Alcohol Consumption and College Campuses

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A quick Google search for “drinking and college students” results in over 37.7 million hits. It is not uncommon to hear negative news in the media pertaining to the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol on college campuses. Unfortunately, this is neither old nor new news. Alcohol abuse is nothing new and though it is a known problem, it will continue to be a problem. In *What Colleges Need to Know Now, An Update on College Drinking Research*, it was reported that alcohol related deaths increased six percent and students’ self reported “driving while intoxicated” increased from 2.3 million to 2.8 million from 1998 to 2002, the time the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) created the Task Force on College Drinking to the publication of *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*.

As the number of students at colleges and universities increase and students come in with more pressures than ever before, students are using different strategies to cope with stress. As educators, what can campuses do to prevent the negative impacts of alcohol use and abuse? What policies or programs can institutions implement to decrease the number of hospital visits and alcohol related car crashes each year?

*A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges* has been successful in beginning the dialogue. It appears we are proficient in the “awareness” aspect of informing people of the extent of the problem. However, the amount of data available does not align with the number of action plans for prevention or solutions. Prevention programs on campuses need to be further assessed and shared with the rest of the community. Which strategies have worked and which have not? How would they be applied to different communities? In addition, to be representative of the problem, newer studies need to take into consideration diverse students. As
universities in America are beginning to enroll more international students, what role do international students play? How does international and cultural alcohol use and influence affect local institutions?

Understanding alcohol misuse as an umbrella of problems may lead to more impactful practices. Alcohol abuse is strongly correlated with other subtopics that need to be further explored. Alcohol and driving leads to death, violence, and sexual assault; adding a whole other layer to problems on campus and the surrounding communities. More than 696,000 students between the traditional college ages (18-24) are assaulted, 97,000 being victims of sexual assault or rape, as a result of alcohol-related use. Specific subtopics or related fields that also need to be further studied include the following:

- effectiveness of health and wellness programs (i.e. education of alcohol abuse),
- student conduct (i.e. alcohol policies on college campuses),
- crisis management & protocols (i.e. what to do when a student is intoxicated), and
- sexual assault & campus safety.

In reviewing the present research within the past five years, the purpose of this report is to investigate what research is currently out and to explore how the research complements each another.

**Annotated Bibliography**


**Synopsis**
This alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) study involved a survey conducted at summer freshmen orientations sessions at a large public university in the southeast in 2002, 2004, and 2006 to over 6,000 students. The sample size represented 34-44% of the campus population for each year the study was conducted. The survey questions explored “current” use (ATOD use before entering college reported via survey) and “intended” use over the four years. In addition, English and his team also asked about students’ intentions to join Greek Life “because much literature has connected high-risk alcohol use and related negative outcomes with membership in a social Greek organization... Likewise, the intent to join a Greek organization has been connected to high alcohol use prematriculation” (p. 167-168). What they found was that there was a decrease across the board from 2002-2006: drinking, tobacco, and marijuana.

Reviewing previous research, the authors share data indicating both an increase in student consumption of heavy alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) upon entering college as well as the claim of preexisting patterns of ATOD abuse from students prior to entering campus. English and his team suggest that educators need to take into consideration the characteristics and culture of the incoming class while developing prevention programs.

Relevance

The article is relevant in that it provides a new lens in which to study ATOD use and actually make use of the data. This study sheds light on factors to consider when developing programs on campus. Instead of looking at the interaction between individual students and staff members, this study challenges practitioners to look at the forever growing complexities of the students (e.g. their level of risk aversion, how they interact, with whom they interact, multiple layers of diversity, etc.) and how this may affect their experience with ATOD. This was also a general study of not just alcohol, but tobacco and other drugs (e.g. marijuana), which are related...
topics mentioned in the rationale statement of this report. How closely these topics relate is evident from the results of this study.

**Evaluation**

This article is three years old and was peer-reviewed in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Journal, therefore making it a reputable source for intended use for student personnel administrators. It is congruent with current body of knowledge though there is a biased consistent push throughout the article attempting to connect the decrease in ATOD use with the traits of the Millennials (e.g. tendency to follow rules and trust in authority) without giving any direct support or evidence for the relationship. The research was conducted mainly by Dr. Erin English, the Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Coordinator at the University of Georgia.

The survey questions were pulled directly from the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Survey and Core Alcohol and Drug Survey and National College Health Assessment (NCHA), contributing to the standardization in instruments. English and his colleagues claim that “both of these instruments have been used repeatedly in national assessments and have well-established reliability and validity” (p. 169). In addition, the level of significance for this study was .007, making it almost too good to be true.

Furthermore, a number of limitations were addressed in the study (e.g. low racial diversity of participants, ATOD policies and enforcements changing from 2002-2006, etc.), which make it helpful for practitioners to look into when conducting further research. One of the limitations I see in the study was that they may not have considered many out of state or international students, who were not present at the orientations. Furthermore, due to the limited
differences in the study (i.e., race and geography and somewhat gender), the sample would not be representative of large public institutions across the nation.


Synopsis

This research was done at a large public institution in Ohio to assess the difference between perceived risks and normative behaviors in students’ actions to their alcohol policies. Nearly 1,400 students were anonymously surveyed. Surveys were conducted by trained graduate students in a random set of classes in which students were asked to leave their answers in an envelope upon completion. The survey questions aimed at figuring out what may cause or influence students to follow policy. Normative behaviors/factors were close friends’ quantity of drinking, close friends’ frequency of drinking, and time spent with friends. Perceived risk factors were losing driver’s license, receiving fines, needing legal assistance, under-aged drinking legal issues, blocked from major, and dismissal from university. It was found that normative factors had the most correlation with drinking, specifically the actions of students’ close friends.

Relevance

In choosing a university with conventional control policies, it would be more applicable to apply students’ reactions to other university policies across the nation. The results of this study have implications that are significant to those on campus working to reduce alcohol abuse. As Lewis and Thombs conclude, “The findings call into question the conventional deterrence
strategies used in many university communities (i.e., belief that students who perceive there to be a low risk of receiving sanctions are those most likely to engage in alcohol related misbehavior)” (p. 203). This assessment’s intended audience remains student affairs administrators and health educations in university settings.

**Evaluation**

This research was conducted by two professors, Dr. Todd F. Lewis and Dr. Dennis L. Thombs, the first with a background education and counseling and the latter in public health. Though the professors are not practitioners, the article was peer reviewed and published through NASPA Journal.

Within the study, almost 70% of the participants were female and 87% identified as white. Therefore, though the conventional policies may be similar to other institutions, the other factor, students who respond to these conventional policies, may differ. It may be a possibility that students in more diverse crowds make more independent or individualistic decisions. Students from different cultures may also be more risk-adverse.

Lastly, Lewis and Thombs acknowledge that their nonexperimental design is also a limitation in the conclusion of a causal relationship between normative behaviors and alcohol use.


**Synopsis**

This article was an assessment of drinking policies at 4-year institutions in Minnesota and Wisconsin, many of which were private institutions. There were two parts to this assessment:
Mitchell et al. researched alcohol policies and campus characteristics via institution websites and learned of the actual policies and implementations via surveying administrators perceived as knowledgeable of the policies (e.g. directors of campus life, dean of students, etc.). Surveying was accomplished via phone. Phone interviews were conducted by a staff member, and not from any of the authors in this article.

What was found was that there were inconsistencies between policies posted on the website and what was currently implemented. There was also variance between institutions in the degree in which students were educated of the policies. Furthermore, private schools were 400% less likely to accept gifts from the alcohol industry and therefore, had less advertisements on campus. On campus bars were also more prevalent in large schools (which also tend to be more public institutions). However, larger institutions, as expected, also had more opportunities for alcohol-free activities on campus.

Relevance

This source was relevant in that there is value added in understanding how institutions portray and present expectations of alcohol policies. In order for public health professionals to assist target populations such as these, it would also be helpful for them to easily understand what policies are in place (p. 156). The authors’ results in this assessment did not allow them to do this. An analogy would be student learning outcomes as presented in a program, but not institutionalized and implemented into a program. Though relevant and related, the assessment itself was not very useful. The title would lead an individual to assume that the research would be a more broad assessment of alcohol policies on college campus across the nation. However, many were private institutions in the same geographic area.
Nonetheless, in recognizing their limitations, the authors offered thoughtful suggestions to take into consideration for further study. One of the suggestions included looking at the characteristics of the Greek organizations (i.e. professional, national, and social) as its stance may have specific policies members are already expected to abide by, no matter how less strict campus policies may be.

Evaluation

The lead researcher/author of this article has a Masters degree in Public Health and was the coordinator in the School of Public Health, Epidemiology division at the University of Minneapolis. This division was also the funding source for the assessment. Though the researcher’s position, the article was still published and peer-reviewed in the Journal of American College Health, a publication of the American College Health Association, an organization that has been around since 1920 with members from over 800 institutions. Therefore, giving some leverage of the work accomplished. Here, the intended audience is not only student personnel administrators, but also community members in the health arena who work directly in or with college populations (i.e. mental health providers, pharmacists, student leaders interested in health promotion, etc.).


Synopsis

In this study between college students and their non college peers, college students began their longitudinal study in 2004 and non college students in 2008. Non college peers were those
who completed less than five courses at a 4-year college. Participants were compensated $40 after web-based survey completion. Though both groups started out with larger sample sizes, the final sample included was 833 participants. This was due to factors such as research mortality (e.g. loss of contact) and ineligibility of criterion (e.g. dismissed due to no longer being needed for demographic matching).

The purpose of the study was to see how the two groups compared in personality and peer influences; and alcohol use. The results of the study were predictable. College students tended to drink more (though not significantly), but relative to their peers, had 50% less alcohol-related problems. This aligns with the result that college students had higher self-regulation. Quinn and Fromme also stated, “the true association between attending college and drinking more heavily may have been masked by the fact that college students were at lower risk for alcohol use as a function of personality” (p. 627). College students were also influenced more by social norms; the more their peers drank, the more they did as well.

Relevance

By approaching the use of alcohol this way (looking at college students and non college students), similarities found between the two groups can be very useful. For example, policies for prevention and education can be streamlined to be implemented to this general age group. In addition, if college students are not drinking that much more than their peers, this also has further implications for society. Should alcohol abuse awareness of young people be more visible everywhere and not just college students?

The explanation for why non college peers may not be as influenced from social norms is because they may not in as close proximity to their social groups. If this is true, there can be ways of shifting individual behavior by changing the learning environment of the group in a
ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AND COLLEGE CAMPUSES

particular residential hall. For the troubled non college population with 50% more alcohol related problems, there is also the possibility of lifting them up by pushing positivity into closer proximity.

Evaluation

The main researcher in this study at the time of the publication holds a Bachelors of Arts degree and though his qualifications may not lead him to advise alcohol policies, his research and results were clearly articulated and easy to understand, reaching the goal of his inquiry. The research was sponsored by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Grants (a governmental agency) and the Waggoner Center for Alcohol and Addiction Research (out of the University of Texas at Austin), two reputable organizations.

There are many factors of the study that make it valuable. Matching demographic factors between the two groups to control for the differences allowed for more credible results. In regards to a longitudinal study, this information is very recent. Most importantly, in addition to presenting data that is congruent with the established knowledge (i.e. college students drink more and are more affected by social norms), Quinne and Fromme also move a step further in evaluating and giving explanation for these possible outcomes. They also suggested further research on the population between college students and non college students (i.e. those who have completed more than five courses but do not complete their education) and the attitudes affecting them.


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Synopsis

This source included multiple surveys, conducted within six years. Participants were 13-24 years of age. There were two samples; one consisted of 7,000 individuals in a sample of the general population and 1,710 in a sample of siblings. Participants were asked about their alcohol consumption to explore whether three factors influenced their behaviors: college attendance, genetic factors, and/or environmental factors. Consistent with other data, college students did tend to consume more alcohol as adults as well as have a greater tolerance each time one drank. This relates to their binge drinking days in college compared to non college students. Those who consumed more alcohol and participated in more binge drinking as adolescents were the same individuals who grew up to be the non college peers. Upon entering college, whether students drank more or less as adolescents, the environment on campus was a significance influencer of one’s genetic tendency to consume more or less. Overall, non college peers are greater consumers until the participants all reach traditional college age, in which amount of consumption between the two groups is switched.

Relevance

This article was useful in that it cited past research collected during the time of its study. Though this source did involve direct study about prevention policies (understandably as its purpose was not to do so), there was still discussion of prevention policies or what college campuses may want to implement in order to change attitudes and behavior, knowing the social influence of college norms. Citing from another study, the suggestion is to “[advocate] that academic institutions work with adjacent communities to limit alcohol marketing and volume discounts” (Weitzman, E.R., Nelson, T.F., & Wechsler, H., 2003, p. 1028). This source was especially useful for understanding factors before a student enters college. Many other studies
questions whether the consumption of alcohol during college has predetermining factors, but studies were never referenced (probably due to time and funding) to explore the idea further. If students are already coming in with drinking behaviors, there are different implications for alcohol education compared to those who begin drinking upon entering college.

**Evaluation**

The collaboration between seven researchers who took part in this publication provided depth and breadth for this research. The diverse institutions they represent include the Institute of Behavioral Genetics (University of Colorado, Boulder) the Division of Epidemiology (UC Irvine), and the Department of Psychiatry (University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver). This study is one of the timeliness in research considering its longitudinal nature. Like other longitudinal studies, there is risk of participant mortality and increased difficulty in controlling constants. However, given their large sample size to begin with, the research was still valid towards the end. Data for this study was extracted from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), an organization reputable for conducing longitudinal data on adolescents (as the title implies) mandated by Congress. They are funding by a wide number of agencies, a few of them being the National Science Foundation; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Office of Minority Health, Office of Public Health and Science; and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

**Integrative Summary**

Fortunately (from a research perspective), alcohol consumption compared to its related topics (i.e. sexual assault) is normalized and culturally accepted. Therefore, there are more studies around the issue. However, the challenge also involves sorting through all the data in
order to come up with one’s own conclusions. Despite the diversity in the scopes and goals of the articles, there were still a few themes and issues that continued to reoccur.

In terms of methodology, all studies involved self-reporting through surveys. Some studies were more intentional in constructing operational definitions for participants whereas others left certain terms up for interpretation. Also, there continued to be the lack of racial and geographic diversity in the samples. Perhaps sampling needs to involve more stratification.

In terms of content, researchers had difficult in clearly drawing the line between college factors directly influencing alcohol consumption and pre-existing attitudes that would pre-determine alcohol consumption. As more and more institutions are increasing in complexity and at the same time losing funding, outside businesses are looking to expand their business on college campuses. The topic of sponsorship and funding from alcohol agencies has made its way into the conversation and will continue to be in the conversation.
References
