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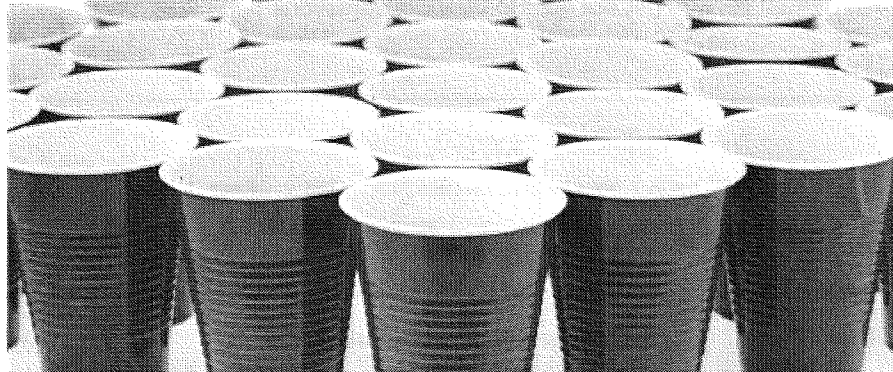


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Sexual Assaults on College Campuses: Focus on Alcohol

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Much has been reported in the press about sexual assaults on college campuses of late. Cases across the country (including at the most competitive and elite schools) have dominated the press. Recent reports have suggested that as many as 20% of college women are victims of unwanted sexual advances by their fellow students while on campus. Certainly any parent who sends their child to college expects them to be safe and to be able to complete their college education free of being victimized by sexual crimes and harassment. In order to maximize safety and minimize assaults there are plenty of critical things that colleges (as well as their students) can do to create a safer campus environment. But if I had to pick just one intervention to reduce sexual assaults it would be to get serious about alcohol!

Certainly there is much that can be done to reduce sexual assaults on campus including greater awareness among students of appropriate and inappropriate sexual behavior, "yes means yes" and "no means no" training, working to educate potential bystanders to intervene as needed, mandating sexual assault reporting as we now do with child abuse cases, ensuring that campus safety officers have ready access to on campus (as well as perhaps off campus) college parties, and changing the culture of campuses to maintain a zero tolerance approach to sexual assault but the one common factor that increases the risk of sexual assault of college students is the abuse of alcohol.

Research suggests that about 20% of college students binge drink (i.e., consuming 5 or more drinks in a short amount of time) and that the vast majority of campus sexual assaults are fueled by alcohol. Too many college students feel compelled to drink to excess while on campus and perhaps expectations regarding what college should be like have too often emphasized excessive alcohol consumption (e.g., the popular movie, *Animal House*, may have done much harm in this regard). If students could only limit themselves to no more than 1 or 2 servings of alcohol per day or per social event following Center for Disease Prevention (CDC) guidelines we would be sure to see incidents of sexual assault on campus drop dramatically. There are no easy answers about how to do this and managing alcohol use and abuse has baffled university administrators for decades. Yet getting serious about sexual assaults can't be adequately accomplished without getting serious about campus alcohol abuse.

Certainly we must continue to try to change college culture in such a way that sexual abuse as well as alcohol abuse is not tolerated. Drinking age laws need to be enforced, alternative social activities that do not include alcohol need to be encouraged and supported, and working to make alcohol abuse socially unacceptable is needed.

We have been very successful in reducing cigarette consumption in recent decades and perhaps a page from that playbook could be used to help reduce alcohol consumption on campus too. You manage the alcohol and you'll find that sexual assaults will be greatly reduced. In many ways it is all about the alcohol.