

Risk Factors Associated with Alcohol Consumption Among Romanian University Students- Preliminary Research

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Bulletin UASVM Food Science and Technology 75(1)/2018

ISSN-L 2344-2344; Print ISSN 2344-2344; Electronic ISSN 2344-5300

DOI: 10.15835/buasvmcn-fst: 0025

Abstract

Young people's consumption of alcohol is an ongoing problem. Many young adults binge-drink alcohol excessively, with serious negative consequences thereafter. This preliminary research assessed risk factors associated with alcohol consumption, drinking problems and related consequences among university students. The study was carried out on a total of 1056 students from UASVM Cluj-Napoca, Romania. University students claimed altered states of health after drinking episodes: vomiting, abdominal pain, headache, dizziness (43.1%), forgetfulness after drinking (3.1%). Furthermore, students who drank over the limit reported physical and violence-related problems (2.7%) and were more likely to develop risky behaviors, like driving under the influence of alcohol (13.9%) or car accidents (0.2%). The participants in the study were not heavy social drinkers, 50.9% of the respondents reported no consequences after drinking alcohol.

Keywords: alcohol drinking, health, risk factors, Romanian university students

Introduction

Globally, alcohol consumption is the third major health-risk factor. Young people are even more vulnerable to the consequences of alcohol consumption. There is a variety of problems related to alcohol that can have a devastating impact on individuals and their families and can significantly affect the community (Constantinescu and Constantinescu, 2012; Salanță et al., 2016). Adolescents are greatly influenced by their peer groups, particularly the values of the society they are involved with during their developmental stage (Mei-Yu Yeh, 2006). Numerous studies suggest that college

students are more likely to consume alcohol and binge drink than their peers who are not enrolled at university (Danzer et al., 2006; Stock et al., 2009; Ansari et al., 2013; Podstawski et al., 2017).

During university or college years, students can escalate their alcohol use to dangerous levels and student alcohol consumption levels are typically higher than their non-university peers (Junqing Chu et al., 2016; Salanță et al., 2017). Heavy alcohol consumption amongst students impacts on individuals, educational institutions, and society: excessive drinking behaviour amongst students is linked to a range of alcohol

related problems, including injuries, unprotected sex, violence, car accidents, health problems, resulting in a significant economic burden for health systems (Moreira et al., 2012; Guillén et al., 2015).

A study performed by the Romanian Anti-Drug Agency showed that no less than 81.8% of respondents aged between 15 and 24 have consumed alcohol at least once in life (Van Hoof et al., 2010).

This preliminary research evaluated the risk factors associated with alcohol consumption, drinking problem, and related consequences among Romanian university students.

Materials and methods

The study was carried out on a total of 1056 students from UASVM Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Twelve participants indicated not drinking any alcohol and were excluded from the analysis. The final sample ($n=1056$) consisted of 475 males and 581 females. The students received an online questionnaire with demographic questions, health risks and an assessment of their drinking behavior. The online Google form system was used. A 30-item omnibus-type questionnaire was used to collect socio-demographic data, relevant information about participants' families, and items related to health lifestyle/ risks and alcohol consumption. The types of questions chosen were: closed and open questions, filter questions, multiple choice (single answer), selection list questions and free text questions.

Eligible participants were undergraduate university students (18-24 years old; academic year 2016/17) from UASVM; recruited through university information systems (posters, email messages, bulletin boards) and through online social networking sites. Participants gave their informed consent to participate by completing the web-based questionnaire. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Food Science and Technology, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

The SPSS Statistics program 17.0 was used for result interpretation, which is a comprehensive system for analyzing data.

Results and Discussion

Alcohol preference is related to lifestyle (dietary habits), depending on the living area, age, gender, physical activity and other habits (smoking, etc.). The researches indicate that a majority of students, male and female alike, remain quite conservative in their alcohol preferences (Podstawski et al., 2017 a; Salanță et al., 2017). Instead, the number of individuals seeking new flavours is constantly growing, for example craft brewing has evoked a new interest (Mudura et al., 2016; Brătă, 2017).

It is estimated that unregistered consumption of pure alcohol per capita is 4.0 liters in Romania (Furtunescu et al., 2009) making its total figure reach 15.3 liters (Constantinescu and Constantinescu, 2012). The increase in alcohol consumption in the "newly independent" European countries is attributed to the social changes, political transformations, transition to a market economy, and economic liberalization that began in the 1990s (Podstawski et al., 2017).

The present study showed that 76.2% of the students consume alcohol in public places (e.g. parks and shops), 15.5% in clubs or at parties, 13.1% at home, 2.5% only on holidays or special moments (weddings, birthdays) and 1.7% in student housing. Adolescents and young adults who often drink large quantities of alcohol at one time, are more likely to experience problems than other age groups, such problems as alcohol poisoning and alcohol-related road traffic crashes, assaults and other injuries (White and Hingson, 2013). The frequency of getting drunk was higher in males (56.45%) than in female (43.55%).

University students claimed altered states of health after drinking episodes: vomiting, abdominal pain, headache, dizziness (43.1%), forgetfulness after drinking (3.1%). Furthermore, students who drank over the limit reported physical and violence problems (2.7%) and were more likely to develop risky behaviors, like

driving under the influence of alcohol (13.9%) or car accidents (0.2%). The results of our study contribute to previous research linked to Romanian young adults/university students (Nasui *et al.*, 2016; Rada and Ispas, 2016).

Our findings resemble those of Anderson and colleagues, 2007: female students, in general, opted for weaker-strength alcoholic beverages, but also suffer from negative consequences of alcohol drinking earlier and to a greater degree than men. A limitation of the study is the fact that women have great difficulty admitting that drinking harms their health (Kerr-Correa *et al.*, 2007).

The results of this study are consistent with other studies examining the drinking habits of college students. Podstawski *et al.*, 2017, observed in their study both these similar trends, as well as inter-gender differences among female and male students, most of whom had liberal attitudes towards alcohol consumption.

Conclusion

The participants in the study were not heavy social drinkers (only 1.7% of participants consume alcohol every day) and 50.9% of the respondents reported no consequences after drinking alcohol. The strength of the present study is the relatively large number of participants, their geographic diversity throughout Romania, as well as the fact that the sample is relatively homogeneous demographically and socio-demographically. Our data complement other research in European countries.

Acknowledgements. The present study was supported by a grant (Ref EA 15 45) from the European Foundation for Alcohol Research (ERAB), Belgium.

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