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Stall Seat Journal as a Social Norms Intervention for Risky Drinking among College Students



M. Alshagra, R. Ericson, Z. Niazi, J. Su, L. Hancock

ABSTRACT

Alcohol use is prevalent among college students and many participate in risky drinking behaviors over the course of their college careers, leading to negative consequences. The social norms theory posits that individuals behave based on their perceptions of peer behavior. Overestimation of peers' problem behavior is associated with increase in their own problem behavior. The Stall Seat Journal (SSJ), developed by the Wellness Resource Center, is used in part to help correct common misperceptions, including those related to peer alcohol use. Our study aimed to see if Stall Seat Journal readership was associated with perception of peer alcohol use among VCU students and if perception of peer alcohol use was associated with alcohol use outcomes. We performed linear multiple regression for continuous dependent variables and logistic regression for binary dependent variables and controlled for gender and cohort. Responses from 4290 VCU Students who participated in the Spring 2015 Spit for Science Survey were used in this study. Stall Seat Journal readership was negatively associated with perception of peer alcohol use ($\beta = -0.05, p < .01$). The correlation was weak but statistically significant. Perception of alcohol use was not significantly related to frequency of alcohol use ($\beta = 0.01, p > .05$), but was significantly associated with quantity of alcohol use ($\beta = 0.20, p < .01$) and likelihood of experiencing blackout (odds ratio = 1.12, $p < .05$). Based on our findings, Stall Seat Journal readership can be used to positively influence college students and potentially lessen risky drinking.

INTRODUCTION

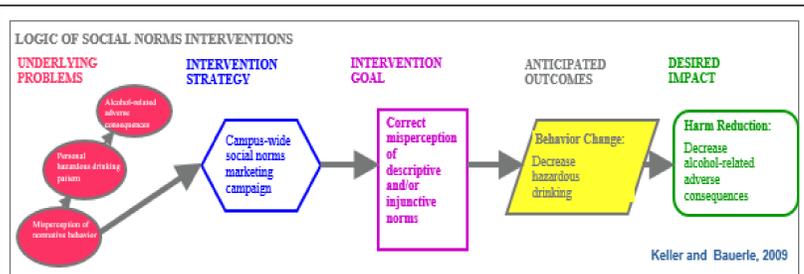


Figure 1. Logic Model of Social Norms Intervention. This model was used as the background for SSJ (Keller and Beaurle 2009)

Alcohol use is prevalent among college students and heavy episodic or binge drinking is a persistent problem across campuses nationwide (NIAAA). Negative consequences related to drinking include assault, sexual abuse, injury, academic problems, and death according to the NIAAA. Colleges need effective methods to reduce negative alcohol related outcomes.

One approach to improve alcohol related outcomes is through application of the social norms theory. The social norms theory postulates that behavior is influenced by perceptions of how our peers think and act (3). An overestimation of problem behavior, such as drinking, among peers will lead to an increase in the person's problem behavior.

At VCU, the staff at the Wellness Resource Center has been using a social norms marketing intervention to correct those misperceptions and better equip students with the education they need to make informed decisions regarding alcohol consumption since 2002. The application of the social norms theory is applied through the Stall Seat Journal (SSJ). The SSJ is a friendly, fun, and educational poster that goes on the back of 1,300 bathroom stalls at VCU restrooms for students to read. By exposing students to alcohol education and accurate statistics about VCU student body behavior, the goal is to correct misperceptions, alcohol harm reduction strategies ultimately reduce heavy episodic drinking and associated negative consequences.

Research Questions and Hypotheses:

Is SSJ readership associated with perception of peer alcohol use among VCU students?

- Higher SSJ readership would be associated with lower perception of peer alcohol use among VCU students.

Is perception of peer alcohol use associated with alcohol use outcomes?

- Higher perception of peer alcohol use would be associated with higher likelihood of experiencing blackout.

METHODS

Sample

- N = 4290 VCU Students who participated in the Spring 2015 Spit for Science survey
- Cohort groups included Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Seniors
- Female – 66.7% Male – 33.3%

Measures

Stall Seat Journal Readership

- "What best describes your reading of the Stall Seat Journal?"

1: Never seen it, 2: Seen it, don't read it, 3: Skipped the headlines, 4: Read less than half, 5: Read more than half, 6: Read it all, 7: Read it all multiple times

Perception of peer alcohol use

- "How many drinks of alcohol do you think the typical VCU student had the last time they socialized?"

1: 0 drinks, 2: 1-4 drinks, 3: 5-6 drinks, 4: 7-9 drinks, 5: 10 or more drinks

Frequency of alcohol use

- "How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?"

1: Never, 2: Monthly or less, 3: 2-4 times a month, 4: 2-3 times a week, 5: 4 or more times a week

Quantity of alcohol use

- "How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?"

1: 1 or 2 drinks, 2: 3 or 4 drinks, 3: 5 or 6 drinks, 4: 7,8, or 9 drinks, 5: 10 or more drinks

Blackouts

- "Have you experienced a blackout in the past 12 months?"

Yes or No, of those who reported alcohol use

Analysis

- Data analyses were conducted in SPSS
- Linear Multiple Regression for continuous dependent variables
- Logistic Regression for binary dependent variable (i.e., blackouts)
- Analyses controlled for gender and cohort

RESULTS

Table 1. Association between SSJ Readership and Perception of Peer Alcohol Use. Stall Seat Journal Readership is negatively associated with perception of peer alcohol use.

Variables	B	SE	β
Male	0.09	0.02	0.06**
Sophomore	-0.02	0.03	-0.02
Junior	0.001	0.03	0.001
Senior	-0.10	0.03	-0.06**
SSJ_readership	-0.02	0.01	-0.05**

Table 2. Association between Perception of Peer Alcohol Use and Frequency of Alcohol Use. Perception of alcohol use is not significantly related to frequency of alcohol use

Variables	B	SE	β
Male	0.22	0.03	0.12**
Sophomore	0.02	0.04	0.01
Junior	0.16	0.04	0.07**
Senior	0.30	0.04	0.15**
Perception of peer alcohol use	0.01	0.02	0.01

Table 3. Association between Perception of Peer Alcohol Use and Quantity of Alcohol Use. Perception of peer alcohol use is positively associated with quantity of alcohol use.

Variables	B	SE	β
Male	0.60	0.04	0.28**
Sophomore	0.03	0.05	0.02
Junior	-0.15	0.05	-0.06**
Senior	-0.22	0.05	-0.09**
Perception of peer alcohol use	0.30	0.02	0.20**

Table 4. Association between Perception of Peer Alcohol use and Blackout. Perception of peer alcohol use is associated with higher likelihood of having experienced a blackout.

Variables	B	SE	OR
Male	0.24	0.07	1.27**
Sophomore	0.16	0.10	1.17
Junior	0.25	0.10	1.29**
Senior	0.11	0.10	1.12
Perception of peer alcohol use	0.12	0.05	1.12*

CONCLUSIONS

- Higher Stall Seat Journal readership was associated with more accurate perception of peer alcohol use, therefore SSJ may be an effective social norms intervention to correct misperception of peer alcohol use, although the effect may be very small.
- Higher perception of peer alcohol use is associated with higher quantity of alcohol use and higher likelihood of having experienced blackout
- Stall Seat Journal readership can be used to positively influence college students and lessen binge drinking and associated blackouts by promoting accurate peer perception of social norms when it comes to alcohol use.
- This study is a cross-sectional study and could further be enhanced by making it longitudinal.

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ALCOHOL 101 with a data dump