Elise Lopez

CPH 609

Discussion Section

Due: 3/26/15

The results of this systematic review confirm that, although there are many studies that catalogue the relationship between alcohol and sexual aggression, there are no evidence-based interventions for reducing sexual assault in bar environments. All of the studies identified in this review as relevant to the research question made calls for the development of trainings for bar staff members that would teach these staff how to recognize and respond to sexual aggression in their establishments as a vehicle for reducing the potential for subsequent sexual assaults. However, despite the wealth of documentation of the characteristics, scope, and frequency of sexually-aggressive behaviors in bar environments, there is a paucity of peer-reviewed literature on interventions to address this issue.

This primary finding adds to the sexual aggression and alcohol literature because it is the first review to systematically review and document the lack of established and evaluated interventions on the subject matter. Other studies have noted the lack of interventions, but did not systematically investigating the availability of literature in this area (Graham et. al., 2014; Graham et. al, 2013; DeGue et. al., 2012; Schnitzer et. al., 2010).

One possibility for the lack of evidence-based interventions is that the notion of training bar staff to recognize and respond to sexual aggression is still novel. All of the identified literature on sexual aggression in bar settings has focused on identifying the characteristics and scope of the problem, and the vast majority of this literature has been published in the last five to ten years. Thus, it follows that the development of interventions would lag behind the science.

A limitation to conducting a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature on approaches to addressing sexual aggression in bars is that there is a lack of evidence-based practices for sexual assault prevention in general. Although there are many evaluated programs and quite a few have been identified as promising practices, only one intervention, *Safe Dates*, is designated as an evidence-based practice for sexual assault prevention. However, the primary focus of this intervention is dating violence prevention aimed at adolescents and thus cannot it cannot be applied to other social contexts or populations.

Other recent literature has identified potential programs to address the issue, although none have been evaluated for effectiveness. Lippy & DeGue’s 2014 review of alcohol policy approaches to prevent sexual violence identifies a few programs that are currently in the development or pilot testing stages that focus on training bar staff to intervene as active bystanders when sexual aggression is perpetrated by patrons.

The results of this study and the fact that there is a lack of evidence-based practices for sexual assault prevention make a strong case for supporting programs like those recognized in Lippy & DeGue’s review. These new interventions aim to address a problem that has been documented repeatedly, and use a novel approach to reduce sexual assault by intervening when precursors to assaultive behavior are present in bar settings. The programs identified by Lippy & DeGue are all being developed by state health departments or local organizations; thus, it is unlikely that these host agencies have the capacity or tools to conduct rigorous evaluations of the interventions that would lead to the evaluations being published in the peer-reviewed literature. To increase the likelihood that these interventions are rigorously evaluated and have the scientific basis required for scale-up and replication, it is imperative that support for research on the development and effectiveness of these interventions can be established. (More here on future directions for research…?)

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