



The role of avoidance and protective behavioural strategies in the university drinking environment – a double challenged approach.

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What are Protective Behavioural Strategies?



- Strategies used by university students to avoid or reduce the effects of alcohol consumption in the drinking environment
- These may or may not include strategies that involve limiting the amount of alcohol consumed



Martens et al (2004); Haines et al (2006)

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Project Background



Female university students are a population at risk of high rates of alcohol consumption

- Increases in weekly dangerous drinking among young people (20-29 yr olds) in Australia between 2001-2004
- Several Australian studies have measured alcohol consumption among university students, all reporting between 40%-60% of students surveyed drinking dangerously
- One study found no difference in drinking rates between female and male students



Aus Inst Health and Welfare (2005)
Johnston and White (2004); Roche and Watt (1999)
Davey, Dave and Obst (2002)

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Current Initiatives at Australian Universities



- Awareness campaigns or education initiatives
- Usually aim to reduce incidence of dangerous drinking by increasing awareness of negative consequences
- Extensive use of promotional materials, sometimes combined with educational workshops, free screening, other activities
- Limited evaluation and little indication of impact

Wylde and Crawford (2004); Ricciardellie and McCabe (2007)

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What are young women told to do?



AIHW

- Not drink beyond guidelines (currently under review, previously no more than 4 drinks)
- Not mix alcohol with other drugs
- Choose low alcohol drinks
- Eat while drinking
- Stay with friends

SO what are young women *really* doing to reduce effects of alcohol?

Women's magazine (Cosmopolitan)

- Drink 2L water before going out
- Take Vitamin B the next morning
- Leave 2 glasses of diluted juice next to your bed for a dry mouth
- If you have a big night ahead, stay alcohol free the day before

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Research into PBS use among university students



Protective Behavioural Strategies – a promising approach?

- American studies have shown that students who adopt the use of protective behavioural strategies are less likely to experience alcohol related harm (Martens et al 2004)

BUT...

- Lack of student input into design of PBS surveys
- Lack of qualitative investigation into the student perspective regarding the use of PBS (e.g. Why students engage in some strategies and not others)
- No investigation into PBS use among Australian university students



Project Objectives



Identify and Investigate

- Strategies used by female undergraduate students to prevent them from drinking alcohol when planning to be in a drinking environment
- Strategies used to prevent feeling the effects of alcohol when there is intention to drink
- Strategies used to prevent (or reduce the risk of) short term effects and consequences of alcohol, when there is intention to become drunk



Project Objectives



And...

- Student perspectives regarding the use and effectiveness of protective behavioural strategies such as...
 - Motivations (e.g. Why use them?)
 - Internal and external influences (What makes them work well, what can decrease their effectiveness?)
 - Perceived costs (What are the perceived consequences of using them?)



Research Methods



- Focus groups
 - Contribute to the PBS literature by producing qualitative research
 - Useful to identify the *range* of PBS used in order to improve survey design (e.g. making appropriate options noted by students themselves and not just the literature)
 - Used in previous alcohol related studies in order to understand *attitudes* towards alcohol related behaviours



Kruger and Casey (2000)
Williams et al (2004)
Abrahamson (2003)

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Discussion Process



- Discussion Guide

- Warm up: non-invasive, general questions to encourage participants to ‘start thinking about the topic’
- Student (audio) interviews used to encourage honest perspectives (participants feeling ‘relaxed’ about expressing attitudes about someone else)
- Each recording represented one of the project objectives



Kruger and Casey (2000); Rice and Ezzy (1994)

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Student Recordings



1. *“Hey, my name’s Taren. I’m living on campus at the moment and I’m so loving first year uni. My favourite times are Wednesday nights at the Glass House, it’s awesome. Yeah, definitely going out this week, but I’m not drinking.”*
2. *Hi, my name’s Madison and it’s my second year at uni and I live at home with my mum and dad. My favourite place in the world that the moment is DEFINITELY North Gong Pub, I’ll be there Friday for sure – and I’m going to go a have a few drinks, but I’m going to avoid getting tipsy*
3. *“Yep my name’s Kate, and I’m having a MASSIVE night this Thursday – end of exams, it should be an awesome night. I’m going to get SO drunk!”*



Key Findings – avoiding alcohol completely



- **External influences:** Those who had drunk alcohol previously are not likely to be successful (history of failed attempts)

“If she normally does drink, on occasion as well, then just decides not to one night, then it might be like you know ‘why aren’t you drinking?, I’m going to buy you one’”

- **Perceived costs:** Situational abstinence doesn’t allow student to remain within the (drinking) circle friends, thus considered ineffective to avoid alcohol-related consequences

“It’ll make it hard ...you get tired if you’re not drinking, like you’re feeling excluded sometimes cause you’re just sitting there, you’re not up on the dance floor acting like an idiot.”



– **The strategies:**

- Driving to the event considered the most effective strategy, allowing the student remain within the group
- Significantly reduce the peer pressure the non-drinker is expected to receive
- Most participants stated this was regularly used by young people

“I just use the strategy that I’m driving, so I can’t drink”

The results suggested that students prefer to limit consumption rather than avoid drinking at all.

Key Findings – limiting consumption to avoid the effects of alcohol



- **Motivation:** most likely to ‘fit in’ or ‘be social’
- **Internal Influence:** student self-confidence plays a significant role in PBS effectiveness
- **External Influences:** the environment (e.g. Friday night vs. Sunday afternoon)

“It depends if she was going to have them at (the pub) on a Friday, which is like ...the Friday night going out to party crowd.”



- **The strategies:**
 - Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks
 - Avoid strong alcoholic drinks
 - Eat before you leave
 - Avoid alcohol you haven't tried previously
- **Overall effectiveness: low**

“I think if you start drinking you don't really have a chance”

Key Findings – avoiding consequences and harm



- **Motivation for use: little**
 - unlikely to use strategies to avoid or reduce the consequences of being drunk
 - Accepted that minor consequences will occur
 - Peers are the best safety net
- **Strategies** (when probed): few
 - Medication and other substances help reduce minor symptoms (vitamins, cold and flu tablets, pain killers etc. travel sickness tablets)



What do these results suggest?



- Students want to avoid or limit their consumption but....
 - Fear of exclusion
 - Peer pressure
- Students are most likely to use PBS to keep them within the drinking circle, when they don't intend to drink to excess - not to avoid harm.
- PBS are not likely to be used by students who are most at risk of alcohol related harm.



So.....



- Questions the appropriateness of awareness campaigns
 - most student drinkers *are* drinking to excess and therefore, are accepting that minor consequences are likely to occur. It is perceived that friends will take care of major risks
- Investigate ways in which students can increase their confidence and capacity to limit or avoid alcohol
- Make this process easier
 - Price of non-alcoholic drinks, standard drink content of mixed drinks



Limitations



- While objectives were met, increased qualitative data (i.e. more focus groups) may contribute to the range of strategies identified.
- However it was evident that data saturation was reached by the third group, and limited time frame prevented more data being collected.
- A male sample is also warranted to investigate gender differences in attitudes towards PBS use, further contributing to the literature.



Conclusions



- The double challenge for using social marketing designed to encourage the use of PBS:
 - Students must first be shifted to a new social norm of limited consumption, in which they are more likely to use protective behavioural strategies
 - Students will only adopt strategies that are likely to keep them within the peer circle, otherwise they are not seemed as effective by the target group





Thankyou 😊

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