



Helping Young People Drink Less: Empirically Based Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harm

A Review of

*Binge Drinking and Alcohol Misuse Among College Students and
Young Adults*

by Rachel P. Winograd and Kenneth J. Sher

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Reviewed by

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Is the assessment or treatment of risky alcohol use part of your practice? Do you conduct research on the harms and hazards of alcohol use in young adults? Do you teach a special topics course on alcohol misuse? Have you been looking for a single source that provides a helpful overview of the best currently available assessment and intervention techniques for risky drinkers that are supported by strong empirical evidence? If any of the above applies to you, I would highly recommend Winograd and Sher's recently published book. This slim book contains four chapters and is a refreshingly accessible quick read while also providing an incredible wealth of information about alcohol misuse in young people. The authors have carefully constructed a book that provides exactly what the clinician or researcher might be looking for in a resource guide that focuses on assessment and treatment of alcohol misuse.

Winograd and Sher have written a book that would be useful for individuals both novice and well versed in this topic area. A general background on the epidemiology of alcohol misuse introduces readers to data that illustrate how alcohol misuse constitutes a significant public health burden. Given that about one half of men and one third of women exceed established safe drinking guidelines in the United States, clinicians will frequently need access to a guide that details best practices for the assessment and treatment of drinking problems. Moreover, the authors repeatedly emphasize that many young people may endorse a whole host of problems that accompany their drinking yet will not self-report a drinking problem. Clinicians are provided with many specific examples and practical techniques for decreasing resistance in young clients who may not feel like their drinking is a problem. Examples are set apart from the text and labeled as "clinical pearls." These specific examples clearly explain how an empirically based strategy can be used to help a client.

The book includes clear descriptions of the most widely used assessment techniques, ranging from screening measures, including measures of alcohol-related consequences, to

readiness-to-change measures. Where free resources are available, the authors have noted them or have provided them in the appendix. Furthermore, the authors go beyond a listing of resources and instead provide suggestions on which assessments are appropriate for certain situations. For example, the use of retrospective drinking diaries may be an ideal way to capture current drinking habits, but administration of these types of assessments can be somewhat time-consuming to administer. If time constraints are an issue, briefer assessments like the Quick Drinking Screen can yield similar information. Important for clinicians who will need to switch to the *International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision*, from the DSM for reimbursements starting in October 2015, the authors provide a nice overview of how the two diagnostic systems are similar and different. For those readers who will be affected by this change, the explanation provided would be very helpful in successfully making this transition.

For treatment options, the authors provide many evidence-based and empirically supported possibilities, including personalized feedback, brief interventions, cognitive behavioral therapy, self-change, harm reduction, and motivational interviewing. Since many alcohol problems differ in seriousness, this book emphasizes treatment of the less severe cases that are more common. The approach is positive, and the authors provide practical suggestions for how to address common obstacles. For example, the clinician is encouraged to roll with client resistance given that this may commonly emerge with young adults who are conflicted about whether their drinking habits are causing them harm. Thus, even though the assessment and treatment of severe alcohol dependence is not the focus of this book, it is still a nice toolkit and reference guide even for clinicians who typically assess and treat more severe addictions.

In sum, this book is a comprehensive resource guide that is based on the highest quality scholarship on alcohol misuse available. This is not surprising given that the second author (Sher) has published some of the most influential empirical papers that have significantly improved our understanding of alcohol misuse in young people. It should be noted that he and his graduate student coauthor (Winograd) are clearly a strong authorship team. The reader never feels that the voice or tone changes within the book. Given the significant public health burden of alcohol misuse in our society, this book is a must-have on the shelves of both college and public libraries. Winograd and Sher have authored an excellent resource guide that emphasizes practical and cost-effective approaches to dealing with this problem.

Footnotes

Cecile A. Marczyński is a coauthor of the book *Binge Drinking in Adolescents and College Students* (by C. A. Marczyński, E. S. Grant, and V. J. Grant, Nova Science Publishers, 2009). This book summarizes the empirical research literature on the harms and hazards associated with binge drinking. The book emphasizes the neuropsychological damage from binge drinking that can occur to the developing brain. However, her book does not focus on assessment and treatment and thus would not be considered a competitor book to the book discussed and recommended above.