Binge drinking at the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire

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Method

• Participants: 712 UW-Eau Claire students (age 18-27). 652 of these had consumed at least 1 drink in their lifetime and were subject to analysis. Students were a representative sample of the UW—Eau Claire campus in terms of sex, race, and distribution of majors.

• Instruments (via 10-15 minute Qualtrics survey):
  • College Alcohol Problems Survey (CAPS; Maddock et al., 2001): 7-point Likert scale (Never to Daily) for how often any of the problems occurred as a result of drinking alcoholic beverages
  • Frequency and amount of drinking
  • Drinking preferences (e.g., favorite beers, wines, liquors)
  • Family history of alcohol problems

Results

• CAPS sum score positively correlated with largest number of drinks in past 30 days, \( r = .34^* \).
• Years of regular drinking (≥ 1/month) positively correlated with largest number of drinks in past 30 days, \( r = .41^* \).
• Trend toward higher prevalence of binge drinking in past 30 days for males (77.8%) than females (70.8%), \( p = .061 \).
• Higher intensity of binge drinking (largest number of drinks on one occasion in past 30 days for males (n = 207, \( M = 10.51, SD = 7.24 \)) than females (n = 445, \( M = 6.49, SD = 4.73 \))**.
• No difference in average CAPS sum score between males (n = 202, \( M = 14.55, SD = 6.96 \)) and females (n = 443, \( M = 14.51, SD = 6.57 \)), \( p = .941 \).
• Male and Female CAPS scores differed significantly for illegal activities associated with drug use, trend for drove under the influence (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling sad/ depressed</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>-2.10</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness and Irritability</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.27</td>
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<td>651</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caused You to Feel Bad About Yourself</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appetite/Sleeping</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>2.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unplanned Sexual Activity</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.31</td>
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Bonferroni Adjusted Alpha = 0.00625; * = Significant, **adjusted for inequality of variance

Discussion

• Of 652 UWEC students (approximately 6% of the student body) who had consumed alcohol at least once, 73% reported binge drinking in the past month.
• Alcohol-related problems and years of drinking regularly were positively correlated with intensity of binge drinking.
• Compared with females, male UWEC students showed a possible trend for higher prevalence of binge drinking, but more clearly show higher intensity of bingeing.
• Overall severity of alcohol-related problems was not different between sexes, but males showed more alcohol-related illegal activity in particular.
• These findings of widespread binge drinking and associated problems should inform education and safety initiatives at the University.
• Future studies could involve other Wisconsin campuses to compare college drinking across the state.

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines binge drinking as 5 or more drinks in about 2 hours for males or 4 or more drinks for females. The CDC found that in 2010 Wisconsin led the nation in prevalence and intensity of binge drinking (percent of adults binge drinking and number of drinks when bingeing, respectively) (CDC, 2012). Also, 18-24 year olds were the age group with the highest rate of binge drinking. We surveyed UWEC students to investigate drinking habits, including sex differences and associations with emotional and behavioral problems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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• Support provided by Student Blugold Commitment Differential Tuition funds through the UW-Eau Claire Summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates program

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