

ASPECTS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract: Alcohol abuse is a strong factor contributing to moral deformity of the fragile and vulnerable personality of a teenager. Recommendation of consumption, even if moderate, involves the risk, with the advent of the drinking habit, for the teenager to shift from social pleasure of consumption to disinterest in themselves and going on to damage their health. Given that the first experience of alcohol consumption occurs in adolescence, many children risk becoming addicts, adopting a behaviour with adverse effects on their health. Using the anonymous survey method we investigated 728 high school students from 10 rural settlements in the Republic of Moldova aged between 15-19 years old, 416 boys and 312 girls. The prevalence of alcohol consumption was high, drunkenness was known by 51.6% of the respondents. The most consumed alcoholic beverages in the order of preferences enlisted by teenagers are beer, sparkling wine, and vodka and the access to them is relatively simple.

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol abuse is a strong factor contributing to the moral deformity of the fragile and vulnerable adolescent's personality. In our society, unfortunately, alcohol consumption is accepted and considered a way to celebrate a happy occasion or as a remedy for colds, fear, and depression. Recommendation of consumption, even if moderate, involves the risk that the teenager, once that the drinking habit has been acquired, will gradually move from the pleasure of drinking to the lack of interest in himself/ herself, which will lead to damaging their health. According to the estimates of researchers (1,3,4,6,8), alcohol is the third risk factor for ill health in the European Union (EU) and is responsible for 195.000 deaths each year. In the Republic of Moldova, alcohol is undoubtedly an important social issue more so as trends are increasing. Research carried out in 2012 (2) revealed that teenagers and young people know more about the relaxing effects of alcohol and less about its negative effects and the risk that consumption may lead to. Overall, 5% of adolescents aged 11 years old, 11% aged 13, and 26% aged 15 consume alcohol at least weekly.

Adolescents who use alcohol in an abusive manner are more likely to become addicted also developing subsequent mental problems, low level of education, and the risk of committing crimes in early adulthood.(3,7) Moreover, alcohol consumption in children can be considered a possible opening to the abuse of other substances.(5,7,8)

Taking into account that the first experience of alcohol occurs in adolescence, many children are risking becoming dependent, by adopting a type of behaviour with a negative effect on their health. In this regard, we proposed to investigate the adolescents' behaviour towards alcohol consumption in order to identify risk factors and the vulnerable age of adopting an unhealthy lifestyle.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted on a group of 728 high school students: 312 girls and 416 boys in 10 villages in the

Republic of Moldova, aged between 15 and 19 years old. The anonymous method was used in the research. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions regarding alcohol consumption.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Of the 312 girls surveyed, 286 (68.9%) were tempted to consume alcohol, and 261 boys (84.2%) out of the total of 416 had consumed alcohol. Most cases of testing alcohol were found at the ages of 15-16 and 13-14. Cases of consumption at a younger age were also confirmed: 6.0% - under the age of 9, 5.8% - aged 9-10, 10.4% aged 11-12 years.

More than half (55.6%) of the subjects of the sociological survey had not consumed alcohol in the last 30 days, 31.9% had consumed at least one sip for 1-2 days, 6.8% 3-5 days, 3.2% 6-9 days, 1.6% 10 to 19 days, 0.5% 20 to 29 days and 0.4% of the total number of students had consumed alcoholic beverages during the 30 days.

In reply to the question "How many days in the last 30 did you drink for more than one hour?" 84.4% of those surveyed confirmed that they had not had such an experience, 10.2% - for 1 day, 3.5% for 2 days, and 1.4% 3-5 days.

In line with the details presented above, we can state that high school students between the ages of 15-19 are more tempted to try a few sips of alcoholic beverages and do not drink excessive amounts during one day. Even so, the danger of alcohol consumption is eminent, because children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to alcohol compared to adults, and their habit of trying can quickly become a habit and addiction.

Regarding the type of alcoholic beverage consumed by the respondents surveyed, the research shows that: 23.3% - do not consume alcohol, 16.6% - consume only beer, 12.1% - only champagne, 9.1% - only wine, 1.1% - only strong drinks, and most of the respondents 37.7% combined alcohol (beer, wine, and champagne). The ratio of beer drinkers is higher among boys (61.2%) than among girls (38.8%), the number of champagne consumers is higher among girls (88.6%) than

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among boys (11.4%), wine is equally preferred by both girls and boys, while strong drinks are consumed sporadically by 1.1% of the respondents, girls in grades 9-10 and boys in grades 11-12.

Over a quarter of the respondents (26.4%) have consumed alcohol to achieve intoxication at least once in their lifetime, 12.2% had such an experience 3 to 5 times, 5.2% 6 to 9 times 4.2% 10 to 19 times. The fact that there are individuals in this age group who mention having been drunk at least 20-39 times (1.4%), or even more than 40 times (2.2%) is extremely alarming.

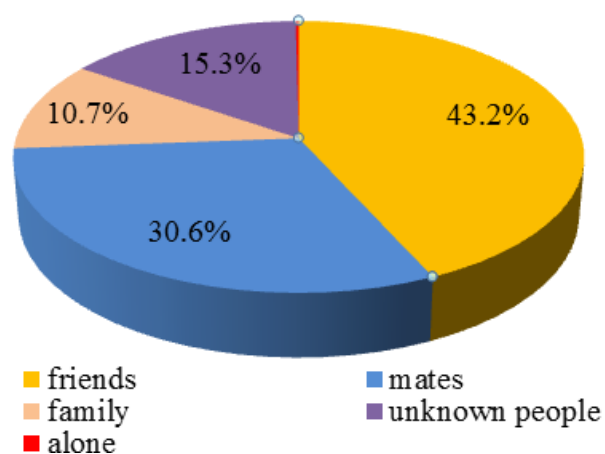
All children are at risk of alcohol consumption, but probably the most exposed are teenagers. From the psychological point of view, teenagers are in a new period, one of searching for their identity. Looking for thrills they become accustomed to the effects of alcohol: joy, mood, sedation, dizziness, and fantasizing. Sometimes, because they are child-minded adults, they face problems and troubles which they cannot cope with and thus, resort to quick solutions, such as consumption of nicotine, alcohol, or drugs.

Based on the analysis of the survey results we can estimate that high school students resort to drinking for very different reasons. Oftentimes, the underlying causes are various. The most common reasons listed by consumers were:

- an integral part of formal and festive occasions (22.9%);
- creating good mood and stress removal (20.5%);
- alcohol helps in communication (3.9%);
- they do not want to create a different opinion to that of the colleagues' (7.6%);
- to satisfy the pleasure of tasting alcoholic beverages (1.1%);
- a reward after some mental effort (1.5%);
- to overcome conflicts (0.2%);
- to overcome fear (0.9%);
- for several of the reasons listed above (23.9%);
- other reasons (17.5%).

The study showed that most high school adolescents (39.9%) consume alcohol in discotheques, bars, and restaurants, 30.2% mentioned multiple locations where they encountered no obstacles in alcohol consumption including schools, 17.3% at home, 7.4% in other places, 4.2% in someone else's home, 1.0% on the streets, in parks. Most often, alcohol was consumed with friends (43.2%) and mates (30.6%) (figure no. 1).

Figure no. 1. The frequency of the environment in which adolescents prefer to consume alcoholic beverages



Of all the respondents 31.6% have never bought alcohol, while 43.9% were not asked to confirm their age when

purchasing alcoholic beverages.

CONCLUSIONS

- Alcohol consumption among young people remains a public health problem. The most vulnerable age is 15-16 years old. The results of our survey show that the percentage of those who have been drunk at this age is very high (48%).
- The results of the research conducted on adolescents and young people reveal information on preferences and the company in which they consume alcoholic beverages. Most beer drinkers are boys (61.2%), champagne drinkers are mainly girls (88.6%), wine is consumed equally by both girls and boys, and the most popular entourages are those of friends and mates.
- Drunkenness had been experienced by 51.6% of the respondents surveyed. The experience of drinking more than a few sips was known at a fairly young age. The eradication of this process can be possible by promoting a healthy lifestyle in the family, school, and society.

Recommendations:

- Informing the public about the risks associated with alcohol consumption through various methods of communication (campaigns, projects, volunteering);
- Promoting the involvement of adolescents in sports, artistic and creative activities;
- Initial and ongoing training of teachers in health education;
- Developing a curriculum and course materials for health education.

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