



Brief motivational intervention for heavy drinking mandated and voluntary freshmen: A 1-year follow-up assessment

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 September 2014

Revised 26 October 2014

Accepted 1 November 2014

Available online 7 November 2014

Keywords:

Alcohol-related consequences
Brief motivational intervention
Freshmen
Mandated
Nursing
Readiness to change
Voluntary

ABSTRACT

Background: Alcohol abuse among freshmen university students is a major public health issue with associated costs to individuals and the society of substantial morbidity, high-risk negative behaviors (e.g., blackouts, rape, suicide, and violence), and mortality. This longitudinal study compared the effectiveness of a brief motivational intervention (MI) in decreasing alcohol consumption and related consequences among mandated students and voluntary students. Readiness to change drinking behaviors was compared between the groups.

Methods: Eligible participants (710 voluntary and 190 mandated, $N = 900$) received MI at baseline and again at 2 weeks with boosters at 3, 6, and 12 months. Repeated-measures analysis of variance was used to compare the two groups.

Results: Alcohol use and related consequences in both groups decreased significantly between baseline and 12 months. At baseline, a significantly larger percent of students from the mandated group than the voluntary group were in the action stage of change (52.1% vs. 27.5%), and a significantly smaller percentage of mandated students were in the precontemplation stage ($p < .0001$).

Discussion: MI effects were sustained over 12 months. Alcohol consumption and related consequences decreased significantly among the freshmen who were mandated to attend the program as well as among students who volunteered to participate in the study. The findings support the importance of advanced practice nurses conducting MI as an intervention with college students.

Cite this article: Kazemi, D. M., Levine, M. J., Qi, L., & Dmochowski, J. (2015, JUNE). Brief motivational intervention for heavy drinking mandated and voluntary freshmen: A 1-year follow-up assessment. *Nursing Outlook*, 63(3), 349-356. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2014.11.002>.

Supported by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services administration (SAMHSA)/Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) (grant number 1H79TI0202).

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2014.11.002>

Introduction

Freshmen college students drink heavily, often in binges and with negative consequences that include blackout, rape, sexual risk taking, suicide, violence, motor vehicle accidents, physical injury, and death (Gonzalez & Hewell, 2012; Ragsdale et al., 2012). More than 1,700 student deaths occur each year from injuries related to alcohol use (Hingson, 2010). The heavy use of alcohol by students is a major global public health problem facing colleges and universities, and the consequences of this high-risk drinking reach well beyond the institutions, affecting families, communities, and society as a whole (Haas, Smith, & Kagan, 2013). More than one third of college students report engaging in binge drinking (4+/5+ drinks in a single sitting for females/males) at least once in the past 2 weeks, and 8% (females) to 20% (males) consume at least twice that much on a binge (i.e., 8+/10+ drinks; Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012; White, Kraus, & Swartzwelder, 2006). Often drinking beyond the binge threshold, freshmen college students are at particularly high risk for alcohol abuse and its negative consequences (Haas et al., 2013; Kazemi, Sun, Nies, Dmochowski, & Walford, 2012). The freshman year brings greater risks for several important reasons, including the absence of adult supervision and peer pressure to conform to drinking behaviors (Hoeppe et al., 2012).

Student arrests for alcohol offenses have steadily increased over the last decade, reflecting zero tolerance policies and greater enforcement of laws on campuses. Alcohol-related violations also have increased on college campuses (Barnett et al., 2008; Porter, 2006). Violations have ranged from minor possession to the more severe violations of public intoxication and destruction of property. Students who violate campus policies often are mandated, sanctioned, or judicially referred to the dean of students (Barnett et al., 2008; Hustad et al., 2011), who might require students to complete an alcohol education or intervention program.

Although many interventions to address heavy drinking among freshmen have produced mixed results, several brief motivational interventions (MIs), including individual, group, and computer-delivered programs, have shown promise (Alfonso, Hall, & Dunn, 2013; Carey, Carey, Henson, Maisto, & DeMartini, 2011; DeMartini, Prince, & Carey, 2013; Kazemi et al., 2012; Larimer & Cronce, 2007). However, although MI is promising, longitudinal studies comparing its effectiveness with mandated and nonmandated (i.e., voluntary) freshman year students are lacking (Barnett & Read, 2005; Palmer, Kilmer, Ball, & Larimer, 2010; Terlecki, Larimer, & Copeland, 2010). The present study builds on our previous finding of the effectiveness of MI at 6 months postintervention by examining effects at

the 1-year follow-up (Kazemi, Levine, Dmochowski, Angbing, & Shou, 2014).

In the present study, we compared readiness to change drinking behaviors between the mandated group and the voluntary group using the transtheoretical model (TTM; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986). Participants' readiness to change their drinking behaviors was determined based on the three stages of the TTM framework: precontemplation, contemplation, and action. The precontemplation stage occurs when most individuals are unaware of their behaviors and will not change them. The contemplation stage occurs when individuals become aware that a problem exists and contemplate taking action but lack the ability to commit to change. The action stage occurs when individuals are successful in modifying addictive behaviors.

This study compared alcohol consumption, associated consequences, and readiness to change the drinking behaviors of two groups of students (mandated and voluntary) who were actively participating in a 1-year MI program. Two research questions were addressed: (1.) Are there differences in alcohol consumption and consequences between mandated and voluntary students who have participated in a MI program over 1 year? (2.) Are there differences between the groups' readiness to change drinking behaviors over 1 year? To our knowledge, this is the first longitudinal study to compare the effects of MI on mandated and voluntary students participating in a 1-year program.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment Methods

The present study was part of a larger study that examined students' alcohol and related outcomes over 1 year. The MI was implemented at a large southeastern public university to address underage drinking among freshmen. Eligibility criteria for mandated and voluntary students included enrollment as freshmen students, ages 18 to 21 years, willingness to participate, consumption of alcohol within the previous 30 days, and ability to read and speak English.

Mandated students had violated a campus alcohol policy and were required by the dean of students to complete an alcohol education program. These students were given the option of completing the university's standard alcohol prevention session or participating in the MI alcohol study. The standard alcohol prevention program was Alcohol 101, an interactive website featuring video animation that encourages students to make responsible decisions about alcohol. The volunteer students were recruited from freshman seminar classrooms and residence halls on campus. Interested students were phone screened to determine their eligibility.

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