Abstract for: The 27th International Institute on the Prevention and Treatment of Alcoholism. Vienna, Austria 15-20 June 1981

THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ALCOHOLISM AND THE RECREATIONAL DRUG USE PATTERNS OF HELPING PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS IN QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Ruth C. Engs, R.N., Ed.D. HPER, Indiana University, Bloomington, In. 47405 USA

A survey of 1447 helping professional students in medicine, law, nursing, pharmacy, police science, seminary and social work/applied psychology as to their attitudes towards alcoholism and the use of common recreational drugs was carried out during the first academic semester of 1980 to gather information for curriculum developmemt.

The Attitude Towards Alcoholism Questionnaire(ATA) and an instrument based on WHO guidelines for surveys in substance use were used in this study. The results indicated that siminary and police students, first year, and students who regarded religion as important had significantly more moralistic and negative attitudes towards alcoholics($p < .05$). On the other hand, social work/psychology, Roman Catholics, individuals who did not consider religion to be important and those in their last year of study had more positive and humanitarian attitudes towards alcoholics. There were few differences due to social class on these scales.

Compared to the American norm these students scored significantly more negative(lower) in the belief that alcoholism is a medical weakness, has a psychological or physiological-genetic etiology and that alcoholics should be treated humanely. They scored significantly more negative(higher) in the belief that alcoholics should be socially rejected and that alcoholism is a moral weakness($p < .05$). Almost 80% of all students, with the exception of law, felt that it was important to study about alcohol and drug abuse in their course of study. Only 40% of law students felt that this was important.

As to recreational drug use patterns, 56% used alcohol and 4% marihuana at least once a month and 70% used coffee or tea and 18% smoked cigarettes at least once a week. The percentage of individuals who have ever tried cocaine, opiates, stimulants or hallucinogens was less than 5%.

There was no correlation between the amount of alcohol, marihuana, caffeine or tobacco consumed and any of the attitude scales. There was a slight positive correlation between the amount of alcohol and marihuana consumed($r = .41$) and cigarette consumption($r = .23$)

Compared to other studies both in, and outside of Australia, these students appear to use alcohol and other recreational drugs much less frequently, in smaller quantities and had more negative attitudes towards alcoholism and alcoholics than other students.

TABLE 1.—*Mean (± SD) Grams of Alcohol Consumed per Day and Drinking Classification of the Students by Sex, Year in School, Importance of Religion and Course of Study, in Percent*

			Drinking Classification					
		Alcohol Consumption*				Moderate-		Very
	N	(*G per Day*)	*None*	*Light* (0-20 g)	*Moderate* (20-39 g)	*Heavy* (40-59 g)	*Heavy* (60-79 g)	*Heavy* (80 + g)
Sex								
Men	803	20.3 ± 37.9‡	14.7	58.4	15.8	5.2	2.9	3.0‡
Women	646	8.7 ± 11.2	9.7	79.2	8.5	1.9	0.3	0.4
Year in School								
First	715	13.6 ± 36.1	13.8	69.1	11.3	3.6	0.7	1.4*
Last	734	16.4 ± 24.5	11.4	66.2	13.8	3.7	2.7	2.2
Importance of Religion								
Very	801	11.9 ± 39.8‡	18.5	67.5	10.1	2.3	0.8	0.9‡
Not	648	18.1 ± 24.3	5.3	67.9	15.7	5.3	2.8	3.0
Means		15.1 ± 30.4	12.6	67.9	12.6	3.7	1.7	1.7
Course of Study								
Law	244	25.9 ± 55.5‡	4.9	56.5	23.0	7.4	3.7	4.5‡
Medical	431	13.2 ± 21.4	10.7	72.8	9.5	3.0	1.9	2.1
Nursing	213	9.4 ± 10.7	7.0	81.2	9.9	1.4	0.5	0
Pharmacy	147	15.1 ± 19.3	5.4	70.1	13.6	7.5	2.7	0.7
Police	96	20.4 ± 24.9	7.3	60.4	20.8	5.2	3.1	3.1
Seminary	130	5.6 ± 6.1	55.8	40.3	3.1	0.8	0	0
Social work-Psychology	188	9.5 ± 12.0	4.8	73.8	15.2	4.8	1.4	0
Means		15.1 ± 18.7	12.6	67.9	12.6	3.7	1.7	1.7

* The means are calculated from the number who drank per day, and not the total in each group. Ten grams of absolute alcohol are equal to about 1 drink.

* $P < .05$. ‡ $P < .001$.

TABLE 2.—*Mean (± SD) Scores on the Attitudes towards Alcoholism Questionnaire by Sex, Year in School, Importance of Religion and Course of Study*

	N[a]	*Psychological Etiology*	*Social Rejection*	*Physical-Genetic*	*Humanism*	*Moral Weakness*	*Medical Illness*
Sex							
Men	803	12.0 ± 1.9‡	10.3 ± 2.3	9.3 ± 2.2	12.2 ± 2.0*	7.9 ± 2.5*	9.9 ± 1.9
Women	646	12.5 ± 1.8	10.2 ± 2.3	9.5 ± 2.7	12.6 ± 1.8	7.3 ± 2.4	10.1 ± 2.1
Year in School							
First	715	12.2 ± 1.9	10.2 ± 1.8	9.9 ± 2.1‡	12.1 ± 1.9*	7.7 ± 2.5*	10.3 ± 2.1‡
Last	734	12.3 ± 1.9	10.3 ± 1.9	9.2 ± 2.2	12.5 ± 2.0	7.4 ± 2.3	9.7 ± 1.2
Importance of Religion							
Very	801	12.1 ± 1.9*	10.2 ± 1.9	9.3 ± 1.8*	12.3 ± 1.8	7.9 ± 2.5‡	10.2 ± 1.9*
Not	648	12.4 ± 2.0	10.4 ± 1.9	9.7 ± 1.9	12.3 ± 1.9	7.1 ± 2.3	9.8 ± 2.1
Means		12.2 ± 1.9	10.3 ± 2.0	9.5 ± 2.2	12.3 ± 1.9	7.6 ± 2.4	10.0 ± 2.1
Course of Study[b]							
Law	242	11.8 ± 1.8	10.2 ± 2.4	9.4 ± 2.1	12.2 ± 2.1	7.4 ± 2.4	10.0 ± 2.2
Medical	431	12.2 ± 1.9	10.1 ± 2.3	9.2 ± 2.2	13.3 ± 1.9	7.5 ± 2.5	10.1 ± 2.1
Nursing	213	12.7 ± 1.9	10.1 ± 2.4	9.9 ± 2.3	12.5 ± 1.8	7.5 ± 2.5	10.3 ± 2.1
Pharmacy	147	12.2 ± 1.9	10.4 ± 2.2	9.8 ± 2.0	12.1 ± 1.9	7.7 ± 2.4	10.2 ± 1.9
Police	96	12.2 ± 2.1	10.4 ± 2.2	9.9 ± 2.0	11.8 ± 2.1	8.2 ± 2.6	10.6 ± 2.1
Seminary	130	12.3 ± 1.9	10.4 ± 2.1	9.2 ± 2.3	12.3 ± 1.7	8.2 ± 2.5	9.5 ± 2.4
Social work–Psychology	188	12.3 ± 1.9	10.5 ± 2.2	9.3 ± 2.3	12.8 ± 1.8	7.0 ± 2.0	9.2 ± 2.6
Means		12.2 ± 1.9	10.3 ± 2.3	9.5 ± 2.2	12.3 ± 1.9	7.6 ± 2.4	10.0 ± 2.2

[a] Total possible number in each category.

[b] The difference between courses of study and the Psychological Etiology scale was significant at $p < .001$, and between the courses of study and the Physical-Genetic, Humanism, Moral Weakness and Medical Illness scales at $p < .05$.

* $P < .05$. ‡ $P < .001$.