



College Alcohol Beliefs, Harm Reduction Strategies, and Alcohol Outcomes: A Cross-National Study

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Introduction

- Research shows that the first semester of freshman year is a vulnerable time for new incoming students as the structure of college life is characterized by unstructured schedules, reduced parental supervision, and peer pressure (Suárez-Suárez et al., 2020; Benner et al., 2024), all of which can create risk for incoming students to engage in problematic drinking behaviors (NIAAA, 2021).
- College students who believe that alcohol plays a central role in college culture (i.e., greater endorsement of college alcohol beliefs) are more prone to drinking more frequently, in larger quantities, and experience more drinking problems as a result (Osberg et al., 2010; Bravo et al., 2017, 2018; Lui, 2019).
- Extensive research indicates that the use of alcohol PBS is associated with reduced alcohol consumption and fewer alcohol-related problems among college students (Pearson, 2013; Prince et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2021).

Study Aims

- In the present study, we examined the associations between college alcohol beliefs (CABs), protective behavioral strategies (PBS), and alcohol-related outcomes among college students from six different countries.



Method

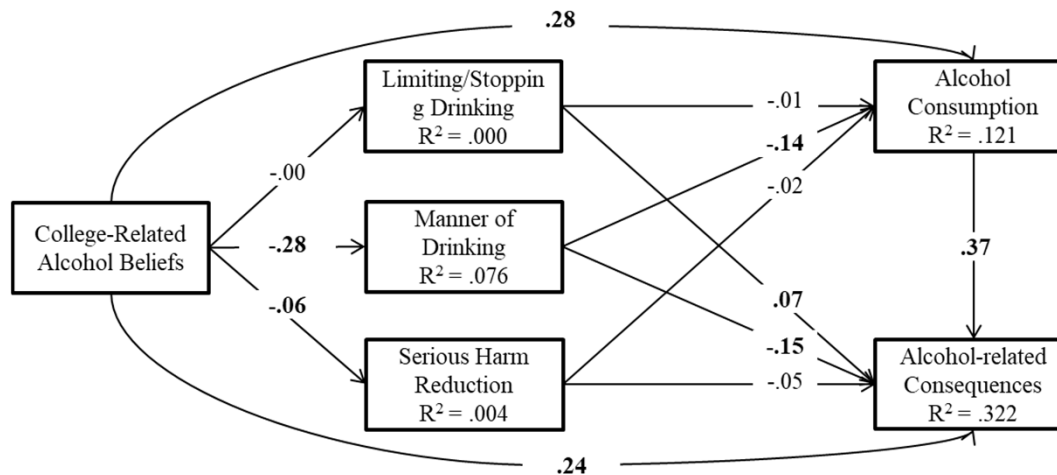
Participants and Procedure

- Participants included 2,543 college students (71.1% female; mean age = 20.87) from six countries (i.e., USA, Argentina, Spain, South Africa, England, and Canada) who completed measures of CABs, PBS, alcohol use quantity, and alcohol-related consequences.
- All participants must have regularly consumed alcohol within a typical week and correctly answered 3 or more attention checks.

Measures

- College Life Alcohol Salience Scale (CLASS; Osberg et al., 2010).** Assesses college alcohol beliefs.
- Protective Behavioral Strategies Survey (PBSS; Martens et al., 2005).** Assesses the use of alcohol PBS (i.e., Limiting/Stopping Drinking, Manner of Drinking, Serious Harm Reduction) in the past month.
- Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins et al., 1985).** Assesses alcohol consumption in a typical week in the past 30 days.
- Brief-Young Adult Alcohol Consequences Questionnaire (B-YAACQ; Kahler et al., 2005).** Assesses alcohol related consequences in the past month.

Results



**Note: Significant associations are in bold typeface for emphasis and were determined by a 99% bias-corrected standardized bootstrapped confidence interval (based on 10,000 bootstrapped samples) that does not contain zero.*

- Several significant indirect effects suggested that higher college alcohol beliefs was associated with more alcohol problems via lower PBS and higher alcohol consumption.
- In the total sample, stronger endorsement of college alcohol beliefs was positively associated with lower use of manner of drinking PBS, which in turn was associated with greater alcohol quantity (indirect $\beta = .04$; 99% CI = .02, .06) and more alcohol-related consequences (indirect $\beta = .04$; 99% CI = .03, .06).
- In the total sample, a significant double-mediation effect was found such that greater endorsement of CABs was associated with more alcohol-related consequences via lower use of manner of drinking PBS and greater alcohol quantity (indirect $\beta = .01$; 99% CI = .01, .02).
- Multigroup models suggested that indirect effects via manner of drinking PBS were weakest in Spain, Argentina, and Canada compared to other countries.
- Multigroup models suggested that indirect effects via alcohol quantity was weakest in Canada, England, South Africa, and Argentina compared to USA and Spain.

Discussion

- Our results suggests that greater CABs is associated with greater problematic alcohol use among college students from six countries.
- Our results extend prior research conducted among U.S. college students by finding support for the notion that greater CABs is associated with more problematic alcohol use via lower use of PBS.
- Focusing on specific harm reduction strategies, Manner of Drinking held the strongest influence suggesting that this is a key harm reduction strategy to target for promoting healthier alcohol use among college students from six countries.
- Multi-group models found differences in associations between our study variables, suggesting that further research is needed to better understand how CABs can affect PBS use and alcohol-related outcomes in different cultures.
- Future research may extend these findings by exploring these relationships longitudinally. Specifically, longitudinal research could be particularly important among first year college students as the transition into college is a high-risk period for problematic alcohol use.