Legal-Age Students' Provision of Alcohol to Underage College Students: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract. Objective: The authors investigated the magnitude and cultural context of legal-age university students' provision of alcohol to underage students and how such alcohol provision might be deterred. **Participants**: 130 legal-age students at a midwestern university in the United States were randomly selected. **Methods:** The authors assessed 16 focus groups and a thematic analysis. **Results**: Most participants reported frequent alcohol provision. Most denied moral responsibility for any negative consequences that recipients might suffer. Small numbers of participants, chiefly women, would decrease alcohol provision after education on the sexual risks to underage females. Larger numbers would decrease provision in response to consistent law enforcement, severe legal and disciplinary penalties, and education on severe penalties. **Conclusions**: Legal-age students' provision of alcohol to underage students is an integral part of college students' drinking culture. As a deterrent, an enforcement-based campaign may be more effective than an educational campaign on the possible negative consequences of alcohol for underage students.

Keywords: alcohol, college health, focus groups, students

Since 21 years became the minimum legal drinking age in the United States, substantial reductions have occurred in underage drinking and alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes.[1] Nonetheless, alcohol use among US underage youth remains prevalent: 28.3% of individuals aged 12–20 years and 51.6% of individuals aged 18–20 years reported drinking alcohol in the month before they were surveyed in 2006.[2] Binge drinking—consuming 5 or more standard drinks within a couple of hours—is especially concerning as such drinking poses high risk for health, social, and legal consequences.[3] Nearly one-fourth (23.0%) of individuals aged 12–20 years and over one-third (36.2%) of individuals aged 18–20 years reported binge drinking during the month before they were surveyed.[2]

Binge drinking has been increasing among US college students, including many who are underage.[4] More than one-fourth of college students reported being intoxicated at least 3 times during the last month, and one-eighth (12.8%) reported alcohol-related injuries. In 2001, about 1,700 college students died from unintentional alcohol-related injuries in the United States, and a disproportionate number were freshmen.[5] Other common negative consequences include academic difficulties, legal problems, and unsafe sex. Secondary impacts include property damage and vandalism, fights, sexual violence, and reduced quality of life.[6] The economic toll of underage drinking in the United States has been estimated at $53 billion annually.[7]

Ample research has focused on ways to reduce underage drinking. Effective strategies include heightening enforcement against underage drinking, constraining the density of alcohol outlets, increasing prices of alcoholic beverages, promoting responsible beverage service, implementing universal screening and brief intervention, and challenging individuals' alcohol expectancies.[8] Another possible strategy could be to deter legal-age individuals' provision of alcohol to underage individuals. This strategy warrants consideration, as more than half of last-month underage drinkers in a national survey, and more than 60% of such individuals aged 18–20 years, last obtained alcohol from legal-age individuals.[9]

Research on identifying and limiting the social sources of alcohol for college students is in its infancy. A recent report was based on 2 focus groups with a total of 19 underage students at the University of Minnesota. The results highlighted the importance of legal-age friends—and, less frequently, parents and siblings—as sources of alcohol, underage students' use of false identification documents (IDs) to obtain

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alcohol, the inconsistency and consequential ineffectiveness of enforcement in curtailing underage drinking, and objections to the current minimum legal drinking age.[10]

We conducted a series of focus groups with legal-age students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where for the past 15 years, the proportion of undergraduates engaging in binge drinking at least once in a 2-week period usually exceeded 60%.[11] The purposes of this study were to assess the magnitude of alcohol providing behavior, understand the contexts and motivations for it, and explore whether an intervention might deter it.

METHODS

Participants and Recruiting

Eligible participants were University of Wisconsin–Madison undergraduate or graduate students between the ages of 21 and 25 years who had purchased alcohol in the past month. The university's Division of Information Technology randomly selected age-eligible students to receive e-mail invitations for the study. Interested students called the toll-free number of an external market research firm whose staff established eligibility. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality. They gave written informed consent before each focus group began. They were offered pizza, soft drinks, and $25 for participating. A federal certificate of confidentiality protected study data from subpoena. A University of Wisconsin–Madison Institutional Review Board approved study procedures.

Sixteen focus groups were conducted during the 2007–2008 academic year. Groups were segregated by sex to facilitate openness about sex-specific behaviors and consequences of risky drinking. There were 8 male and 8 female groups. Of the 61 men and 69 women who participated, most were juniors, seniors, and graduate students.

Focus Group Design

As no prior research could be found on legal-age students' perceptions about providing alcohol to underage students, we decided that a qualitative methodology would be best to elicit initial rich, contextual information. Focus groups were selected as the specific methodology, as they are capable of eliciting rich information from populations[12,13] and promoting self-disclosure,[14] especially on potentially sensitive topics.[15]

The focus groups were moderated by a professional market researcher with extensive experience conducting groups on potentially sensitive topics. An average of 8 students participated in each group. Groups were held at the university's student union to facilitate student access and comfort. To ensure consistency throughout all 16 groups, the moderator used a discussion guide that was developed in conjunction with the research team. However, as with all qualitative research, participant responses determined the direction and depth of conversation during the focus groups. The role of the focus group moderator was to elicit students' feelings about providing alcohol to underage students and thoughts on what interventions might be most likely to discourage such behavior. When apparent discrepancies and inconsistencies arose, her role was to pursue resolution. The lead author attended most focus groups, as the focus group facilitator found that his presence did not inhibit self-disclosure.

One of the criticisms of focus groups is that for some participants, it may be uncomfortable to disclose personal opinions in a group setting, especially if that group is composed of peers.[16] For this reason, the moderator was available for individual discussion with participants after the focus groups. No participants took advantage of this opportunity, and most seemed to contribute freely to discussions.

Focus Group Analysis

With permission of the participants, the focus groups were audiotaped and videotaped. An experienced market research analyst performed thematic analysis. After reviewing tapes and reading the transcripts of the groups, the analyst extracted quotations and organized them into recurrent themes. The focus group moderator and lead researcher reviewed and concurred with the analysis.

Kidd and Marshall have identified 3 criteria for reliability of focus group findings: stability, equivalence, and internal consistency.[17] The stability of findings over time could not be examined because all focus groups were conducted within several weeks. Equivalence was maximized with a single moderator and a single coder. Internal consistency was maximized because 1 individual assumed primary responsibility for the analysis. To enhance validity,[17] we tested the findings from previous groups on subsequent groups throughout the study.

Because of the qualitative nature of focus groups, findings cannot be reported with quantitative precision. Instead, we use terms such as s*ome*, *a few*, and *the majority*.

RESULTS

Underage Drinking

Access to Alcohol by Underage Students

As this study did not include underage students, the legal-age participants were asked to describe their access to alcohol at their college before they turned 21 years of age. The universal perception was that alcohol was readily available to any underage student who wanted it.

Early in the academic year, the most common sources for freshmen are large house parties (parties hosted by students in off-campus residences) and fraternity parties. At such parties, IDs are usually not checked, and $5 typically buys a cup and unlimited alcohol, usually beer. A few fraternity and sorority members reported that insurance restrictions prevented them from serving alcohol to underage students, but most other students reported that alcohol was freely available to underage students at many fraternity and sorority parties.

Within several months, most freshmen develop a network of legal-age friends and relatives who serve as their primary sources of alcohol until they turn 21 years of age. In addition, some students learn which drinking establishments

and liquor stores do not check IDs. Most students obtain counterfeit IDs and learn which establishments are least likely to scrutinize them. Some students know or intentionally befriend bouncers, who allow access to bars and returned confiscated fake IDs.

Parents, older siblings, and cousins serve as another source of alcohol for some underage students. A few participants commented that some teaching assistants and housefellows (resident assistants) provide alcohol to underage students, and a few teaching assistants regularly teach underage students to brew beer.

All students agreed that at any given time, any underage student could obtain alcohol within a few minutes to a few hours. One female student said, "This campus is so open you don't have to ask. At some point, you'll be offered, or maybe not even offered, just handed something."

Venues Where Underage Drinking Occurs

Underage drinking takes place in several settings. At small parties or gatherings in apartments or dormitory rooms, legal-age students typically provide for underage friends. At larger house parties, most of the guests are friends or "friends of friends" of the hosts, but "randoms" (individuals who are known to neither the hosts nor the intended guests) are often able to gain entry. Some large, open house parties are advertised widely and intended to make money for the hosts—up to thousands of dollars. Many of these parties are held in the fall, before freshmen have established other sources of alcohol. Additional drinking venues for underage students include bars, restaurants, and various indoor and outdoor parties around athletic events, particularly football games.

Decisions to Provide Alcohol to Underage Students

Alcohol Providing Behaviors

The large majority of participants had provided and continues to provide alcohol to underage students. Only a few participants stated that they have not provided and would not provide alcohol to underage students. One of those participants did not drink; his nonverbal behaviors and quietness suggested his discomfort among his drinking and alcohol-providing peers. A few participants who did not provide alcohol feared losing a job as a housefellow or jeopardizing admission to law or medical school. Finally, a few additional students did not provide alcohol because of prior exposure to individuals who suffered alcohol-related injuries or deaths.

Reasons to Provide

A common reason for providing alcohol to underage students is that most social activities revolve around drinking, and underage students need alcohol to participate in these activities. Furthermore, as most students turn 21 years of age and continue to have underage friends, not providing them with alcohol would be tantamount to excluding them from their social activities.

Most participants felt—many very strongly—that the current legal drinking age of 21 years is inappropriate and unfair since 18 year olds can serve in the military, vote, and have other adult responsibilities. They view providing alcohol to underage students as an ethical circumvention of an unjust law. Some participants justified underage students' drinking by saying it was no different from drinking by older adults. As 1 female student said, "Just be here on a [football] Saturday and you will see all these 30, 40, and 50 year olds who are just as smashed and just as obnoxious [as the students]."

As further justification for providing alcohol, students cited the prestige associated with admission to the university. Participants in several groups commented that individuals who were smart enough to get into this university are certainly smart enough to be responsible with alcohol. As 1 participant said, "We study hard. We party harder."

Expectation to Provide

An additional reason to provide alcohol was to satisfy social expectation and conform to cultural imperative. One male participant stated, "Social credit is powerful." Some said they would "look like a nerd" if they did not provide alcohol. Many participants were glad to "give back," "return the favor," or "pay it forward." One student said,

> [Drinking] is a big part of the culture here. It's so overwhelming. From the minute you get here, all the discussion about social things or whatever is centered on the procurement of alcohol. It's a big part of what this school is about, aside from its academics and reputation.

Denying underage students alcohol would violate this cultural norm. Expectations to provide alcohol are strongest when students first turn 21 years of age, particularly if they are the oldest in their peer groups. Most underage students long for the legal right to buy alcohol. After turning 21 years of age, most enjoy exercising this right. However, for many, the novelty wears off over a few to several months. For some, overly frequent requests to provide alcohol become annoying. Usually by then, another student in a peer group turns 21 years of age and assumes providing responsibilities.

Occasionally, legal-age students refuse requests to provide alcohol. Reasons that are considered valid are when legal-age students lack time to go to a liquor store, do not drink themselves, did not receive alcohol from legal-age students when they were younger, or fear negative impacts on career goals. A few participants believed that underage students should not drink alcohol, felt no obligation to provide them with it, and easily denied requests, often with an excuse that they were too busy. However, they felt that their refusals did little to deter underage drinking because other sources of alcohol were so plentiful. Some participants said it is easier to provide alcohol than to come up with reasons not to, suggesting that they preferred not to provide alcohol but lacked the will or skill to deny the request.

Risks of Providing Alcohol to Underage Students

Most of the participants readily admitted that drinking poses risks. The participants shared stories of people—

sometimes themselves—who experienced alcohol-related property destruction, tickets, more serious legal consequences, physical fights, muggings, injuries, academic problems, and admission to detoxification centers. Several students knew individuals who had died from their drinking, and many discussed well-publicized incidents in which local college students had been hurt or killed.

Participants readily agreed that freshmen were at higher risk for alcohol-related problems than were older students. They attributed freshmen's higher risk not to their age, but to their inexperience with drinking. To become responsible drinkers, they said, individuals need to learn their limits. Learning one's limits is a rite of passage, and experience is the only teacher. Beyond their freshmen or sophomore year, many participants develop academic or career goals, tire of the drinking scene, or come to detest hangovers, and they cut down. Alternatively, some participants admitted that their drinking and associated consequences had remained steady or increased. Yet, there was consensus that learning one's limits, getting older, and "building a tolerance" for alcohol makes individuals more responsible drinkers, even if they continue to suffer alcohol-related negative consequences. In fact, most of the participants of 1 focus group admitted to recent negative consequences of drinking, yet they identified themselves as responsible drinkers.

Many participants, especially women, identified women as a high-risk group, particularly for negative sexual consequences of drinking. Also, 2 of the 69 females volunteered that they had been raped when they had been drinking. Some reported waking up with men with whom they did not remember going to sleep. A few believed that date-rape drugs had been placed surreptitiously in their drinks at parties.

Unwritten Rules for Minimizing Risks of Providing Alcohol

Most participants stated initially that their provision of alcohol to underage students is safe and responsible because they follow certain rules. All participants agreed that they do not provide alcohol for individuals who intend to drive. Most participants do not provide alcohol to individuals who "can't handle it," such as those who have repeatedly been violent, suffered injuries, drawn the attention of police, or become overly intoxicated. None knowingly provide alcohol for high school students or younger individuals, except for siblings and cousins.

Most participants followed an important unwritten rule, providing alcohol only for friends and relatives who they know and can trust "to handle it." Most participants did not provide for "randoms," or strangers, whose drinking histories were unknown. Some students also feared that randoms might be complicit in sting operations to catch legal-age individuals who provide alcohol to underage individuals. By making "good decisions" about who gets alcohol in the first place, participants initially asserted that most problems are avoided. An acknowledged exception is that many legal-age men provide for women whom they do not know, especially ones they find attractive. One male said, "Girls have powers and they work on me." Female students agreed that some women take advantage of their looks and charm to get alcohol from men.

Many focus group participants reported providing alcohol for friends who host their own small gatherings. Most of these participants reported initially that such alcohol provision is safe but ultimately agreed that their sense of safety is an illusion, as they do not know many of the "friends of friends" who consume much of the alcohol they provide. Some students still defended such provision of alcohol, asserting that it is safer for underage students to drink in small gatherings hosted by their friends rather than at large parties or bars.

Some students—more women than men—feel responsible for those they drink with or provide for. Some—mainly women—provide alcohol only for small gatherings where they drink, monitor others for safety, help drinkers get home safely, and ensure good care for those who get sick. In contrast, most participants ascribe responsibility solely to the drinkers, who, as adults, make their own decisions about drinking and take responsibility for the consequences.

Decisions to Provide Alcohol for Large Parties

All the participants agreed that hosting large house parties poses the greatest risk of injuries, violence, property destruction, and legal jeopardy. Some participants—mainly men, but also some women—host large parties where underage students drink. Some of the men and virtually all of the women expressed concern for the unique risks encountered by female drinkers at these parties, such as sexual assault and unwanted sexual advances. Many participants reported reducing risk at their parties by limiting their own drinking, observing guests, ensuring that women get home safely, and allowing very intoxicated guests to stay until morning. Initially, most participants asserted that watching out for friends keeps them safe. However, many ultimately agreed that any risk reduction measures are only partially effective, and that providing alcohol at these events inevitably poses some risk to underage drinkers.

Some participants decided to host such parties without much thought about risks. Most participants carefully weighed possible costs and benefits in these decisions, such as recent level of enforcement, social advantages, and potential for monetary gain. Participants in all groups either knew someone who was fined substantially for serving underage students at house parties or received fines themselves. For most of them, fines deterred house parties. For some of them, fines were an anticipated cost of doing business. As 1 male student said, "I've been hosting parties for 4 years and it was probably worth $10,000." Most of the participants perceived that the police were unlikely to "bust" a party unless they received a noise complaint. Even then, the participants said that the police were more likely to break up the party than to issue citations, particularly if the hosts were cooperative. Many participants described instances in which fines for serving alcohol to underage individuals were reduced or dropped altogether. The student

quoted above reported that his $10,000 fine was reduced to $900, which he raised by hosting another house party. None of the participants knew anyone who had been incarcerated for hosting large parties.

Only a few participants provided alcohol for underage friends to throw large parties. Most participants did not provide kegs of beer. Even though there is no local keg registration law, keg purchasers must leave their names and contact information with alcohol outlets in case they do not return empty kegs, and most students already fear that kegs they buy could be traced to them.

Perceptions About Law Enforcement

Most of the participants had some knowledge of the fines for providing alcohol to minors. In later focus groups, the facilitator or lead author provided details on possible penalties in Wisconsin, including a felony charge, fines of $10,000–$25,000, and incarceration for 6–10 years if legal-age individuals provided alcohol to underage individuals who consequently suffered serious injury or died. Many of the participants were surprised by these penalties and spontaneously voiced hesitation to continue providing alcohol. The rhetorical question, "Would you trust the next 6 to 10 years of your life to a drunk undergraduate?" resonated among some students as a possible social marketing slogan. However, others were not swayed because they thought the chances of getting caught would continue to be low.

Participants were clearly aware that providing alcohol to underage individuals posed risk for legal consequences. They were aware that their choices could significantly impact their life and hurt future career plans. However, most participants believed that if they were careful to follow the unwritten rules, they would never get caught. As 1 female student said, "Even if the consequences are detrimental and horrible, if the chance of getting caught is slim, it may not even matter what the consequences are because you know it isn't going to happen."

The participants were asked to speculate on why enforcement seemed lax. Many felt that the police did not have sufficient resources for consistent enforcement, given the high prevalence of underage drinking. Some participants also perceived that the police were friendly and lenient because they wanted to maintain cordial and constructive relationships with students. A small number of participants expressed a preference for stricter enforcement to protect students from adverse effects of alcohol overconsumption.

Ways to Deter Provision

Toward the end of each focus group session, the facilitator hypothetically assigned the participants the job of figuring out how to deter legal-age students from providing alcohol to underage students on campus. A few participants stated they were uncomfortable contributing ideas that, if implemented, could ruin the current drinking scene, but most participated vigorously.

In response to a question on how to make it "cool" not to provide alcohol to underage students, most participants stated that this would be impossible. There were several students in every group who felt that there could be no effective deterrent without a complete culture change on campus. One male participant said, "It is part of the social fabric." A female student offered the following comment: "You'd have to try to deter people's motivations for wanting to drink underage. You'd have to start from the root."

Many students indicated that the only answer would be to lower the drinking age and remove the illicit nature of underage drinking. Elaborating on that point, 1 male student said the following:

> There's a huge mystique about drinking everywhere in the culture. It's got power. It's a rite of passage. If you normalize it and make it more everyday and make it less forbidden, you will keep people from doing it to such excess when they can.

A participant in an early group suggested offering rewards to legal-age students who would promise not to provide alcohol to underage students. Such students could wear a badge, which if seen by a spotter, could bring prizes. Participants in later groups ridiculed this idea, saying that legal-age students who provided alcohol would wear the badges and use cash prizes to buy alcohol. Another joked, "We'd put the badge on the keg."

A few participants felt that perceptions about drinking could be changed if students had more personal exposure to negative consequences. One of these participants had witnessed many stark consequences of drinking while volunteering in a hospital emergency room.

When the participants could not produce additional options, the facilitator offered some. The participants were asked to consider whether educational messages on negative consequences to underage drinkers could deter alcohol provision. They were presented with national and local statistics on the frequency of various negative consequences of drinking for college students.[4–6,11,18] Most of the participants were neither surprised nor swayed by these findings. Only the few students who had witnessed serious negative consequences of drinking, plus a few others—mainly women—stated that these messages would make them think twice about providing. They said that these messages would be more effective coming from other students rather than from authority figures. Other participants questioned the validity of the statistics, emphasized that most provision of alcohol to most underage students causes no problems, and asserted that they provide alcohol safely. As 1 participant said, "The social benefits outweigh the social risks."

Participants were asked to consider a program in which large alcohol purchases, such as kegs of beer, would be registered with the police. Participants stated that the potential deterrent value of this program would be fear that police would be prompted to patrol possible party locations. Although some large purchases might be discouraged, students would circumvent the program by making multiple smaller purchases and by hosting parties at addresses other than those on their IDs. In response to keg registration alone, many students would buy and provide more

hard liquor. Overall, registration of large alcohol purchases would not deter the most common, smaller transactions.

Participants were asked to consider the idea that students could have underage drinking charges dropped if they identified their sources of alcohol and assisted with prosecution. Most of the participants found this idea offensive and did not believe that friends would report them, though some were wary of being reported by "friends of friends."

The participants agreed that enhancing enforcement of current laws would be the most effective way to reduce legal-age students' provision of alcohol to underage students. The most effective strategy would be to increase the likelihood that legal-age alcohol providers would be caught and suffer substantial penalties and to publicize examples of successful enforcement.

Another idea to deter illegal alcohol provision for underage students was enhanced university disciplinary measures, including expulsion. Students agreed that expulsion after a third offense would have little impact, but expulsion after 1 or 2 offenses would be an effective deterrent. Most students agreed that they would not jeopardize their own futures to provide alcohol to underage students.

COMMENT

Although the focus groups provided very interesting information, there may be some limitations. Findings from focus groups can be inaccurate if group dynamics hinder or distort contributions from participants. The facilitator's ability to elicit comments from all participants and the consistency of findings across the 16 groups provides some confidence on how well the findings truly reflected the opinions of the participants. Another limitation is the lack of clarity on the extent to which the participants were representative of the general student population of legal-age students who buy alcohol and the extent to which the findings from this 1 university can be generalized to other universities. The results of this initial qualitative study can be used at least to suggest hypotheses for future study.

A key and consistent theme through our focus groups was that drinking is deeply rooted in the culture of this midwestern campus in the United States. Most students view drinking as an appropriate and desirable social activity for all students, including underage students. The drinking culture includes a proud work-hard-and-party-hard ethic and an assumption that most smart college students of any age will drink smartly, albeit only after a self-managed trial-and-error process of learning one's limits.

Legal-age students' provision of alcohol to underage students is clearly reflective and supportive of the dominant culture. Students regard the minimum legal drinking age of 21 years as an unjust intrusion into a community that benefits from easy availability of alcohol to all students and would benefit further from easier availability. For legal-age students, an important aspect of providing alcohol to underage students involves a symbolic, cross-generational repayment to those who provided alcohol when they were underage.

Most participants regularly provided alcohol to underage friends and acquaintances. For many of them, providing alcohol peaked during the few months after turning 21 years of age and waned thereafter. Most participants' providing of alcohol occurred as sharing among friends and acquaintances in small gatherings or bars. One-to-one providing was also common and allowed underage students to throw their own parties, which were also usually fairly small. Little providing of alcohol occurred directly between strangers, except at large fraternity and house parties, which were regarded as drinking venues of last resort, in part because of safety concerns. Decisions to host such parties were taken very seriously and often involved explicit cost-benefit analysis that factored in the higher chances of legal sanctions. For some students, the threat of legal sanctions discouraged parties. Other students were emboldened by the common knowledge that most severe legal sanctions are substantially reduced.

On the surface, legal-age students expressed complete comfort with providing alcohol to underage students. Most initially upheld the practice for its social benefits and its low risk. Not far below the surface, inconsistencies were readily identified.

Students initially stated that their unwritten rules about providing alcohol (ie, providing only to people they knew and monitoring fellow drinkers for danger) kept everyone safe. Yet many students acknowledged that they and other students frequently suffered negative consequences of drinking, some quite serious. Many of them admitted that the alcohol they provide only to trusted friends is often consumed by friends of friends and sometimes by individuals completely unknown to them. Some students confessed that monitoring drinking venues or drinkers fails to prevent at least some negative impacts.

However, many students disavowed responsibility for any negative impacts of the alcohol they provide to others, even when its express purpose is intoxication, which inevitably promotes irresponsible and unsafe behavior. Students' notions of responsibility seemed to be distorted, at least around drinking, as students who recently suffered negative health, social, and academic consequences of drinking identified themselves as responsible drinkers. This finding raises the question of whether campaigns that vaguely promote "responsible drinking" can be effective.

Many students, including most who came to appreciate the above inconsistencies, manifested a sense of invincibility, which is expected for their age.[19] Even though certain numbers of students suffered major alcohol-related consequences every year, they felt that consequences seemed highly unlikely for them and their underage friends, who were perhaps more responsible than other students. Most of the relatively few students who felt vulnerable had witnessed severe consequences of drinking in friends, family members, or patients they observed in clinical settings.

Although the threat of legal sanctions substantially deters large parties that serve underage individuals, for most students, there is currently almost no deterrent effect on

the routine providing of alcohol for underage friends and acquaintances. Legal-age students believe that the risk of getting caught is almost nil, and getting caught incurs only mild penalties, which are usually further reduced. An exception was a few students who perceived that legal sanctions would thwart their future careers.

The participants agreed that 2 major categories of approaches to reducing alcohol provision would be effective. All participants agreed that the most effective category of approaches would be based on enforcement. An easily implemented strategy in Wisconsin would be to publicize that providing alcohol to an underage individual who consequently suffers great bodily harm or dies is a felony punishable by fines of up to $10,000–$25,000 and imprisonment for up to 6–10 years, respectively. This strategy might be strengthened by emphasizing the potential impact of legal sanctions on future careers. An advantage of this strategy would be that it avoids directly attacking the drinking culture and the students' perception that they lack responsibility for any harm that arises from the alcohol they provide. It would invoke the same calculated analysis that currently discourages many risk-averse students from hosting large parties, but it would not be effective with students whose calculus strongly considers the low chances of getting caught.

Accordingly, the participants reported that the most effective interventions would involve elevating their perceived risk of being apprehended and harshly penalized, as per current law. An initial step would be public commitments by city and university officials to enhance enforcement. Publicity on illustrative cases would follow. Expulsion from the university after 1 or 2 offenses would be a particularly effective deterrent.

An approach with more limited effectiveness would be to educate students about the fact that providing alcohol to underage students inevitably causes negative consequences. The most effective implementation of this strategy would be directed toward women who, by providing alcohol, increase underage women's risk for unwanted sexual advances and sexual violence. Although such educational strategies might have limited effectiveness, they may be a useful accompaniment to enforcement-based strategies, if only to help justify and mollify the expected outcry against enhanced enforcement of the minimum legal drinking age of 21 years that students believe is unjust.

In conclusion, at the college where this research was performed, and consistent with findings at another large public university in a neighboring state,[10] there is a strong culture of underage drinking, and legal-age students' provision of alcohol to underage students is an integral part of this culture. Nevertheless, findings from multiple focus groups of legal-age students suggest that alcohol-providing behaviors may be amenable to intervention. The most potent interventions would involve publicly bolstering law enforcement. Heightening awareness of the most severe penalties might be moderately effective. Educational interventions on possible harms to underage students might have some impact, especially for women who wish not to put underage females at risk for unwanted sexual advances and sexual violence. Further research is necessary to determine precisely how effective such interventions can be, either alone or in combination.

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