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Alcohol Use on Campus

The college years are a time of experimentation and change. Many young adult students are living on their own for the first time in their life and many will be forced to make personal decisions regarding alcohol. Drinking is a part of college life for many students and some experts have identified the widespread abuse of alcohol as one of the most serious threats faced by our nation's institutions of higher education (Caron, 2000). Eighty-one percent of college administrators at four-year institutions describe students drinking as either a "problem" or a "major problem" (Hoover, 2004). Data from the Harvard School of Public College Alcohol Study found that nationally, one in five college students are frequent binge drinkers (Wechsler, 1993). A study by Yu found that eight-six percent of students drank in the last year; seventy-two percent drank in the last month (2001). Alcohol use causes close to 1,400 student deaths, 500,000 injuries, and 70,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year to college students (Nations, 2002).

Some studies have shown that alcohol consumption rates vary depending on where a student lives. A study on binge drinking done by Henry Wechsler (2001) of the Harvard School of Public Health found that the highest level of underage binge drinking (seventy-five percent) occurs among students living in fraternities and sororities. About half of students who live off campus were binge drinkers, as were thirty-six percent of those living in dormitories. The lowest rate of binge drinking (twenty-five percent) occurred among students living with their parents.

Even though many students are living apart from their parents for the first time and making decisions on their own, numerous studies have reported relationships between college student drinking tendencies and parental attitudes, beliefs, and consumption of alcohol (Turrisi, 2001). A study performed by Baer in 1995 showed that a student's family history of drinking problems is a predictor of alcohol problems. Another study done by Turrisi (2001) showed that parents who had been mailed information about underage alcohol consumption and later informed their teens about alcohol use and abuse had first year college students with lower drinking tendencies.

Many researchers believe that college students' perceptions of campus alcohol norms impact personal alcohol use. Research in a variety of college settings shows most students tend to overestimate alcohol usage and consequently exaggerate what is typical (Perkins, 1996; Suls & Green, 2003, Wechsler, 2000). Some speculate that the widespread abuse of alcohol on college campuses may be partly fueled by some students thinking that their peers are heavier users than in reality, thus encouraging more alcohol abuse (Perkins, 1996). "Students tend to overestimate the amount of alcohol consumed among their peers and often drink to that imaginary level (Carter, 2000. p. 12)."

The purpose of this study is to explore alcohol usage at Goshen College. Given the research studies to date the hypotheses are:

1. Students coming from a family in which alcohol is consumed will be more likely to consume alcohol during their college years.
2. Students perceive a greater amount of alcohol consumption than actually occurs.

3. The majority of alcohol consumption by Goshen College students occurs in off campus houses.

Method

Participants

Participants included 111 men and 139 women students from Goshen College, a small liberal arts college in Northern Indiana. Participants ranged in age from 17-25 (See Appendix A). All participants attended convocation on Wednesday September 25, 2004. Students are required to attend half of the convocations held each semester in order to graduate. Exceptions are made for nontraditional students and students that live off campus. The members of the Study Service Term (SST) group who spent the summer in Senegal presented the convocation held on that day. Since convocation attendance varies depending on the topic and day, this convocation was selected based on historically higher attendance for such topics.

Materials

A 19-question survey including questions regarding personal alcohol use, family alcohol use, and perceptions of other students' alcohol use was used. (See Appendix B)

Procedure

Students were handed the questionnaire as they entered the sanctuary. No verbal instructions were given. All instructions were written at the beginning of the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire students were thanked for taking the time to answer the questions and space was provided if they wished to offer suggestions or

comments. Candy was offered as an incentive for students to complete their surveys. The candy was distributed to students as they turned in their surveys and left the building.

Results

A slight correlation was found using a Pearson Product correlation between the presence of alcohol in the home and alcohol consumption by students during the college years, $r (df=258) = .177, p=.016$.

A difference was found between the perception of students' alcohol consumption and the actual amount of consumption within the sample, $t(3.24, 2.24, df=258), p=.000$.

The majority of alcohol consumption was found to occur solely off-campus (76.4%), while 17% drink both on and off-campus, and only 7% drink solely on-campus.

A Pearson Product correlation showed a relationship between the frequency of drinking and quantity of drinks in one sitting, $r (df=258) = .494, p=.000$.

A majority of students believed the campus should be dry, 53.8%. Twenty-three percent believed the campus should not be dry, while the remaining 23.2% were unsure as to whether the campus should be dry. A majority of students believed that drinking was not a problem on campus, 45.7%, 25.9% of students believed it was a problem, and the remaining 28.4% were unsure as to whether it was a problem or not.

Discussion

The findings of the study support the three hypotheses. Students who come from families in which alcohol is consumed will be more likely to consume alcohol during the

college years, students perceive a greater amount of alcohol consumption than actually occurs, and the majority of alcohol consumption by college students occurs off-campus.

The social learning theory of modeling may easily explain why students who come from families in which alcohol is consumed are more likely to consume alcohol during college. When parents consume alcohol in the home they are showing acceptance of the behavior. Young adults from these homes will be much more likely to model the alcohol consumption than young adults from homes in which alcohol consumption is not accepted.

The question of why students perceive a greater amount of alcohol consumption than actually occurs is an interesting one. Are students being confronted more than necessary about the issue of alcohol consumption by parents and teachers to the point that the problem seems larger than it actually is? Or is the popular media portraying alcohol consumption by college aged students as being more frequent than it actually is? It may be possible that college aged students simply exaggerate their own levels of alcohol consumption to their peers.

It should not come as a surprise that the majority of alcohol consumption by college students occurs off-campus. Off-campus locations are not as highly supervised as dorms and on-campus houses and students believe it is safer to do their drinking off-campus.

While the findings did support the hypotheses some limitations were encountered. First, some questions were not understood by all participants and one question had a popular answer not included as an option. In several questions only one answer was wanted and many participants circled multiple answers, despite wording that indicated

the answer that best applied should be circled. More careful attention needed to be given to the instructions, clearly informing subjects to select only one answer.

In order to work with the multiple answer data a coding system was established that created categories for multiple answers. For example in questions regarding where drinking occurs, people who circled both options that were considered on-campus (dorms and small group housing) were categorized into one group and people who circled more than one option for off-campus (off-campus homes, bars, or other) were categorized into another group. People who circled answers from both on-campus and off-campus were categorized into a final group.

A second limitation encountered dealt with the sample. Not all students are required to attend convocation. Non-traditional students, part-time students, and students who live off campus and do not have a morning class are not required to attend. Thus convocations are more highly attended by students in their first two years who live on campus. This may in some ways have skewed our data. Older students, especially students who are older than 21 and live off-campus, may be more likely to consume alcohol. Having more of these students in our sample may have changed the mean amount of alcohol consumed by students.

The findings from this study may be reason for college campuses who are concerned about student alcohol consumption to move towards requiring all students to live on-campus. While requiring students to live on-campus would not totally eliminate alcohol consumption it would make it less convenient to drink than if students are living unsupervised off-campus.

Further research could examine the impact direct dialogue between parents and children about alcohol consumption have on a student's decision to consume alcohol in college. Does dialogue that backs up parental actions have a greater impact on whether a student consumes alcohol in college?

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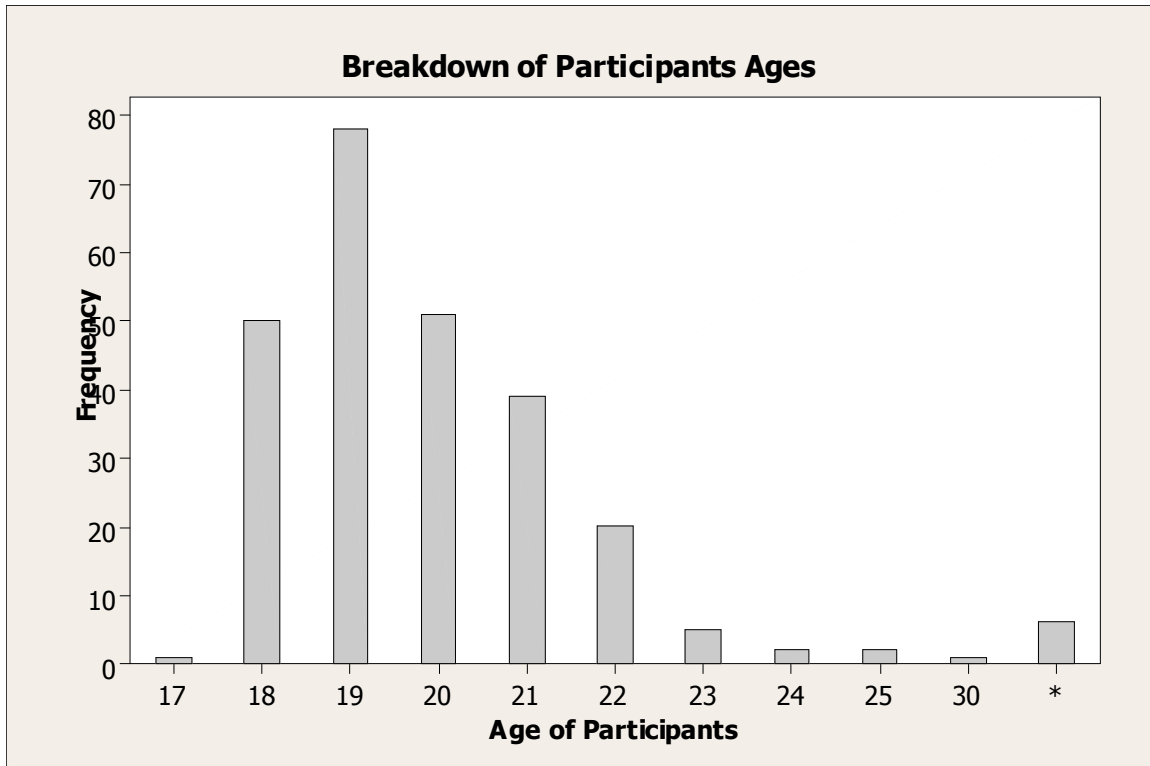
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Appendix A



Appendix B

Survey Used

The purpose of this questionnaire is to learn about attitudes and behaviors towards alcohol on Goshen College's campus. This survey is being conducted by the PSYC 402: Statistics and Methods class. We would very much appreciate your assistance in answering the questions below. Please do **NOT** write your name on this form in order that the replies remain anonymous. Only compiled results will be reported, not individual questionnaires.

1. Have you ever consumed alcohol?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (if no, skip to #9)

2. At what age did you first consume alcohol? _____

3. Where did you first consume alcohol?
 - a. Home
 - b. Friend's home
 - c. Family Members Home
 - d. Other _____

4. How often do you consume alcohol?
 - a. Never
 - b. 1-3 times a year
 - c. 1-3 times a month
 - d. 1-3 times a week
 - e. Every day

5. Since arriving at college, has your drinking...
 - a. Increased
 - b. Decreased
 - c. Remained the same

6. Do you usually drink (circle all that apply)
 - a. To celebrate/have a good time
 - b. To relieve school pressure/stress
 - c. To join friends who are drinking
 - d. To feel better when you are sad, angry, upset

7. Where does your typical drinking occur?
 - a. Dorm
 - b. Campus houses
 - c. Off campus houses
 - d. Bars
 - e. Other _____

8. During a typical drinking time how many drinks do you consume?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2-3
 - c. 4-6
 - d. 7-9
 - e. 10+

9. If you abstain from alcohol, what is the primary reason?
 - a. Religious beliefs
 - b. Moral convictions

- c. Don't like the way it tastes
 - d. Negative personal experiences associated with alcohol
 - e. Other _____
10. How frequently do your parents consume alcohol?
- a. Never
 - b. 1-3 times a year
 - c. 1-3 times a month
 - d. 1-3 times a week
 - e. Every day
11. During the school year how often do you think the typical student at Goshen College drinks alcohol?
- a. Never
 - b. 1-3 times a year
 - c. 1-3 times a month
 - d. 1-3 times a week
 - e. Every day
12. Where do you think Goshen College students typically drink?
- a. Dorms
 - b. Campus Houses
 - c. Off Campus Houses
 - d. Bars
 - e. Other _____
13. Who has been most influential in your attitude towards alcohol?
- a. Parents
 - b. Peers
 - c. Teachers
 - d. Church/Pastor
 - e. Boyfriend/Girl Friend
 - f. Other _____
14. How many times a week do you skip class?
- a. 1 time a week
 - b. 2-3 times a week
 - c. 4-5 times a week
 - d. 6+ times a week
15. Drinking on Goshen College's campus is a big problem. (Circle One)
- Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree
16. Goshen College should be a dry campus. (Circle One)
- Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree
17. I am...
- a. Male
 - b. Female
18. My age is _____
19. This school year I'm living in...
- a. Dorms
 - b. Small Group Housing
 - c. Off Campus Housing
 - d. Parent's Home
 - e. Other _____

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. If you have any suggestions or comments please feel free to write in the blank space below. During the second semester our results will be posted for students on the public drive.