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

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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 - Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI)
• Data was analyzed using a multivariate analysis.

Results

Main effects by anxiety sensitivity on urge and motive to drink

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ACQ
  | Emotionality | 1, 84 | 5.67 | .02* |
|         | Expectancy   | 1, 84 | 1.40 | .239 |
| DMQ
  | Enhancement  | 1, 84 | .14  | .71  |
|         | Social       | 1, 84 | 1.25 | .276 |
|         | Conformity   | 1, 84 | 1.34 | .251 |
|         | Coping       | 1, 84 | 4.70 | .033* |

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

Main effects by stress condition on urge and motive to drink

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ACQ
  | Emotionality | 1, 84 | 1.05 | .308 |
|         | Expectancy   | 1, 84 | 946  | .333 |
| DMQ
  | Enhancement  | 1, 84 | 2.18 | .642 |
|         | Social       | 1, 84 | 0.00 | .99  |
|         | Conformity   | 1, 84 | 6.98 | .046 |
|         | Coping       | 1, 84 | 3.45 | .068 |

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 (Mage = 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)

Acknowledgements

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References