A Comparison of Alcohol Drinkers at a State and Private University

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to compare the drinking behaviors of college students at a large state university to the drinking behaviors of their counterparts at a smaller church university.

Questionnaires were administered to a total sample of 764—434 students represented the state university, while 330 students represented the church university. Statistical analysis of the data revealed significant differences at the .05 alpha level between the two groups of drinkers. However, many similarities between the two groups did exist. Two of the three null hypotheses were supported by the data. Only in one category did the drinkers at the church school respond notably higher than the state school drinkers. Considerably more church school drinkers admitted to drinking primarily when in a lonely or sad mood than the state school drinkers. Drinkers at the church school felt a need to hide or be alone when drinking and did not use alcohol to socialize as often as their state school counterparts.

Introduction

In 1982, Joseph Califano, Jr., suggested that only two types of prevention policies held considerable promise in deterring alcoholism and alcohol abuse in America. The first was to regulate the availability of alcohol. The second was to “prevent hazardous drinking practices directly through education, public-service radio and television advertising, and legal penalties.”

In the past few years a greater public awareness of the problems associated with alcoholism and alcohol abuse has prompted many educational programs to be developed and presented to the public through the school and community health education components. However, many people in community agencies have ignored their responsibility of educating the public. This negligence may persist because a better understanding of specific causes of the alcohol problem is needed by all community leaders.

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It is crucial that advances be made in educating the public, because there remain approximately 13 million alcoholics and problem drinkers in the United States. Various media have informed the public that irresponsible alcohol use is involved in the majority of all fatalities caused by motor vehicle accidents, fires, falls, drownings, and suicides. In fact, after reviewing all the available reports, one could conservatively estimate that alcohol is involved in 43 percent of all accidental fatalities in our country each year. This observation becomes more meaningful when it is known that in the United States death by accident is the fourth leading cause of death.

Such facts as those stated above seem to be common knowledge, yet there is little doubt among alcohol educators that other facts are yet to be uncovered by research. Alcohol misuse would probably have a high positive correlation with the occurrence of many existing social ills if all questions posed by researchers could be accurately answered. Such ills would include premarital pregnancies, divorces, unemployment, feelings of human unworthiness, financial problems, school dropouts or failures, abuse of other drugs, and sexually transmitted diseases. As the facts are acknowledged and viable hypotheses are constructed, it is easy to understand the importance of total community involvement. A major priority within the community must be that of educating the public in an attempt to prevent (or at least to reduce) the occurrence of alcoholism or alcohol-related problems.

Specifically, it is time for local churches within the community to assist in educating those who choose to drink about responsible use of alcohol. Historically, the local church has stood out as one of the first American institutions to respond to the problem of alcoholism in society and to express concern for the alcoholic as an individual. Conley and Sorenson wrote, "Over the last 200 years the church has developed a closer association with the alcoholic than with almost any other ill or troubled person." Alcohol-related church activities have ranged from local halfway houses to the internationally recognized Salvation Army. Several church groups have instituted specific projects to provide leadership and research. However, to date, the vast majority of the services that churches are providing is directed to those persons who are already addicted to alcohol or who have been labeled as serious problem drinkers. It is time that the focus be on primary prevention rather than secondary or tertiary prevention. Ideally, preventing the problem through primary prevention programs is better than establishing programs or services to deal with people who are victims of alcohol.

Some church groups have not developed programs which teach responsible use of alcohol because they believe the current alcohol problem does not exist among their congregations. Also the old myth still exists that if one does not talk about drinking, drinking will never occur. Among Protestant groups a historical alliance with the temperance movement has led to a call for complete abstinence. However, church goers do use alcohol. Perkins reported that alcohol consumption and drug use steadily increases as the importance of