Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri’s higher education substance abuse consortium focused on promoting healthy behaviors on college campuses. In order to gain an understanding of the current health behaviors of college students, PIP implements the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) each spring. The information gained from the MCHBS not only allows PIP to learn more about the risky behaviors of Missouri college students as a whole, but also provides the opportunity to focus on the behaviors of particular sub-populations such as student athletes. The tables below present information on the risky drinking behaviors as well as the protective behavior strategies (PSB) practiced by athletes in comparison to all students.

DISCUSSION

The MCHBS asks a variety of questions that reveal how many college students are engaging in high risk drinking behaviors. Students were asked to indicate whether or not they had participated in the listed behavior within the past year. Results show that athletes reported higher rates on each of the above risky behaviors when compared with the general student body.

The MCHBS also asks questions to gauge the level at which protective behavior strategies (PBS) are being practiced. These strategies can be positive tools for students to use as they help students to drink in a healthier and safer way. The table to the right shows that athletes are just as likely, if not more likely to utilize a PBS “usually” or “always” when compared to all students. Furthermore, 39% of student athletes reported being ready to try, or currently trying, to drink in a healthier and safer way. This is compared to 31% among the general student body reporting a readiness to change.

SUMMARY

The athletes on Missouri campuses face unique circumstances when compared to their non-athlete counterparts. As such, some of the behaviors inquired about through the MCHBS reveal that athlete behavior differs when compared to the behavior of all students. Athletes are practicing many of the highest risk drinking behaviors; however, they are doing so in tandem with multiple PBS. While there is no safe level at which to do these risky alcohol related behaviors, it is possible that the negative consequences could still be reduced as a result of the PBS. Furthermore, the utilization of PBS show a readiness to commit to healthy drinking habits by college athletes in Missouri. As athletes are already practicing certain PBS, they may be open to incorporating additional strategies into their lifestyles.

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