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Anxiety Sensitivity, Stress, and Problematic Drinking Behaviors Among College Students

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Introduction

•Heavy drinking in the college population has been linked to several adverse side effects, including accidental injuries, poor classroom performance, and psychological impairment (Pedrelli et al., 2010).

•To successfully limit these adverse consequences, it is important to understand the main risk factors that lead to excessive alcohol use.

•Anxiety sensitivity (AS) and stress have been separately identified as risk factors for problematic drinking (Stewart et al., 1999; Zvolensky et al., 2004).

•A theory of motivational use of alcohol has also suggested that the primary factor that influences drinking behaviors is one's motivation (Cox and Klinger, 1988).

Current Study

•This study will investigate whether AS and stress affect an individual's urge and motive to drink.

•Hypothesis: Students with high AS and high state stress levels will record greater urges to drink as well as higher coping motives to drink.

Methods/Procedure

- Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI)
 - Determines low or high AS
- Questionnaire Packet #1
- Short Anagram Task
- Questionnaire Packet #2
- Data was analyzed using a multivariate analysis.

Distribution of Participants

Low AS = ASI score 0-21

High AS = ASI score 22+

| | High AS | Low AS |
|-----------|---------|--------|
| Stress | n= 23 | n= 24 |
| No Stress | n= 21 | n= 20 |

Participant Demographics

- $n = 95$
- 44.2% male, 55.8% female
- $M_{age} = 18.82$ years; age range: 18-24 years
- Race
 - 61.1% Caucasian/White
 - 8.4% Latino/a American/Hispanic
 - 6.3% African American/Black
 - 6.3% Asian American
 - 16.8% other
- Social Drinking
 - 44%: Always drink with others
 - 27%: Sometimes drink with others
 - 28%: Never drink alcohol

Results

Main effects by anxiety sensitivity on urge and motive to drink

| Variable | df | F | p-value |
|--------------|-------|------|---------|
| ACQ | | | |
| Emotionality | 1, 84 | 5.67 | .02* |
| Expectancy | 1, 84 | 1.40 | .239 |
| DMQ | | | |
| Enhancement | 1, 84 | .514 | .475 |
| Social | 1, 84 | 1.25 | .267 |
| Conformity | 1, 84 | 1.34 | .251 |
| Coping | 1, 84 | 4.70 | .033* |

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ACQ = Alcohol Craving Questionnaire; DMQ = Drinking Motives Questionnaires.

Main effects by stress condition on urge and motive to drink

| Variable | df | F | p-value |
|--------------|-------|------|---------|
| ACQ | | | |
| Emotionality | 1, 84 | 1.05 | .308 |
| Expectancy | 1, 84 | .946 | .333 |
| DMQ | | | |
| Enhancement | 1, 84 | .218 | .642 |
| Social | 1, 84 | .000 | .99 |
| Conformity | 1, 84 | .698 | .406 |
| Coping | 1, 84 | .345 | .558 |

Note. ACQ = Alcohol Craving Questionnaire; DMQ = Drinking Motives Questionnaire.

Summary of Findings

- ACQ Emotionality subscale yielded a significant result ($p = .02$) for anxiety sensitivity's effect on one's urge to drink.
- DMQ Coping subscale yielded a significant result ($p = .033$) for anxiety sensitivity's effect on one's motive to drink.
- Differing stress conditions did not yield any significant results on one's urge or motive to drink.
- There was no interaction effect between anxiety sensitivity levels and stress levels.

Conclusions

•Individuals with high AS levels have a greater urge to drink in order to relieve negative affect compared to an individual with low AS levels.

•Individuals with high levels of AS are more likely to be motivated to drink as a coping mechanism compared to individuals with low AS. Coping motives are indicative of heavier and more frequent drinking patterns (Cox & Klinger, 1988; Cooper, 1994).

•There was no evidence to support the claim that the effects of AS on urge and motive to drink differed depending on the situational stress condition.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Young cohort ($M_{age} = 18.82$ years)
- Stress Appraisal Measure (SAM) may not have been an accurate measure of stress
- Anagram task was biased towards individuals who spoke English as a first language
- Difficult to generalize results to a broader population

Future Directions

- Focus more on gender differences
- Look at participants' social involvement (e.g., Greek life)

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