suggestions*

The study shows that it is not possible to realise the objectives that were set, using Halt Alcohol sanctioning. This raises the question whether, looking at the limited duration of the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme (six hours for young people, two and a half hours for parents), perhaps too many and overly ambitious objectives were set.

With other interventions, effects studies are frequently left out or may be impossible. Accordingly, whether those interventions actually achieve the effects they claim remains unknown. At any rate, the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme does not achieve them.

In the effects evaluation, an unexpected and short-term effect was found among the control group of young people, who become lighter drinkers in the short term. If nothing else, this result indicates the usefulness of some form of enforce-

ment. In the case of the control group enforcement consisted of arrest by the police and referral to Halt. This enforcement may be intensified by the changes in the Dutch Licensing and Catering Act.

Findings from the scientific literature and additional analyses indicate that greatly involved parents and parents who punish their children have children who drink less. However, the research leads to the conclusion that the involvement of parents cannot be promoted by following the Halt Alcohol sanctioning programme.



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