

Resident Assistants' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: Consequences for Students Living On Campus

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Purpose

- ❖ To explore challenges in the role of resident assistants (RAs) in situations where students are influenced by alcohol
- ❖ To explore the implications of alcohol use in UW-EC residence halls as observed and described by Resident Assistants



Rationale

- ❖ It is widely recognized that alcohol plays a significant role in college culture, especially in Wisconsin. This study examines the effects of alcohol use for students as observed by RAs on the UW-Eau Claire campus.

Description & Methodology

- ❖ There are 2500 students in 11 residence halls and 2 hotels for temporarily housing students.
- ❖ Qualitative study design interviewing 31 RAs from 10 residence halls and 1 hotel.
- ❖ Inclusion Criteria: All RAs had experienced their role for at least 2 academic semesters.

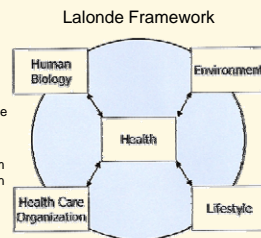
Data Analysis

- ❖ Interviews audio-taped and transcribed verbatim
- ❖ Team explored themes observed regarding alcohol use and its consequences for students on campus
- ❖ Periodic team meetings for confirmability of data
- ❖ Information saturation reached within 25 interviews

Theoretical Model

Lalonde's Health Field Concept

- ❖ Open Systems model
- ❖ Focuses on human biology, environment, lifestyle, and health care organizations which all contribute to overall health
- ❖ Comprehensive model that demonstrates that any health problem can be traced to one or a combination of the four elements

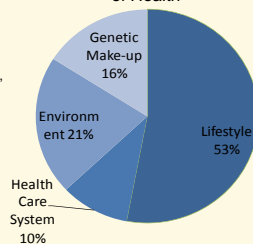


Nursing Theory

Penner's Health Promotion Model

- ❖ Defines health as a positive dynamic state, not merely the absence of disease
- ❖ Focuses on individual characteristics, behavior-specific cognitions and affect, and behavioral outcomes
- ❖ Each person has unique personal characteristics and experiences that affect subsequent actions
- ❖ Focuses on health promotion rather than health protection or illness prevention
 - Health promotion is "approach" motivated rather than "avoidance" motivated.

The Four Determinants of Health



Culture of Drinking at UWEC

Cultural Expectations

- ❖ Assumed norm that students drink in college
- ❖ "That's what you do when you go to college...you drink"
- ❖ "How are you supposed to get your college experience if you can't drink?"
- ❖ "Media doesn't help...people think 'Oh you party and drink' because of all the movies and TV"
- ❖ "I have had too many professors who just assume that we're drunken college students"

Major Events

- ❖ Focus around the consumption of alcohol
- ❖ "Culture of college Homecoming is a big drunk fest"

Alcoholism

- ❖ Possibility of alcoholism generally overlooked by students and the University community
- ❖ "You're not an alcoholic until you leave college"

Negative Consequences of Alcohol Use

Safety

- ❖ Unintentional injuries
- ❖ "Broken blood vessels in their eyes because they dry heated for so long"

Relationships

- ❖ Roommate incompatibility when one drinks and the other does not
- ❖ Fights between a couple due to drinking or being intoxicated

Sexual Assault

- ❖ Directly related to alcohol use
- ❖ Instances happen far more than reported
- ❖ "I'll never forget holding a sobbing girl in my arms who has just been raped"
- ❖ "She has been carried home many times by strange men that she has never met before...who knows what happened before that."



Academics

- ❖ A lifestyle of partying can lead to academic probation or dropping out
- ❖ "Too much socializing and not enough studying"

Property Damage

- ❖ Tearing down decorations, writing on walls, urinating and vomiting in public areas

University Response

Fines

- ❖ Not severe enough to keep students from drinking again
- ❖ "It feels like they're babying students and coddling them."

"Choices" Class

- ❖ Ineffective because students treat it as a joke and don't learn from it
- ❖ There's a severe jump in sanctions between first offense and getting kicked out of dorms

Campus police

- ❖ Opinions vary about helpfulness

Hall directors

- ❖ Seen as greatest support for RAs when situations arise

Complexity of RA Role

Duties

- ❖ Job is extremely time consuming
- ❖ "It's not really like a time commitment. It's more of what time you can't commit"
- ❖ Patrol building and protect welfare and safety of residents
- ❖ RAs expected to perform janitorial duties, such as cleaning up bodily fluids

Friend vs. Enforcer

- ❖ "I think the most difficult part is finding a balance between being their friend and being an authority figure in their lives"

Resource for residents

- ❖ Often viewed as favorite/most fulfilling part of RA role
- ❖ "I like the fact that people will come to me to ask questions and I can help them out"

Leader

- ❖ RAs want to be a good role model for their residents

RA Preparedness

Training Inadequate

- ❖ "I feel like alcohol training is pretty useless"
- ❖ "I don't feel like I really got trained how to talk with those individuals about [alcohol abuse]"
- ❖ Training for the spring semester leaves new RAs feeling lost and confused regarding alcohol

Personal Experience

- ❖ RAs without personal drinking experience lacked basic knowledge
- ❖ "Lot of things I have been taught on how to deal with alcohol...have come from experience of my staff and hall director"
- ❖ "Only thing that makes me relate to those girls is my background"

Conclusions & Recommendations

Information from Literature Review

- ❖ Wisconsin has the highest prevalence of alcohol use in the U.S.
- ❖ Wisconsin has the second highest college student binge drinking rate and the highest underage drinking rate in the U.S.
- ❖ 51% of UW students engage in binge drinking
- ❖ In 2007, 47% of WI high school students reported current alcohol use
 - High school binge drinking is a predictor of binge drinking in college
- ❖ 31% of college students met criteria for diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6% met criteria for alcohol dependence
- ❖ 25% of college students report academic consequences related to alcohol use
- ❖ 1700 college students die per year from alcohol related unintentional injuries
- ❖ 79.8% of incoming freshmen reported experiencing secondhand effects of alcohol as least once during the first 2 months on campus
 - Secondhand effects may decrease student's quality of life, endanger them, or decrease chances of academic success

Strengths of UWEC

- ❖ Communication between staff and Hall Director
- ❖ RAs are a positive role model for their residents
- ❖ Non-judgmental attitudes towards students who do drink

Areas for Improvement/Recommendations

- ❖ Modifications of RA training
 - Include more alcohol information in mid-year training
 - Relevant alcohol scenarios in "Behind Closed Doors"
 - Basic information about alcohol and its effects
- ❖ Stricter sanctions for repeat offenders
- ❖ Revision of "Choices" class
- ❖ Improved availability and accessibility of resources for students and RAs
- ❖ Increased awareness of alcoholism and long term effects of alcohol use
- ❖ Lack of social events that do not involve alcohol
- ❖ Prevalence and awareness of sexual assault
- ❖ Decrease perceptions of heavy alcohol use as social norm
- ❖ Greater communication between residence halls about alcohol incidents
- ❖ Promote responsible and safe drinking



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