PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON COLLEGE STUDENT PROBLEM DRINKING

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Abstract

Problem drinking has become a public health concern and is a pattern of drinking common among college students at campuses across the United States [1]. A style of problem drinking is binge drinking which is a pattern of drinking that brings a person’s blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams or above. “This typically happens when men consume 5 or more drinks or when women consume 4 or more drinks in about 2 hours” [2]. Family values and the impact such values and influences may have on the potential binge drinking of college students’ ages 18 to 24. The period during which teenagers enter adulthood is a critical developmental transition characterized by new social context, additional responsibilities and privileges and opportunities and incentives for important developmental work in self-definition. Literature suggests that ongoing problem behaviors during this important period, including binge drinking, may reflect difficulties with the transition to young adulthood [3]. The study will assess family values and the significance they may play on college students’ binge drinking. “Harmful drinking during the college years has been linked to potential long-term ramifications, as it has been associated with alcohol-use disorder up to 10 years later” [4]. Due to binge drinking, many college students partake in risky behaviors such as engaging in sexual activity that they would not ordinarily have engaged in, therefore contributing to the many psychosocial barriers that may impact the students' ability to learn.

Keywords: Problem drinking, binge drinking, psychosocial barriers, risky behaviors, family values.

1 INTRODUCTION

Problem drinking has become a public health concern and a pattern of drinking common among college students at campuses across the United States [1]. A prevalent style of problematic drinking is binge drinking, defined as a pattern of drinking that brings a person’s blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams or above, which “typically happens when men consume 5 or more drinks or when women consume 4 or more drinks, in about 2 hours” [2]. A drink refers to half an ounce of alcohol content (e.g., one 12-ounce beer, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounce shot of distilled spirits) [5].

Although the United States has a legal drinking age of 21, problem drinking is prevalent among high school and college students ages 18-24 [6]. According to The National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (1995) [7], “68% of college students had at least 1 drink of alcohol during the 30 days preceding the survey and more than one third (35%) of college students had 5 or more drinks in a row” (p.238). Problem drinking is recognized as a major public health concern affecting college students in the United States [8]. Research continues to reveal the seriousness of excessive alcohol intake and its consequences [1]. Some consequences of college drinking include alcohol-related unintentional injuries, motor vehicle crashes, unprotected sex, suicide attempts, health problems, police involvement, and academic problems [1]. Heavy college drinking leads to hangovers, engaging in behaviors later regretted, blacking out, arguing with friends, and receiving medical treatment for an alcohol overdose [1]. Excessive alcohol intake on college campuses is associated with a variety of adverse consequences, including damage to student drinkers, other students, and the institution [8].

During their college years, young adults face changes that bring new challenges, risks, and responsibilities. College life is full of new experiences, including establishing new relationships, learning time management skills (i.e., how to balance partying, dating and school work), possibly living away from home for the first time, and making independent decisions [9]. College experiences can be stressful as students develop new routines, live on a limited budget, and face new opportunities. New routines themselves can also be challenging, as the students learn to juggle responsibilities like attending classes, studying long hours, having a social life, working, and staying safe and healthy [9]. These issues can have tremendous implications for patterns of drinking among college students ages 18-24 [9].
Werner-Wilson and Coughlin-Smith (1977) [10] discussed the interpersonal influences parents and peers can have on adolescents and young adults. In focus groups, parents reported worrying that their values and family rules are undermined by their child’s peers. Conger (1971) [11] suggested that parents have more influence on their children than peers do. Parents do have the ability to influence through a variety of means such as location of home and social group memberships. They can also influence the choice in friends for their children based on availability or proximity [11].

Social learning theory suggests that substance-specific cognition or thinking is the strongest predictor of adolescent and young adult experimental substance use [12]. However, social learning theory does not assume that the roots of experimental substance use originate in an adolescent's own substance-specific cognitions. Rather, social learning theory begins at a distal point and assumes that experimental substance use originates in the substance-specific attitudes and behaviors of people who serve as an adolescent's role models such as parents and peers [12]. Specifically, social learning theory asserts that an adolescent's involvement with substance-using role models is likely to have three sequential (chronological) effects, beginning with the observation and imitation of substance-specific behaviors, continuing with social reinforcement (i.e., encouragement and support) for experimental substance use, and culminating in an adolescent’s expectation of positive social and physiological consequences from future experimental substance use [12].

Social learning theory approaches the explanation of human behavior in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants [13]. “Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. When observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” [13]. According to Bandura (1977) [13], people who are skeptical of their ability to exercise adequate control over their actions tend to undermine their efforts in situations that tax capabilities.

The bond between parents and adolescents or young adults has been shown to have an effect, both positive and negative, in restraining or increasing youth engagement in various deviant or delinquent activities including their use of substances [14].

According to social learning theory, one may conclude that it is the interaction between parent use and the parent-child relationship that can have primary influence on the teen’s use and abuse of substances [14].

“Researchers have consistently found that college students with parents who drink more in quantity and frequency are more likely to drink than students whose parents do not” [1]. Parents do influence college students’ drinking [1]. According to Akers (1992), [15] the child’s passive adoption of parental values through “observation and mimicry” is cited as the more common manner in which behavior is learned and values transmitted. Social learning is a very important part of understanding an individual and his or her behaviors, particularly when the child witnesses’ substance-related behaviors early in the life course.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study used surveys designed to provide quantitative descriptions of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population [16]. Students at public and private universities, both traditional campus residents and non-traditional commuting students, was selected for participation. Participants answered questions designed to elicit data on various aspects of parental and peer behavior modeling of problem drinking, parental, and peer influence regarding alcohol, and residence of participants. Aggregate analysis of the entire dataset was undertaken when statistically justifiable (i.e., sample size and distribution is sufficiently voluminous and randomized to provide meaningful conclusions) [17].

The study’s core analysis focused on identifying which of the factors cited on the questionnaires most influenced the student’s alcohol use. There are five variables; parental and peer behavior modeling of problem drinking, parental and peer influence to abstain from problem drinking, and current residence of participant. Student participants included any first year, sophomore, junior or senior students, from Argosy University of Denver and Colorado University of Boulder. Students was ages 18 to 24, living on or off campus that are willing to participate in the study [17].
3 RESULTS

This study did not find a correlation between parent’s drinking, parental influence and increase student drinking. The frequency of the parental drinking and degree of parental influence were not significant predictors. However, research does not fully support this finding: like Andrews, Hops, and Duncan (1997) [18], stated that the power of alcohol or substance abuse and misuse has often been attributed to the adolescent and young adult modeling of parents’ behaviors. Additional research by Ary, Tildesley, Hops, Lichtenstein and Andrews (1993) [19]. suggested that parent modeling of alcohol use did not affect concurrent use of alcohol by their children. Taken together, the extensive research evidence is mixed about the importance of parent modeling of alcohol use [19].

The study did find peer influence to be a significant predictor of college student problem drinking. The result indicated that a higher frequency of peer influence is predictive of a higher frequency of student drinking behaviors. Relative influence of peers versus parent’s research has found that the quality of interpersonal relationships significantly influences problem-drinking [20]. Prior research has shown that adolescent alcohol use and abuse was strongly influenced by association with alcohol-drinking peers. Problem drinking is tied to some of the most desired aspects of American college life: parties, social life, dormitory living, athletics, and interaction with peers.

4 CONCLUSION

Findings from the data analyses in this study indicate that two of the predictors are significant, peer drinking behavior and peer influence. Specifically, these coefficients indicated that higher frequency of peer drinking and greater peer influence are predictive of a higher frequency of student drinking behavior. However, the frequency of parental drinking, and degree of parental influence were not significant predictors [17].

REFERENCES


