Heavy Drinking in University Students with and without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Contributions of Drinking Motives and Protective Behavioral Strategies.

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Abstract

This study examined rates of heavy drinking and alcohol problems in relation to drinking motives and protective behavioral strategies in university students with a documented current diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; n = 31) compared with students with no history of ADHD (n = 146). Participants completed a Web-based questionnaire, and logistic regression models tested interactions between ADHD/comparison group membership and motives and protective strategies. Group differences in rates of heavy drinking and alcohol problems were not statistically significant, but medium-sized risk ratios showed that students without ADHD reported heavy drinking at a rate 1.44 times higher than students with ADHD and met screening criteria for problematic alcohol use at a rate of 1.54 times higher than students with ADHD. Other key findings were, first, that drinking to enhance positive affect (e.g., drinking because it is exciting), but not to cope with negative affect (e.g., drinking to forget your worries), predicted both heavy drinking and alcohol problems. Second, only protective behavioral strategies that emphasize alcohol avoidance predicted both heavy drinking and alcohol problems. Contrary to expectations, we found no ADHD-related moderation of effects of motives or protective strategies on our alcohol outcomes. Results of this study are limited by the small sample of students with ADHD but highlight tentative similarities and differences in effects of motives and strategies on drinking behaviors and alcohol problems reported by students with and without ADHD.