Young adult predrinking and experiences of sexual aggression at bars and clubs: Results from the Windsor bargoer study

Background: Research on male-to-male alcohol-related aggression in bars and clubs

- barroom observations
- interviews
- focus group discussions
- surveys
Several contributing factors, including:

- effects of alcohol
- the barroom environment
- men’s attitudes and beliefs and masculinity concerns
- men’s approval of aggression and perceptions regarding peer approval
The **Safer Bars** program

- **Risk assessment** focuses on addressing physical environmental factors that may increase risk of aggressive behavior.

- **Staff training** directed toward improving the way that staff interact with patrons.

Safer Bars was developed by Kathryn Graham, funded by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the US National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (2000-2004).
In focus group discussions about aggression in bars, many participants raised the issue of predrinking:

“…students don’t have that much money, drinks are expensive, so they just get completely hammered before they even go to the bar. So that might really play a big part in what happens at the bar – ‘cause they’re already out of hand when they get there”

(Wells et al., 2009, pp. 1448)
Issue of sexual aggression emerged in our research on barroom aggression

- barroom observations of 1,057 incidents of aggression observed during 1,334 visits to 118 large capacity bars/clubs in Toronto

- 258 (24%) incidents related to sexual overtures or sexual advances

- 90% of these were male-to-female

(Graham, Bernards, Osgood et al., 2014)
What is predrinking?

- drinking in a private location, usually at someone’s home, prior to going to a bar or nightclub
Why do young adults engage in predrinking?

- save money
- social functions:
  - allows young people to socialize
  - reduces social anxiety and self-consciousness
- reach desired level of intoxication

“Just getting drunk before you go somewhere else so you don’t have to purchase as much alcohol”

“No matter what the quantity, if it gets the job done, the intent is to get wasted” (DeJong & DeRicco, 2005)
Why is it a problem?

- rapid consumption in short period of time increases risk of blackouts, passing out, hangovers, and even alcohol poisoning

- young people are navigating public places with impaired judgement and reduced perception of risk both on their way to and from licensed premises
Why is it a problem?

- linked to a greater likelihood of experiencing negative consequences:
  
  - one study found that the number of drinking consequences (a sum of 24 items) was larger for predrinking occasions compared with non-predrinking occasions (Hummer et al., 2013)
  
  - another study found that predrinkers were significantly more likely than non-predrinkers to be involved in a fight during a night out (Hughes et al., 2013)
Research questions

• If young people predrink to save money, does this mean that they drink less alcohol at licensed establishments if they engage in predrinking?

• Or does predrinking lead to further heavy drinking?
Limitations of previous research

- many studies have compared predrinkers and non-predrinkers in terms of their usual drinking behaviour, but fewer studies have examined alcohol use at the time of the drinking event.

- some studies have asked people to report on their alcohol use on predrinking compared with non-predrinking days.

- recall problems.

- very few studies have collected breathalyzer data.

- few studies have controlled for general drinking pattern.
Bargoer study
Recruitment

- groups of young adults randomly selected for recruitment based on the “fixed line method” (Voas et al., 2006)
- same sex groups of 3-5 young adults (aged 19-29 years)
- 10pm and 12:30am, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings over 11 week period

(Wells et al., 2015)
Data collection

- Participants were asked to complete an “entry” survey
  - brief interview
  - breathalyzer sample
  - measures of member-nominated status

- Before leaving the bar district, participants returned to the mobile lab for an “exit survey”
  - brief interview
  - breathalyzer sample

- Online survey completed at a later time assessing usual drinking pattern and other topics

(Wells et al., 2015)
Alcohol use on nights out and usual drinking pattern for predrinkers compared with non-predrinkers

(Wells et al., 2015)
Mean breath alcohol concentration at end of night for predrinkers compared with non-predrinkers

(Wells et al., 2015)
In summary

- predrinkers were more likely than non-predrinkers to engage in heavy episodic drinking and to consume a larger number of drinks.

- predrinkers consumed more alcohol while out in the bar district than did non-predrinkers – thus, while they may intend to save money, predrinking is not followed by less drinking (and may promote further drinking).

- predrinkers had higher intoxication levels at the end of the night compared with non-predrinkers (controlling for drinking pattern).

(Wells et al., 2015)
Implications

• consideration of how alcohol pricing may influence predrinking

• staff training and enhanced enforcement to recognize and deter intoxicated patrons when they arrive at the bar and better monitor and restrict how much they are drinking at the bar

• efforts to change drinking norms, such as rapid consumption

• programs promoting safer choices, such as having a sober friend present

(Wells et al., 2015)
Sexual aggression in and around bars and clubs
• compared with other ages, young adult women (ages 18-24) are most at risk for rape and sexual assault (Sinozich & Langton, 2014)

• alcohol is involved in about 75% of incidents (Senn et al., 2014)

• sexual objectification experiences have been found to be linked to mental health and substance use problems among women (see review by Szymanski et al. 2011)

• how men and women interact at the bar may set the stage for what happens when they leave the bar (Kavanaugh, 2013)
Measures of sexual aggression

Persistence
Did anyone keep trying to hit on you when you had clearly given them the message that you were not interested?

Unwanted touching
Did anyone touch you sexually in a way that you did not want to be touched or do something else sexual to you that you didn’t want them to do?

(Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas & Wells, 2014)
Percent of women reporting sexual aggression experienced that night

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence only</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted touching only</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both persistence and touching</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual aggression that night</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas & Wells, 2014)
Link between women’s alcohol use and their experiences of sexual aggression

- women’s alcohol consumption on the survey night was positively associated with likelihood of experiencing sexual aggression
- alcohol may make women less able to communicate clearly that the behaviour was unwanted or less able to recognize risks
- or more intoxicated women may be targeted because they are seen as more sexually available or less able to resist

(Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas & Wells, 2014)
Link between women’s alcohol use and their experiences with sexual aggression

- Having a lower status position in the group was associated with increased risk of sexual aggression among women who had consumed five or more drinks.
- Possibly seen as more sexually available, less able to resist or easy targets.

(Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas & Wells, 2014)
What happens when a woman experiences unwanted sexual advances in a bar or club?

- women usually respond with evasion and indirect methods of discouragement
- third parties sometimes intervene but also sometimes encourage the initiator
- bar staff rarely intervene

(Graham, Bernards, Osgood et al., 2014)
Thank you!

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References

Graham, K., Bernards, S., Abbey, A., Dumas, T. M., & Wells, S. (2014). Young women’s risk of sexual aggression in bars: The role of intoxication and peer social status. Drug and Alcohol Review (Special Issue on Understanding Alcohol and Other Drug Use During the Event), 33, 393-400.


Wells, S. Graham, K., & Tremblay, P.F. (2009). ‘Every male in there is your competition’: Young men’s expectations of the role of the drinking setting in male-to-male barroom aggression. Substance Use and Misuse, 44, 1434-1462.


Additional resources – predrinking literature


Additional resources – sexual aggression literature


Additional resources – sexual aggression literature


