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ALCOHOL KNOWLEDGE AMONG COLLEGIANS: 1983-1985

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Paper presented: Annual Meeting of the *American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, Cincinnati, OH, April 10-12, 1986.

Digitalized for IUScholarWorks Repository, Jan 2014. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/17284>

Background

There has been increased attention to alcohol education programming on the college campus over the past decade. Most college campuses since 1980 have developed various prevention programs including those for children of alcoholics. It is hypothesized that because of these increased alcohol education programs in colleges that an increase in alcohol knowledge among students may have occurred during the past few years. However, only a few studies have investigated the students' knowledge of alcohol and drinking.

Various studies have indicated that demographic factors such as sex, race, GPA and year in school are related to drinking patterns and problems. Only a few have investigated these variables in relationship to knowledge of alcohol. Some have investigated change of knowledge after educational programs. However, few if any have investigated possible change in knowledge over time, particularly within various demographic groups. This type of information would be useful for college alcohol educators to help ascertain what populations of students might need extra educational efforts.

Thus the purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of knowledge of alcohol among a sample of college students from throughout the United States in 1984-1985 with a sample drawn from the same universities and colleges in 1982-1983.

Methods

The Student Alcohol Questionnaire, an anonymous pre-coded instrument, which has been used in previous studies concerning college student drinking patterns and knowledge about alcohol was used. The instrument includes demographic items, questions regarding consumption of alcohol and 36 alcohol knowledge questions. These knowledge questions contained items regarding facts about alcohol, the effect of alcohol on the body, myths about

drinking, and facts about alcoholic beverages. Instructions explaining the voluntary nature of participation in the study as approved by the Indiana University Human Subjects Committee was also included on the instrument.

The statistical procedures of t-test and Chi square analysis were accomplished by using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)

Sample

The questionnaire was administered to students at 72 of the 82 colleges (87.8%) from throughout the United States that had participated in a similar study conducted about two years earlier by the authors.(Hanson and Engs, 1984; Engs and Hanson, 1985). Thus the same instrument was used in both time periods at the same 72 colleges.

The sample was drawn, as was done about two years earlier, from in-class administration in survey type sociology and health or physical education courses that had a high probability of containing students from every academic major and class year.

Demographic Composition

Results

With the exception of females, the demographic composition of the resulting samples closely approximated that of students attending four-year institutions of higher learning in the United States . Sixty-four percent were females and 36% were males, while 92% were whites and 8% blacks. Eighty- nine percent attended public and 11% attended private institutions.

The regional distribution was as follows; North East, 29%; North Central, 26%; South, 25%; and West, 20%. Academic majors were social science (including pre-professional), 22%; arts and humanities, 8%. education, 20%, health related majors, 16%; science and engineering, 76%; business, 18%; and other majors 8%. While females were over-represented, their proportion in both samples in the two time periods were similar (63% vs 60%). The other demographic characteristics were also highly comparable. The total number of students completing the questionnaire in 1983 was 4877 and in 1985, 4176. The response rate of all students was over 98%.

Mean Scores for Questionnaire

Out of 36 possible correct answers, between the two time periods, a mean score of 20.9 for the 1983 group and 21.3 for the 1985 group was found. This represented a significantly higher ($p < .01$) mean score in the second time period compared to the first time period. (See Table I). These two mean scores represented 58.2% of the students during the first and 59.1% during the second time period answering the questions correctly.

Many students adhered to common myths about alcohol. However, there was a significant decrease in the percent of students who answered the question incorrectly during the second time period for nine, or, 25% of the items. Some of these items included: ‘Alcohol is classified as a stimulant,’ ‘Alcohol is not a drug,’ ‘A blood alcohol concentration of 0.1% is the legal definition of alcohol intoxication in most states in regards to driving,’ ‘Drinking coffee or taking a cold shower can be an effective way of sobering up.’ Only one item (There is usually more alcoholism in a society which accepts drunken behavior than in a society which frowns on drunkenness) had a significant increase in the percentage who answered it incorrectly during the second time period ($p < .001$).

Demographic Information and Mean Scores between the Two Time Periods

The mean score of knowledge items between, and within, the various demographic variable groups and between the two time period were calculated.

Gender

A significant ($p < .01$) increase in the total mean score for males between the two time periods was found. However, there was no significant difference between the two time periods for females. As was found in the first Engs’ (1978) study, there was also a significantly higher score for males than for females the second time period ($t=7.47, p < .001$).

Race

There was a significantly higher ($p < .01$) mean alcohol knowledge score at the second time period for whites but not for blacks. As was also found in the 1978 study whites had a significantly higher mean score compared to blacks during the 1985 time period ($t=15.31 p < .001$).

Class

A significantly higher ($p < .05$) mean score for Juniors at the second time period, but not for the other class levels, was found. As was also found in the 1978 study there was a significant difference in mean alcohol scores between the class years with seniors having the highest mean score. ($df=3 F=23.2 p < .05$).

Grade Point Average

No significant difference between the two time periods in the mean alcohol knowledge score was found between any of the GPA levels. However, there was a significant difference in the mean score between the different grade point average (GPA) levels ($df=5 f=4.1 p < .05$) for the 1985 time period. On the whole the higher the GPA the higher the alcohol knowledge score. A significant difference was not found in the 1978 study.

Importance of Religion

There was no significant difference between the two time periods for students to whom religion was and was not important. Those individuals who stated that religion was not important to them had a significantly higher mean score than those to whom religion was n important, as was also found in the 1978 study ($t=7.85$ $p < .001$).

Religion

Between the time two period there was only a significant difference between mean scores among Roman Catholic students ($t=2.57$ $p < .05$). As was also shown in the 1978 study there was a significant difference in the mean alcohol knowledge scores among the different religious groups ($df=3$ $F=40.5$ $p < 0.05$) in the 1985 sample with Protestants whose religion does not approve of drinking having the lowest score.

Discussion and Recommendations

It appears that with a slightly higher total mean score on the knowledge portion of the Student Alcohol Questionnaire that the sample in the 1985 time period had slightly more knowledge of alcohol compared to the 1983 sample. Anderson and Gadaletto(1985) and Gonzales (1986) have suggested that over the past few years that an increased number of colleges and universities have now implemented alcohol education programs and policies ontheircampuses. The higher mean alcohol knowledge score among students from the same universities over the two time periods may be a reflection of increased campus education programs and policies. Also over the past five years there has been much mass media coverage concerning alcohol and drinking and driving which perhaps also could have affected these results.

It is interesting to note that among this sample there was a significant increase in knowledge scores for males, whites, Roman Catholics and those to whom religion is not important. Other reports by the authors have found that among this same sample, there is a higher quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption and more problems related to drinking compared to females, blacks very religious and Protestants whose religion does not approve of drinking. However, the other reports have indicated that there has been little change in drinking patterns over the past three years among these groups. Though these results suggest that students still subscribe to myths and inaccuracies about drinking and alcohol, it is encouraging to see decreases in nine of the myths.

It is recommended that educators on college and university campuses as part of their baseline data collection concerning drinking also include a knowledge portion. A change in levels of knowledge could be used as one of the indicators as to the effectiveness of their campus program and policy.

Table I: Mean alcohol knowledge scores between the two time periods for different demographic variables

<u>Variable</u>	1983			1985		
	N	X	SD	N	X	SD
Sex						
Males	1923	21.6	5.1	1523	22.1	5.1+
Females	2939	20.5	5.0	2659	20.8	5.1
Race						
White	4257	21.4	4.3	3710	21.7	4.9+
Black	427	16.9	5.6	297	17.1	5.8
Class						
Freshmen	1522	20.1	5.2	1185	20.3	5.4
Sophomores	1294	20.8	5.0	1222	21.0	5.0
Juniors	1118	21.3	5.0	946	21.8	5.0+
Seniors	850	21.9	5.0	777	22.2	5.0
GPA						
4.0	115	20.8	5.0	124	21.6	5.0
3.5	822	21.2	5.1	683	21.6	5.0
3.0	1893	21.4	5.0	1721	21.5	5.0
2.5	1392	20.6	5.0	1185	21.1	5.3
2.0	406	20.4	5.3	342	20.5	5.4
<2.0	91	19.2	5.2	76	20.0	5.9

<u>Variable</u>	1983			1985		
	N	X	SD	N	X	SD
Importance of Religion						
Very	1528	19.8	5.3	1303	20.1	5.6
Not	1898	21.2	4.9	1653	21.5	4.8
Religion						
Roman Cath	1734	21.4	4.3	1509	21.8	4.8+
Prot-Drink	1688	21.5	5.0	1478	21.8	5.0
Prot-No-Drnk	920	19.2	5.6	751	19.3	5.8
Jewish	186	21.8	4.9	148	21.7	4.7
TOTAL	4877	20.9	5.1	4196	21.3	5.2+

*p < .001	+p < .05					

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