Drinking and Depression: Pilot of a Brief Intervention

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**STUDY AIMS**
This pilot study examines the feasibility and effectiveness of a brief intervention for young adults who engage in heavy drinking and are depressed.

**DEPRESSION, DRINKING, AND YOUNG ADULTS**
Emotional problems such as depression heighten an individual's vulnerability to the development of long-term alcohol problems. The period of young adulthood is the time of greatest risk for the development of alcohol and depression problems.

**DRINKING TO REGULATE AFFECT**
While reasons for drinking among young adults commonly include to be social or to celebrate an occasion, drinking to cope is not uncommon. Young adult drinkers commonly have multiple motives for drinking.

Recent research indicates that, among young adult drinkers experiencing mental health problems, problems caused by drinking are better predicted by coping motives than by other motives.

**EXISTING BRIEF INTERVENTIONS**
Brief motivational interventions have been applied with success to heavy drinking young adults. Assessment of these interventions for those with mental health problems has not been examined.

**STUDY PARTICIPANTS**
- 19 Participants
- 53% Female, 100% Heterosexual
- 74% Caucasian, 26% Asian
- 5% Hispanic, 95% Non-Hispanic
- Ages 18-26, average age of 19 (1.9)
- Screening Criteria in Psychology 101 courses: Drink at least weekly, Binge drinking in past month (men drinking 5 drinks or more in 2 hours, females drinking 4 or more), Drinking to cope at least some of the time, Scoring a 14 or greater on the Beck (BDI)

**ASSESSMENT METHODS**
Measures were completed by participants online with DATSTAT illum software at baseline and one month.
- Main variables were depression scores (BDI), drinks per week over the past month (based on the Daily Drinking Questionnaire; DDQ), and difficulties coping emotionally (Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale; DERS).

At baseline, participants in the control condition did not differ significantly from those of the intervention condition on main variables.

**DESCRIPTION OF CONDITIONS**
Relaxation Control
- Participants were told to relax for a 30 minute period and given access to a computer, magazines and a telephone with the only restriction that they not work.
- Brief Intervention
- Interventions (30 minutes) were conducted in a motivational interviewing style. Participants were given a feedback sheet with normative information about their drinking. Expectancy effects and ways for managing drinking were discussed. As part of treatment development, some participants (n=3) also received normative feedback about their depression levels as well as cognitive behavioral skills for coping.

**MOOD RESULTS**
- Depression Scores
  - Baseline: 16
  - One Month Follow-Up: 15
  - Beck Depression Inventory
  - Baseline: 14.8
  - One Month Follow-Up: 11.4

- Difficulties Coping with Emotions
  - Baseline: 98.6
  - One Month Follow-Up: 96.4

- Difficulties Regulating Emotions Scale
  - Baseline: 89.1
  - One Month Follow-Up: 92.9

There were no significant differences between conditions at the one-month follow-up. While all findings were nonsignificant, it is likely that there is insufficient power to detect effects.

**DISCUSSION**
This study indicates that further research is warranted for brief intervention use among young adults engaging in heavy drinking and experiencing depression.

The current study is the pilot and manual development project for an NIAAA-funded trial comparing a brief motivational intervention to an enhanced version which includes mindfulness-based emotion regulation skills from Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.
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Poster References


