

Intervention method reduces binge drinking

January 30 2009

Brief but personal intervention reduces drinking among risky college drinkers, according to a research study at The University of Texas School of Public Health. Results of the study will be published in the February issue of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

Scott Walters, associate professor at the UT School of Public Health Dallas Regional Campus, led the study on an intervention designed to reduce college binge drinking. The Southern Methodist Alcohol Research Trial (SMART) found that motivational interviewing with feedback (MIF) significantly reduced drinking among a group of heavy-drinking college students.

The MIF intervention includes a personalized feedback profile and a 45-minute counseling session. The feedback profile, produced by e-CHUG (www.e-chug.com), provides students with information to help motivate them to decrease their alcohol consumption. Information such as caloric intake, comparisons to other students on campus, income spent on alcohol, negative consequences of alcohol use and local referral information are provided in the feedback report.

Walters believes using commercially available tools such as e-CHUG is a step universities can take toward reducing binge drinking on their campuses. "This is a big part of the solution, especially for students who are most at risk," said Walters.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) notes that there are 1,700 alcohol-related deaths a year among college

students. NIAAA defines binge drinking as a pattern that brings a person's blood alcohol content (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above. To reach this BAC, men must consume five or more drinks and women must consume four or more drinks in about two hours. According to Walters, the binge drinking pattern for college students is typically to not drink during the week and consume numerous drinks at once on the weekend.

"What makes college binge drinking more risky than adult drinking is the pattern," said Walters. Forty percent of students in the study reported heavy episodes of binge drinking in the past two weeks.

Research shows males, members of fraternities and sororities, and athletes are more likely to binge drink. Walters believes college students are more motivated to drink because of social pressures, the desire to try new adult roles and a misperception of drinking norms on campus. This pattern of binge drinking makes alcohol consumption riskier and causes problems such as lower grade point averages, vandalism and an increase in violent behavior, including rape.

An important part of the intervention involved a discussion of campus norms around alcohol. According to Walters, "College students tend to misperceive the drinking norms on campus, thinking that other students drink more than they actually do, and are more permissive of drinking and drunkenness than they actually are."

In attempt to correct misperceptions of drinking norms on campuses, students were asked to guess how their drinking compared to other students on campus. The average student in the study guessed 43 percent of students drank more than they did. In actuality, only 17 percent of students drank more than the students in the study. "It can be a real eye-opener. It just never occurred to them that their drinking was above the norm," said Walters.

In the six-month follow-up of the study, students who received the intervention reported consuming 5.26 fewer drinks per week than participants in the control group. The intervention group also had a peak BAC that was 0.039 lower than that of assessment-only participants. Finally, MIF group participants reported a mean alcohol problem score that was 2.32 points lower than study participants who did not receive MIF.

Source: University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

Citation: Intervention method reduces binge drinking (2009, January 30) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-01-intervention-method-binge.html>

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