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.

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

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

Main effects by stress condition on urge and motive to drink

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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)

Acknowledgements

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References


Distribution of Participants

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