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The Effects of Alcohol on the Social Aspects of High School Students

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Although the legal drinking age is twenty-one, the age that a person begins to consume alcohol is decreasing. In a study in 1997, the average age of first alcohol use was 13.2 years old (Maney, Higham-Gardill, & Mahoney, 2002). Drinking alcohol at a young age can lead to social problems and even delinquent behavior. It has been said that adolescent alcohol misuse has been shown to be part of a constellation of problem behaviors including delinquency and illicit drug use (Barnes, Welte, & Hoffman, 2002). Not only does it aid in future delinquency but also antisocial personality and health problems. Several studies have been done to discover the age and occurrences in which adolescents begin drinking and the possible consequences including but not limited to delinquent behavior, illicit drug use, sexual activity and longitudinal studies that project adult alcoholism. The main question in this particular research is to investigate if high school students who consume alcohol have a higher rate of social problems than those students who do not consume alcohol do. The reason for this research is the personal observance of adolescents who abuse alcohol, which resulted in problems with school and family life.

Sometimes getting answers from students to rely on research can be faulty. Results from a study involving three high schools showed that students grossly overestimated the prevalence of substance abuse when compared to self-reports of use (Hammermeister, Roland, & Page, 2002). The only way to find out about activity among high school students is to ask the students, so those are chances researchers are willing to take. As we

try to understand some of the responses that we may gather in our research, we can use Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory as a guide. Bandura believed that people modeled behaviors, attitudes and emotional reactions from others. This is evident in the behavior of teenagers.

Other issues when dealing with alcohol and social problems are the variables of sex and how often they drink. Are adolescent boys more affected by alcohol use than girls? A study conducted by Maney et al. (2002) mentions that adolescent males are significantly more likely to drink at risk than adolescent females. The same article mentions that high-risk adolescents (those who drank more than twice per year) reported having trouble with parents, school troubles, and experiencing more social problems. My hypothesis is that adolescents who consume alcohol do have more social problems such as school problems, trouble at home and delinquency.

Method

Participants

The ideal participants will be public high school students ages 14 to 18 in three different high school environments. The three different high schools will be one metropolitan area school, one county school and one rural school. With 100 participants (50 male and 50 female) from each school, there will be 300 participants total.

Materials

The only physical materials that will be used are a list of survey style questions that will consist of a mixture of self-report questions and questions about other peers and chairs for the students to sit in. Some example questions could be "How often in the last month have you drank alcohol?" or "Do you drink at parties if your friends are?" The

questions will contain a Likert scale format and multiple-choice format. The actual survey will be administered interview style.

Procedure

Upon arriving at the schools, there will be both a male and a female researcher interviewing the students. The interviews will be administered in health or physical education classes where the subject of alcohol abuse may be a topic that is covered in classroom material. The researchers will interview the students in two different settings. First, there will be a round of individual interviews. In this case, the male interviewers will interview the male students and the female interviewer will interview the female students. After all of the individual interviews have taken place, there will be group interviews. There will be 10 students in each interview group. The interviewers will not only record the answers to the questions but also observe the characteristics of people answering questions. This information will support answers to interview questions and will be coded. For example, attitude, quietness, etc. are some levels of characteristics to rate when evaluating data. After all of the group interviews have taken place, there will be an open forum for students to ask questions of the researchers. The dependent variable for this research would be whether adolescents consumed alcohol or not.

Implications

By doing a one-way ANOVA analysis, I would hope to find that my hypothesis is supported. Being similar to other studies but varying slightly with the interview approach, the chances of having supporting data is likely. By gathering data that supported my hypothesis would mean that more students are having social problems when they drink alcohol in high school. This could help implement a new kind of alcohol

awareness program that concentrates solely on alcohol instead of a broad “drug” awareness program. With alcohol, next to cigarettes, being the most widely accepted of drugs, it is difficult to include those in a “drug” awareness program. Alcohol is so influential among students because they may feel cooler or more accepted by others when drinking in social situations. This study would be beneficial in showing that alcohol needs its own awareness program to effectively teach students. If the results are not supported than alcohol will continue to be talked about in a general drug awareness program and the social problems in the lives of adolescents may or may not continue as a result.

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