Clinical and Program Note

Heads UP! A Nested Intervention With Freshmen Male College Students and the Broader Campus Community to Promote Responsible Drinking

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Abstract. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism developed several guidelines for effective interventions in dealing with problematic college student drinking, including targeted individual interventions paired with broader campus community involvement. The project Heads UP! combines these suggestions in an effort to intervene with high-risk first-year male college students. The objective of the program is to reduce campus alcohol-related negative events and prevent these high-risk students from developing dangerous drinking patterns throughout college. The program provides an environment that supports students in actively following the goals outlined by the intervention, and it actively impacts the overall campus by helping students make responsible drinking decisions. Promising results are forthcoming, and the authors encourage other universities to design and adopt similar campus-supported programs nested within the broader campus community that target high-risk populations on campus.

Key Words: alcohol, binge drinking, college students, group intervention, motivational interviewing

Problemat...
Consistent with the NIAAA guidelines, the current program, Heads UP!, involves a nested approach to intervention—it targets a high-risk group of students while providing support and infrastructure for broader campus culture change with respect to drinking. At the center of this approach is a group AMI intervention administered to first-year male students during their initial 6 weeks in college. Although the intervention is the key component of the approach, it is nested within a series of broader campus community initiatives that encourage and support students in practicing responsible behavior when making choices about alcohol use.

OVERVIEW OF HEADS UP!

Group Intervention

The group intervention with first-year male students (a high-risk group on college campuses for problems related to drinking) is at the center of Heads UP! During the first month of the academic year, men are recruited from first-year housing using a combination of leaflets, e-mail solicitation, and in-person presentations. Approximately 120 first-year men (20%–25% of male freshmen living in campus housing) volunteer each fall semester for participation in Heads UP! Students initially receive a cash stipend for volunteering to attend the groups. Groups of 10 to 15 students participate in a 60- to 90-minute intervention conducted in the style of MI that aims to promote responsible drinking, reduce high-risk drinking, and decrease negative alcohol-related incidents on campus, including violations of campus alcohol policies. Masters- and doctoral-level, MI-trained facilitators conduct the groups and merge several empirically validated techniques into a single brief group intervention. These techniques include a timeline follow-back (TLFB) measure, social norms feedback, group and individual decisional balances, relapse prevention, expectancy challenges, and the setting of individual behavioral goals about future drinking behavior. At the end of the group intervention, individuals continue to monitor alcohol use by filling out monthly drinking diaries.

Upon arrival, participants complete an initial questionnaire that assesses current drinking behavior and attitudes toward drinking. After the participants complete the questionnaire, the group intervention begins with a TLFB assessment, during which the facilitator, starting from the current day, leads participants back day-by-day through 3 1-month calendars in which participants individually record each of their drinking days and the quantities they drank. In addition to providing researchers with honest and reliable portrayals of previous drinking in the 3 months prior to the intervention, the TLFB is used to raise awareness of past behavior by allowing the students to see their own patterns and to make them mindful of these patterns. The 3-month TLFB is more a tool of the intervention rather than of assessment, but it has displayed reliable results in assessing college student drinking.

Next, participants together estimate the typical drinking behavior of students on campus (social norms), as well as the campus incidence of alcohol-related negative events (e.g., sexual assaults, violence). The facilitator then provides participants with actual normative drinking data for the campus (based on the CORE Alcohol and Drug Survey) to correct overestimations of perceived normal drinking behavior. The facilitator also gives participants feedback about the prevalence of on-campus alcohol-related incidents of violence, forced sex, vandalism, and other negative activities to correct underestimations of alcohol-related negative events.

The group then generates a list of reasons for (pros) and reasons against (cons) drinking less than they presently do. The facilitator writes these lists on a blackboard and, using an established decisional balance scale, adds any reasons for drinking less that the group may have missed. Participants then create personal decisional balance sheets, rating the strength of their personal pros and cons. The decisional balance aids individuals in recognizing their ambivalence to change, examining personal discrepancies between their goals and their behaviors, and clarifying their own motivating factors for changing. This encourages participants to consider the possibility of changing their drinking behaviors. After the participants complete their personal lists, the facilitator leads the group in brief, open-ended discussions on the importance of reasons for drinking less. Some of these reasons may be the following: doing better in school, saving money, being in better shape, avoiding hangovers, and avoiding problems with school and legal authorities.

After the discussion about the reasons for and against drinking, the group generates a list of high-risk situations in which they feel it is difficult for themselves or others to avoid drinking in excess. Discussions follow about how to deal with these risky situations as students explore their own abusive drinking experiences, identify their existing skills to effectively deal with risky situations, and develop new strategies for dealing with future situations. The facilitator reinforces skills and strategies for effectively reducing risk. The group also discusses the roles alcohol expectancies play in drinking by talking about general perceptions and expectations about the social, physical and sexual effects of alcohol. The facilitator provides the participants with alternative evidence to counter the perceived alcohol-related positive expectancy that alcohol alone leads to the enhancement of social and sexual outcomes.

Students then set personal behavioral goals for their own drinking in the next month. They share their goals with the group. The facilitator reinforces goals relating to responsible behavior or reductions in drinking. The facilitator also discusses these goals with the students during brief, monthly individual follow-ups to see how successful the individual is in adhering to the goal and whether or not the goal needs to be adapted for the following month.

Following the intervention, students keep a monthly drinking diary, recording how many drinks they consume each day and when and with whom they consume them. Students return diaries at the end of each month for 3 consecutive months and, at the time of return, discuss with the facilitator their drinking behavior and successes or failures in meeting...
their behavioral goals. For research purposes, the diary includes other assessments of drinking behavior to determine the extent to which individuals are reducing their problematic drinking behavior (or the extent to which preintervention responsible drinking behavior is not becoming problematic). Each student receives nominal prizes (e.g., pizza certificates, water bottles, Frisbees) for participating in the project.

**Campus Community Involvement**

In addition to the group intervention with students themselves, several aspects of Heads UP! involve engaging the campus community (faculty, staff, parents, student body leaders) to establish an environment that will support the first-year students in actively following the goals outlined by the intervention and to shift campus attitudes concerning alcohol use toward more risk-reducing attitudes. Involvement of the campus community increases and encourages campus dialogue about alcohol problems, impacting students, staff, and faculty who did not participate in the intervention.

**Administrative Initiatives**

Heads UP! benefits from the support of the university's president and vice president, which creates synergy for the overall project. One month prior to the start of the fall semester, all incoming first-year students and their parents receive separate letters from the university president describing negative consequences related to drinking often experienced by new students. The letters encourage parents and students to discuss prior to arriving at school the role drinking will play in the students' college life. This presidential initiative sets the institutional tone against illicit and irresponsible drinking and raising the awareness of freshmen and their parents about how problem drinking can negatively affect college success. The university's vice president for student affairs (a coprincipal investigator) is also actively involved in and supportive of the project and encourages staff involvement in programs. The NIAAA highlights the importance of administrative leadership in developing successful campus alcohol programs.

**Campus Dialogue**

Heads UP! implements several activities and programs across campus throughout the academic year to raise awareness of alcohol-related issues and to promote responsible drinking. Resident directors present social norms programs during mandatory dormitory meetings during the first month of school. This feedback session corrects the misperceived normative drinking patterns of the university students. In addition, separate student leader and faculty and staff monthly luncheons involve campus members in discussions that present helpful information on drinking issues and increase faculty and student-leader involvement in campus alcohol issues. Program administrators give advice on how to include issues related to alcohol in courses and clubs, and faculty, staff, and student leaders learn how to use MI techniques to intervene with persons at risk. A campus-wide poster campaign developed on-site by students in a graphic design course provides students with further campus-specific normative drinking information. Heads UP! also maintains a presence at many campus events, has an accessible and approachable campus office, and involves students in online alcohol assessments (e-Check Up to Go). By increasing campus dialogue about university alcohol problems and by establishing an accessible presence on campus, Heads UP! attempts to reinforce the first-year intervention and provide the campus with an environment supportive of responsible drinking choices.

**DISCUSSION**

We are preparing the results of the current program for future publication; however, preliminary analyses reveal a reduction in problematic drinking and alcohol violations among first-year male participants, as well as a preventive effect for male students developing risky drinking patterns during their first year of college. We established this by comparing the first-year participants' current behaviors to their own previous behaviors and to the behaviors of a control group of freshmen who did not participate in the group intervention. We also examined campus judicial records of alcohol violations by students who received the intervention and by those who did not.

In addition to the freshmen piece of Heads UP!, the university has introduced a similar intervention as the frontline sanction for students violating campus alcohol policies. Adjudicated students are disproportionately heavy drinkers who are at increased risk for negative alcohol-related consequences. Results from this project are forthcoming, but preliminary analyses also reveal a decrease in drinking behavior, alcohol-related consequences, and judicial recidivism for adjudicated students.

Campus administration, Student Affairs, student leadership groups, and the overall student population have enthusiastically received the Heads UP! project. Student publications and local news sources have highlighted the project and several of its programs. Because of its welcomed reception, the project appears to be making progress in targeting both high-risk individuals and the broader campus community. We encourage other universities to design and implement similar nested programs supported by the broader campus environment on their own campuses.

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**REFERENCES**


