Excessive Student Drinking on Canadian Campuses

Parent Action on Drugs Webinar
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About CCSA

• **Vision:** A healthier Canadian society where evidence transforms approaches to substance use.

• **Mission:** To address issues of substance use in Canada by providing national leadership and harnessing the power of evidence to generate coordinated action.

• **Value Proposition:** CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.
Why Our Work Matters

Canadian context
• Opioid crisis
• Legalization and regulation of marijuana

Health
• Substance use disorder is a disease and should be treated like other chronic diseases and health conditions
• Contributes to mental health conditions, family violence and suicide
• Contributes to 60+ diseases like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS
• Illicit drug dependence directly accounted for 20 million disability adjusted life years
Public Safety
• Significant factor in the commission of crime; as many as 80% of federal offenders have a history of problematic substance use
• Impaired driving accounted for 9,000 deaths in Canada from 2000–2010

Economics
• Substance use costs over $40 billion per year in Canada

Effective Interventions and Supports
• Recovery is attainable and sustainable
National Priorities and Areas of Action

Canada’s National Framework for Action

Objective: present findings from focus groups with post-secondary students regarding excessive drinking.

Overview:
- Background and Context
- Research Study
  - Method
  - Preliminary Findings
- Next Steps
Background Context

• Excessive student drinking poses high risks.
• Majority of research is survey based.
• Limited research in Canada.
Study Objectives:

• Identify and better understand factors associated with excessive student drinking.

• Develop harm reduction strategies, tools and resources.
Method

• **School and participant characteristics:**
  ▶ 5 universities; 110 (27M; 83F); ages 17-30

• **Recruitment and screening:**
  ▶ Since (date), how many standard drinks did you usually have on days when you drank (including before you went out, while you were out, and afterwards)?
  ▶ Since (date), how often have you had 4 or more (if female) or 5 or more (if male) standard drinks on one occasion (including before you went out, while you were out, and afterwards)?
Method (cont.)

• **Factors influencing drinking:**
  ▶ (Mis)perceptions, expectations, consequences, motivations, attitudes, recommendations.

• **Drinking issues:**
  ▶ Alcohol-induced blackouts, drinking to cope, pre-drinking.

• **Analysis:**
  ▶ Nvivo software.
Findings: Perceptions

Perceptions:

• Can consume 5 drinks before negative consequences.
• Only consider physical experiences.

“I would say probably five to seven [drinks] for there to be absolutely no way that there could be negative consequences.”
Findings: Attitudes

Attitudes:

• Drinking is expected; part of university culture.

• Want to figure out their own limits for themselves.
Findings: Expectations

Expectations:

• To have fun, have confidence.
• To keep drinking.
• To be drunk, hung over.

“I would expect to be…drunk, and I’d probably honestly expect to keep drinking. It’s almost like once I pass that stage, I’m probably going to keep drinking.”
Alcohol-induced blackouts

- Typically accidental; inexperienced; not know limits.

“When I came to university… I didn’t know how [to drink], so I tried to keep up [with my friends].”

“I’m on this emergency medical thing, and the amount of calls we get responding to people who have [drank] themselves to oblivion, to the point where they need medical care is frightening.”
Findings: Motivations & Consequences

Drinking to cope

• Not as frequent, but not always recognized.

“If I’m stressed because of so many assignments that I have to deal with, I go out drinking… that’s really not helping, so I’ll end up more stressed the next day.”

“It’s hard to get to sleep so I would just drink a little.”
Pre-drinking

• Most common issue; want to be drunk at low cost; socialize; peer pressure.

“At pre-drinks, because everyone will just bring alcohol, or [there’s] a fridge stocked of alcohol… it’s just everywhere you look….. I will bring my own, like a few beers, but then…I just end up with…10 other people’s drinks, … and then just lose track of it.”
Findings: Student Ideas

Student Ideas to Reduce Excessive Drinking:

• Normalize and educate on responsible drinking.
• Information delivered by peers.
Limitations

- Exploratory study.
- Self-selection bias.
- Only universities involved.
Implications

• Need for assortment of approaches.
• Closer examination of pre-drinking.
• Responsible drinking and earlier engagement.
Next Steps

- Report on findings, spring 2018.
- Develop strategies, tools and resources.
Questions?