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Environmental Scan of Post-Secondary National Campus Survey Questions about Alcohol

Summary Report

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Introduction

Drinking in general and in excess has become a ritual that students often see as an integral part of their post-secondary education experience. According to a survey conducted in 41 post-secondary education institutions in Canada in 2016, while the majority of students drink, they rarely drink more than twice a week. However, when they do drink more than twice a week, nearly half of them consume excessively (American College Health Association, 2016).¹

Immediate alcohol-related harms are the concern with excessive drinking. There is considerable evidence that undergraduates who engage in excessive drinking are more likely to be involved in assaults, motor vehicle crashes, and unplanned and unprotected sex. Female students are also at greater risk of experiencing sexual assaults when drinking in excess (White & Hingson, 2014). Within the past 12 months covered by the American College Health Association survey, more than half of college drinkers (55%) experienced at least one related harm when they used alcohol.

Among the majority of post-secondary students, alcohol has high potential for harm, so effective prevention and policy interventions are required. Unfortunately, Canadian information to successfully guide the development of interventions on campuses is limited, outdated or not available.

To reduce alcohol-related harms on Canadian post-secondary campuses, there is a need to improve our understanding of the drivers of excessive drinking by students, with the aim of tailoring effective prevention and policy interventions to reduce alcohol-related harms in this population.

Through an environmental scan, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) compiled an inventory of alcohol-related questions extracted from campus surveys around the world. This inventory of questions will be an essential reference for those who would like to develop a survey about the alcohol consumption of post-secondary students.

The Highlights from the Questionnaires section of this document provides summary highlights of the questionnaires CCSA sampled for the environmental scan. To protect the integrity of the questionnaires, CCSA cannot translate them and due to our Official Languages policy we cannot publish them in one language. CCSA can provide the questions to interested parties in the language in which they were originally administered. If you would like a copy of the questions, please contact us at alcohol@ccsa.ca.

¹ All schools collected data via the American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment web survey. The mean response was 19% and the median was 19%.



Methods

For the environmental scan, researchers undertook a search of national surveys of college and university students with questions about alcohol use. The search was conducted using Google and a combination of search terms: “national,” “survey,” “questionnaire,” “post-secondary education,” “post-secondary,” “university,” “college,” “students” and “alcohol.” Additionally, the Kettil Bruun Society (KBS) for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol shared with us their knowledge about college surveys on alcohol.

The Google search and the responses from KBS yielded a total of nine surveys: the National College Health Assessment (NCHA), the Canadian Campus Survey, the CORE Alcohol and Other Drug Survey (CORE), the Safer California Universities (SAFER) survey, the Tertiary Health Research Intervention Via Email (THRIVE) survey, the Harvard School of Public Health, College Alcohol Study, the Student Alcohol Questionnaire (SAQ), the College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National (CLAN) survey, and the CALIBRATE project survey (CALIBRATE). Four of the surveys were based in the United States, two in Canada, one in New Zealand, one in Ireland, and one was multinational across eight European countries (see Table 1).

The SAFER survey was the only survey that was neither national nor multinational. However, it was administered in California, a state whose population is equivalent to Canada’s, so the sample size was relatively large. This survey was also recommended by a KBS contact, hence we decided to keep it for consideration.

The survey questions were reduced to only include questions that pertained to alcohol. Questions were analyzed and classified according to the Postsecondary Education Partnership – Alcohol Harms (PEP–AH) logic model, which formalizes links between alcohol-related outputs (campus resources, services, initiatives) and outcomes (students’ knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and harms). (See Appendix 1 for the PEP–AH Logic Model.) This classification exercise revealed eight major themes across the surveys: alcohol consumption, protective behavioural strategy, consequences, drinking in context, knowledge and awareness, attitudes, use of services and environmental factors. The inventory of survey questions were organized according to the eight themes.

The overall search for national campus surveys highlighted the lack of large-scale surveys investigating alcohol consumption in post-secondary students. To our knowledge, only one European country has conducted a national-level survey (CLAN, Ireland), although there have been several large-scale surveys done in this topic in the United States (CORE, SAFER, SAQ, Harvard School of Public Health, and NCHA [American reference group]).



Table 1. List of Post-Secondary Education Surveys

Name of Survey	Obtained	Location	Participating institutions	Students Sample Size	Year(s) of Data Collection	Response Rate for Latest Survey (%)	Month/Season	Web (W) or Paper (P) Survey	Organization	Reference
National College Health Assessment (NCHA)	KBS list	Canada	34	38,171	2013, 2016	19%	spring	W	ACHA- American College Health Association / CACUSS	www.acha-ncha.org/survey.html#survey Data report for Canadian reference group: www.cacuss.ca/health_data.htm (by request)
Canadian Campus Survey (CCS)	Google	Canada	40	6,282	1998, 2004	41%	March & April	P & W	Centre for Addiction and Mental Health	web.archive.org/web/20111111142053/www.camh.net/Research/Areas_of_research/Population_Life_Course_Studies/ccs04_studentqn_english.pdf
CORE Alcohol and Other Drug Survey (CORE)	Google	U.S.	N/A	39,064	2006-2013	N/A	May	P & W	CORE Institute	core.siu.edu/surveys/
Safer California Universities (SAFER)	KBS list	California, U.S.	14	19,791	2003-2012	32%	fall	W	Prevention Research Center-	Paper copy at CCSA
Tertiary Health Research Intervention Via Email (THRIVE)	KBS list	New Zealand	5	2,683	2005-2007-2009-2013	49%	N/A	W	Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research	Paper copy at CCSA
Harvard School of Public Health, College Alcohol Study (HSPH)	Google	U.S.	119	10,904	1993, 1997, 1999, 2001	52%	February	P & W	Harvard School of Public Health	www.colorado.edu/oda/surveys/special/rwj/chbsurvey05.pdf
Student Alcohol Questionnaire (SAQ)	Google	U.S.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	W	Indiana University	www.indiana.edu/~engs/quest/saq.html
College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National Survey (CLAN)	Google	Ireland	21	3,259	2002-2003	50%	N/A	P	Health Research Board	Paper copy at CCSA
CALIBRATE project	KBS list	Denmark, England, Italy, Germany, Portugal & Switzerland	7	1,930	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	European Research Advisory Board	Paper copy at CCSA



Table 2. Themes of National Surveys

THEMES	National College Health Assessment (NCHA)	Canadian Campus Survey (CCS)	CORE Alcohol and Other Drug Survey (CORE)	Safer California Universities (SAFER)	Tertiary Health Research Intervention Via Email (THRIVE)	Harvard School of Public Health, College Alcohol Study (HSPH)	Student Alcohol Questionnaire (SAQ)	College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National Survey (CLAN)	CALIBRATE project (CALIBRATE)
Alcohol Consumption									
Alcohol Use (A)		X	X		X	X		X	X
Drinking Frequency (F)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Usual Quantity		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Heavy Drinking	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Alcohol Use of Others	X	X	X	X	X				X
Age at First Intake		X	X		X	X		X	X
Protective Behavioural Strategy	X			X		X			
Consequences									
Related to Own Drinking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Related to Others Drinking		X	X	X		X		X	
Drinking in Context	X	X			X	X			
Knowledge & Awareness	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Attitudes									
Towards Alcohol Use			X	X	X			X	X
Towards Alcohol Policies		X	X	X		X			X
Towards Drinking Culture		X	X	X	X	X			X
Towards Responsible Drinking									X
Use of Services		X		X		X			
Environmental Factors									
Alcohol Affordability		X				X		X	
Alcohol Availability		X	X	X	X	X			
Policies and enforcement				X		X			



Highlights from the Questionnaires

Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol Use

- CCS, CORE, THRIVE, HSPH, CLAN and CALIBRATE surveyed students about general alcohol use.
- Questions are framed within four different timeframes: “past year”; “past three months”; “past month” and “past week”.
- THRIVE and CORE questionnaire focused on students’ alcohol use across various locations.
- HSPH asked students to describe their current alcohol use in terms of drinking patterns.
- CALIBRATE asked students about their alcohol use by comparing themselves to non-drinkers.

Drinking Frequency

- Every campus questionnaire surveyed students about their drinking frequency.
- Specific questions focused on drinking frequency during two different timeframes: “past year” and “past month”. One survey, SAFER, focused on the last semester, and another one, CALIBRATE, on frequency per week.
- CLAN and SAQ surveys focused on the drinking frequency for different types of alcoholic beverages.

Usual Quantity

- Eight questionnaires surveyed students about usual quantity; only NCHA did not.
- Most questions focused on the usual quantity “per occasion”.
- Particular attention was paid to usual quantity across different locations and for different types of alcoholic beverages.
- CCS, THRIVE and CALIBRATE assessed usual quantity by using the drinking wheel.
- HSPH questionnaire surveyed students about usual quantity during high school.

Heavy Drinking

- Eight questionnaires surveyed students on the issue of heavy drinking; only SAQ did not.
- Across questionnaires, students were generally surveyed about their frequency of heavy drinking.
- The majority of questionnaires focused on a “past two weeks” timeframe.
- While four or five drinks is the usual cut point to assess heavy drinking, six out of eight questionnaires used higher cut points (e.g., 6, 8, 9 or 12 drinks).
- SAFER, HSPH and CALIBRATE questionnaires surveyed students about frequency of drunkenness, regardless of the number of drinks the students had consumed.
- THRIVE questionnaire surveyed students about heavy drinking during high school.



Alcohol Use of Others

- NCHA, CCS, CORE, SAFER, THRIVE and CALIBRATE surveyed students about the alcohol use of others.
- Questions mostly focused on prevalence of drinking, drinking frequency and usual quantity per occasion.
- SAFER questionnaire included questions about the alcohol consumption of different types of acquaintances.

Age at First Intake

- CCS, CORE, THRIVE, HSPH, CLAN and CALIBRATE surveyed students about age at first intake.
- Three out of six questionnaires assessed “age at first drink” and “age when first got drunk”.

Protective Behavioural Strategy

- NCHA, CCS, SAFER and HSPH surveyed students about their use of protective behavioural strategy, that is, specific behaviours students can use to reduce the negative consequences experienced from drinking.
- None of these questionnaires used a complete list of protective behavioural strategies that usually contains 15 items (Martens, Ferrier, Sheehy, Corbett, Anderson, & Simmons, 2005).

Consequences

Consequences Related to Own Drinking

- Every questionnaire surveyed students about consequences related to their own drinking.
- Students were usually asked about consequences “since arriving on campus” and “since the beginning of the school year”.
- The focus was mostly on acute rather than chronic consequences. Only NCHA and HSPH asked students whether they may have an alcohol-related disorders. The CCS and CALIBRATE used the AUDIT (Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders, & Monteiro, 2001).
- Questionnaires addressed a wide range of alcohol-related consequences including psychological, physical, relational, academic and legal problems.
- HSPH specifically asked students whether their drinking led to any sanctions.
- SAFER and CORE questionnaires asked students how frequently they experience consequences related to their own drinking.
- SAFER asked questions regarding the setting where the drinking occurred before it led to negative consequences.

Consequences Related to Others' Drinking

- CCS, CORE, SAFER, HSPH and CLAN surveyed students about consequences related to others' drinking.
- All five questionnaires except CORE focused on violent consequences either psychological, physical or sexual.
- All five questionnaires except CCS included at least one question about property damage.
- All five questionnaires except CLAN included one question about studying being interrupted.



- CORE questionnaire focused on consequences that are long-standing (e.g., interference with life in general) rather than being immediate.
- Students were usually asked about consequences “since arriving on campus” and “since the beginning of the school year”.

Drinking in Context

- HSPH, NCHA, CCS and THRIVE included questions about a specific occasion on which students drink.
- HSPH and NCHA asked students two general questions about the “last time” they consumed alcohol.
- CCS asked students 18 contextual questions about their last three drinking occasions.
- THRIVE included two series of 11 contextual questions. One series asked students about their last drinking occasion. The second one asked students about the context in which they might have experienced a negative consequence related to their own drinking.

Knowledge and Awareness

- Eight questionnaires surveyed students about their knowledge and awareness of alcohol-related issues; only THRIVE did not.
- All questionnaires, except SAQ, CLAN and CALIBRATE, tested student’s awareness about campus-based alcohol programs and initiatives.
- CORE, SAFER and HSPH surveyed students about family history regarding alcohol problems.
- CCS, SAFER, SAQ and CLAN tested students’ general knowledge of alcohol and its effects.
- CALIBRATE asked students about their knowledge regarding alcohol marketing.

Attitudes

Attitudes toward Alcohol Use

- CORE, SAFER, THRIVE, CLAN and CALIBRATE surveyed students about their attitudes and their opinions about alcohol in general.
- A central theme across questionnaires was students’ beliefs or expectations about alcohol-induced disinhibition of attention and verbal, sexual or locomotor behaviours.
- Questions focused on the individual and general effects of alcohol, as well as both the positive and the negative impacts.

Attitudes toward Alcohol Policies

- CCS, HSPH, CORE, SAFER and CALIBRATE surveyed students about their attitudes toward alcohol policies.
- The general focus was on campus alcohol policies.
- A recurrent theme across questionnaires was students’ opinion of a dry campus, sites or events.

Attitudes toward Drinking Culture

- CCS, CORE, SAFER, THRIVE, HSPH and CALIBRATE surveyed students about their attitudes toward the drinking culture.
- Questions mostly focused on the drinking culture on campus rather than in society in general.



- Three out of the six questionnaires directly addressed peer-pressure as a drinking culture-related theme.

Attitudes toward Responsible Drinking

- CALIBRATE was the only questionnaire that surveyed students about attitudes towards responsible drinking.
- Most questions focused on attitudes about drinking within safe limits on different occasions.
- CALIBRATE asked contextual questions on when it would be difficult to refuse alcohol.

Use of Services

- CCS, SAFER and HSPH surveyed students about their use or their intention to use alcohol-related services.
- Only the SAFER question is campus-specific.

Environmental Factors

Alcohol Affordability

- CCS, HSPH and CLAN surveyed students about alcohol affordability.
- Questions focused on either price promotions or actual money spent on alcohol.
- The past 30 days is the usual period of reference for questions about alcohol affordability.

Alcohol Availability

- CCS, CORE, SAFER, THRIVE and HSPH surveyed students about alcohol availability.
- Availability questions mostly focused on underage access.
- The availability of a dry residence was another common theme.
- SAFER questionnaire focused on alcohol accessibility across various locations.

Policies and Enforcement

- Only SAFER and HSPH surveyed students on their views about alcohol-related policies and enforcements in their campus environment.
- Two themes emerged from questionnaires: underage access to alcohol and public disturbance.
- Both SAFER and Harvard School of Public Health asked students about sanctions imposed if alcohol was obtained or consumed irresponsibly.



Conclusion

The Highlights from the Questionnaires are presented to allow the reader to locate key information within themes of particular interest. In the completion of this inventory, our attention was drawn to some elements that deserve to be further emphasized.

First, regarding heavy drinking, most campus surveys use the World Health Organization (WHO) cut point to assess prevalence (i.e., four drinks per occasion for women and five for men). Because this measure has been widely used, its inclusion in campus surveys allows comparability across time, regions and populations. However, from a harm reduction perspective, it might be fruitful to use cut points that are aligned with practical knowledge from student services, which commonly report that students consume alcohol at levels well above those defined by the WHO. To this end, an interesting alternative to assess heavy drinking is the one used by SAFER, HSPH and CALIBRATE surveys, which focuses on students' frequency of "drunkenness," regardless of the number of drinks consumed. It is possible that the required knowledge is not about the number of alcoholic beverages students drink on one occasion, but rather if they are intoxicated and, therefore, at higher risk for harm.

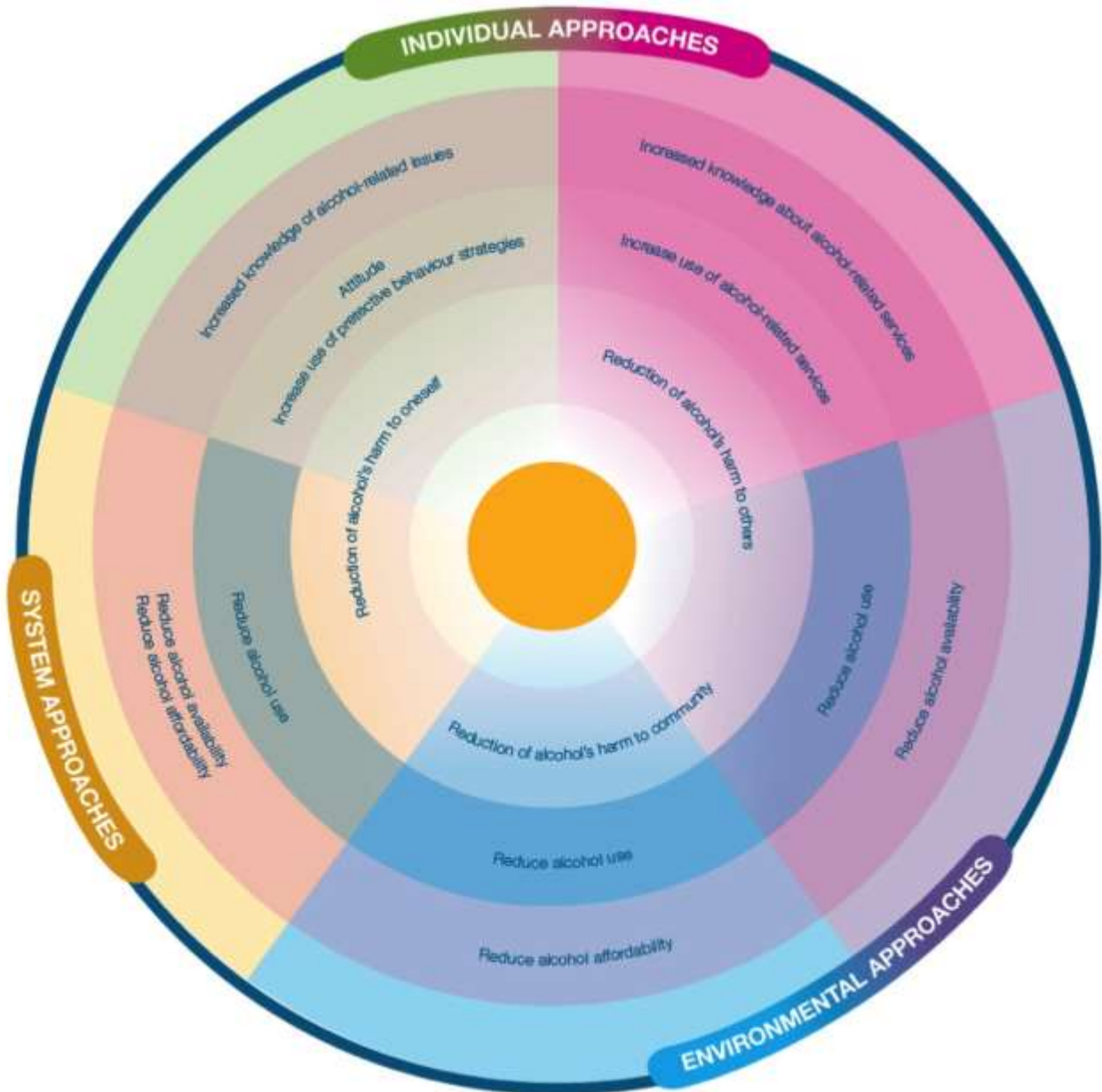
Second, it is surprising that campus surveys include more questions about alcohol use than about alcohol-related consequences and harms. In areas such as the tobacco field, where the goal is the eradication of use, it is essential to report the trends of use. In the alcohol field, where the objective of authorities cannot be abstinence, but rather reducing harm to oneself, to others and to the community, it would appear essential to collect data on prevalence and types of alcohol-related harm. Moreover, three campus surveys do not even address the issue of consequences related to other students' drinking. Given the ongoing debate about sexual assault on campuses and given the fact that alcohol is involved in the majority of assaults (e.g., Bird, Gilmore, George, & Lewis, 2016; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Testa & Livingston, 2009), an argument can be made that questions focusing on consequences related to other students' drinking should be the norm in campus surveys, not the exception.

Third, the fact that the act of drinking is grounded in specific situations is well documented in the scientific literature. Research has revealed that when, where, why and with whom students drink is associated with individuals' alcohol intake (Demers, Kairouz, Adlaf, Gliksman, Newton-Taylor, & Marchand, 2002; Grüne et al., 2016; Huckle, Gruenewald, & Ponicki, 2016; Miller, Borsari, Fernandez, Yurasek, & Hustad, 2016; Thrul, Labhart, & Kuntsche, 2016). Hence, there is growing consensus that prevention and intervention initiatives might benefit from targeting the context in which students drink. In this regard, some of the most interesting questions identified by this inventory are those focusing on drinking contexts, particularly those included in the THRIVE survey (Drinking in Context, pp. 29–32). Indeed, the THRIVE survey not only includes questions about drinking in context, but, more specifically, about negative alcohol-related consequences in context. These specific questions allow data to be gathered about the genesis of how students experience harm and so carry the promise that they could lead to the development of effective intervention strategies.

Finally, questions about environmental factors were found to be uncommon across the campus surveys. Only five campus surveys include specific questions about alcohol availability, three about alcohol affordability and two about general alcohol policies and enforcement. Yet, in the United States a review of nearly 60 interventions rated for effectiveness, costs and other criteria revealed that restricting access to alcohol is among the most effective strategies on campuses (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2015). Documenting how often students take advantage of low-price alcohol promotions or how easy it is for them to access alcohol across different settings and various locations might help post-secondary education administrators decide funding allocation and where to focus prevention efforts.



Appendix 1: PEP-AH Logic Model





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