

Evaluation Of The Texas Youth Awareness Program

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Abstract

The State of Texas, USA has laws which prohibit consumption, purchase or possession of alcoholic beverages prior to age 21. In addition, a zero-tolerance (any detectable amount of alcohol) law for drivers under age 21 was enacted in 1997. Young people convicted of these offenses must complete an approved alcohol education program in addition to other legal sanctions. This paper presents an analysis of young people who attended this program and an evaluation of cognitive, affective and behavior change by this group. Demographic data, alcohol/drug abuse screening scores and knowledge tests were analyzed.

Introduction

While fatal traffic crashes may occur to a driver of any age, young people have been identified as being at disproportionate risk for involvement in alcohol related traffic crashes in the U.S. and the state of Texas. In the U.S. in 1998, young drivers (age 16-20) were 60% over-represented in fatal alcohol related crashes based on the percentage of drivers they represent (1). In Texas, the over representation was 69% (2). (See table 1.)

Table 1: Drivers age 16-20 in fatal alcohol crashes.

Location	% Licensed Drivers	% Driver Fatalities	Representation
U.S.	7.0%	11.2	60% Over
TX	7.2%	12.2	69% Over

Even though these numbers are alarmingly high, significant declines (approximately 49%) have occurred in the last 10 years (1).

To attempt to address the high alcohol related crash rates of young drivers, a number of legal and educational measures have been taken. Throughout the U.S., laws prohibiting purchase, possession or consumption by persons under age 21 have been enacted. In addition, zero - tolerance laws for alcohol related to operation of a motor vehicle have been enacted in many states. In Texas, one of the sanctions for violation of such laws includes completion of a state

approved 6 hour alcohol awareness course (3). This paper provides an analysis of young people who have completed the course.

Methods

Data was collected on 329 young persons who completed an approved Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) alcohol awareness course from January 1998 to August 1999. The course was provided by the Texas A&M University, Center for Alcohol and Drug Education Studies. Data collected for analysis included:

- Gender
- Age
- Education level
- Pre-post knowledge on test results
- Previous alcohol related offense
- Age at which alcohol consumption began
- Alcohol beverage consumed when cited and favorite beverage
- Alcohol abuse indicators
- Parent/family alcohol abuse
- Drivers license number and driving history

Results

Gender and Age

Table 2 provides a breakdown by gender and age for all participants. As can be noted, males age 20 were the single largest group of participants and as age increases, there were more offenders in each age group.

Table 2: Gender and age of all awareness course participants.

Age	Male	Female	Total
16	6	3	9
17	7	7	14
18	43	21	64
19	60	32	92
20	94	56	150
Total	210 (64%)	119 (36%)	329

Educational Level

The majority of the participants were university students. This was to be expected as Texas A&M University is a large university (43,500 students) in a metropolitan area of approximately 110,000 people. Classification for participants was as follows:

High School Students	26	College Juniors	70
College Freshmen	104	College Seniors	8
College Sophomores	104	Not in School	17

Knowledge Analysis

All participants in the alcohol education program are required to complete a multiple-choice pre-test and post-test which reflect material taught in the course related to laws, effects of alcohol on humans, influences of advertising and signs of alcohol abuse. (Tests and exact course content are available from the author.) Improvement was evident across age, gender, and educational level. Tables 3 & 4 provide an overview of these findings.

Table 3: Mean knowledge scores and improvement of Alcohol Awareness Course participants by age and gender.

	<u>MALE</u>			<u>FEMALE</u>			<u>TOTAL</u>		
Age	Pre %	Post %	Imp %	Pre %	Post %	Imp %	Pre %	Post %	Imp %
16	45	85	40	51	82	31	48	84	39
17	48	89	41	44	87	43	47	88	42
18	54	87	33	59	88	29	56	87	32
19	55	88	33	49	89	40	53	88	36
20	58	90	32	56	91	35	57	90	33
Mean	53	88	35	53	88	36	53	88	35

Table 4: Mean knowledge scores and improvement by Alcohol Awareness Course participants by education level and gender.

	<u>MALE</u>			<u>FEMALE</u>			<u>TOTAL</u>		
Educational Level	Pre %	Post %	Imp %	Pre %	Post %	Imp %	Pre %	Post %	Imp %
High School	50	85	35	44	86	42	47	85	38
College Freshman	53	88	35	56	91	35	59	89	35
College Soph	58	89	31	50	88	38	55	89	34
College Junior	59	94	35	59	89	30	59	92	33
College Senior	51	90	39	73	97	24	62	93	31
Not In School	49	82	33	53	87	34	50	84	34
Mean	53	88	35	56	90	34	55	84	34

Previous Alcohol Related Offense

Only 12% of the participants admitted to a previous alcohol related offense. As Texas does not maintain a state-wide database on underage alcohol offenses, it was not possible to verify the accuracy of this finding. If participants were truthful, it appears that the vast majority of young people assigned to the educational program are first offenders.

Age At Which Alcohol Consumption Begins

Recent research (4) has determined that the younger a person begins to consume alcohol (more than an occasional sip with a parent, communion, etc.) the more likely they are to become alcoholics. Data from the study group revealed that males were most likely to begin drinking at age 15 and females at age 17. Table 5 provides an overview of beginning drinking age by gender.

Table 5: Beginning age of drinking of Alcohol Awareness Course participants by gender.

Age	Male	Female	Totals
10-12	3	0	3
13	10	2	12
14	14	4	18
15	51	24	75
16	49	21	70
17	43	37	80
18	36	24	60
19	3	5	8
20	1	2	3

Alcohol Beverage At Time Of Arrest And Favorite Beverage

In an attempt to determine if a particular type of alcoholic beverage is favored by young people, data collected at time of registration asks for both the alcoholic beverage at time of arrest and their favorite alcoholic beverage. As can be seen from Table 6, beer is overwhelmingly the beverage at arrest and favorite choice of both males and females. Forty-four young people claim to have had no alcoholic beverage at the time of arrest. This is possible as they could have been arrested for attempted purchase, misrepresentation of age or DUI by minor.

Table 6: Alcoholic beverage at arrest and favorite beverage of participants in Alcohol Awareness Course.

Beverage	Male		Female		Total	
	Arrest	Favorite	Arrest	Favorite	Arrest	Favorite
Beer	153	146	88	57	241	203
Mixed Drinks	15	31	14	29	29	60
Whiskey	5	11	2	5	7	16
Wine Cooler	4	1	4	18	8	19
None	33	21	11	10	44	31

Alcohol Abuse (participant, parents, family)

While it is possible to receive a citation for underage possession or purchase of alcohol though a young person is a non-drinker, all study participants claim to drink alcoholic beverages. To seek to determine if alcohol abuse is present, an analysis of participant responses to a screening

instrument (Personal Alcohol Profile-PAP) was made. This instrument contains a set of 35 questions designed to reveal abuse of alcohol in the 6 month period prior to the alcohol offense. Table 7 provides an overview of the findings in this area by gender.

Table 7: Personal Alcohol Profile (PAP) results for participants in Alcohol Awareness Course by gender.

Numbers of Indicators	Male	Female	Total
0	14 (1%)	11 (9%)	25 (8%)
1-3	46 (22%)	34 (28%)	80 (24%)
4-6	51 (25%)	32 (27%)	83 (25%)
7-9	29 (15%)	17 (14%)	46 (14%)
10-12	36 (18%)	12 (10%)	48 (15%)
13-15	18 (9%)	5 (4%)	23 (17%)
16-18	9 (5%)	5 (4%)	14 (4%)
19-21	2 (1%)	2 (2%)	4 (1%)
22-24	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	4 (1%)
25-27	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (0%)
TOTAL	210	119	329

The PAP also provides data on drinking problems by parents on other family members. Table 8 lists information on this subject.

Table 8: Parent /Family drinking problems.

GROUP	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	UNKNOWN
Parents Only	11	3 %	3
Family Only	70	22 %	3
Parents & Family	12	4 %	2
TOTAL	93	29 %	8

Discussion

Analysis of the various data sets revealed the following:

- A. Although the student population of TAMU (from which 86% of the participants come) is split approximately evenly between males and females, males receiving an underage alcohol offense out-number females by almost 2 to 1. This is similar to data in Texas which indicates that males ages 16-20 are twice as likely to be involved in fatal traffic accidents as females of the same age group. Young people age 20 (of both sexes) were more likely to be arrested for alcohol offenses than any other single

age group. Age 20 is also the single most likely age for alcohol related fatalities in Texas (2).

- B. Alcohol related arrests were most likely for college freshmen and sophomores (63% of the sample) and declined steadily thereafter. This is partially a function of age, but may also indicate greater maturity as educational level is enhanced.
- C. The TCADA Alcohol Awareness Course was successful in increasing the knowledge of course participants. Analyses of knowledge gain by age and educational level were very similar with gains of approximately 35%.
- D. The finding that most people began to drink alcoholic beverages prior to coming to college (79% prior to age 18) indicates the need for prevention measures before college matriculation takes place.
- E. The fact that beer was in the possession of 74% and the favorite beverage of 62% of participants illustrates the need for an education emphasis on this beverage. This is especially important as analysis of persons who are convicted of DWI in Texas found that 80% of such offenders have consumed only beer prior to their arrest (5).
- F. Even though substantial knowledge gain was evident for all subgroups, it is unrealistic to expect a 6 hour course to modify alcohol abuse consumption. The fact that 67% of youthful offenders in the study had PAP scores of 4 or greater indicates the need for further evaluation and counseling. This is supported by evidence that 29% of the participants recognized that their parents or other family had alcohol problems.
- G. There appeared to be a relationship between parents/family drinking problems and indications of participant problems on the PAP. Participants who believed their parents/family have drinking problems had average PAP scores which were 25% higher than those with no perceived parent/family drinking problems.

While these findings will help decision makers to focus upon specific areas of concern, a longitudinal study of post-course behavior is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the education program. Such an analysis is underway with results expected by mid 2000.

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