

Alcohol use among college students: A study of peer influence and social norm

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation was to find a relationship between alcohol use such as excessive alcohol use and peer influence among DBS college students. Research sample consisted of 209 participants that answered a questionnaire. A very significant relationship was found between excessive alcohol use and peer influence. Findings from results suggests the more alcohol college students consume the more influenced they are by their peers.

Introduction

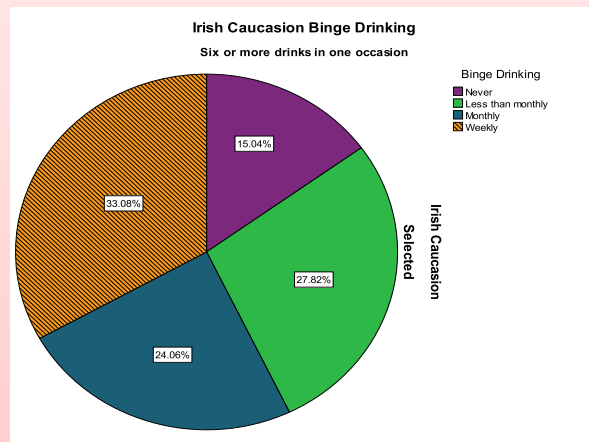
The aim for the dissertation is to find a relationship between alcohol use such as excessive use and peer influence among college students. Differences between variables age, gender and ethnic background will also be determined further in the research study. Berkowitz (1990; as cited in Wheeler, 2010) point out peer influence as the most important factor leading to excessive drinking.

Studies show that young males are showing higher levels of alcohol use however two studies further show that women tend to keep up with their male counterparts in the level of alcohol use and frequency of use (Cahill & Byrne, 2010; Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd & D'Arcy, 2004). Ireland for many is known for its extensive pub culture which can be seen in a recent publication by European Commission (2010) the prevalence of frequent binge drinking is highest in Ireland 44%.

Students tend to overestimate the extent to which their peers use alcohol and see alcohol as desirable, often their own levels of alcohol use increase and drinking continues to be seen as an acceptable behaviour (Prentice & Miller 1993; as cited in Crawford & Novak, 2010).

It will be followed what differences will be found in findings between different ethnic groups. Purpose of dissertation is to find gaps in literature reviewed and to apply findings to an Irish College environment.

Findings from this dissertation could be further used in responsible drinking campaign in Ireland such as Drinkaware.ie.



Method

Survey research design used for dissertation of non experimental correlation approach. Questionnaires were used for data collection among a sample of 209 college students (N = 209). Two questionnaires were used Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and Peer Influence Scale (amended to suit particular study). Scores from AUDIT and Peer Influence Scale questionnaires were further analysed for determining the relationship.

Participation in study was voluntary and completely confidential which was clearly communicated to participants prior to handing out questionnaires. DBS strict ethics guidelines were followed. Sampling method used was stratified random sampling, strata based on college students from year 1, 2 and 3 from different DBS faculties.

Handing out questionnaires late in the week was avoided to the greatest extent possible where more students tend to go out drinking from mid week onwards.

For this correlation research study Level of Alcohol Use as Predictor Variable (PV) and Level of Peer Influence/Estimation of Peer Alcohol Use as Criterion Variable (CV).

Results

Results showed a very significant relationship between total alcohol use (AUDIT score) and peer influence (Peer Influence Scale score) ($r = .516$, $N = 197(205)$, $p < .001$). Results showed the highest number of participants who binge drink on a weekly basis were among the youngest age group 18 – 23. For Alcohol Use T-test analysis showed a non significant difference between males and females $t(198) = 1.93$, $p > .05$. Young male and female showed similar answers for peer influence questions. Ethnic groups were compared. Irish Caucasian showed significantly higher levels of alcohol use than African $t(90.75) = 10.904$, $p < .001$ as well as peer influence $t(39.1) = 4.373$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

A strong and very significant relationship was found between alcohol use and peer influence. As shown students tend to overestimate the extent of which their peers use alcohol and often their own use increase (Crawford & Novak, 2010). Youngest age group had highest levels of alcohol use agree with SLAN survey (Morgan et al, 2009). Gender differences for alcohol use and peer influence are quite equal between young men and women. Mirroring study of college women attempted to 'drink like a guy' (Young et al, 2004). Also agreed with study, men and women overestimate the quantity and frequency of the drinking of their peers (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). Irish Caucasian showed highest levels of binge drinking on a weekly basis 98% , African ethnic group did not drink excessively and showed low levels of peer influence.

References

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