

Drinking away anxiety -- a new program finds safer ways for college students to cope

November 26 2007

Researchers from the University of Cincinnati are reporting on a pilot program aimed at curbing alcohol abuse among college students. Early promising results from this intervention program were presented Nov. 18 at the annual conference of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies in Philadelphia.

The creation of the program was supported by \$392,159 in funding from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health. Principal investigator Giao Tran, UC associate professor of psychology, says the program was geared toward college students who turned to drinking to keep the edge off their anxiety at social gatherings.

Tran, along with Joshua Smith, a graduate student for the UC Department of Psychology, and Kevin Corcoran, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of psychology at Northern Kentucky University, developed a program that used motivational interviewing and behavioral therapy to help socially anxious undergraduates curb tendencies that could resort to hazardous drinking.

Tran says college students who abuse alcohol can encounter problems in four key areas:

- Neglecting responsibilities which can take a toll on grades as well as job performance
- Dangerous behavior such as drinking and driving

- Significant interpersonal problems such as getting into arguments and physical confrontations
- Legal problems

The challenge, Tran says, is motivating the student to get help. She adds that previous research has found that social anxiety was a unique predictor of alcohol dependence among adolescents. Research from UC psychologists has found that college students are more likely to seek help to relieve their anxiety over reporting a drinking problem.

The pilot program addressed both issues, as students were recruited into the program after reporting at least one heavy drinking episode (four or more drinks for women, five or more drinks for men), occasional to frequent drinking problems and discomfort from social anxiety in the month before entering this program, which resulted in 22 participants.

The intervention program consisted of three sessions (one session per week, running about an hour-and-a-half) with the first session exploring the participant's history of social anxiety and alcohol use and personal feedback on how the two could be interlinked. The second session examined social anxiety, drinking-related problems and family risk factors for both problems. The third session involved role-playing in a social situation with a research assistant, which provided the student with tools to effectively cope with anxiety while managing alcohol consumption. Follow-up meetings were conducted one month and four months after the series of three sessions.

Tran says in the follow-up sessions, students reported a significant reduction in number of drinks consumed and in bouts of heavy drinking. Students also reported that they weren't as fearful about being judged negatively by their peers, a common trigger for social anxiety. There was also a significant increase in the students' confidence about turning down a drink around other people who were drinking.

“While prior studies have shown that a brief intervention using motivational interviewing helps reduce alcohol consumption or alcohol-related problems among college students, this study is the first to add strategies for coping with social anxiety in relation to alcohol intervention for college students,” says Tran.

Based on the preliminary results of the intervention program, Tran says UC researchers are now seeking additional funding to conduct a large-scale clinical trial on the findings.

Source: University of Cincinnati

Citation: Drinking away anxiety -- a new program finds safer ways for college students to cope (2007, November 26) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-11-anxiety-safer-ways-college.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.